

Determinants of Religious Tourism: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract: Religious tourism presumably the oldest form of tourism in which the tourists search for tranquility and sacred experience. Despite having promising faith centers in different parts of Bangladesh, religious tourism receives little research attention. Owing to inadequate understanding and precise portrayal of religious tourism's products, domestic travelers often exclude religious attractions out of their usual year round itinerary. This study aims to identify major determinants for developing religious tourism in a credible way to the travelers. Through snowball sampling, 100 respondents who visited at least once to any religious sites was surveyed face to face. Descriptive statistics portrayed the demographic profile of the respondents and Regression analysis explored the influence of each determinant. The results make contribution by suggesting that unique branding and communicating religious values through social media promotion determine the success of religious tourism. Moreover, the study offered some managerial implications to develop Bangladesh as an attractive religious tourism hub.

Keywords: Religious Tourism, Unique and consistent branding, interpreting religious values, sustainable policies, innovative promotion.

Introduction

Tourism is now considered as one of the most dominant sectors in the world consisting multifarious forms and diverse nature. One of the most sensible and prevalent forms of tourism is religious tourism. It can be defined as travel with the core motive of experiencing religious forms, or the products they induce, like art, culture, traditions and architecture. According to the Ministry of Tourism of Brazil (MTUR) (2010), "Religious Tourism is the set of tourism activities arising from the spiritual quest and religious practice in places and in events related to institutional religions, regardless of creed or ethnic origin". As religious and pilgrimage tourism share almost similar attributes, in this paper both of these terms are used interchangeably. Onions (1983) stated "Pilgrimage is a journey made by a pilgrim, who travels from place to place, usually journeying a long

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distance and to a scared place as an act of devotion”. Regarding the number of religious travelers, UNWTO estimated that around 330 million people travel reputed religious sites every year and this very form of tourism has now become a major contributor in the economy of different countries (UNWTO, 2014). This form of tourism not only contributes to the economy but also it creates huge scope of cultural exchange among tourists of different origins. This type of visits also strengthens the faiths and beliefs regarding religion in the minds of people. According to UNWTO former secretary-general, “With their unique historical, cultural and natural features, pilgrimages represent vital opportunities to further strengthen tourism’s ability to foster intercultural dialogue and contribute to the protection of religious and spiritual sites (UNWTO, 2014).”

Bangladesh is a developing country where tourism sector has huge potential because of its diversified tourism attractions ranging from natural to cultural to man made. Among different types of tourism, Religious tourism also draws the attention of authorities. Bangladesh Government is trying to create regional hub for flourishing tourism in Bangladesh. Moreover, Bangladesh Tourism Corporation (BPC), Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB), ATAB, TOAB and other stakeholders are also playing role for the flourishing of religious tourism in Bangladesh. Some of the famous religious tourism sites of Bangladesh are Baitul Mukarram, Shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal, Shrine of Shah Paran, Shat Gambuj Mosque, Dhakeshwari National Temple, Kantaji Temple, Golden Temple, Chandranath Temple, Ramu temple, Aranya Kutir Bhuddist temple and Seema Buddha vihar, etc. Throughout the year people celebrate different religious festivals like Eid-ul-Fitar, Eid-ul-Adha, Durga Puja, Kali puja, Maghi Purnima, Probarona Purnima, Christmas day and Baro din, etc.

Although there are abundant promising faith centers in different parts of Bangladesh, religious tourism receives little research attention. Owing to inadequate understanding and precise portrayal of religious tourism’s products, domestic travelers often exclude religious attractions out of their usual year round itinerary. Besides, some tourists consider tourism and religious beliefs as mutually exclusive events (Battour et al., 2017) that lead to some narrow segments of tourists whose needs become unaddressed and consequently there is a growing need to further study the faith based tourism and its intricacies (Weidenfeld & Ron, 2008). Despite having lots of studies relating to religious tourism and the potential relationships between pilgrims and other tourists, most of them turned out to be theoretical. There is a lack of empirical studies to appropriately weigh the potential determinants that could open newer possibilities to understand and develop religious tourism from the perspective of Bangladesh. Hence, this paper examines the demographics who are interested to visit religious destinations and explores the variables essential to the development of the religious sites so that travelers irrespective of their religious views can see faith based destinations as a thriving tourism product.

