

Unveiling the Journey Beyond: Understanding the Factors Influencing Pilgrimage Tourists' Revisiting Intention to Mecca

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the multifaceted variables that influence pilgrimage tourists' intention to return to Mecca, the holiest site in Islam, using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory. Every year, millions of Muslim pilgrims from around the globe converge on Mecca. Determining the factors influencing their intention to revisit is imperative for enhancing the overall pilgrimage experience and effective destination management. This study delves into the critical elements of the S-O-R model through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to understand how pilgrimage tourists' perceptions of Mecca as a destination (Stimulus), individual characteristics and experiences (Organism), and responses to the pilgrimage experience (Response) interact to shape their intention to revisit the sacred site. The results can help pilgrimage organizers, religious authorities, and tourism partners create meaningful and gratifying pilgrimage experiences while building long-term pilgrim loyalty to Mecca.

Keywords: Pilgrim tourist experience, revisit intention to Mecca, stimulus, organism, response, pilgrim loyalty

Introduction

For millions worldwide, pilgrimage is a significant religious and cultural activity. It includes traveling to a holy place to perform religious rituals and seek spiritual fulfilment. A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred destination that holds deep meaning and significance for the traveller¹. It is frequently driven by religious devotion² and entails visiting heritage locations where change and meaningful experiences occur.³ Traditional pilgrimages were concerned with penance and self-denial, while modern pilgrims frequently chose luxurious travel arrangements.⁴

Furthermore, it has been observed that even non-religious people travel to sites of personal meaning in an increasingly secular environment.⁵ Visits to gravesites, celebrity monuments, prominent athletic fields, or political landmarks are examples of secular pilgrimages.⁶ Pilgrimage tourism, often regarded as the first form of tourism, has led to modern tourism as a secular version of pilgrimage.⁷ Pilgrimage tourism is defined as visiting religious locations to meet both spiritual and recreational requirements,⁸

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¹ Barber, Richard (1991), *Pilgrimages*, Boydell & Brewer Ltd.

² Hung-Che Wu, Ya-Yuan Chang, and Tsung-Pao Wu (2019), "Pilgrimage: What drives pilgrim experiential supportive intentions?" *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 38, pp. 66-81.

³ Yogesh Hole, E. B. Khedkar, and Snehal Pawar (2019), "The significance of pilgrimage tourism to sustainable development with special reference to the Indian context," *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 1-11.

⁴ Magdalena Vorzák, and C. M. Gut (2009), "The place of religious tourism in Romania's tourist industry," *WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics*, Vol. 6, No. 8, pp. 425-434.

⁵ Kenneth F. Hyde, and Serhat Harman (2011), "Motives for a secular pilgrimage to the Gallipoli battlefields." *Tourism Management*, Vol. 32, No. 6, pp.1343-1351.

⁶ Amador Durán-Sánchez, et al. (2018), "Religious tourism and pilgrimage: Bibliometric overview," *Religions*, Vol. 9, No. 9, pp.249.

⁷ Catherine M. Matheson, Russell Rimmer, and Ross Tinsley (2014), "Spiritual attitudes and visitor motivations at the Beltane Fire Festival, Edinburgh," *Tourism management*, Vol. 44, pp. 16-33.

⁸ Kiran A. Shinde (2015), "Religious tourism and religious tolerance: insights from pilgrimage sites in India," *Tourism Review* Vol. 70, No. 3, pp. 179-196.

and it frequently involves a departure from one's typical environment to foster a sense of spirituality.⁹ It usually follows specific attendance patterns to locations of religious significance or pilgrimage sites where tourists strive to fulfil their religious obligations.¹⁰ Pilgrimage tourism provides a variety of purposes, including self-actualization, personal well-being, and meeting other individuals' needs. It has acquired popularity in today's culture and continues to draw an increasing number of participants.¹¹

Pilgrimage tourism,¹² religious or spiritual tourism has a long history and is practiced by religious communities worldwide to visit places with profound religious or spiritual significance. These holy places include Mosques, churches, shrines, and other religious landmarks.¹³ Pilgrimage tourism is deeply rooted in faith and religious belief, and individuals from different religious communities like Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hindus, and Sikhs undertake pilgrimage tourism hoping to connect with their religion, participate in religious ceremonies, or seek spiritual consolation and enlightenment. These journeys frequently include religious ceremonies, prayers, meditation, or acts of devotion peculiar to the religious tradition linked with the destination.¹⁴

Mecca is the holiest city in Islam, attracting millions of Muslims each year for the Hajj pilgrimage and it is regarded as one of the most essential spiritual trips in the world.¹⁵ The pilgrimage to Mecca is a life-changing journey that shapes individuals' religious beliefs, cultural identities, and general well-being.¹⁶ It is one of Islam's five pillars, and as such, it is a fundamental religious responsibility for every financially capable and able-bodied Muslim. Every year, millions of Muslims gather in Mecca to perform the obligatory Hajj ceremonies, creating a breathtaking display of faith and devotion.

Understanding the factors that lead to the intention to return to Mecca is significant because it relates to the long-term influence of the pilgrimage experience on the pilgrims' lives.¹⁷ Returning to Mecca is frequently motivated by a genuine desire to recreate the transforming experience, enhance the spiritual connection formed during the first visit, and continue the path of self-discovery and dedication.¹⁸ Although the first pilgrimage is often regarded as a once-in-a-lifetime experience, there is an increasing interest in identifying factors influencing pilgrims' desire to undertake subsequent journeys to Mecca.¹⁹ Exploring this phenomenon can provide valuable insights into the motivations and drivers that underpin the decision to make frequent visits to the Holy City.

