

Tourist Motivation and Behavioral Intention to Visit the Religious Site of Ayodhya: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract

This research investigates the reasons and behavioral intentions of tourists visiting Ayodhya, a venerated city in India acknowledged as the birthplace of Lord Rama. This research utilizes the push-pull incentive framework and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine the factors influencing travelers' decisions to visit this significant holy place. A standardized questionnaire was employed to collect data from 400 tourists, originating from the United States and many other nations. We employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among push and pull motives, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention. The findings indicate that spiritual fulfillment, cultural exploration, and social connection serve as the primary push factors, while Ayodhya's religious significance, infrastructure, and heritage sites constitute the principal attractions. The results further confirm that attitudes and subjective norms significantly influence the relationship between motivations and behavioral intention. This study contributes to the existing literature on religious tourism and provides pragmatic recommendations for destination management in Ayodhya.

Keywords: Religious Tourism, Ayodhya, Tourist Motivation, Behavioral Intention, Push-Pull Framework, Theory of Planned Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism, one of the earliest forms of travel, encompasses journeys undertaken for spiritual or religious purposes, often directed toward sacred sites, places of worship, or pilgrimage destinations (Rinschede, 1992). This form of tourism transcends mere leisure, blending spiritual fulfillment with cultural exploration and social interaction, appealing to both devout pilgrims and secular travelers seeking heritage experiences (Smith, 1992).

Globally, religious tourism has witnessed significant growth, driven by improved accessibility, rising spiritual curiosity, and the post-COVID-19 resurgence of interest in meaningful travel (Kim et al., 2020). In India, a country steeped in spiritual traditions, religious tourism constitutes a substantial segment of the tourism industry, with sacred cities like Ayodhya, Varanasi, and Tirupati drawing millions annually.

Ayodhya, located in Uttar Pradesh, India, holds profound religious and cultural significance as the birthplace of Lord Rama, a central deity in Hinduism and the protagonist of the epic Ramayana. The city's spiritual prominence is anchored by the iconic Ram Janmabhoomi temple, alongside other revered sites such as Hanumangarhi, Kanak Bhavan, and the ghats of the Sarayu River (Timane & Wandhe, 2024). These sacred landmarks attract a diverse array of visitors, including devout pilgrims seeking spiritual solace and tourists interested in India's rich cultural heritage. Recent infrastructural advancements, including the operationalization of an international airport, modernized railway facilities, and enhanced hospitality services, have elevated Ayodhya's status as a global religious tourism destination (Chaturvedi, 2024). These developments have not only improved accessibility but also positioned Ayodhya as a key hub for both domestic and international tourists, amplifying its appeal in the global tourism landscape.

This study seeks to explore the motivations that drive tourists to visit Ayodhya and to examine their behavioral intentions, specifically focusing on their likelihood to

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revisit and recommend the destination through word-of-mouth. Tourist motivations are analyzed through the push-pull motivation framework, a widely adopted model in tourism research (Dann, 1977). Push factors represent internal drivers, such as the desire for spiritual fulfillment, cultural exploration, or social connection, that propel individuals to undertake travel. Pull factors, conversely, are external attributes of a destination, such as its religious significance, cultural heritage, or infrastructural amenities, that attract visitors (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In the context of Ayodhya, push factors may include spiritual aspirations or the need for personal rejuvenation, while pull factors encompass the city's sacred sites, festivals, and modern facilities.

This study used the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) to elucidate the decision-making process, positing that behavioral intentions are shaped by three constructs: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In religious tourism, attitudes denote visitors' evaluations of visiting Ayodhya, subjective norms reflect the influence of social groups like family or peers, and perceived behavioral control indicates the perceived facilitation or hindrance of undertaking the journey. This study aims to clarify the interaction between internal and external motivations and psychological factors influencing tourists' intentions to visit, return, or promote Ayodhya, by synthesizing the push-pull framework with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

The findings of this research are expected to contribute significantly to the academic literature on religious tourism, particularly in the context of non-Western destinations, addressing a gap in the predominantly Eurocentric focus of prior studies (Shinde, 2022). Furthermore, the study offers practical implications for destination managers and policymakers in Ayodhya, providing insights into enhancing visitor experiences, optimizing marketing strategies, and sustaining the city's growth as a global religious tourism hub.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ayodhya as a Religious Tourism Destination

Religious tourism, characterized by travel undertaken primarily or partially for spiritual, faith-based, or

devotional purposes, remains one of the oldest and most enduring forms of tourism. It encompasses pilgrimages, visits to sacred places, participation in religious festivals, and other spiritually motivated experiences. According to Rinschede (1992), religious tourism not only includes formal pilgrimages but also encompasses broader travel behaviors where spirituality plays a central role. Shinde (2007) underscores its multidimensional nature, suggesting that religious tourism serves both ritualistic obligations and socio-cultural engagement, often combining personal faith with collective religious practices.