Objectives of the study

This study mainly aims to identify major determinants for the development of religious tourism from the context of Bangladesh. However, to rationalize the primary objective, the study investigated the potentials of religious tourism products and based on the findings, tried to outline possible managerial implications.

Significance of religious tourism

Tourism is expected to be emphasized in all countries of the World in accordance with its potentials. Nowadays it is extensively influencing all the societies around the world. In the meantime, cultural tourism, especially its religious kind, has become an important phenomenon and plays a key role in developing tourism in the countries having religious sites and attractions. Religion is a means to draw attention of tourists to countries like Spain, France, Saudi Arabia, India, Syria, and so on at present. By developing religious tourism, these countries make the best use of their potentials and their enduring heritage as an economic means to absorb investment. For undertaking serious measures, some countries have started competition with a great number of other countries in the World.

Religious tourism creates great potentials for earning currency from the tourists and gives opportunity to explore the religious culture and rituals of the country. Sometimes architectural heritage also flourished with the support of pilgrimage tourism. Most of the European countries, mainly Spain and Italy are the great examples of this phenomenon.

Likewise, the European countries, the Asian countries have huge prospects to flourish religious tourism. All types of religions have their own heritage from different times. All the important religious groups, such as Muslim, Hindu, Christian and Buddhist have found their root in this region. Maximum countries of Asia have multiple religions because followers of the above mentioned religions live here. Some of the well know countries of Asia are Bangladesh, India, Iran, China, Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia etc. For this reason, many people of the world visit this side of the world to participate in different religious activities.

Bangladesh has huge prospect to flourish pilgrimage tourism here because she has various religious minded people, different mentionable religious sites and availability of religious festivals throughout the year. Besides this, people of Bangladesh are very much hospitable and cooperative. Considering great potentials in religious tourism, as experts assert, development of this has not been received serious attention.

If everyone considers these facts then they will be interested in studying and doing research about Bangladesh's religious tourism potentials as an important instrument to improve tourism industry in Bangladesh. As a new subject, tourism in general and religious ones in particular are accordance with the above mentioned potentials in

Bangladesh seems to be the best instrument to help the growth of tourism industry in Bangladesh.

Religious Tourism in Bangladesh

The people of Bangladesh are very much cooperative minded in terms of religious perspective. They have their own religious beliefs and they always respect the rituals of other religions. It makes Bangladesh a unique place compared to other neighboring countries. Here most of the people are Muslims beside other religions, such as Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism. All the religions have their separate religious institutions, rituals and festivals. The maximum number of important religious sites are associated to Islam because the highest percentage of people are Muslim here. Some of the famous religious sites of Muslim people are Baitul Mukarram – the national mosque of Bangladesh, Chhota Sona Masjid - The Fifteen-Domed "Small Golden Mosque", Bangladesh's Sparkling Star Mosque, Shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal in Sylhet, Shrine of Shah Paran in Sylhet, unique Shat Gambuj Mosque in Bagerhat and many others mosques and shrines. Besides these, many more Hindu temples are situated around the country. Some of the famous temples are Dhakeshwari National Temple - Dhaka's Oldest Hindu Temple, Kantaji Temple - A Masterpiece of Terracotta Architecture, Golden Temple - Nestled in Scenic Tranquility, Chandranath Temple in Sitakunda, Adinath Temple in Maheskhali, Cox's Bazar, Loknath Brommochari temple in Barodi, Ramna Kali Mondir in Dhaka, Ramkrisno mission, etc. Some of the famous Buddhist temples are Ramu temple in Cox's bazar, Aranya Kutir Bhuddist temple in Khagrachori, Jadi Buddhist temple in Bandarban, Rajbana Vihara in Rangamati, Kuakata Bhuddist temple, Seema Buddha vihar etc.

