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EMPIRICALLY EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS MOTIVATION ON DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT: A MEDIATING ROLE OF DESTINATION VISIT

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of religious tourism motivation on destination development through destination visits. Religion has long been a primary motivation for journeys and is considered the oldest reason for travelling. Religious travel has developed constantly with the development of the tourism industry worldwide. However, Jammu and Kashmir has vast potential to attract tourists, but there is a need to create awareness and motivate by highlighting its uniqueness and differentiating it from other destinations. Purposive sampling has been used to collect the data from 500 tourists in J&K and Ladakh. EFA has been used to identify the number of factors, which have been validated through confirmatory factor analysis. Structural equation modeling has been used to test the hypotheses. The findings of this study exposed that travel motivation significantly and positively affects destination visits, which substantially affects destination development. The contribution of this study lies in the inclusion of destination visits while examining the relationship between travel motivation and destination development.

KEYWORDS: Religious tourism motivation, Destination visit, Destination development, Jammu & Kashmir, Structural Equation Modeling

1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism industries have grown in importance as a source of foreign exchange in many countries. This sector also contributes significantly to income, saving, investment, and economic growth by helping to reduce the balance of payment deficit and the problem of unemployment (Tsintsadze & Diasamidze, 2022; Enzenbacher, 2019; Thrassou et al., 2014). Since the 1960s, tourists' travel motivation has been an important area of research and a central point to understanding tourist behavior (Guzel et al., 2020), understanding why people travel, and what factors influence their behavioral intention to visit a destination. Religious Tourism has been defined as travel with the principal motive of feeling religious forms they encourage, like culture, traditions, art, and architecture (Robina & Fernandez, 2020). Religious tourism affects both individual and social life by generating meaning in life; this religious meaning helps people know themselves better and helps them achieve mental health (Terzidou et al., 2018). The concept of religious tourism motivation has many facets. Researchers have looked into religious tourist's underlying travel motives in several studies. In addition to their religious aspirations and willingness to receive healing, religious tourists are primarily driven by a desire to discover new things and make spiritual memories in their lives (kim et al., 2024; Albayrak et al., 2018). Religious tourists go on vacations to experience new cultures, visit inspiring locations around the world, deepen their religious faith, explore the historical roots of their religion, and have fun while traveling (Huang, 2017; Cross, 2018). The assessment of destination image has received a lot of attention in associated academic literature and has helped us understand tourist behavior better. Hunt (1975) was among the first to acknowledge the significance of tourism in attracting more tourists to visiting destinations.

The association between travellers and their beliefs in today's secular world influences individuals who visit religious sites. The strength of their religious beliefs determines individuals' visitation patterns. According to the available literature, religion is a fundamental part of our lives and cultures in various modern worlds (Hinnells, 1984; Richards, 2001; Raj and Morpeth, 2007; Raj and Rashid, 2011). This study investigates deeply religious individuals' motivations for visiting religious sites. After various studies, this paper considers the Buddhism sites which have the potential to attract international and national travelers to J&K and Ladakh. The origin of Buddhism

in India spread to the entire globe in Asia for the most part (Kleinmeyer, 2004). The Buddhists, are any part of the world, look in the direction of India with a positive approach and admiration. The main countries where Buddhism's prime religion are China, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Japan, Thailand, and South Korea. Buddhism is one of the most significant viewpoints influencing Indian philosophy and its way of life. For these countries, India is a widespread practice to visit for religious purposes, particularly for Buddhism. The outlook is that tourist growth will be most significant due to the historical link of Buddhism with India.

Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh have unique tourist destinations offering attractions for diverse types of tourists, as Jammu is known as the city of temples (Mir, 2014). Religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, etc., have co-existed in J&K and Ladakh for hundreds of years (Shahib et al., 2018). Religious tourism has now become an important industry in J&K, contributing immensely to the state's economy and generating employment for a large number of local as well as national and international people (Ganie & Dar, 2020); that's why religious tourism is considered as the backbone of the J&K and Ladakh economy. The study examines and discusses how visitors are drawn to religious sites and what they hope to gain from such visits. The research will also focus on the implications of tourist motivations for visiting religious sites in J&K and Ladakh. Much work has been done on religious tourism in J&K and Ladakh, but as route development in J&K and Ladakh is an international travel perspective, no work has been done. Religious tourism is defined as tourism that is solely or primarily motivated by religious beliefs. It is one of the oldest forms of tourism and a worldwide phenomenon of religious history; it incorporates emotional feelings and sacred behavior while serving as a moral compass for communities. There are two aspects to Religious Tourism in India: the national tourist's faith, who has a divine affection for the destination in line with their religious views. The other is the foreign traveler, someone from a different religion, area, or nation. Even though the ethical values delivered remain the same, the destination and religious practices have an innovative dimension, providing a spiritual experience unlike theirs.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Religion encompasses emotional sentiments and ritualistic behaviour, it shapes and influences religious identity through both individual and shared