While extensive quantitative research has been conducted to explore the motives and experiences of first-time Hajj and Umrah pilgrims,²⁰ lesser emphasis has been paid to analysing the reasons that inspire individuals to return to Mecca for the pilgrimage using a qualitative approach. Returning to Mecca for Hajj and Umrah – commonly referred to as doing the journey outside of the Hajj season – holds immense significance for pilgrims'. It offers valuable information to many stakeholders participating in the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage.

As a result, this qualitative study aims to investigate the underlying elements that influence pilgrimage visitors' decision to return to Mecca. The Stimulus Organism Theory (S-O-R) is used in this qualitative study because it provides a comprehensive lens for analysing external stimuli, individual perception, and behavioural reactions.²¹ Using S-O-R theory, the study explores how ideas, feelings, and pilgrimage

⁹ Farooq Haq, and John Jackson (2009), "Spiritual journey to Hajj: Australian and Pakistani experience and expectations," *Journal of management, spirituality & religion*, Vol. 6, Vol. 2, pp. 141-156.

¹⁰ Kiran A. Shinde (2015), "Religious tourism and religious tolerance: insights from pilgrimage sites in India."

¹¹ Tanti Handriana, Praptini Yulianti, and Masmira Kurniawati (2020), "Exploration of pilgrimage tourism in Indonesia," *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 783-795.

¹² Farooq Muhammad Haq (2014), "The significance of partnership as a marketing strategy for Islamic spiritual tourism," *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 258-272.

¹³ Arnab Karar (2010), "Impact of pilgrim tourism at Haridwar," *The Anthropologist*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 99-105.

¹⁴ Noga Collins-Kreiner (2018), "Pilgrimage-tourism: Common themes in different religions," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 3.

¹⁵ Kholoud Al-Ajarma (2021), "After Hajj: muslim pilgrims refashioning themselves," *Religions*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 36.

¹⁶ Tahani Hassan et al. (2022), "Segmentation of religious tourism by motivations: A study of the pilgrimage to the city of Mecca," *Sustainability*, Vol. 14, No. 13, pp. 7861.

¹⁷ Hassan, Tahani, Mauricio Carvache-Franco, Wilmer Carvache-Franco, and Orly Carvache-Franco (2022), "Segmentation of religious tourism by motivations: A study of the pilgrimage to the city of Mecca," *Sustainability*, Vol. 14, No. 13, pp. 7861.

¹⁸ Antón M. Pazos (2023), "Introduction: Pilgrimages, Religion and Mediterranean," in *Religious Pilgrimages in the Mediterranean World*, London & New York: Routledge, pp. 1-10.

¹⁹ Tahani Hassan et al. (2022), "Segmentation of religious tourism by motivations: A study of the pilgrimage to the city of Mecca."

²⁰ Tahani Hassan et al. (2022), "Segmentation of religious tourism by motivations: A study of the pilgrimage to the city of Mecca."

²¹ Rocky Nagoya et al. (2021), "Exploring intention to enroll university using an extended stimulus-organism-response model," *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 20, pp. 1-12.

experiences impact pilgrimage travellers' revisit intention to Mecca through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussion. The study's findings will not only advance theoretical understandings of pilgrim behaviour but also have practical ramifications for Mecca's tourist stakeholders, such as tour operators and local communities.

Pilgrimage Literature Review

Pilgrimage is a religious practice wherein an individual or a group embarks on a voyage to a specific revered site to seek divine intervention from God and the saints of that location for various concerns.²² Pilgrimage can be considered one of the earliest forms of tourism mobility. However, the research on pilgrimage as a distinct area remained underdeveloped until the 1990s. Nevertheless, its beginning can be identified in the concepts and theories developed by sociologists and anthropologists during the 1970s and 1980s. These concepts primarily focused on the "visitor experience" and the psychosocial dynamics influencing various forms of tourism, including pilgrimage, as discussed in many studies.²³ During that era, the study of pilgrimage introduced several key social concepts, including the "ritual process"²⁴, and the notion of the "holy site" as the centre of the world.²⁵ Rituals such as Christian sacraments, Islamic prayers, Hindu puja, and Buddhist meditation are structured and symbolic ceremonies serving the diverse purposes of communicating with the divine, marking life events, and reinforcing community bonds. These rituals are often connected with some holy site.

A pilgrimage is a journey to a distant sacred destination often embodying profound significance and deep meaning or serving as a source of core identity for the traveller.²⁶ It represents a ritualistic journey to visit holy sites, where personal transformation occurs, with each step in the journey holding profound significance.²⁷ Pilgrimage is one of the most well-known religious and cultural phenomena within human society²⁸ and is acknowledged as the earliest manifestation of tourism. There is a fine line that differentiates between religion and tourism, and it poses a difficulty for places with both religious and cultural significance. Some places may attract pilgrims and tourists, but the underlying motivation and the nature of the experience distinguish the two. For example, religion influences food, drink, dress, social and political views, travel motivation, and behaviours. Those behaviours include travel patterns, seasonal demands, and transportation choices. Consequently, pilgrimage tourism can be defined as visiting religious sites to satisfy both religious and leisurely desires.²⁹ Typically, this involves individuals journeying to a specific location distinct from their usual surroundings to nurture a sense of spirituality.³⁰