Bangladesh is also famous for its religious festivals and fairs which are held throughout the year. Some of the famous fairs and festivals are Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha, Durga Puja and other festivals, Buddha Purnima, Baisakhi Purnima and Christmas day, Fair of Adinath, Muharram, Golakandail Fair, Gurpukur Fair, Langalbandh Fair, Shib Chaturdashi Fair, Fair of Ashwin Sankranti etc.

Literature Review

Religious tourism is a faith based travelling that leads tourists to move from one place to another in order to have closeness with the divine and sacred that cannot be achieved anywhere else or appreciated as profanely. Religious or faith based tourism can be defined as a journey that discovers a new sense of self while performing several rituals in accordance with one's own belief (Kasim, 2011). Mass tourists often consider the religious destinations as 'side-trips' to relish their inner happiness. Religion is inextricably linked with tourism (Poria et al., 2003) as tourists and the destination components shared a closed relationship with each other.

Pilgrimage tourism as a research area has its root in the 1970's and 80's proposed largely by the anthropologists and sociologists. Though Turner & Turner (1969) described religious tourism as a "ritual process", MacCannell (1973) was the pioneer who clearly identified pilgrimage as a quest for the 'authentic' experiences. Later Graburn stated the religious tourism as 'sacred journeys' that motivate people for transforming themselves through gathering sacred self-knowledge (Graburn, 1977; Turner, 1973). Until 1990's religious tourism as a separate form of tourism have not been discussed in tourism literatures. Eade & Sallnow (1991) in their study showed religious tourism as a heterogeneous phenomenon discussing the impact from the perspective of politics, culture, behavioral and tourists. Later on the religious tourism perspective got its prevalence in terms of destinations attributes as well. Cohen (1992a) in his study identified two broad types of religious sites namely 'the formal' that is associated with sacred and dedicated religious activities and 'the popular' that is related with the enjoyment of the sense of place. Defining religious tourism both the pilgrim sites and the motivations of the tourists who visit those places need to be considered (Stoddard, 1997). However, defining 'general tourist' as a recreational traveler and pilgrim tourist' as a tourist interested in religious sites often gives a confused view of the religious tourist's motivation that is biased by the cultural polarization (Smith, 1992). An important study was conducted by Uriely et al. (2003) who first tried to identify resident's perception regarding religious tourism which was quite essential to efficiently manage the services catered to this special segment.

After the year 2000, most of the religious tourism literatures shifted their view towards the unification of the religious interests of the tourists which is an aptitude towards the 'secular tourism' (Badone & Roseman, 2004; Margry, 2008). An increasing research concentrating on secular form of religious tourism got its primacy due to the new age motivations like personal growth and non-traditional transformative rituals (Attix, 2002). Growing demand for travelling to war graves, the graves and residences of celebrities, and churchyards and funeral sites as sacred and secular pilgrimage are some examples of new age religious tour (Alderman, 2002; Reader & Walter, 1993). Thus, tourism, which has long been considered to have its origin from the religious travel in the ancient period, however, lately it has been transformed to a new form of tourism that considers the ancient journey to the religious sites as well as encompassing the modern secular journeys (Collins- Kreiner, 2016).

The journey of the religious tourists passes through several thresholds and to understand these stages could be essential in developing and managing the tourist destinations. Carrasco (1996) identifies that religious tourists go through three development phases that transform their sense of self. The first one is separation from the usual state of mind and bodily desires, when the individuals observe themselves in unity with every living creature then comes the second phase that is insightful sense of union, in the final phase

of the spiritual journey, pilgrims experience a total transformation of the self that gives them a new meaning of the world (Davies, 1998).

Determinants of Religious Tourism:

Religious tourism is an emergent field in the academic literature, however, studies about religious motives, interest and determinants are insufficient (Hughes et al., 2013). A number of topics have been focused in the literature related to significance of unique branding for the development of any particular form of tourism. A recent work (Rodríguez et al, 2019) have addressed that unique and consistent promotional message contributes to uplift the brand equity of tourist destination and eventually increase the tourist arrivals regardless of tourism forms. Similarly, Pike and Page (2014) asserts that to be a successful destination, communicating the branding message in a brief, focused and consistent manner is quintessential.