experiences and interactions (Salihu & Baidoo, 2024; Liutikas, 2015). Religious tourism differs from other types of tourism in that it has specific goals, motivations, and locations (Minnaert, 2025; Tsai, 2021). The practice of visiting religious sites as part of a holiday is a form of tourism that has existed for centuries. It is motivated by a commitment to a specific religion or spiritual path (Liutikas, 2025; Sharpley, 2009). The practice of visiting religious sites as part of a holiday is a form of tourism that has existed for centuries. It is motivated by a commitment to a specific religion or spiritual path (Sharpley, 2009). The belief in the power of a god or other extraordinary person, as well as the practice of reverence and other religious practices. Nicolaidis (2018) contends that religious tourists seek to escape the stresses of ordinary life. This is why so many individuals want to visit somewhere to have a transforming cultural and spiritual experience that will help them evolve and gain understanding.

Extending the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) posits that an individual's purpose to execute a behaviour is an important aspect in determining that individual's actions, according to this theory, three separate elements might influence a person's intention to engage in a specific action, including their attitude toward engaging in that behaviour (Thakur & Sharma; 2025; Ajzen 1985, 1991). Visit intensity can objectively indicate a tourist's level of knowledge about a destination, as well as evidence that a tourist appreciates visiting a specific site. The more in-depth the experience, the more likely it is that one will learn new things and create stronger emotional links to the destination (Sharma et al., 2026; Kibler et al., 2015). The more an individual interacts with the location being visited, the more intense the experience will be.

For instance, the availability of lodging, restaurants, and shops, as well as people with high levels of "soft skills" such as being hospitable and friendly to customers, all contribute to the level of satisfaction that tourists feel when visiting religious sites. Visit intensity can objectively reflect the amount of information a tourist has accumulated about a destination, and it can also be evidence that a tourist enjoys visiting a particular location (Thakur et.al., 2026; Antón et al., 2017).

According to the World Tourism Organization (2019), a destination is a specific location where a tourist spends at least one night and is exposed to tourism products like attractions, support services, and tourism resources within clearly delineated administrative, management, and physical boundaries. Destination development is the deliberate and concerted effort to improve specific locations so that they become more appealing to tourists. This is done with an eye solely on the supply side of the tourism industry, with the goal of attracting new visitors and retaining those who have already been there (Nematpour et al., 2021). It has been suggested that collecting and using data will be beneficial for the future of destination development in areas such as new product development and visitor attraction, both of which add to the overall quality of the destination. One such tool is the Destination Innovation Matrix (Gardiner & Scott, 2018), which maps out potential connections between the destination's current offerings and potential visitors. A destination is "a geographical, economic, and social unit consisting of all those firms, organisations, activities, areas, and installations which are intended to serve the specific needs" of the visitor (Gajdošíková et al., 2019).

