

Assessing The Impact Of Memorable Tourism Experiences And Religiosity On Behavioural Intentions In Religious Tourism

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Abstract

In the context of religious tourism, the study looked at a conceptual framework that investigates the relationship between tourist satisfaction, memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), religiosity, and behavioral intentions (revisit and referral). The study was carried out utilizing data obtained from 400 tourists who visited Varanasi, India. The results of the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) study demonstrated that religiosity had a direct and indirect impact on behavioral intentions through MTE and visitor satisfaction. In religious tourism, MTE was revealed to be the most powerful determinant of behavioral intentions despite the presence of strong variables like religiosity. This study opposes the view of scholars who have asserted that satisfaction is the sole and most important factor influencing travelers' behavioral intentions. The study's findings are analyzed to understand their theoretical and practical significance, and suggestions for further research are proposed.

Keywords: Religiosity, Memorable Tourism Experience, Tourist Satisfaction, Behavioural Intention

1. INTRODUCTION

"Religious tourism," referring to travel to holy locations, is a well-established sector and arguably the oldest form of tourism (Kim et al., 2020; Das et al., 2024). Humans have long journeyed to sacred sites, and the sector is growing in popularity, with over 300 million global visitors and an estimated value of over US\$300 billion annually (Gabor, 2016). This sector not only impacts the leisure industry but also contributes to sustainable tourism and policy development (Wang, 2022). Studies emphasize the importance of religious tourism in Asia, particularly regarding Hindu, Islamic, and Buddhist sites, where religious beliefs and practices drive substantial tourism potential (Siddique et al., 2024). India's rich cultural heritage, historical legacy, and multiculturalism make it a prime destination for religious tourism (Mittal & Sinha, 2022). As the birthplace of Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, and home to adherents of Islam and Christianity, India attracts both domestic and international visitors to its ancient religious monuments (Bhadeshiya & Prajapati, 2024). In 2018, approximately 60% of Indian travelers engaged in religious tourism, with nearly 100 million domestic visitors traveling primarily for religious purposes (Alphons, 2018; Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2018). Religious tourism significantly contributes to local economies and also the broader Indian economy, with foreign currency revenues from tourism totaling 28.09 billion USD in 2018 and grew by 6.8% in 2019 (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India). Despite this, the sector remains under-researched (World Tourism Organization, 2013). Although religious tourism and religiosity are known to influence behavior, research on their connection is limited. Religiosity, which involves religious beliefs and practices, significantly impacts consumer behavior (Eid and El-Gohary, 2015). When tourism destinations meet the expectations shaped by these beliefs, it enhances engagement and generates optimistic word-of-mouth (Kim et al., 2020). The perspectives of religious tourists can be elucidated by examining their intentions, behaviors, and beliefs, as some individuals pursue unique experiences such as nature and sports at holy sites, rather than exclusively emphasizing religious motivations (Kim et al., 2020).

Experience is the main output of the travel and tourism sector (Sthapit et al., 2017), and recent years have seen a heightened focus on tourism experiences due to intense industry competition (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Consumers' memories of past experiences significantly influence their future judgments and travel decisions (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). This underscores the importance of studying memorable tourism

experiences (MTEs). Kim et al. (2012) define MTEs as "tourism experiences positively recalled and remembered after the event" and distinguish them from general tourism experiences. They identify seven dimensions associated with MTEs: refreshment, local culture, hedonism, involvement, novelty, meaningfulness and knowledge. Although memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) are gaining importance, research still predominantly focuses on traditional determinants of behavioral intentions, such as customer satisfaction, which has historically been crucial for retention and profitability (Kim, 2018). But there isn't always a clear-cut correlation between loyalty and satisfaction. Some studies have found a limited impact of satisfaction on loyalty (Park and Jang, 2014), with satisfaction often seen as just an initial step in loyalty formation (Oliver, 1997). Factors like perceived product superiority also affect loyalty. Given tourism's experiential nature (Laing et al., 2014), MTEs are increasingly recognized as key drivers of loyalty, as travelers seek memorable experiences (Kim, 2010; Kim et al., 2012). Despite this, research on the impact of MTEs on behavioral intentions in religious tourism remains limited. In view of the current need, the goal of this study is to develop and evaluate a conceptual model that explores the relationships between tourist satisfaction, memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), religiosity, and behavioral intents (referral and return). Specifically, the study seeks to understand how religiosity influences tourist behavior through its impact on MTEs and satisfaction.