The value of branding and positioning and its impact on the tourist's travel behavior have been investigated in different prominent studies (Chen & Uysal, 2002; Mykletun, Crotts, & Mykletun, 2001; Kozak & Rimmington, 1999). Diversifying religious tourism products in the form of monument viewing, religious cultural experience, religious tourism for peace, religious festivals becomes a new trend of tourism (Koroglu and Guzel, 2013; Xintong and Yuhui, 2014) that breaks the monotony of just a place of pray and worship. Therefore, the religious and cultural values of destinations should be properly communicated that would eventually ease the interaction between the tourist and stakeholders (Božic et al, 2016).

Importance of strategic marketing communication has been underscored as the prime reason for tourist arrival (Štefko, Kiráľová & Mudrík, 2015). KOCYİĞİT (2016) used the example of Konya Museum to illustrate the use of creative promotional materials and social media to develop positive image of religious sites. Similarly, Štefko, Kiráľová & Mudrík (2015) supports the use of both on and offline especially the use of social media should be used to communicate the uniqueness of religious sites. Whereas, Dowson (2016) holds that to promote experiential product like Religious tourism, offline promotion is effective as it seeks to engage customers' senses, motivate tourist's to take action, and strengthen their commercial relationships.

Through innovative promotion materials like logo, slogan and catchphrases cities that are not religious destinations may also capitalize their religious connections to boost culture, art and non-religious materials (Uysal, 2013). Istanbul's mega event European Capital Of Culture (ECOC) is an ideal depiction of this, where they portray the logo of three arcs that represent Imperial mosques or the basilica domes of Byzantine churches, introduce Istanbul as a spiritual and mystical city by using the slogan 'The capital of religions', historical figures like Rumi's 'tolerance and respect for other faiths' becomes the

catchphrases. Navruz-Zoda & Navruz-Zoda (2016) investigated the significance of proper segmentation of religious visitors and the use of creative and personalized promotional materials for the development religious tourism from the perspective of Sufi travelers.

Policymakers, municipalities, project developers, tourism entrepreneurs, special interest groups, residents, tourists all are considered active stakeholders of tourism. As religious tourism is a special interest form, planned stakeholder driven approach is a necessary for development (Wiltshier and Griffiths, 2016). Moscardo (2014) suggests supply chain stakeholders and volunteer groups involvement to develop any destinations. Štefko, Királ'ová & Mudrík (2015) identified separated activities by different stakeholders is one of the obstacle in developing religious tourism. Hence, cooperative product formulation with the local key stakeholders (Kilipiris & Athanasios, 2016) and the systematic involvement of stakeholders (Tala and Padurean, 2008) strengthens the management of religious tourism destination. However, Graave et al. (2017) studied the positive relationship between active involvement of stakeholders and the religious destinations local economy.

The necessity of public policy has been stressed as an essential determinant for developing religious tourism (Kurmanaliyeva et al, 2014). Without proper governance and sustainable management of religious sites, planned development cannot be ensured. Cohen (1998) pointed out the contrary effects of unplanned explicit policies in religious destinations that encourage only fundamentalist visitors and dispirit the arrivals of common tourists. Mattila et al. (2001) also pointed out the negative impact of religious orthodoxy on tourist arrivals. Yet, studies (Fourie et al., 2015) shows a positive relationship between religious diversity and tourist arrivals. The necessity of sustainable policies has been a predominant issue when developing any forms of tourism mainly because the adverse effect of commodification has been portrayed in some studies (Madichie, 2011) where it has been noted that hip hop lyrics are being used to promote religious destinations. George (2010) investigated the extent of exploitation of traditional religious practices in favor of revenue generation. These studies positively asserted the efficacy of sustainable policies to ensure long-term possibility and attractiveness of religious tourist destinations (Rashid, 2018).