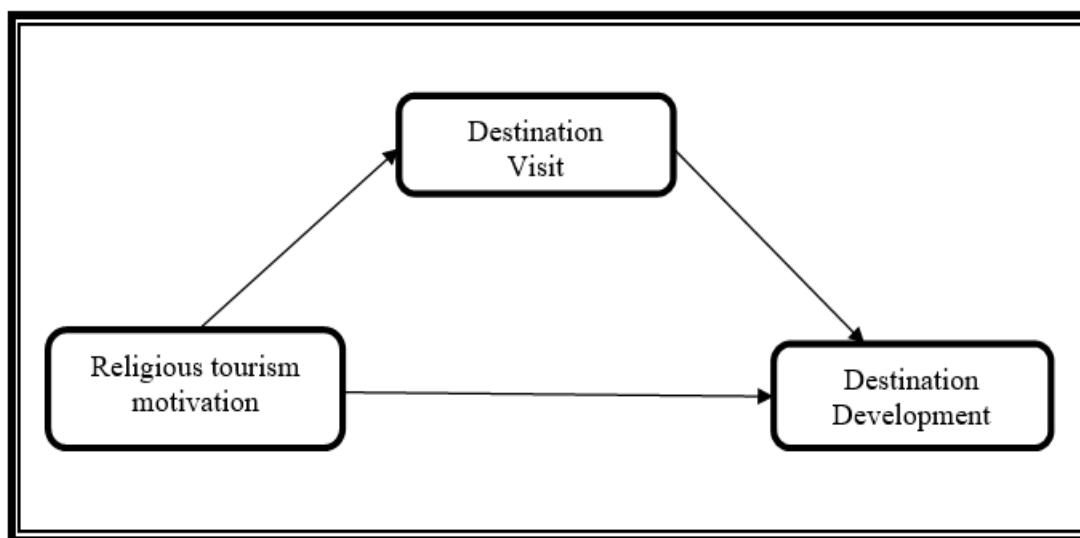


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Various Studies explore several aspects such as the familiarity of uniqueness, facts enhancement, getting relaxed, the run-through of good shopping (Tsoumakas, 2025; Michael & King, 2021; Huang & Hsu, 2009), self-esteem and social acknowledgment, escape from routine, enrichment of societal attachment, learning or determining, involvement excitement and enthusiasm (Skinner, 2023; Hung & Petrick, 2011), awareness and adventure, cost-effective concern, individual safety, destination facts, travel planning, destination topographies, friends and family, relaxation and recreation, religious and traditional thoughts, and travel bragging (He, 2023; Mutinda & Mayaka, 2012).

Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim et al. (2017) described a happy relationship between religious tourism motivation and intention to visit an actual visit to a destination. They depict that understanding the needs and wants of a visitor in the tourist destination leads to the intention to visit and has a potential for an increased future beneficiary of the tourist industry. Similarly, (Khaksari et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2017) found that religious tourism motivation has the most substantial direct influence on destination visits. Religious tourism helps build the destination image and visit intention of potential tourists to the destination visit. (Joo et al., 2021; Rinschede 1992) describes that the relationship between religious tourists and their faith significantly influences individuals visiting religious sites. (Tshifhumulo & Mudau, 2025 & Raj et al., 2007) argue that the visitation arrangements for religious-related depend on the strength of their religious principles.

Similarly, (White, 2024 & Debats, 1995) argues that searching for considerate solutions is significant to the foundation of life and the universe. Finding answers to the questions approximately makes sense of individual life and, most importantly, the relationship between the metaphysic world and with dignified God, such as examining the import of life and becoming a better person. The strength of his religious beliefs can influence the visit of individuals. (Curties & Pajaczowska, 1994) depict that the travelers' primary goal is to visit religious places to expand their awareness and find desire, love, and devotion for themselves.

H1: Religious tourism motivation has a significant impact on destination visit.

Destination visits and economic development can be viewed as a mediator of monetary growth and development, frequently derived from the capital-output (Banister, 2000). Foreign capital investment generates additional earnings and progress, inspires foreign currency incomes, and generates new employment in the tourism industry (Negassa, 2024).

Leiper (1990) argues that an actual visit to a destination is the activity of travelling to a place for any purpose like religion, pleasure, meeting, etc. Similarly, (Seyfi & Hall, 2019) argues that it greatly contributes to local economies by producing employment opportunities and developing the destination. (Du & Cheong, 2025 & Horng et al., 2012) depict that a destination visit is an everyday activity in modern life and has contributed expressively to economic development for decades. (Ijatuyi et al., 2025 & Butler 1980) supported an alternative rejuvenation method to benefit formerly untapped natural resources. Specifically, the growth of innovative amenities becomes economically viable and simultaneously rejuvenates the destination (Faulkner, 2005). (Aguilo et al., 2005) analyzed that tourist areas will always persist in tourist areas if tourists are understood in tourism arrangements. Public and private agencies express the foreseen lifespan of a traveller region or its attractions. Instead, since tourism has exposed an indefinite perspective for development, in spite of economic downturns, it is taken for granted that the number of tourists will endure increasing (Howie, 2003).

H2: Tourists' destination visit has a significant impact on destination development.

Motivation is an internal force that arises from an unsatisfied need and propels an individual to engage in a specific behavior (Yu & Li, 2026). Understanding visitor motivations can often increase visitors' enjoyment of a destination (Xie & Luo, 2021). Furthermore, it allows you to attract and retain more visitors. (Hassan et al., 2024 & Fernandes et al., 2012) investigated various possible reasons and motivations for pilgrimage tourists to travel, including requesting blessings and satisfying vows, as well as curiosity, visiting the attractions, and holidaying to develop the destination. Another study (Shuo et al., 2009) decided that cultural and religious motives played a role.