Spirituality is a personal, subjective feeling of connection with the divine or nature. It can involve searching for meaning, inner peace, and exploring beliefs. Moreover, pilgrimage tourism typically follows specific visitation patterns to places of religious significance or pilgrimage sites where visitors seek to fulfil their spiritual needs.³¹ Concerning the religion of Islam, existing research focuses on Hajj.³² Hajj is an Arabic terminology that linguistically means a journey to a holy place to carry out specific rituals and activities.³³ Muslim pilgrimage, the Hajj, a massive annual gathering in Mecca, is one of the oldest rituals and among the most extensive human assemblies globally. Muslims worldwide,

²² Graham, Brian, and Michael Murray (1997), "The spiritual and the profane: the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela," *Ecumene*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 389-409.

²³ Cohen, Erik (1998), "Tourism and religion: A comparative perspective," *Pacific Tourism Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 1-10; Jackson, Richard H., and Lloyd Hudman (1995), "Pilgrimage tourism and English cathedrals: The role of religion in travel," *The Tourist Review*, Vol. 50, No. 4, pp. 40-48; Reisinger, Yvette, and Lindsay Turner (1998), "Cross-cultural differences in tourism: A strategy for tourism marketers," *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 79-106.

²⁴ Coleman, Simon, and John Eade (2004), "Introduction: reframing pilgrimage," in *Reframing Pilgrimage*, London & New York: Routledge, pp. 1-25.

²⁵ Collins-Kreiner, Noga, and Nurit Kliot (2000), "Pilgrimage tourism in the Holy Land: The behavioural characteristics of Christian pilgrims," *GeoJournal*, Vol. 50, pp. 55-67.

²⁶ Noga Collins-Kreiner (2010), "Researching pilgrimage: Continuity and transformations," *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 440-456.

²⁷ Yogesh Hole, E. B. Khedkar, and Snehal Pawar (2019), "The significance of pilgrimage tourism to sustainable development with special reference to the Indian context," *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 1-11.

²⁸ Hung-Che Wu, Ya-Yuan Chang, and Tsung-Pao Wu (2019), "Pilgrimage: What drives pilgrim experiential supportive intentions?," *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 38, pp. 66-81.

²⁹ Kiran A. Shinde (2015), "Religious tourism and religious tolerance: insights from pilgrimage sites in India."

³⁰ Farooq Haq, and John Jackson (2009), "Spiritual journey to Hajj: Australian and Pakistani experience and expectations."

³¹ Kiran A. Shinde (2015), "Religious tourism and religious tolerance: insights from pilgrimage sites in India."

³² Nimrod Luz (2020), "Pilgrimage and religious tourism in Islam," *Annals of Tourism Research*, No. 82, pp. 102915.

³³ Ghadeer Kayal (2023) "The personas and motivation of religious tourists and their impact on intentions to visit religious sites in Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 201-219.

spanning the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Australia, converge for this significant event, engaging in the major Hajj or the year-round 'Umra pilgrimage. An individual often describes the journey of Hajj as a transformative event beyond the confines of rational expression.³⁴ The primary determinant of religious tourism is motivation. There are different theories and views about motivation concerning this type of tourism. For example, Battour et al.³⁵ and Terzidou³⁶ pointed out that tourists visit sacred sites because of both push and pull motivations. Push motivations arise within an individual and are related to personal values, interests, or the desire for self-improvement. Pull motivations refer to the destination's attractiveness, image, facilities, culture, and overall experience.

The study on the Divine Mercy Sanctuary in Kraków highlights diverse tourist attractions, including business activities, buying religious items, cultural event attendance, sightseeing, exploring cultural heritage, and interacting with sacred artifacts that contribute to motivating religious tourists.³⁷ In the same vein, the study by Chih-Yu Liu, et al. on tourist motivation for the Dajia Mazu pilgrimage found that participants are attracted to the event for various reasons, such as seeking profound experiences, exploration, spiritual connections, social interactions, blessings, and lively atmosphere.³⁸

Marketers equate satisfaction experienced by the pilgrims during Hajj with customer satisfaction while consuming services. In the spiritual context, being pleased with Hajj services strengthens Islamic commitment and shapes the overall experience. Pilgrims' experiences were greatly influenced by their satisfaction with accommodation, souvenir shops, and restaurants.³⁹ We can say that pilgrims' visits to the holy places cannot be studied in isolation; instead, the pilgrim experience includes food, accommodation, destination image, services, and culture. Perceptions of transportation and the local infrastructure of the destination also influenced pilgrim expectations.⁴⁰ Other than food, accommodation, and infrastructure, cleanliness and guidance for hajj pilgrims also affect the motivation and experience of pilgrims.