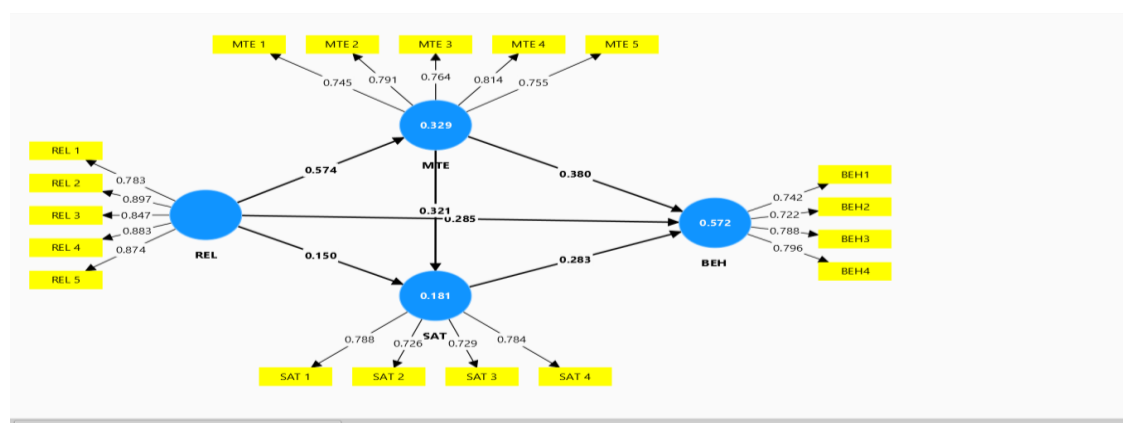


Figure 1. An estimated model

2. Theoretical background and development of hypotheses

2.1 The effect of Religiosity

Religiosity affects how individuals think and live, reflecting both societal and individual values (Amer, 2024). It is a strong predictor of visitor satisfaction, behavior and advertising effectiveness (Eid and El-Gohary, 2015), with studies showing its impact on visitor satisfaction (Abror et al., 2019). Religiosity also influences customer value and behavior (Sim and Bujang, 2012) and can enhance positive word-of-mouth and loyalty (Tegambwage & Kasoga, 2023). Religiosity, encompassing religious beliefs and practices, significantly influences human behavior and reflects societal and individual values (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). It is often measured through practices, beliefs, and self-perception (Obregon et al., 2022). Studies specifically exploring religiosity's impact on tourist experiences are limited, though Andriotis (2009) highlighted its role in shaping experiences at Mount Athos. Abror et al. (2019) investigated religiosity's influence on customer satisfaction, with the latter focusing on Muslim customers. Despite some debate over religious perceptions, research confirms religiosity's impact on customer behavior (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Sim & Bujang, 2012). In Indonesia, Hariani et al. (2017) discovered a favorable relationship between hotel revisit intentions and Muslim religiosity. These studies jointly underscore the significance of religiosity in comprehending visitor behavior and experiences.

The following hypotheses are therefore proposed:

H1: The Religiosity will have positive impact on Memorable Tourism Experience.

H2: The Religiosity will have positive impact on Tourist Satisfaction.

2.2 The effect of Memorable Tourism Experience

Tourist experiences are important to the tourism and hospitality industries (Tung and Ritchie, 2011). Research shows that extraordinary experiences, such as travel, create vivid, long-lasting memories known as "flashbulbs" (Hosany et al., 2022). Emotional sensations and affective thoughts are crucial for autobiographical recall (Kim et al., 2010). The visitor experience has evolved from basic to exceptional,