A number of previous studies (Amore and Hall, 2016; Wiltshier and Griffiths, 2016) have attempted to assess the impact of good governance in terms of policies on religious tourism literatures. To facilitate the smooth processes, it is the sole responsibility of the concerned government bodies to ensure the infrastructural facilities to cater the special needs of the religious tourists (Štefko, Királ'ová & Mudrík, 2015). Study finds that residents actively participate and support the development of religious tourism when relevant tourism ministry involved and take positive initiatives (Silva & Marques, 2016).

Ministry of tourism should innovate new and creative tourism product to showcase the potential of the religious sites and protect the sustainability of the sacred sites (Suleiman & Mohamed, 2011). Competitive advantage of a destination is not only dependent on its unique qualities but also the networked organizations and the contributions of ministry (Wiltshier and Griffiths, 2016). Similarly, Dredge (2006) underlined the role of Government bodies to act as a catalyst for developing tourism in cooperation with community and tourism entrepreneurs.

Infrastructure quality and portrayal of religious rituals in an appealing way has been considered as successful determinants of successful religious tourism (Tala and Padurean, 2008). Support infrastructures in the form of souvenir shop, library, resting places communicate meaningful information about the places' history, culture and architectural values to the visitors (Božic et al, 2016). Malodia and Singla (2017) explored the positive relationships between increased infrastructural facilities and growing numbers of tourist arrivals in the religious tourists in Himalayan region of India.

A number of topics have been addressed in the literature related to the importance of organizing events in the religious sites. Some studies have investigated the context of events to rejuvenate community's unique traditions, norms and values (Janiskee, 1980; Bowdin et al., 2006, p.3), while others have empirically examined the significance of events for collective identification (Quinn, 2009). Other studies on events have sought to establish association among events, agricultural festivals (Rolfe, 1992) and religious rites and rituals (Gotham, 2005). Recent studies (Anna Prof, 2016) asserts that holding of events in religious sites should be backed up by infrastructural measures and community participation. Since the 'eventization of faith', introduced by Pfadenhauer (2010), the importance of arranging events to foster the growth of religious destinations has been noticed in many recent studies (Dowson, 2016) where religious events seen as 'liminal experience'. Abdelazim and Alajloni (2016) examined the multiple roles of events and festivals, being religious or nonreligious (Durgamohan, 2015) in different contexts to allure the visitors of different interest to the pilgrimage destinations.

To maintain the sustainability and competitiveness of any religious site the significance of 'Balanced' interpretation is quintessential. The understandings of different history, culture, theological issues, rites and rituals provides the visitors an opportunity to connect with the sites and derive personal meaning out of it (Hughes et al., 2013). Through proper interpretations of the religious sites' values, Stakeholders can play a major role to alleviate possible dissonance with visitors (Nyaupane et al., 2015). Religious activities are converging with cultural performances as tourists are enjoying the core learning of the religious observance and ritualized practice (Cheer et al. 2017).

Among the various determinants that constitute the development of religious tourism, combining religious tourism with other forms of tourism considered to be the most basic

level of integration. Staiff and Bushell (2017) note that the Lai Heua Fai festival in Laos is such a convergence of heritage and religious tourism, also worthy of particular attention the study of Donato and Lohrasbi (2017) where they pressed the significance of such convergence. The findings of Karvelyte-Balbieriene and Grazuleviciute-Vileniske's (2014) are in line with their previous works where they asserted the merging of cultural festivals with the religious functions and their sustainability in the rural landscapes. UNWTO (2011) recommended that enhancing the values of existing religious products, favorable policies and combining religious tour with other forms of tourism would attract more visitors.

Methodology

The main purpose of the research was to figure out the prospects of religious tourism through discovering some significant determinants that drive this form of tourism towards an effective and sustainable development. The research approach is descriptive cross sectional study. Researchers found it difficult to appropriately use probability sampling as there were no previous secondary data and lists of the religious tourists. Since, respondents needed to be selected by the criterion that they should travel faith based sites inside the country at least once for religious purpose, it was hard to reach such special interest visitors. As snowball is a useful sampling choice when the population is hidden or hard to reach (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997) and for chain referral sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), the study adopted this non probability technique by asking the respondents for referral who visited the religious sites with them or whom they know. To identify the determinants for this study, researchers attempted 130 respondents, however, 100 was compatible for conducting the survey. Respondents are the people who travel at least once in any religious site for the sake of religious learning inside Bangladesh and sampling frame is in Dhaka city.