In recent years, the landscape of religious tourism has undergone significant transformation. Smith (1992) argues that sacred destinations today attract not only devout pilgrims in search of spiritual elevation but also secular tourists who are drawn to the historical, cultural, and architectural heritage embedded in religious spaces. This dual nature enhances the economic and cultural relevance of religious tourism, positioning sacred cities as important nodes of both spiritual revival and heritage-based tourism.

Within this global context, Ayodhya has emerged as a prominent religious tourism destination, particularly in light of its profound religious and mythological significance in Hinduism. Revered as the birthplace of Lord Rama, Ayodhya holds a central place in the Ramayana epic and in the collective consciousness of millions of Hindus worldwide. The city is home to numerous revered temples, including the Ram Janmabhoomi—the site of the newly constructed Ram Mandir—alongside other spiritual landmarks such as Hanumangarhi, Kanak Bhavan, and the Sarayu River ghats, which serve as sites for ritual bathing, spiritual reflection, and religious festivities (Timane & Wandhe, 2024).

Recent infrastructural and policy-driven developments have significantly transformed Ayodhya into a modern religious tourism hub. Enhanced transportation networks, increased accommodation capacity, heritage restoration projects, and government-backed promotional campaigns have improved both accessibility and visitor experience. These initiatives have positioned Ayodhya not just as a place of pilgrimage but also as a symbolic and cultural epicenter of Hindu identity (Chaturvedi, 2024). The construction and inauguration of the Ram Mandir in

January 2024 has further amplified Ayodhya's visibility on the national and international stage, attracting a diverse spectrum of visitors ranging from religious devotees to cultural tourists and diaspora travelers.

In summary, Ayodhya exemplifies the evolving dynamics of religious tourism by blending mythological reverence, cultural heritage, and modern infrastructure, thereby reinforcing its role as a key destination in India's spiritual and tourism landscape.

Push-Pull Motivation Framework

The push-pull framework has been a foundational model in tourism studies to explain why individuals choose to travel, particularly in contexts where motivations are both internally and externally shaped. First introduced by Dann (1977), the model distinguishes between push factors, which are intrinsic psychological motivations that drive an individual to consider travel, and pull factors, which are the specific characteristics or attributes of a destination that attract the tourist once the decision to travel has been made.

Push factors originate from within the individual and are typically associated with emotional or psychological needs. These may include the desire for spiritual fulfillment, personal growth, escape from daily routines, self-reflection, or even social recognition. In the realm of religious tourism, push motivations are often deeply rooted in faith, the pursuit of inner peace, or the need to perform religious duties such as pilgrimages, penance, or vows. For many religious tourists, especially in post-pandemic times, travel is not just a leisure activity but a meaningful journey with spiritual and emotional depth.

On the other hand, pull factors refer to the external attributes and offerings of the destination that make it appealing. These include the site's religious or historical significance, the availability and quality of infrastructure (such as accessibility, accommodation, and safety), cultural attractions, and religious events or festivals. Yoon and Uysal (2005) emphasized that pull motivations are shaped by the perceived ability of the destination to fulfill the tourist's expectations and desires. In religious tourism, key pull factors might include sacred architecture

(temples, shrines, monuments), ritualistic experiences, the presence of spiritual leaders or gurus, and large-scale events like Kumbh Mela or Ram Navami celebrations.

Battour et al. (2017) further expanded the application of the push-pull framework in religious contexts by illustrating how Islamic and faith-based tourists are often motivated by a complex interplay of both sets of factors. For example, a Muslim tourist may be pushed by a spiritual obligation (e.g., Umrah or Hajj) while being pulled by the availability of halal amenities, religious ambiance, and social acceptance in the host country.