with "memorable tourism experiences" (MTEs) now emphasized. MTEs are those recalled moments remembered after the event (Park and Santos, 2017). Kim et al. (2012) identify seven dimensions of memorable tourism experiences: novelty, local culture, hedonism, refreshment, involvement, meaningfulness and knowledge. To meet the expectations of sophisticated consumers seeking memorable experiences, the industry must adapt its services (Hosseini et al., 2023). The growing rivalry for destinations has made the research of memorable tourist experiences (MTEs) more important. Kim et al. (2012) define MTEs as positive experiences that visitors recall after the event. To stay competitive, destination managers must offer memorable experiences (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Research shows a strong link between tourism experiences and satisfaction (Kahraman & Cifci, 2023). Chen and Chen (2010) identified involvement, peace of mind, and educational experience as key factors influencing tourist satisfaction at Taiwanese heritage sites. MTEs are vital for destination competitiveness, influencing future choices and revisit likelihood (Kahraman & Cifci, 2023).

Therefore, we put up the following hypothesis:

H3: The memorable tourism experience will have a positive impact on tourist satisfaction.

H4: The memorable tourism experience will have a positive impact on behavioural intention.

2.3 The impact of Visitor Satisfaction

Tourism literature extensively examines satisfaction as a key factor in the visitor experience (Kahraman & Cifci, 2023). Satisfaction is a major determinant of tourists' future behavioral intentions, evaluated by comparing actual experiences to expectations (Biswas et al., 2021; Singh and Mehraj 2018). It reflects how well a product or experience meets a need (Oliver, 1997). High satisfaction is crucial for destination marketing, influencing choice and future intentions (Kanwel et al., 2019). Overall satisfaction affects loyalty, repeat visits, and future behavior (Ledikwe, 2021). Satisfaction has a nonlinear effect on return intentions, with highly satisfied visitors more likely to return than those with lower satisfaction (Zeng & Yi Man Li, 2021). Service quality is closely linked to customer satisfaction (Dires & Anteneh, 2016), which is a predictor of revisit and repurchase intentions. Comparisons between expectations and actual experiences lead to satisfaction, and satisfied visitors are more likely to recommend and visit a location again (Evren et al., 2020). Dissatisfaction, however, leads to negative future behavioral intentions (Choo et al., 2014). Intention to revisit is crucial for the travel and hospitality sectors due to its potential for positive word-of-mouth and financial gains (Choo & Petrick, 2014). Research indicates that service quality and satisfaction are antecedents to revisit intention and loyalty, but satisfaction alone may not guarantee revisits (Zeng & Yi Man Li, 2021). If customers perceive the service as overpriced, their revisit intention may decline, even if they are satisfied (Bassey, 2014).

Hence we propose following Hypothesis:

H5: Tourist Satisfaction will have positive impact on visitor's behavioural intention

2.4. Behavioural Intention

a. Revisit Intention

Tourism literature emphasizes the importance of revisit intention as a research focus (Li et al., 2018). Numerous factors impact travel satisfaction, which strongly influences the inclination to return (Pratminingsih et al., 2014). Repeat visitation is a strong factor indicating satisfaction (Chen et al., 2023). Attracting repeat visitors is more cost-effective than acquiring new customers (Gumede & Mdiniso, 2022), with repeat visitors often spending more and extending their stays (Peng et al., 2023). Positive travel experiences primarily drive revisit intentions, with satisfied tourists acting as word-of-mouth advocates (Chien, 2016). The desire for repeated visits underscores the importance of visitor satisfaction (Chen et al., 2023). Similar to repurchase intentions in other industries, revisit intention reflects positive consumer experiences. Measuring destination loyalty involves various approaches: revisit intention (behavioral), recommending the destination (attitudinal), or a combination of both (Mohamad and Ab Ghani, 2014). Ultimately, fostering revisit intentions is a primary goal for tourism industry stakeholders.

b. Word of mouth

After decades of intensive research, word-of-mouth (WOM), or consumer-to-consumer interaction, is acknowledged as a very reliable source of marketing information (Phi et al., 2022). It has a significant impact, especially in developing markets (Punpairoj et al., 2023). WOM involves exchanging opinions without marketing tools (Ismail and Spinelli, 2012). Due to the expansion of the internet, e-commerce, and social media, word-of-mouth (WOM) has changed into electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which is more efficient and reaches a wider audience even if it is less personal (Phi et al., 2022). Organizations

recognize eWOM's potential to positively or negatively impact their reputation (Phi et al., 2022). Recommendations from previous visitors are seen as highly credible sources for potential tourists (Nechoud et al., 2021). Travelers' behavioral intention is significantly influenced by the quality and reliability of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), especially user-generated material on social media (Nechoud et al., 2021)