A structured questionnaire was administered for collecting primary data through personal interview and secondary data were collected from relevant research reports and publications, newspapers, books, journals and websites. The survey questionnaire was developed to assess the respondent's perception regarding the possibility of flourishing religious tourism using a 5-point Likert scale where 1= Strongly Agree; 2= Agree; 3= Neutral; 4= Disagree; and 5= Strongly Disagree. The multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the collected data. These statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20) software.

Analysis and Results

Respondents' Socio-Demographic Profile

Table 1 provides the respondents' information. Out of a total of 100 respondents, 70 (70%) were male and 30 (30%) female. Data were collected from different age groups.

Large group of respondents (54%) were from 21-30 age group, followed by 27% from 11-20 age group. In addition, 46% respondents were students, followed by 24% hotel associates, whereas 14% respondents reported that they are business men, and 11% service holders and other category includes self-employed in different organizations at the time of the survey.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 70 | 70% |
| Female | 30 | 30% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |
| Profession | | |
| Student | 46 | 46% |
| Business | 14 | 14% |
| Hotel associates | 24 | 24% |
| Service holders | 11 | 11% |
| Others | 5 | 5% |
| Total | 100 | 46% |
| Age Segment | | |
| 11-20 | 27 | 27% |
| 21-30 | 54 | 54% |
| 31-40 | 14 | 14% |
| Above 40 | 3 | 3% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

Source: Field survey

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|------------------|--|------------|
| .979 | .986 | 10 |

Before applying statistical tools, testing of the reliability of the scale is very important as it shows the extent to which a scale produces consistent result if measurements were made repeatedly. This is done by determining the association between scores obtained from different attributes of the scales. If the association is high, the scale yields consistent results, thus it is reliable. Cronbach’s Alpha is the most widely used method in this regard. It may be mentioned that its value varies from 0 to 1 but the satisfactory value is required to be more than 0.6 for the scale to be reliable (Malhotra, 2002; Cronbach, 1951). In the present study, we therefore used Cronbach’s alpha scale as a measure of reliability.

Authors have used multiple regression for data analyses, the purpose of which is to measure the relative influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable. Thus following model is developed to test the significance of stated relationship. The regression used in this model is given below:

$$Y \text{ (Effective development of Religious Tourism)} = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + b_6X_6 + b_7X_7 + b_8X_8 + b_9X_9 + b_{10}X_{10} + e_i$$

Where, b_0 = Constant

X_1 = Sustainable Policies and institutional framework

X_2 = Portraying core learning of different rituals

X_3 = Unique and Consistent Branding

X_4 = Patronization by the religious ministry

X_5 = Innovative promotional tools

X_6 = Combining with Other forms of Tourism

X_7 = Integrated Infrastructure

X_8 = Stakeholder’s Participation

X_9 = Improving Connectivity

X_{10} = Arranging events

e_i = Error term

Table 3: Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .971 ^a | .943 | .938 | .165 | .943 | 188.400 | 8 | 91 | .000 |

In Table 3, it is found that a strong relationship exists (R= .97 or 97%) between the predictors or independent variables and the flourishing of religious tourism in Bangladesh. The $R^2 = .94$ means that predictors explained 94% of the variation in low

flourishing religious tourism that seems very good. The most important thing in this table is adjusted R^2 (.938) that suggests adding each of the independent variables after the first independent variable, makes a 93% contribution in explaining the variation in flourishing and the Sig. F change (.000) is significant at 99% that is very satisfactory to prove the model is very fit.