Pilgrimages and journeys to sacred sites are becoming increasingly popular. According to Iso-Ahola & Baumeister, (2023) & Fodness and Murray (1997), the growing interest stems from people's desire to find sense in their progressively indeterminate lives. Many persons have been unable to find this through traditional methods of adoration, so they are turning to diverse forms of knowledge in a physical search for a spiritual objective (Van Niekerk, 2018; Richards and Fernandes, 2007 & Pargament et al., 2005).

Tourism has been recognized as a substance for stimulating monetary growth, increasing the feasibility of immature areas, and improving local communities' comfort levels (Aquino et al., 2018;

Manyara & Jones, 2007). While destinations are commonly considered places to visit, tourism routes are viewed as areas through which persons travel, even though many travellers may choose to stay for a night or more along the route (Sanchez-Martin et al., 2020). Apart from attracting tourists, one of the main goals of routes is to connect numerous magnetism that would not otherwise be able to attract tourists to devote time and money using an interaction effect increases dragging power. It furthermore diffuses tourist money among many recipients (Niedbala et al., 2020), and activities result in a new tourist support system (Chilufya et al., 2019).

According to (Reisinger & Crofts, 2021), motivation for religious tourism indicates that people leave their homes to visit religious tourist places and boost the nation's economy by improving the destination. Travelers are attracted to contribute to some religious activities, gather faith, and meet their essential for relaxation and recreation. On the other hand, Tourism motivations are reflected in resource management and planning. According to Iloranta (2022), tourism motivation literature leads to value formation. Accepting how principles and consequent approaches express internal or self-directed motivations and outer-directed principles are assisted by their role in motivation establishment. (Milner et al., 2020) depict that spirituality is about one's wellness, opinions, and ability to connect with others. (Bacchiocchi 2019) argues that Spirituality grips the distinct search for meaning or persistence and faith in a higher or supreme power. (Biswas et al., 2020) depict that satisfaction refers to the apparent difference between prior expectations and purposeful level after consuming a product or goods.

Similarly, (Kumar & Madaan, 2025; Raibley, 2012; Nettle, 2006) have also argued that a different body of work absorbed individual well-being, calling courtesy and happiness. (Hadar & Oren, 2024; Taleghani et al., 2011) describes the transfer of thoughts, messages, or meaning from one person to another, like family relationships and communication with others. The enormous and varied gathering of technologies (Internet, satellite, mobile, chat, etc.) is used to connect with persons and magnify the destination (Khajenoori et al., 2014). (Rashnabadi, 2025 & Gauchet 1999) argues that religion identifies that it is continuously held in a significant place in the growth of every race individual and convinced to remain a most powerful factor in the civilization of the imminent. In this context, motivate the tourist to visit the destination, increase the nation's economy, and improve the destination. Based on the above, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Destination visit mediates the relationship

between religious tourism motivation and destination development.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Generation of Scale Items

A 5-point Likert scale has been used for the sake of uniformity in measuring the variables. The scales ranged from 1 to 5, where five represents "strongly agree" and 1 indicates "strongly disagree". The present study has used three constructs, i.e. Religious tourism motivation, destination visit, and destination development toward the destination. The items have been generated from various sources and methods for operationalizing these constructs, such as reviewing the existing literature and detailed conversation with the subject specialists.

The religious tourism motivation consisted of 9 items ($\alpha = 0.716$), which have been taken from Yousefi, M., & Marzuki, A. (2012); Hsu et al. (2010). Sample item: destination visit; Six items scale have been adapted from Yousefi, M., & Marzuki, A. (2012); Ojo et al., 2017; Wee-Kheng Tan & Cheng-En Wu, 2015(4) ($\alpha = 0.902$), Sample item: "destination development" Seven items of destination development have been adapted from Busayo, B. M. (2017) ($\alpha = 0.807$).

3.2. Sampling Technique and Data Collection

3.2.1. Pilot Survey

Initially, pretesting was conducted on Seventy tourists contacted using a convenient technique. Reliability, validity and descriptive statistics, that is, mean, standard deviation, have been used to analyse the data (table 1). The data collected at this stage have also been used for final sample size determination in the case of tourists. Sample size has been considered with the help of the following formula (Malhotra, 2004).

$$n = S^2 Z^2 / e^2$$

Where n = sample size, Z = standard error (1.96) associated with the chosen level of confidence, S = variability indicated by an estimated standard deviation, e = amount of precision or allowable error in the sample (at 95% confidence level the value of $e=0.05$).