Research on tourists' intentions to revisit is a common theme in the literature. Meanwhile, revisiting the intention of Muslim pilgrims to Mecca has gotten little attention. Previous research has established that the factors that affect the revisit intention of religious tourists include electronic word-of-mouth, destination consumption,⁴¹ attitude,⁴² religious engagement, satisfaction,⁴³ subjective norms, perceived behaviour control, and experiential aspects.⁴⁴

The existing literature provides valuable insights into pilgrim tourism and factors influencing initial visits to Mecca. However, there is a significant research gap in understanding the intricate processes that motivate pilgrims' desires to return to Mecca. The causes that sustain the desire to return, which include recurring spiritual experiences, changing perspectives, and societal pressures, remain unknown. This qualitative study seeks to fill this void by investigating the numerous elements influencing pilgrimage travellers' intentions to return to Mecca adopting the Stimulus Organization Response (S-O-R) model. The S-O-R embodies a holistic approach to understanding pilgrims' response to external and internal motivations (Stimulus). In the SOR paradigm, the stimulus is defined as external environmental variables affecting an individual's internal states (Organism).⁴⁵ The pilgrim processes this external stimulus, the organism in the model since the organism refers to internal processes between

³⁴ Noga Collins-Kreiner (2020), "Pilgrimage tourism-past, present and future rejuvenation: a perspective article," *Tourism Review*, Vol. 75, No. 1, pp. 145-148.

³⁵ Mohamed Battour et al. (2017), "Islamic tourism: an empirical examination of travel motivation and satisfaction in Malaysia," *Current Issues in Tourism*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 50-67.

³⁶ Terzidou, Matina (2012), *Religiousness as Tourist Practice*, United Kingdom: University of Surrey.

³⁷ Justyna Liro (2021), "Visitors' motivations and behaviours at pilgrimage centres: Push and pull perspectives," *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 79-99.

³⁸ Chih-Yu Liu et al. (2023) "Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage Show: Exploring the Sustainable Development of Taiwan's Religious Tourism from the Perspectives of Attraction, Happiness, and Revisit Intention," *Sustainability*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 8744.

³⁹ Damir Krešić, Josip Mikulić, and Katarina Miličević (2013), "The factor structure of tourist satisfaction at pilgrimage destinations: The case of Medjugorje," *International journal of tourism research*, Vol. 15, No. 5, pp. 484-494.

⁴⁰ Daniel H Olsen and Dallen J. Timothy (2006), "Tourism and religious journeys," in *Tourism, religion and spiritual journeys*, London and New York: Routledge, pp.1-21.

⁴¹ Ying Kai Liao et al. (2012) "A model of destination consumption, attitude, religious involvement, satisfaction, and revisit intention," *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 330-345.

⁴² Ofunre C Iriobe and Abiola-Oke, Elizabeth O. (2019), "Moderating effect of the use of eWOM on subjective norms, behavioural control and religious tourist revisit intention," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, Vol. 7, No. 3.

⁴³ Yanghang Yu et al. (2023), "Tourist perceived value, tourist satisfaction, and life satisfaction: Evidence from Chinese buddhist temple tours," *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, Vol. 47, No. 1, pp. 133-152.

⁴⁴ Agoes Tinus Lis Indrianto, Adrie Oktavio, and Agustinus Nugroho (2022), "Pilgrimage tourism events in Indonesia"

⁴⁵ Otto Buxbaum, and Otto Buxbaum (2016), "The sor-model," *Key insights into basic mechanisms of mental activity*, pp. 7-9

external variables and the final reactions and responses.⁴⁶ The tourism literature uses the SOR perspective to explain visitor experience and tourist behaviour. Therefore, this study examines the specific cognitive processing and behavioural responses received during a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research methodology to investigate the factors influencing pilgrim intention to return to Mecca. The sample comprised experienced pilgrims who had completed the trip at least once or several times, allowing for a thorough examination of motivation, experience, and variables influencing their intention to return to Mecca. Purposive sampling ensured that individuals were diverse in age, gender, cultural background, and past pilgrim experiences.⁴⁷ For data collection, a semi-structured interview approach allowed participants to freely describe their motivation, experience, and perspective on revisiting Mecca for pilgrimage purposes. The approach of semi-structured interviews was intended to investigate the diversity of participants' narratives, allowing them to express themselves freely.⁴⁸

For accuracy, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.⁴⁹ Data collection involved methods such as individual interviews and focus group discussions, the latter of which was the primary data collection method. Individual interviews took place with 20 participants and Five focus group interviews with a total of 25 participants. Focus group discussions encouraged group interaction and yielded valuable insights.⁵⁰ To uncover recurring themes and patterns in the data, thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis approach, will be used.⁵¹ The procedure entails coding the transcribed interviews. Triangulating data from multiple sources, credibility, and validity will be used to increase the validity and credibility of findings. Triangulation is utilized to increase the reliability and validity of study findings, which entails combining data from many sources, such as interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).⁵² Researchers may find similar ideas and inconsistencies by comparing viewpoints acquired through various approaches, allowing them to draw firm conclusions.

Analysis

Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, several themes are identified to understand the factors influencing pilgrimage tourists' revisit intention to Mecca. Using S-O-R theory as a theoretical framework, the analysis focused on recurring themes and patterns related to external stimuli, individuals' emotions and perceptions, and behavioural responses that help in the decision-making process of pilgrims to revisit Mecca for future pilgrimages.

External Stimuli

The external stimuli that played a significant role in influencing revisit intention to Mecca are religious significance of Mecca, the cultural and historical attraction of Mecca, and amenities available in Mecca.

Religious Significance of Mecca

Several previous studies revealed that Mecca holds unparalleled religious significance for Muslims.⁵³ Mecca is considered the birthplace of the Holy Prophet, and Kabba, located in Masjid Haram (Mecca), is the most sacred place for Muslims. It is also significant for Muslims because of its historical and

⁴⁶ Farah Putri Wenang Lusianingrum, and Widya Nur Bhakti Pertiwi (2023), "Applying Stimulus-Organism-Response (Sor) Adoption for Predicting Generation Z's Intention to Visit Tourism in Indonesia," *Qubahan Academic Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 277-288.