Table 4: ANOVA

| Model | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|------------|----------------|----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| Regression | 41.080 | 8 | 5.137 | 188.400 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 2.480 | 91 | .027 | | |
| Total | 43.560 | 99 | | | |

In Table 4, researchers analyzed the variance of the variables loaded in the model to examine if there is any relationship exists between the dependent variable scope of flourishing religious tourism and the independent variables. The significance level of the F value determines the goodness of fit of the model. Typically, if “Sig” is greater than 0.05, we conclude that our model could not fit the data. If Sig < .01, then the model is significant at 99%, In this study, we can see that Sig is .000 that is < .01; so we can conclude that the model is significant at 99% and we can accept the model.

Table 5: Parameter Estimates

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | VIF |
|---|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|-------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| 1 (Constant) | .063 | .50 | | 1.255 | .213 | |
| Sustainable Policies, and institutional framework | .269 | .073 | .367 | 3.712 | .000 | 1.550 |
| Core learning of different rituals | .350 | .086 | .293 | 1.788 | .009 | 1.330 |
| Unique and consistent branding | .573 | .096 | .566 | 1.977 | .000 | 1.613 |
| Patronization by the religious ministry | .199 | .080 | .341 | 2.492 | .015 | 1.162 |
| Innovative promotional tools | .342 | .075 | .225 | 1.715 | .000 | 1.186 |
| Combining with other forms of tourism | .293 | .050 | .250 | 1.855 | .025 | 1.064 |
| Integrated infrastructure | .120 | .070 | .180 | 1.717 | .049 | 2.453 |
| Stakeholder’s Participation | .255 | .040 | .220 | 1.225 | .030 | 1.504 |
| Improving Connectivity | .008 | .050 | .130 | 1.675 | .090 | 1.354 |
| Arranging events | .032 | .091 | .042 | .020 | .090 | 1.841 |

In the Table 5, the beta coefficients are showing the relative importance of each of the ten attributes (independent variables) in contributing to the variance in effective development of religious tourism (dependent variable). As far as the relative importance of the ten attributes are concerned, unique and consistent branding ($\beta=0.573$, $p=0.000$) has the highest contribution and carries the heaviest weight that means improving the brand of religious sites and delivering consistent quality messages by stakeholders and appropriate authority would lead to a positive impact on the development of religious tourism holding other variables constant. The other two most significant factors are portraying core learning of different rituals ($\beta: 0.350$, $p=0.009$) followed by using innovative promotional tools ($\beta: .342$, $p=.000$). It is quite evident that the all the attributes are not equally significant as they have not passed the significance criterion ($p=.05$). Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is indicating that there is no multicollinearity issues among the independent variables since the values are less than its standard cut off value 10 (Hair et al., 1995).

Conclusions

This study provides a framework for understanding the religious tourism in the form of some effective determinants contributing to the development of religious tourism. The above result shows that the significance of unique and consistent branding is a quintessential determinant to develop religious tourism, this finding are in line with (Rodríguez et al., 2019) where they indicated by delivering unique and consistent messages destinations can pull a large numbers of tourists regardless of tourism forms. Therefore, different faith based centers of Bangladesh should consider to reshape their views from ‘performing rituals in sacred places’ to ‘traveling to a place for inner understanding’ that would deliver a unique message to build a brand equity in the mind of travelers irrespective of their travelling purpose. This motivational change should reflect in the visions, activities and promotions of different faith based centers to effectively rejuvenate a latent potential in terms of tourism product in Bangladesh. Often the ‘sacred outlook’ towards the religious places confines its potential to promote the core learning of different appealing rituals of religious places. The understandings of different history, culture, theological issues, rites and rituals provides the visitors an opportunity to connect with the sites and derive personal meaning out of it. Hence, the proper interpretations of different religious rituals standing out to be an important determinants and find similarities with previous studies (Cheer et al., 2017; Nyaupane et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2013) where balanced interpretations of religious activities have been underscored so that travelers of any religious values can understand the core message of the rites. However, the social media can play an important role in promoting different tourist destinations through disseminating the emotional and sacred appeal of different religious tourist destinations (Cristea, 2015).