Applying this framework to Ayodhya, visitors may be pushed by a sense of religious duty, cultural identity, or spiritual transformation, and simultaneously pulled by the newly developed Ram Mandir, improved infrastructure, and the symbolic significance of the city in Hindu belief systems. Together, these dual motivations help explain the rising behavioral intention to visit sacred destinations.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Ajzen (1991) developed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), a robust framework for comprehending the determinants of individuals' intentions, which serve as significant predictors of actual behavior. TPB asserts that behavioral intention is shaped by three core constructs: attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitude is how someone feels about doing something, like going to a sacred location. It can be either excellent or negative. Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressures from important individuals, such as family, friends, or community members, that impact the choice to partake in specific behaviors. Perceived behavioral control refers to an individual's evaluation of their ability to do an activity, including factors such as resources, accessibility, and personal constraints (Ajzen, 1991).

In the context of tourism, TPB has been widely applied to predict tourists' behavioral intentions, including revisit intentions and destination loyalty (Meng & Cui, 2020). For religious tourism, TPB is particularly relevant due to the cultural and communal dimensions of such travel. Subjective norms play a significant role, as decisions to

visit sacred sites are often influenced by social groups, including family members or religious communities, who reinforce the cultural and spiritual importance of the journey (Hasan et al., 2020). For instance, in destinations like Ayodhya, the decision to visit may be driven by familial expectations or community traditions, amplifying the impact of subjective norms. Similarly, positive attitudes toward the spiritual and cultural experiences offered by a destination, coupled with perceived ease of access (e.g., improved infrastructure), enhance tourists' intentions to visit or recommend the site. By integrating TPB, this study examines how these constructs mediate the relationship between tourist motivations and their behavioral intentions to visit Ayodhya, contributing to a deeper understanding of religious tourism dynamics.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- *H1*: Push motivations positively influence tourists' attitudes toward visiting Ayodhya.
- *H2*: Pull motivations positively influence tourists' attitudes toward visiting Ayodhya.
- *H3*: Push motivations positively influence tourists' behavioral intention to visit Ayodhya.
- *H4*: Pull motivations positively influence tourists' behavioral intention to visit Ayodhya.
- *H5*: Attitude mediates the relationship between motivations (push and pull) and behavioral intention.
- *H6*: Subjective norms mediate the relationship between motivations (push and pull) and behavioral intention.
- *H7*: Perceived behavioral control positively influences behavioral intention to visit Ayodhya.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research methodology to investigate the motivations and behavioral intentions

of travelers to Ayodhya, a significant religious tourism site in India. A structured questionnaire was the main tool used to gather data. The questionnaire was constructed with previously validated evaluations and customized to the distinct religious and cultural context of Ayodhya. The measurement items were explicitly sourced from prior research on tourist motivation and behavioral intention, namely Yoon and Uysal (2005) for the push-pull framework and Meng and Cui (2020) for the components of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The purpose of using a structured approach was to ensure that the fundamental constructs of interest were assessed in a manner that was consistent, replicable, and statistically valid.

Sampling and Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using a non-probability convenience sampling method, targeting tourists present at prominent religious and cultural landmarks in Ayodhya. A total of 400 valid responses were obtained during the survey period from January to March 2025, with the sample comprising 200 domestic and 200 international tourists. Survey locations included the Ram Janmabhoomi complex, Hanumangarhi temple, and the ghats along the Sarayu River—sites frequented by both pilgrims and cultural tourists. The questionnaire was administered in both English and Hindi to ensure accessibility for a broader range of respondents. The chosen sample size meets the minimum threshold recommended for structural equation modeling (SEM), as outlined by Hair et al. (2014), thereby allowing for robust multivariate analysis.

Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire has four key elements. The first component asked for basic information about the person, such as their age, gender, country, and how often they travel. This was done to learn more about the people who answered and to determine if there were any influences that changed the results. The second half looked into what pushes people to do things, like spiritual fulfillment, self-discovery, cultural curiosity,

and the yearning to move away from regular life. A 5-point Likert scale was used to rate ten things, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree.” The last half talked about pull reasons, which were elements that pulled tourists to Ayodhya from outside the city, such as the temples’ religious significance, cultural festivals, upgrades to the infrastructure, and the city’s overall image. This section also featured ten items that were rated on the same 5-point Likert scale. The last segment looked at the four main parts of the TPB: attitude toward visiting Ayodhya (5 items), subjective norms (5 items), perceived behavioral control (5 items), and behavioral intentions (5 items), which included plans to go back and tell others about the area. We used 5-point Likert-type questionnaires to measure all of the constructs so that we could compare them and make sure they were all the same.