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 About the study site

One of the oldest towns in the world still inhabited is Varanasi, also called Kashi, which is frequently considered India's cultural and spiritual hub. Located in Uttar Pradesh on the banks of the revered Ganges River (Singh, 1988), Varanasi has lot to offer for tourists the sacred Ganges and its ghats (steps), ancient ruins, temples, winding lanes, mysticism, classical arts, contemplation, and handicrafts. Varanasi's over 100 ghats and countless temples epitomize the city's timeless essence and Hinduism's core beliefs (Shinde, 2022). Kashi is India's cultural capital, holding immense religious significance for Hindus, Buddhists, and seekers of spiritual connection (Ritesh Sharma, 2021). As a paramount Hindu sacred city, Varanasi attracts extended stays for immersing in cultural offerings like Ganges rituals. Sarnath, though important, often receives shorter visits. The Sarnath archaeological park also serves as a picnic spot for domestic tourists (Shinde & Singh, 2023). Located about 10 kilometers from Varanasi, Sarnath is a Buddhist holy site marking Buddha's first sermon post-enlightenment (Shinde, 2022). Varanasi's proximity to the Ganges reinforces its spiritual aura. Hindus believe the city can liberate all beings from reincarnation, making it a favored place for death and final rites (Parry, 1994; Singh Rana, 2009). A renowned tourist destination, Varanasi is often associated with religion, the Ganges, and reverence. Boat rides on the Ganges, especially at sunrise, are iconic experiences for foreign visitors (Singh, 1988).

3.2 Sampling and collection of data

Data for this study was gathered using a quantitative, self-administered questionnaire. Tourists traveling to Varanasi were the intended audience. Random sampling technique was used, with the author and two field investigators collecting data at major religious tourism hubs like Ganga river ghats, parks, railway stations, and bus stands. Screening questions ensured respondents were tourists. The average survey completion time was fifteen minutes. Of 400 tourists contacted, 380 completed the survey, and 362 valid responses were retained after excluding 19 due to missing values or errors, resulting in a 90.5% response rate ($362/400 \times 100$). To achieve this high response rate, safeguards included a brief questionnaire, trained and courteous field investigators, avoidance of sensitive questions, and the author's presence during data collection.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Categories	Respondents(n=362)	Respondent's proportion
Genders	Male	244	67.40%
	Female	118	32.59%
Age	18-25	169	46.68 %
	26-35	118	32.59%
	36-35	44	12.15%
	46-55	15	4.14%
	56-65	14	3.86%
	65 Above	2	0.552%
Education	High School or Below	9	2.48%
	Bachelor's	227	62.70%
	Master's	119	32.87 %
	Others	7	1.93%
Marital Status	Married	120	33.14 %
	Unmarried	242	66.85%
Profession	Unemployed	56	15.46%
	Self Employed	33	9.11%
	Employed Full Time	142	39.22%

	Employed Part Time	3	0.828 %
	Student	128	35.35 %

3.3 Measures

For this study, multi-item measures were employed to assess religiosity, memorable tourism experience (MTE), satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. These measures were adapted from previously validated scales to align with the study's context. A five-item scale, modified from Sthapit and Coudounaris (2018), Kim et al., (2010), Kim et al. (2012), and Kim (2018), measured MTEs. This scale encompassed refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, hedonism and local culture. Items included assessing experiences as involvement, enjoyable, culturally immersive, revitalizing and meaningful. Respondents rated MTEs on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Religiosity was calculated