⁴⁷ Steve Campbell et al.(2020), "Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples," *Journal of Research in Nursing*, Vol. 25, No. 8, pp. 652-661.

⁴⁸ Petros Karatsareas (2022), "Semi-structured interviews," *Research Methods in Language Attitudes*, pp. 99-113.

⁴⁹ Petros Karatsareas (2022), "Semi-structured interviews," *Research Methods in Language Attitudes*.

⁵⁰ Bojana Lobe, David Morgan, and Kim A. Hoffman (2020), "Qualitative data collection in an era of social distancing," *International journal of qualitative methods*, Vol. 19, pp. 1609406920937875.

⁵¹ Michelle E Kiger, and Lara Varpio (2020), "Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide No. 131," *Medical teacher*, Vol. 42, No. 8, pp. 846-854.

⁵² Sanjana Mondal, and Kaushik Samaddar (2020), "Issues and challenges in implementing sharing economy in tourism: a triangulation study," *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal*, Vol. 32, pp. 64-81.

⁵³ Daniella Talmon-Heller (2022), "Islamic Pilgrimage in the Middle East: An Overview," *Pilgrimage Through the Ages in Religious and Non-Religious Context*, pp. 48-65.

spiritual connections with early prophets like Prophet Ibrahim and his family.⁵⁴ It became apparent through the interviews that the religious significance of Mecca had a substantial influence on pilgrims' revisit intention. For many pilgrims, Mecca is more than simply a destination; it is the centre of their faith. They felt a profound sense of honour and privilege when visiting Islam's holiest city and conducting the sacred rites of Hajj or Umrah. Many people strongly desired to return to Mecca because of their spiritual connection to the Kaaba and its religious significance.

One participant was of the view, "My initial motivation to visit Mecca for pilgrimage was deeply rooted in my religious beliefs and the significance of Mecca as the holiest city in Islam." Another participant said, "My decision to revisit Mecca for pilgrimage is firmly grounded in my profound religious convictions and the importance of Mecca as the most sacred city in Islam." Citing religious obligation and in line with previous participants, another participant said, "I see going back to Mecca as more than a desire; it is a fundamental obligation as a devout Muslim. It is a spiritual experience that renews my faith and reminds me of Islam's sanctity." Another participant highlighted the everlasting effect of Mecca, "I feel it is essential to recognize that the religious importance of Mecca extends beyond the journey itself, and the experiences and feelings I have during pilgrimage will remain with me for the rest of my life."

In group discussion, many participants described their spiritual experience in Mecca as overwhelming. Following in the footsteps of the Prophet Ibrahim, specifically performing the Tawaf around Kaaba and participating in other sacred ceremonies, produced a strong emotional connection to their faith. They spoke of the powerful presence of Allah's kindness and guidance that impacted their hearts and thoughts indelibly.

A 35-year-old pilgrimage tourist shared his spiritual encounter, which he dreamed of since childhood because he always heard about Mecca's religious and historical significance from his elders. He mentioned that this journey increased his faith and changed his perspective on life. He stated a desire to return to Mecca several times, believing that each trip would give him an opportunity for spiritual growth and rejuvenation.

Cultural and Historical Attractions of Mecca

Mecca's cultural and historical characteristics provide an additional dimension of significance to the pilgrimage experience.⁵⁵ As the pilgrimage's centre point, the Kaaba is an awe-inspiring building with millennia of history. It is considered a sign of unity for Muslims all around the world.⁵⁶ Being in the presence of the Kaaba and doing Tawaf (circumambulation) around it fosters a sense of connection with the worldwide Muslim community. This community feature, as well as its historical significance, profoundly influences the pilgrims.

Mecca also has several other important places of historical significance in Islam. Being in the Holy Prophet's birthplace and knowing its cultural legacy is an enlightening and spiritually fulfilling experience for most participants. The adjacent hills of Safa and Marwah relate to the tale of Hajar's search for water, providing a link to the past and reinforcing the pilgrims' connection to the foundations of their religion. The historical backdrop enhances the whole pilgrimage experience, providing a compelling incentive for many to revisit Mecca.⁵⁷

One participant was of the view that "It was a combination of religious motivation and cultural heritage for me. Being in the presence of the Kaaba and doing Tawaf around Kaaba with many people with various cultural backgrounds and belonging to different sects nurtures a feeling of unity with the worldwide Muslim community." Another highlighted deep emotion, "When I was standing in front of the Kaaba, surrounded by fellow believers from all walks of life, it evoked a deep sense of humility and unity." "In front of Kaaba, I felt a spiritual connection that transcended cultural boundaries and left an indelible impression on my heart. I could not return to Mecca again in my lifetime," said another

⁵⁴ Mounia Chekhab-Abudaya (2023) "Islamic Pilgrimage," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*.

⁵⁵ Marjo Buitelaar (2015), "The Hajj and the anthropological study of pilgrimage," in *Hajj: Global interactions through pilgrimage*. Sidestone press, pp. 9-25.

⁵⁶ Daniel H Olsen (2018), "Religion, pilgrimage and tourism in the Middle East," *Routledge handbook on tourism in the Middle East and North Africa*, London and New York: Routledge, pp.109-124.