Data Analysis

To empirically assess the proposed research model, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was implemented using IBM AMOS version 26.0, a sophisticated statistical method frequently utilized in behavioral and tourism research to analyze complex causal relationships among latent variables. This study is particularly well-suited for SEM as it enables the simultaneous examination of the measurement model (validating the constructs’ validity and reliability) and the structural model (assessing potential links). Prior to assessing the structural model, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to ascertain the adequacy of the measurement model. We utilized Cronbach’s alpha and Composite dependability (CR) to see how reliable each construct was. It was predicted that each of these numbers would be higher than 0.70, which is the acceptable level. To verify for convergent validity, we employed Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Values greater than 0.50 were regarded as acceptable. To check for discriminant validity, we employed the Fornell-Larcker criterion and a cross-loading matrix comparison. We used a lot of goodness-of-fit indices to make sure that the model fit well and could be used in future situations. The ratio of Chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) is one of the most essential

numbers. Values less than 3.0 indicate a good fit for the model. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) are also crucial. For a good fit, both should be above 0.90. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is another essential measure. If the number is less than 0.08, it means that the model fits well. When you put these indices together, they showed how well the model functioned and how statistically solid it was.

RESULTS

Measurement Model Evaluation

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to test the reliability and validity of the constructs in the measurement model. All standardized factor loadings were higher than the necessary level of 0.60, which means that the indicators were reliable enough. The results of Cronbach’s alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) ranged from 0.78 to 0.91, which showed that the test was consistent within itself. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded 0.50, meeting the standard for convergent validity. Discriminant validity was confirmed when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct surpassed the inter-construct correlations.

Model Fit Indices

The overall fit of the structural model was evaluated using multiple goodness-of-fit indices. The results are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Observed Value
Chi-square/df (χ^2/df)	≤ 3.0	2.37
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	≥ 0.90	0.94
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	≥ 0.90	0.92
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	≤ 0.08	0.059