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	BEH	MTE	REL	SAT
BEH	0.760	0.847	0.581	0.762			
MTE	0.832	0.882	0.599	0.659	0.744		
REL	0.909	0.933	0.736	0.598	0.574	0.858	
SAT	0.769	0.843	0.574	0.533	0.407	0.334	0.757

using a five-items scale adapted from Eid and El-Gohary (2015) and Abror et al. (2019). Items assessed the extent to which religion influenced life, provided guidance, belief, involvement and brought happiness. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Satisfaction was calculated using a four-item scale taken and revised from Kim (2018), Eid and El-Gohary (2015), and Wang and Hsu (2010). Items assessed overall pleasure, enjoyment, satisfaction, decision appropriateness. Responses were marked on a 7-point Likert scale. A four-item scale that was adapted from Kim & Ritchie (2014), Harrigan et al. (2017), and Wang and Hsu (2010) was used to calculate behavioral intentions. These were separated into two categories: revisit intention and word-of-mouth. The former was measured using items that assessed intentions to positively discuss and recommend the tourist site, while the latter was measured using items that assessed revisit intention within a year or during free time. Responses to the constructs were scored on a seven-point Likert scale.

4. Analysis of data and results

Partial least squares - structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is a widely used multivariate data analysis method (Memon et al., 2021). Hair et al. (2019) advocate for PLS-SEM in testing predictive frameworks, complex structural models, exploratory research, and path modeling. Smart PLS SEM 4.0 is a user-friendly tool for researchers in social sciences, marketing, and business dealing with intricate multivariate relationships. Hair Jr. et al. (2017) highlight its intuitive interface, ability to handle complex models, and flexibility with data distribution. The software offers robust bootstrapping, an improved algorithm for accuracy, comprehensive model validation tools, enhanced visualization, advanced features like multi-group analysis, mediation, moderation, and latent class segmentation, as well as support for endogeneity. The Smart PLS community provides ample resources, tutorials, and support. By leveraging these strengths, researchers can conduct thorough and reliable SEM analyses, yielding robust and insightful findings.

4.1 Measurement model

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Validity

Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) guidelines for evaluating structural linkages are followed in this research. Before looking at the structural model, it is recommended that the validity and reliability of the

measurement model be verified. Confirmatory factor analysis was employed to evaluate the measurement characteristics of the developed constructs. Cronbach's α and composite reliability were used to determine the reliability of the measurement scale.

Cronbach's α values were found to be above 0.7, indicating the measurement scale is credible. Similarly, composite reliability values were found to be more than the required criterion of 0.7, validating the scale's internal consistency (Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity was assessed by examining the values of average variance extracts and the magnitude and significance of factor loadings (AVEs; Hair et al., 2010). Factor loadings is greater than the suggested threshold of 0.5 and were significant ($p < .01$). Similarly, average variance extract were above than the minimal cutoff value of 0.5. AVEs of 50% or above indicate the measuring scale's convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The fact that the AVEs in this research exceeded 50% supported the measuring scale's convergent validity (Table 3).

4.2 Structural model and hypotheses testing

The structural model and hypotheses were evaluated by PLS. The PLS technique was used to determine the path coefficient and assess its relevance. The results supported the proposed research hypothesis (Table 4.). The analysis revealed that religiosity (REL) has remarkable effects on memorable tourism experience (MTE) ($\beta = 0.574$, $P < .05$), behavioral intention (B.I.) ($\beta = 0.285$, $P < .05$), and satisfaction ($\beta = 0.150$, $P < .05$), supporting H1, H2, and H3. Memorable Tourism Experience was also found to have influences on behavioral intention ($\beta = 0.380$, $P < .05$) and visitor satisfaction ($\beta = 0.321$, $P < .05$), supporting H4 and H5. The impact of tourist satisfaction on behavioral intention ($\beta = 0.283$, $P < .05$) were also found to be significant, supporting H6.

Religiosity has a 32% variance on the destination image ($R^2 = 0.329$). Religiosity and MTEs together explained 18% of the variance in satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.181$). Religiosity, MTEs, and satisfaction together explained 57% of the of the variance in behavioral intention ($R^2 = 0.572$). In every evaluated relationships, the R^2 values were found to be more than the suggested threshold limit of 10% (Falk & Miller, 1992). Furthermore, the study finds that the impact of religiosity (REL) is stronger on memorable tourism experience (MTE) than any other variable (Table 4).