⁵⁷ Turki Hassan Abu Al-Ela (2022), "Knowledge and Awareness Needs of Visitors to Historical Landmarks in Mecca from Perspective of Hajj and Umrah Services Providers," *Tobacco Regulatory Science (TRS)*, pp. 2503-2528.

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participant. Focusing on Islamic legacy, one participant said that “Being in the home of our beloved prophet and dipping myself in Islam’s cultural legacy has been an enlightening experience.” Group discussants highlighted that visiting Mecca and seeing the historical sites was an extremely emotional journey. It helped me understand the historical relevance of our faith even more, especially during the visit of Safa and Marwah.

When we recall the history of Hazrat Hajra and her family, we could not help but feel a rush of emotion, bringing tears to my eyes. We were filled with respect and adoration. This trip has increased my determination to return to Mecca and retrace our holy heritage. Lastly, another participant chimed in, “I visited so many historical places, and it was amazing too and emotional to see all the places out Nabi SAW once put the foot in, in-person.”

Amenities Available in Mecca

In addition to the religious importance and cultural attractions, the conveniences provided in Mecca operate as external stimulants for many respondents who intended to visit Mecca for pilgrimage frequently.

Access to contemporary facilities and services is encouraging for many pilgrims, particularly those old or with health issues.⁵⁸ Several participants mentioned the comfort of modern lodgings, transportation services, and medical facilities throughout the interviews.

Discussing in a group, a pilgrim who needed medical assistance while on their journey appreciated the availability of well-equipped medical facilities and medical professionals responsive to the pilgrims’ needs. The sense of protection and comfort afforded by these amenities was a major motivator for him to return for another journey.

These facilities not only make the journey safer and more enjoyable, but they also remove any concerns regarding logistical issues.⁵⁹ Pilgrims indicated that knowing they can focus on their religious tasks without worrying about practical issues makes them more likely to return to Mecca.

The pilgrims liked the ease of lodging near the Masjid al-Haram and the Kaaba since it permitted them to engage in prayers and ceremonies regularly. The ability to conduct Tawaf or other acts of worship without traveling large distances was a significant benefit. A 23 year old girl who is a resident of South Africa mentioned, “We were staying right opposite the Haram and were fortunate to run down for every salah and fit in a tawaf between *namaaz*.”

One pilgrim mentioned that his first trip was tough owing to a lack of acceptable housing and transportation. However, he saw significant changes in the city’s infrastructure and services on future trips, considerably improving his experience. Consequently, he indicated a wish to revisit Mecca in the future.

Organism Factors

Organism factors represent individual qualities and experiences.⁶⁰ These characteristics include an individual’s religious beliefs, emotional connection, personal experiences, social interactions, cultural background, and psychological well-being. These internal characteristics impact how an individual perceives and interprets external stimuli. The organism factors in the context of forming revisit intention include how an individual’s prior experiences, beliefs, emotions, and personal characteristics come into play while deciding whether to revisit a place.

Transformative Encounters and Emotional Connection during the Pilgrimage

As part of the group discussion, many participants shared profoundly moving stories of their first journey to Mecca in individual interviews and group discussions. This religious trip significantly

⁵⁸ Basheer Alshammari, Robert B. South, and Kevin Raleigh (2023), “Saudi Arabia outbound tourism: an analysis of trends and destinations,” *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, pp.1-23.

⁵⁹ Syed Ahmad Rizwan and Charu Sheela Yadav (2023), “Islam and Tourism: Where Thou The Two Meet?” *Tourism Innovations An International Journal Of Indian Tourism And Hospitality Congress*, Guarav book center.

⁶⁰ Ganghua Chen et al. (2022), “Travel for affection: A stimulus-organism-response model of honeymoon tourism experiences,” *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, Vol. 46, No. 6, pp. 1187-1219.

impacted their inner spirits, instilling a solid attachment to the Holy City and causing significant spiritual development. Their deep emotional and spiritual attachment to Mecca was critical in their decision to travel on successive pilgrimages. Furthermore, these people stressed that their desire to return to Mecca was motivated by a sincere desire to strengthen their relationship with Allah.

According to one of the participants, “My first journey was an unbelievable emotional development. Throughout my stay in Mecca, I felt a strong sense of calm and peace, as if I were in the presence of Allah. This strong emotional bond has stayed with me, fuelling my need to recapture that closeness - a powerful factor motivating my want to return.”

The other participant responded that the emotional relationship was significant. “Mecca brought comfort and consolation when I was dealing with personal issues. The journey proved transformative, altering my faith and perspective of life. Returning to Mecca is not just a revisit; it is a search for spiritual healing and progress.” In the group discussion, Participants emphasized Mecca’s significant influence on their capacity to disconnect from their everyday commitments and engage more deeply with their faith. This revitalization of their faith and an increased sense of connection to Allah fuelled their desire to plan future pilgrimages to Mecca.

One participant said, “My perspective on life and material goods experienced a tremendous transformation following my initial visit. I felt a greater detachment from the material realm and a greater emphasis on my spirituality.” Another participant felt the need to reinforce the purpose of life, “My emotional attachment to Mecca reminds me of the fleeting nature of life and how our ultimate purpose is to seek Allah’s pleasure. Returning to Mecca will reinforce this reminder and keep me grounded..” “I became more conscious of my behaviours and decisions, attempting to line them with Islamic ideals. The experience in Mecca reinforced my faith in the power of prayer and reminded me of the significance of asking for forgiveness and being thankful for all of life’s blessings.” was the view of another respondent.