Application of this formula resulted in a sample size of 420. We used Purposive sampling to collect the data from tourists as the population was unknown. This study has been carried out in our target locations, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. 500 questionnaires have been distributed among travellers sitting in the waiting halls of different hotels, tourists' spots and parks, out of which 420 returned completely filled questionnaires.

Table 1: Reliability, Validity and Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	SRW	AVE	Composite Reliability	Alpha Value
Religious tourism motivation	RTM1	4.26	3.89	.575	0.593	0.842	0.761
	RTM 2	3.72	3.10	.490			
	RTM 3	3.97	3.02	.592			
	RTM 4	4.13	3.78	.655			
	RTM 5	4.02	3.18	.654			
	RTM 6	3.98	3.13	.596			
	RTM 7	4.47	3.87	.623			
	RTM 8	4.02	3.99	.689			
	RTM 9	4.67	3.89	.701			
Grand Mean		4.01	3.77	.698			
Destination Visit	DV1	4.17	3.88	.692	0.684	0.841	0.751
	DV2	3.95	2.97	.598			
	DV3	4.09	3.76	.668			
	DV4	4.12	3.41	.780			
	DV5	4.55	3.28	.657			
	DV6	4.29	3.19	.623			
Grand Mean		4.08	3.03	.699			
Destination Development	DD1	4.16	2.98	.617	0.645	0.871	0.818
	DD2	4.89	3.05	.667			
	DD3	4.01	2.79	.748			
	DD4	4.12	3.07	.616			
	DD5	3.91	2.68	.769			
	DD6	3.89	2.99	.549			
	DD7	4.13	3.43	.571			
Grand Mean		4.03	3.26	.668			

4.RESULTS

4.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) has been applied to identify the factors of different scales used in the present study as items have been generated from multiple scales. The factor analysis's appropriateness test has been verified through Kaiser- Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham, 2010). The items with

factor loading less than 0.50 and multiple factor loading have been deleted (Hair et al., 2010). The religious tourism motivation scale resulted in a two-factor solution: knowledge & places, religion & events with nine items. Further, one-factor solution emerged for destination development with seven items. Destination visit scale converged under one factor six items. The Values of KMO and total variance explained by all the scales are above 0.70 and 60 percent respectively (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2: Result of Exploratory Factor Analyses

Factor	VE (%)	Eigen Values	KMO Values
Knowledge & places	29.170	5.540	
Religion & events	38.978	5.968	
Total VE by religious tourism motivation	68.148		.952
Destination visit	62.170		.901
Destination development	65.423		.948

4.2. Measurement Validation

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) has been used to assess the goodness of model fit, reliability and

validity of the different constructs used in this study. Second-order factor models have been generated for religious tourism motivation, destination visit and destination development emerged after EFA.

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results of Religious tourism motivation, destination visit and destination development

Constructs	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	RFI	CFI	RMSEA
Religious tourism motivation	3.147	0.963	0.941	0.968	0.957	0.985	0.061
Destination visit	2.644	0.972	0.970	0.972	0.981	0.989	0.042
Destination development	2.866	0.967	0.950	0.972	0.916	0.970	0.063

Table 4: Discriminant Validity

Construct	Religious tourism motivation	Destination visit	Destination development
Religious tourism motivation	0.667		
Destination visit	(.262) .512**	0.683	
Destination development	(.099) .316**	(.119) .345**	0.597

Composite reliability is above 0.50 for all constructs (Religious tourism motivation=0.989; destination development=0.814 and destination visit=0.732). High standardized estimates (>0.5) and average variance extracted (>0.5) proved convergent validity (as suggested by Hair et al., 2010). By comparing the average variance extracted with squared correlation between the constructs used in this study, the discriminant validity has been established (Hair et al., 2010). It is demonstrated by the average extracted variance, which exceeds the squared correlation between the study's constructs (Table 4).

4.3. Hypotheses Testing

SEM has been used to test the various hypothesized relationships. It is a multivariate technique that helps to explain the relationship among multiple variables (Kaplan, 2008). In the present study, the relationship between perceived Religious tourism motivations, destination visit and destination development have been assessed.