The structural model and hypotheses were evaluated using PLS-SEM. Path coefficients were determined and assessed for significance. Results supported the proposed research hypotheses (Table 4). Religiosity (REL) significantly influenced memorable tourism experience (MTE) ($\beta = 0.574$, $p < .05$), behavioral intention (B.I.) ($\beta = 0.285$, $p < .05$), and satisfaction ($\beta = 0.150$, $p < .05$), supporting H1, H2, and H3. MTE also significantly influenced behavioral intention ($\beta = 0.380$, $p < .05$) and satisfaction ($\beta = 0.321$, $p < .05$), supporting H4 and H5. Satisfaction significantly influenced behavioral intention ($\beta = 0.283$, $p < .05$), supporting H6. Religiosity explained 32% of the variance in destination image ($R^2 = 0.329$). Religiosity and MTEs together explained 18% of the variance in satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.181$). Religiosity, MTEs, and satisfaction together explained 57% of the variance in behavioral intention ($R^2 = 0.572$). All R^2 values exceeded the recommended 10% threshold (Falk & Miller, 1992), indicating religiosity's substantial explanatory power over endogenous constructs. Moreover, religiosity exerted a stronger influence on MTE than any other variable (Table 4).

Table 2. Measurement items and loadings

Constructs	Item Code	Measurement Items	Loadings
Religiosity	REL1	Everything that happens to me reminds me of God.	0.783
	REL2	My religion helps me to have a good life.	0.897
	REL3	I believe that God helps me.	0.847
	REL4	I feel happy when I think of God.	0.883
	REL5	I pray for guidance.	0.874
Memorable Tourism Experience	MTE1	I enjoyed this tourism experience.	0.745
	MTE2	I had a chance to experience the local culture of a destination area.	0.791
	MTE3	This trip was a revitalizing experience for me.	0.764
	MTE4	I did something meaningful.	0.814

	MTE5	I enjoyed activities that I wanted to do	0.755
Behavioral Intention	BEH1	I will make an effort to revisit here within a year.	0.742
	BEH2	I will plan to visit here again within a year.	0.722
	BEH3	I would say positive things about this tourism site to other people.	0.788
	BEH4	I will encourage those around me to visit this place.	0.796
Satisfaction	SAT1	I feel good about this tourism experience.	0.788
	SAT2	I found this tourism experience enjoyable.	0.726
	SAT3	I am satisfied with this tourism experience.	0.729
	SAT4	I feel good about my decision to visit here.	0.784

4.3 Mediation effect

The study found that both memorable tourism experience (MTE) and tourists' satisfaction (SAT) mediated the relationships between religiosity (REL) and behavioral intentions (BEH). In particular, the effect of religiosity on behavioral intention was mediated by MTE, REL → MTE → BEH (indirect effect = 0.218, direct effect = 0.285), and Satisfaction played the role of mediator the impact of religiosity on behavioral intention, REL → SAT → BEH (indirect effect = 0.042, direct effect = 0.285). To ensure our study was rigorous, we verified the p-value and t-value for all indirect effects. As shown in Table 5, the t-value and p-value of the indirect impact for REL → MTE → BEH and REL → SAT → BEH were significant.

The study found that both memorable tourism experience (MTE) and tourist satisfaction (SAT) mediated the relationships between religiosity (REL) and tourist's behavioral intentions (BEH). Specifically, MTE mediated the influence of religiosity on behavioral intention, REL → MTE → BEH (indirect effect = 0.218, direct effect = 0.285), and also satisfaction mediated the impact of religiosity on behavioral intention, REL → SAT → BEH (indirect effect = 0.042, direct effect = 0.285). To ensure comprehensiveness, the t-value and p-value for all indirect effects were verified. As shown in Table 5, the indirect effects for REL → MTE → BEH and REL → SAT → BEH were significant.

Table 5. Results of mediating effect.