Lastly, one respondent highlighted inner peace as a reason, “My spiritual connection grew more personal and profound after the journey. I talked more openly to Allah and asked for direction in my decisions. It was as though the journey had opened a direct channel of connection with Him. I also felt more inner peace and trust in Allah’s will for my life.”

The emotional and spiritual relationships they formed with Mecca emerged as the most recurring theme in the study, motivating their desire to go on future pilgrimages. This emphasizes Mecca’s crucial position in pilgrimage tourism since its significance extends beyond being a mere physical location. Instead, it becomes a spiritual anchor that continually attracts people to its hallowed grounds. The transforming quality of the pilgrimage experience proved to be a catalyst for preserving and cultivating their newfound spiritual depths.⁶¹ This, in turn, fuelled their desire to return to Mecca in the future. The participants’ stories together reinforce Mecca’s ongoing influence on people’s spiritual journeys, underlining its significance as a significant factor in moulding pilgrims’ spiritual environment.

Social Influence and Interaction within the Pilgrim Community

Another attendee, who had previously undertaken their mandatory Hajj, remarked on the pilgrimage’s transformational influence that the ceremonies and the spirit of solidarity among millions of pilgrims worldwide left an unforgettable impact on their souls. They considered returning to Mecca for subsequent Umrah visits to recover that tremendous sense of spirituality and to continue their spiritual journey.

Response Factors

The behavioural, emotional, and cognitive reactions the individual produces due to the interplay between the stimulus and organism variables are referred to as response factors. These reactions include an individual’s decision to either revisit a destination or not, their level of passion or excitement, their emotional tie to the area, and their overall happiness or dissatisfaction.

⁶¹ Kholoud Al-Ajarma (2021), “After Hajj: muslim pilgrims refashioning themselves,” *Religions*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 36.

Thematic analysis revealed several behavioural responses that affected pilgrimage travellers' willingness to return to Mecca. Participants indicated a strong sense of devotion and dedication to the trip as a periodic spiritual practice, with several expressing a desire to return numerous times throughout their lives. The communal component of the pilgrimage experience, defined by the gathering of Muslims from all backgrounds, undoubtedly contributed to the urge to return. The pilgrims felt a strong connection and camaraderie with their fellow Muslims, which increased their determination to return to the trip.

Sense of Spiritual Fulfilment and Connection to the Divine

Response (R) elements such as spiritual fulfilment and connection to the divine are important in determining the intention to return to Mecca.⁶² Pilgrimage to Mecca is frequently viewed as a transforming journey that generates a strong sense of spiritual fulfilment and contributes to continuous spiritual growth.⁶³ Participants perceived Mecca as a place where they have a direct relationship with God and an enhanced connection to the divine through rituals and prayers. As a response, participants frequently reported a great desire to revisit and magnify this experience of spiritual fulfilment.

Overall Satisfaction with the Pilgrimage Experience

The overall pleasure level is critical in determining the desire to make another trip to Mecca. A rewarding pilgrimage experience has an unquestionable potential to urge pilgrims to re-enter the trip, whether due to a strengthened spiritual connection, a victorious sense of success, beloved memories made, or profound emotional contentment.

During the interview, participants shared their thoughts on how the response factor of overall satisfaction with the pilgrimage experience influences the intention to return to Mecca. One of the participants said, "My overall satisfaction was excellent. The journey gave me a sense of spiritual fulfilment and connection that I had never felt before."

Another participant had a mixed response, "So far, my experience has been mixed. While I loved the spiritual side and connecting with others, some logistical challenges impacted my pleasure. Issues with lodging and transportation hampered my whole experience. So, my level of pleasure was modest." "It is not only the rituals, however. It is the complete package: the people you meet, the prayers you offer, and the difficulties you conquer. When everything falls into place, and you depart with a happy heart, you are more inclined to arrange another trip." chimed a respondent.

Another respondent was quite satisfied saying, "I had high hopes coming in, and they were met. The entire event was quite enlightening. It was eye-opening, from the ceremonies to the encounters with the many pilgrims. There were a few little problems, but they did not detract from the overall enjoyment." In group discussion, some participants shared that although they faced some problems and challenges during the tour, they expressed that overall satisfaction does not imply a flawless experience during a pilgrim tour that results in the desire to revisit Mecca. Problems are sometimes a part of the trip and may only sometimes reduce total satisfaction.

One of the participants said that challenges can enhance the richness of the experience. Overcoming them might strengthen your connection to the trip. So, overall pleasure is about experiencing a sense of fulfilment and progress rather than perfection. One participant said, "I feel that the overall satisfaction is like "planting a seed." If you foster it, it will develop into a strong desire to return. It is a feeling that lingers and keeps drawing you back."

Some participants discussed the difficulties and challenges that might influence their decision to return to the Holy Place. While the spiritual value cannot be denied, one of the most significant problems is the cost of undertaking Hajj or Umrah. The costs of travel, lodging, and other related arrangements might be rather considerable. The financial weight may prohibit people from returning as frequently as people want.

⁶² Deepak Chhabra, and Eunhye Grace Kim (2023), "Sustaining inner transformation through spiritual tourism," *International Journal of Spa and Wellness*, pp.1-22.