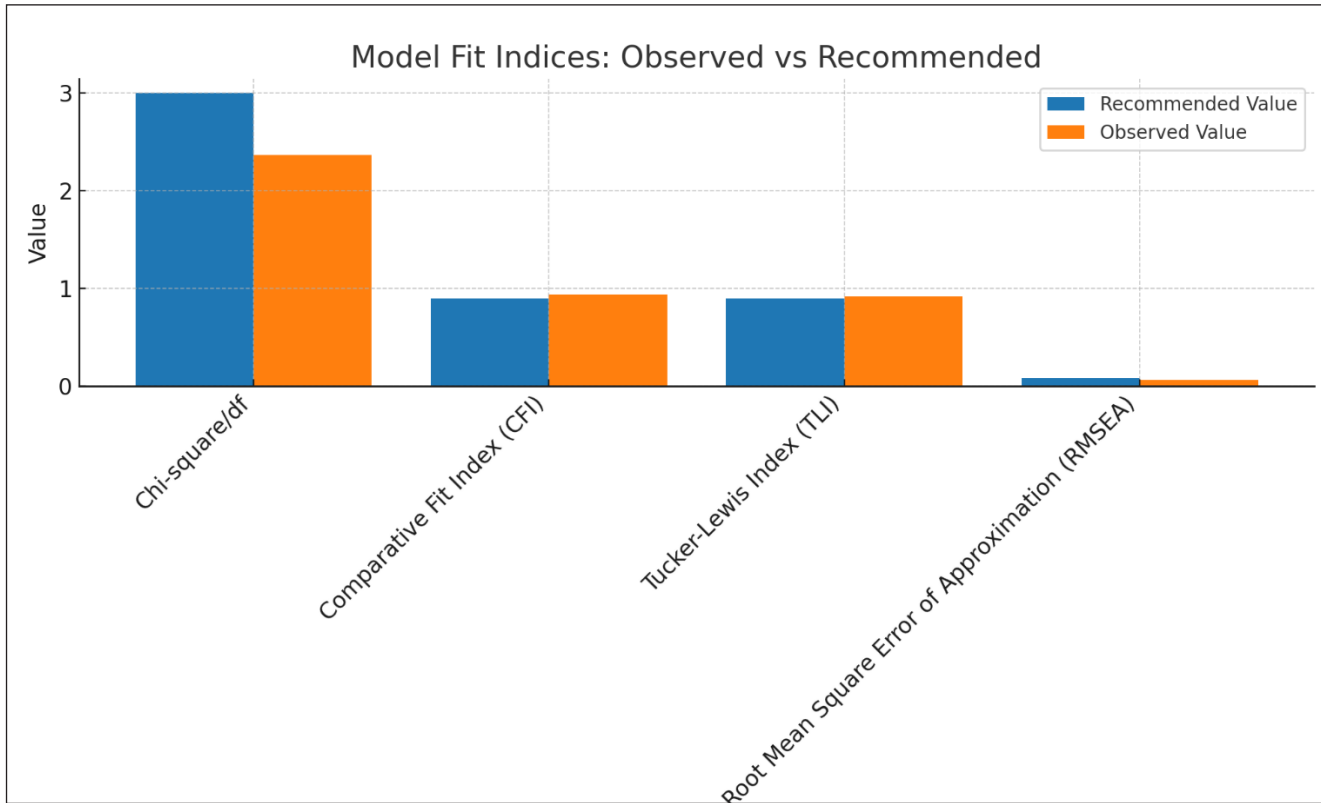


Fig. 1: Indicates These Fit Indices That the Model Demonstrates a Good Fit (Recommended) to the Observed Data

Explanation

The bar chart under “Model Fit Indices: Observed vs. Recommended” shows the difference between the actual (observed) model fit values from the study’s Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis and the predefined threshold (recommended) values. This is important to check if the study’s measurement and structural models are good enough. The observed value of the Chi-square/df ratio is 2.37, which is significantly below the maximum allowable threshold of 3.0. This means that the model is simple enough. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) both have values of 0.94 and 0.92, which are both higher than the recommended value of 0.90. This shows that the model fits well compared to a null model and adds to it. Finally, the Root Mean Square

Error of Approximation (RMSEA), which assesses how well the model fits the population covariance matrix, is 0.059, which is substantially below the allowed range of ≤ 0.08 . This means that the model fits well. In general, all of the observed indices meet or surpass their suggested levels. This shows that the structural model is statistically strong and may be used to explain religious tourist motivations and behavioral intents.

Hypothesis Testing

Structural paths were assessed using standardized regression weights (β) and p-values to test the hypothesized relationships. All hypotheses were supported with statistically significant path coefficients ($p < 0.05$). The results are presented in Table 2 below:

transportation, and time. A greater perception of control increases the probability of behavioral enactment. The picture also has dashed arrows that connect both push and pull incentives directly to behavioral intention. This suggests that these motivations may not just work through attitude but may also have a direct effect. These putative routes suggest partial mediation, indicating that attitude may only partially elucidate the influence of motivation on behavioral intention, a framework frequently examined in advanced SEM models employing SmartPLS or AMOS.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

This research significantly advances the understanding of religious tourism by applying the push-pull motivation framework and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to the context of Ayodhya, a prominent non-Western religious destination. Much of the existing literature on religious tourism has been criticized for its Eurocentric focus, often overlooking the unique cultural and spiritual dynamics of destinations in Asia and other regions (Shinde, 2022). By examining Ayodhya, this study addresses this gap, offering fresh insights into how internal and external motivations shape tourist behavior in a culturally distinct setting. The findings confirm that spiritual fulfillment and cultural exploration are primary push factors driving tourists to Ayodhya. These intrinsic motivations reflect a deep desire for personal enrichment and connection with the divine, which are central to religious tourism. Simultaneously, the city's sacred sites, such as the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, and its modern infrastructure, including improved transport and accommodation facilities, serve as powerful pull factors that attract both domestic and international visitors. These results align with earlier studies that emphasize the interplay of internal drives and destination attributes in shaping travel decisions (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Moreover, the study highlights the critical mediating roles of attitude and subjective norms within the TPB framework. Tourists' positive evaluations of visiting Ayodhya, shaped by their spiritual and cultural expectations, significantly influence their behavioral intentions, such as revisiting or recommending the destination. Similarly, subjective norms, driven by the

influence of family, friends, and religious communities, play a pivotal role in religious tourism due to its communal nature (Hasan et al., 2020). These findings reinforce the applicability of TPB in understanding how social pressures and personal attitudes mediate the relationship between motivations and behavioral outcomes, extending prior research by Meng and Cui (2020). By integrating the push-pull framework with TPB, this study provides a comprehensive model for analyzing tourist behavior in religious contexts, contributing to the theoretical discourse on non-Western tourism dynamics.

Practical Implications

Marketing strategies should prioritize the city's rich spiritual and cultural heritage, emphasizing iconic sites like the Ram Janmabhoomi temple and the Sarayu River ghats to attract both devout pilgrims and cultural enthusiasts. Tailored campaigns can target diverse audiences, highlighting Ayodhya's unique blend of spirituality and heritage to appeal to international tourists unfamiliar with its significance. Additionally, ongoing investments in infrastructure, such as improved accommodation, transportation networks, and visitor amenities, are essential to sustain Ayodhya's accessibility and appeal (Chaturvedi, 2024). These enhancements not only facilitate smoother travel experiences but also reinforce the city's position as a modern yet sacred destination.