4.4. Direct Relationship

Religious tourism motivation significantly and positively affects destination development (SRW= 0.744, p<.001) as well as destination visit (SRW= 0.521, p<.001), which provides the support for hypothesis 1 & 2. Destination visit significantly and positively effects on destination development (SRW = .537, p<.001). Thus, the hypothesis 3 stands accepted.

4.5. Mediation

In the present study, destination visits mediate between tourism motivation and destination development. The bootstrap approach has been used to check the mediation. Hayes (2013) revealed that the mediation effect exists when the indirect effect is significant in this approach. The absence of zero value between biases corrected the upper and lower bound confidence interval. Therefore, structural equation modeling in AMOS has been used to estimate indirect effect with 1000 bootstrap at a 95% confidence interval. The results revealed that tourism motivation significantly affects destination visit (SRW= 0.603, p<.001), and destination visit significantly affects destination development (SRW= 0.501, p<.001) (Figure 2). Bootstrap of 2000 sample at 95% confidence interval revealed significant indirect effect (SRW= 0.420, p<.001). Besides this, Sobel statistics (3.463, p< 0.01) are also significant, supporting the

indirect impact of religious tourism motivation on destination development.

5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The study empirically examined the relationship between religious tourism motivation and destination development with the mediating role of destination visit. The findings reveal that religious motivation significantly influences tourists' intention to visit religious destinations. Pilgrims and spiritual travelers are strongly driven by factors such as faith, spiritual fulfillment, cultural curiosity, and religious attachment. These motivations encourage increased visitation to religious destinations, which subsequently contributes to the overall development of the destination. The study revealed that religious tourism motivation significantly and positively impacts destination visits. Therefore, hypothesis 1 has been accepted. Further, destination visit significantly and positively affects destination development. In this context, when tourists visit the destination, in this regard, it helps to grow the economy of the nation and improve the destination. Hence, hypothesis 2 has been accepted. In addition, a destination visit mediates the relationship between religious tourism motivation and destination development. Hence, Hypothesis 3 has been accepted. Travelers are motivated when they believe that by visiting a particular location, their inner desires to travel and experience specific qualities will be satisfied. Travelers' reasons for leaving their hometowns include getting away from their hectic and monotonous routines, learning more about the destination's culture, traditions, and historical sites, as well as its natural beauty, all of which impact how people perceive the place. The development of a destination is also influenced by the increased motivation to flee, knowledge of the area, places to go, and safety. Furthermore, the results confirm that destination visit acts as a significant mediator between religious tourism motivation and destination development. Increased tourist visits lead to improvements in infrastructure, local economy, cultural preservation, and tourism-related services, thereby fostering sustainable destination development. Religious tourism, therefore, serves not only as a spiritual journey but also as an important catalyst for socio-economic growth and destination competitiveness.

6. IMPLICATIONS

This study has various implications that are important for practitioners and academicians. These are discussed as under:

There is a lack of focus on the imperative destination attributes such as accessibility means, comfortable accommodation facilities, and increased awareness about diverse J&K destinations. Management should be aware and provide better facilities to the tourists to motivate them to visit the destination and improve the destination.

Further, ancillary services such as poor public services, limited shopping facilities, government initiatives, etc., also affect the destination. Management should take the initiative to develop quality accessibility facilities like good transportation facilities, local parking facilities, and an adequate road network.

Further, a lack of awareness and knowledge about the explosive tourist destination might confine tourists to making future travel decisions and negatively perceive such an explosive destination. These destinations are always risky in terms of economic loss, comparable service quality, human-induced problems, etc.

Tourist guides can take the initiative in raising social and interpersonal relationships by sustaining tourists' catalogs with all noteworthy information about their likes and dislikes. It will pave a long way for the affirmative destination image.

The development of religious destinations and attracting international tourists to visit religious sites to boost their knowledge and awareness about the numerous destinations of J&K. would be immensely helpful in generating revenue, income, employment, and infrastructure in the state.

6.1. Limitations and Future Research

Although every precaution was taken to guarantee the study's objectivity, reliability, and validity, some limitations were still found. Future research can overcome these restrictions. These limitations are that this study is cross-sectional as the longitudinal study should be considered in future research to generate the generalizability of the findings. Only three constructs were used in this study. Future research should focus on more variables such as perceived risk, destination image, attitude, etc. This study is geographically limited to Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. Future research should include other areas like Himachal Pradesh, Shimla, etc.

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