Redefining the religious tourism destinations is quite necessary because Bangladesh has some places that promote both the cultural and religious values like two of the World heritage cultural sites namely historic mosque city of Bagerhat and ruins of the Buddhist Vihara at Paharpur. These destinations combined with other cultural places like Fakir Lalon Shah's Mazar that is reputed for transformative folk-music should be promoted as 'A self-immersion tour' rather than traditional 'religious packages'. The importance of preservation and sustainability of the cultural and spatial attributes of religious destinations are quite extraordinary as this single attribute adheres to the appeal of the destination. A balanced management of the religious destinations is quintessential to sustainably maintain the integrity of the places. Often profit earning becomes primary motives in this hyper-competitive globalized environment. The religious destination management authority should emphasize on those issues that could overshadow the traditional role of religious ceremonies (Kasim, 2011). Bangladesh has also regional variations in religious programs, it has unique religious rituals of ethnic communities as well as strong bonding among different religious groups. Authority should focus more on the development of religious sites with proper flavor and varieties of tourism activities, increase connectivity through infrastructural development. After all, domestic tourism is flourishing at a great speed which is also creating scope for the religious tourism in Bangladesh.

The role of ministry of religious affairs are very important in patronizing and promoting the significance of religious tourism in Bangladesh. Moreover, it is the marketers, the state and central government who could join their hands to concentrate on the faith based locations in order to generate business and employment opportunities as well as to promote their products/services. The government could make public private partnerships to offer necessary infrastructure support viz. transportation, water and sanitation, power and other basic facilities which will ensure the influx and pleasant stay of pilgrims.

Therefore, this paper calls for a fundamental rethinking of religious tourism as a transformative tour rather than a traditional view of sacred traveling to perform rituals. Unique and consistent branding, initiating sustainable policies, disseminating the core values of different religious learning could expedite the development process of religious tourism in Bangladesh.

Managerial Implications

Bangladesh has a repository of bountiful natural and cultural resources, and one of such diverse cultural resources that Bangladesh have is enriched religious or faith based centers those spread around different parts of the country. However, these latent resources yet to bloom its fullest potential due to lack of adequate attention. In this paper, authors endeavor to identify different attributes contributing to the development of

religious tourism and based on the results of this study the following strategic choices have been recommended for the appropriate authority:

- As Bangladesh is in a strategic position having three sided borders with India which is one of the prominent destination for religious tourism. Authority should give priority to promote circuit tourism by using hub and spoke model that emphasizes on an enhanced connectivity with the nearby countries adjacent to Bangladesh.
- An effective brand slogan like ‘Discover yourself in faith hubs’ could do a lot to motivate conventional pleasure of tourists to visit in a different dimension except usual trajectory.
- As Bangladesh has a lot of religious places in different parts of this country, a repository or bundle of religious product could be offered such as Sylhet could be promoted by bundling different shrines as ‘Sylhet the abode of saints’, Rajshahi as ‘find yourself in the ruins’, Dhaka as ‘The city of mosque with enriched history’, Chittagong as ‘The religious diversity’ and ‘Khulna as ‘The heritage’. These brand names of the different zones could communicate an effective message about the places inside these regions. Destination Management Organization and the travel agencies should collaborate together to implement these zonal distribution of religious attractions.
- Religious center should constantly emphasize on the self-transformative and secular form of travelling approach. Effective participation of all the stakeholders is necessary to communicate the values, morals and code of conduct of the place so that the higher numbers of tourists from different beliefs can unify together to nurture the sense of community wellbeing and enjoy the ultimate experience. Profit motive should not be the major concern of sustainability, preservation of the religious values and attitudes should get the utmost importance.

Future research

Very few study have been found on the religious tourism in Bangladesh. However, the researchers try to give their utmost endeavor to identify certain factors that could contribute to understand the nature of religious travel. The scope of conducting future study is huge in this arena. The behavioral pattern of the pilgrims in different religious places could be an interesting study. As this study focusses on reshaping the motivation of religious traveling, motivational study could be conducted in a large scale on a broad segment of travelers. The impact of the managerial implications of this study could also be analyzed through quantitative study. The resident’s perception regarding the pilgrimage sites could also be an effective observational study in this regard.

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