Relationship	Direct Effect	t-value	Significance p<.05	Indirect Effect	t-value	Significance p<.05
REL>MTE> BEH	0.285	5.039	YES	0.218	6.854	YES
REL>SAT>BEH	0.285	5.039	YES	0.042	2.320	YES

5. Conclusion, Implications, Limitations and Future Research

5.1 CONCLUSION

Despite pilgrimage's transformation into a contemporary form (Collins-Kreiner, 2016), research on religious tourism and pilgrimage remains limited. This study aims to comprehensively analyze existing research, identify challenges, and propose future research directions. Tourism literature acknowledges the importance of exploring memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) (Kim et al., 2018; Mathisen, 2012). However, research on religiosity's influence on behavioral intentions is scarce. By creating a comprehensive model that connects religiosity, MTE, tourist satisfaction, and behavioral intentions in religious tourism, this study fills this knowledge vacuum. It also examines the direct and indirect impact of religiosity on behavioral intentions through MTE and visitor satisfaction. The findings contribute to understanding and serving India's significant tourism sector. This study confirms religiosity's direct positive effects on MTE, behavioral intention, and tourist satisfaction (H1, H2, H3), aligning with previous research (Ithnan & Ariffin, 2020; Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Sulaiman et al., 2022; Preko et al., 2020; Zulvianti et al., 2023; Juliana et al., 2024; Taheri et al., 2016), highlighting religiosity's role in determining behavioral intentions and satisfaction in religious tourism.

While tourism literature extensively explores Islamic and Christian religiosity, research on Hindu religiosity and its influence on visitor behavior is limited. Given India's large market and potential for Hindu religious tourism, this study contributes by investigating the role of Hindu religiosity in shaping

the behavioral intentions of tourists visiting Varanasi, a prominent religious and cultural destination (Sharma, 2021). The study confirms memorable tourism experience's positive impact on behavioral intention (H4) and tourist satisfaction (H5), aligning with previous research (Chen & Phou, 2013; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Ledikwe, 2021; Sharma & Nayak, 2019). Additionally, satisfaction positively and significantly influenced behavioral intention (H6), consistent with previous findings (Suhartanto, 2018; Sharma & Nayak, 2019). A key contribution is analyzing religiosity's indirect impact on behavioral intentions through MTE and visitor satisfaction mediation in religious tourism. The study found that both MTE and tourist satisfaction played the role of mediator in between the influence of religiosity on behavioral intention. Specifically, MTE mediated the influence with an indirect impact of 0.218 and a direct impact of 0.285, while satisfaction mediated the effect with an indirect impact of 0.042 and a direct impact of 0.285. The t-value and p-value for all indirect effects were validated (Table 5).

Table 4. Results of the structural model.

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	P-Value	Remarks	R Squared
H1	REL => MTE	0.574	0.000	Supported	0.329
H2	REL => BEH	0.285	0.000	Supported	0.572
H3	REL => SAT	0.150	0.009	Supported	0.181
H4	MTE => BEH	0.380	0.000	Supported	
H5	MTE => SAT	0.321	0.000	Supported	
H6	SAT => BEH	0.283	0.000	Supported	

5.2 Academic and practical implications

This research offers significant theoretical and managerial implications for enhancing service quality at religious tourism destinations. As competition intensifies within the tourism industry (Kim & Ritchie, 2014), understanding factors influencing visitor loyalty becomes crucial. While religiosity, memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), and visitor satisfaction have been linked to behavioral intentions (Hariani et al., 2017; Sim & Bujang, 2012; Chi, 2012; Kim and Ritchie, 2014), their combined effects on behavioral intention in the context of religious tourism remain unexplored. The study's findings offer useful information to managers of tourism and marketers. In theory, this study makes a distinctive addition to the field of religious tourism. It explores the connection between religious beliefs, memorable travel experiences, and behavioral intentions in addition to validating aspects of religiosity. The results greatly advance the field's understanding by showing that religiosity affects religious tourists' behavioral intentions both directly and indirectly (via MTEs and visitor satisfaction).

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Despite the fact that this study provides useful information, it is crucial to acknowledge many limitations on how MTEs, religiosity, and visitor satisfaction all interact to influence future behavior. Because the study's primary focus is on domestic tourists visiting Varanasi, its findings cannot be extended to other

cultural groups. To confirm findings, more cross-cultural studies using a range of samples are advised. Additionally, while this study examined MTEs, religiosity, and satisfaction's impact on behavioral intentions, previous research highlights perceived value as a key influence on visitor behavior (Prebensen & Xie, 2017). Incorporating perceived value into future studies could enhance the framework. Furthermore, the questionnaire's closed-ended format restricted in-depth exploration of memorable tourism, religiosity, and behavioral intentions. Employing open-ended questions or qualitative research methods could enrich future studies.

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