⁶³ Alexander Chirila (2023), "Pilgrim-Tourists: Tourism and the Spiritual Experience." *Analele Științifice ale Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza «din Iași. Teologie Ortodoxă*, Vol.28, No.1, pp. 43-72.

Furthermore, during peak seasons, the sheer number of pilgrims may make the experience cramped and overwhelming. The practical hurdles of dealing with such a massive number of people may dissuade some visitors from returning repeatedly.

The importance of reliability cannot be overstated.⁶⁴ When tour companies fail to meet their obligations or deliver on promises, it can substantially influence the whole pilgrimage experience. This lack of trustworthiness may either deter future visits by pilgrims or earn a bad mouth for the tour operator. Pricing transparency is critical. Some tour companies claim inexpensive pricing but include hidden fees or unforeseen expenditures. This might lead to sentiments of mistrust and dissatisfaction, making it difficult to return to the same operator.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study explored the factors influencing pilgrimage tourists' intention to revisit Mecca. Though many past studies have examined and discussed the significance of religious tourism, evolution,⁶⁵ satisfaction,⁶⁶ and destination loyalty,⁶⁷ they have yet to study the in-depth phenomenon of revisiting the intention of pilgrim tourists using the Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) model. Furthermore, this study will contribute substantially to generating precise insights into motivation and overall spiritual experiences and exploring factors influencing pilgrims' revisit intention. It will also provide meaningful insights regarding management of the event to foster enduring pilgrim loyalty to Mecca.

The findings of the study provide substantial key factors that significantly influence the pilgrimage revisit intentions to Mecca. One of the key factors that influence pilgrims' experience of revisiting Mecca is the deep sense of spiritual fulfilment. The ritual participation, seeking forgiveness, and visiting sacred sites not only strengthen their faiths but also elevate feelings of religious fulfilment, emotional ties, and spiritual encounters. These create powerful emotional and spiritual connections to the Holy City. The study reveals that many participants expressed their desire to revisit Mecca to relive these profound spiritual moments and to enhance their religious commitment.

The other significant factor influencing the revisit intention of pilgrimage tourists is the sense of community. Physical experience with fellow pilgrims and shared experiences fosters rapport and a sense of unity and belonging among pilgrims. The communal aspect and support from family and friends who have previously visited play a crucial role in shaping the pilgrim's revisit intention.

The study also highlighted the availability of amenities as an important factor. The quality and accessibility of facilities and religious services in the holy city of Mecca such as the organization of rituals, crowd management, and cleanliness significantly influence the revisit intentions of pilgrims. However, many pilgrims appreciated the efforts made to enhance their experience through well-maintained experiences though negative experiences in these areas could deter future visits.

Economic factors and affordability of undertaking the pilgrimage were considered significant for influencing the revisiting intentions of many participants. Many participants indicated that financial constraints might delay or prevent a revisit despite their strong spiritual desire to return to Mecca.

This study also draws attention to the difficulties that may arise. These can include both psychological and emotional elements like post-pilgrimage blues or scepticism about the possibility of reproducing the life-changing experiences had on the first pilgrimage, as well as practical problems like budgetary limitations, visa requirements, and safety concerns. Pilgrims who experienced smooth and well-supported journeys were more inclined to consider revisiting.

⁶⁴ Amran Harun, et al. (2020), "Star rating factors for Umrah services: The perspectives of Umrah operators and consumers." *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, Vol.8, No.4, pp. 4.

⁶⁵ Anirban Das, Rama Koteswara Rao Kondasani, and Rupam Deb (2023), "Religious tourism: a bibliometric and network analysis," *Tourism Review*.

⁶⁶ Tahani Hassan et al. (2023) "Sociodemographic relationships of motivations, satisfaction, and loyalty in religious tourism: A study of the pilgrimage to the city Mecca," *PloS one*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. e0283720.

⁶⁷ Abror, Abror et al. (2023), "Antecedents of Muslim tourist loyalty: The role of Islamic religiosity and tourist value co-creation," *Cogent Business & Management*, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 2247871.

The advertising efforts should not focus solely on outward stimuli, such as the iconic landmarks and religious significance of Mecca, but also on transmitting potential internal benefits and experiences. Marketing campaigns should promote pilgrims' emotional and spiritual fulfilment, helping them connect with the internal processes. Furthermore, developing marketing techniques emphasizing the connectivity of outward stimuli and internal experiences can help potential pilgrims connect with the experience in a more profound manner. Highlighting testimonies and anecdotes that testify to the pilgrimage's transforming journey as influenced by external factors can help build a captivating story that encourages revisiting aspirations.

In conclusion, the findings of the qualitative study provide a holistic picture of pilgrimage tourists' intention to revisit Mecca. Recognizing the interdependence of environmental stimuli, internal processes, and behavioural responses provide meaningful insights for pilgrimage tourism management and marketing initiatives. Pilgrims experience an extraordinary sense of peace, contentment, and personal growth during their pilgrimage to Mecca. For many people pilgrimage is more than a religious duty; it is a transformative, profoundly fulfilling, and life-enriching event that creates a strong desire to return and experience it all again. The study highlights the intricate and diverse nature of pilgrims' intentions to revisit Mecca. It provides valuable insights for stakeholders aiming to improve the pilgrimage experience and foster a sustainable increase in revisit intentions among pilgrimage tourists to Mecca.

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