Furthermore, leveraging subjective norms through community engagement initiatives can amplify positive word-of-mouth, particularly among domestic tourists who are heavily influenced by family and social networks. Programs that involve local communities in tourism activities, such as festivals or guided tours, can foster a sense of shared cultural pride and encourage visitors to share their experiences with others. By aligning marketing efforts with the social and cultural values of target audiences, destination managers can strengthen Ayodhya's reputation and drive sustained tourism growth.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study provides substantial insights into tourist motivations and behavioral intentions in Ayodhya;

however, it contains serious shortcomings that necessitate rectification. Convenience sampling, while useful for accessing travelers at prominent sites like Ram Janmabhoomi, may limit the generalizability of the findings. This non-probabilistic approach may not fully represent the diverse demographics of Ayodhya's visitors, particularly those from marginalized regions or groups. The cross-sectional design only looks at motivations at one point in time, therefore it might not show how these factors change over time due to changes in society or infrastructure. Future research could address these limitations by adopting more robust methodologies. Longitudinal studies, for instance, would allow researchers to track changes in tourist motivations and behaviors over time, offering deeper insights into the impact of seasonal events, such as Ram Navami, or ongoing infrastructural improvements. Comparative studies with other prominent religious destinations, such as Varanasi, Puri, or Tirupati, could elucidate regional variations in tourist behavior, highlighting unique cultural or logistical factors. Furthermore, incorporating qualitative methods, like in-depth interviews, could provide richer narratives about tourists' spiritual and cultural experiences, complementing quantitative findings. Exploring the role of digital platforms in shaping tourist decisions could also enhance understanding of modern religious tourism dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of the factors driving tourists to visit Ayodhya, a globally significant religious destination revered as the birthplace of Lord Rama. By integrating the push-pull motivation framework (Dann, 1977) with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), the research elucidates the interplay of internal and external motivations and their impact on tourists' behavioral intentions. The findings underscore that spiritual fulfillment and cultural heritage are primary push factors, reflecting tourists' intrinsic desires for personal enrichment and connection with the divine. These motivations resonate strongly with both devout pilgrims and cultural tourists seeking to engage with Ayodhya's rich historical and spiritual legacy. Concurrently, pull factors, such as the city's iconic sacred sites, including the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, and its modernized infrastructure, such as the international airport and enhanced transportation networks, significantly

attract visitors by offering accessibility and an immersive experience (Chaturvedi, 2024; Timane & Wandhe, 2024). This dual influence of push and pull factors highlights the multifaceted appeal of Ayodhya as a destination that caters to spiritual, cultural, and practical needs.

Positive attitudes toward visiting Ayodhya, shaped by the anticipation of spiritual and cultural rewards, significantly influence tourists' intentions to revisit or recommend the destination. Subjective norms, driven by social influences from family, friends, and religious communities, are particularly salient in religious tourism, where communal values often guide travel decisions (Hasan et al., 2020). Perceived behavioral control, reflecting the ease of accessing Ayodhya due to improved infrastructure, further strengthens tourists' intentions to engage with the destination. These findings align with prior studies that emphasize the role of psychological and social factors in shaping tourist behavior (Meng & Cui, 2020), while also extending the TPB framework to a non-Western religious context, addressing the Eurocentric bias noted in tourism literature (Shinde, 2022).

For academics, this study contributes to the theoretical discourse on religious tourism by offering a robust model that integrates motivational and behavioral frameworks in a culturally distinct setting. It provides a foundation for future research to explore longitudinal trends or comparative analyses with other religious destinations. For practitioners, the findings offer actionable insights for destination management in Ayodhya. Marketing strategies should emphasize the city's spiritual and cultural significance to attract diverse audiences, while continued investments in infrastructure can enhance accessibility and visitor satisfaction. Community engagement initiatives can leverage subjective norms to foster positive word-of-mouth, particularly among domestic tourists. By aligning promotional efforts with tourists' motivations and social influences, Ayodhya can solidify its position as a leading global religious tourism hub. Ultimately, this research underscores the dynamic interplay of spiritual, cultural, and practical factors in shaping tourist behavior, offering a roadmap for sustainable tourism development in sacred destinations.

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