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A review of tourist behavior at religious sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Abstract. The goal of this study was to find out the tourists' behavior at religious sites in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The study also looks into what motivates tourists to visit religious sites, how they behave at the sites, and how they feel about their overall experience. This study used a qualitative, descriptive research approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 20 tourists from various religious sites in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) who had visited within the previous year. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data. The findings of the study indicate, on the whole, that tourists who visit religious sites in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa exhibit various kinds of behavior depending on their level of awareness, the personal beliefs they bring with them, and the approach they take to visiting the religious site. The people who live in that area also affect how they act in that setting. The research reveals that tourists visiting religious sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa lack understanding and competent direction. This might be due to tourists' lack of personal knowledge or education, as well as a lack of information supplied at religious sites. Nonetheless, the government and relevant departments may take significant actions in this area to help reduce tourists' inappropriate and disrespectful conduct as well as to take proper measures to educate and enlighten visitors about the norms and restrictions that must be obeyed while visiting religious sites. This could also help the country's economy and make it a more attractive place for tourists to visit.

Keywords: religious sites, tourist behaviors, tourism industry, awareness, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Religious tourism is a significant and rising sector all over the globe. Religious sites are often seen as locations of spiritual value, cultural legacy, and historical relevance. Individuals of all nationalities, races, and faiths visit these sites for a variety of reasons. Some people visit religious sites to learn about the history, culture, architecture, and customs associated with these sites (Tsironis, 2022), while other tourists may visit religious places in search of peace and tranquility away from the rush and bustle of daily life. Understanding the motivation behind visiting religious sites is important in the field of tourism, as it helps in the planning and management of these sites. Also, people visiting religious sites help the local economy and spread a country's culture (Siddiqui, 2020). In this regard, religious sites are important tourist attractions, especially in developing countries like Pakistan (Abbasi & Khan, 2022). Pakistan is a country with a rich and diverse religious heritage. Islam is the predominant religion, but there are also sizable populations of Christians, Hindus, and other faiths (Mehfooz, 2021). This religious diversity is reflected in the many sacred sites that can be found throughout the country (Ormsby, 2021).

One such site is the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), located in the northwest of Pakistan. This province is home to several important religious sites. However, studying the behavior of tourists visiting religious sites has long been a fascinating topic for researchers; it is especially fascinating when it comes to the study of the case of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, where the majority of the population is Muslim and there are numerous religious sites to visit (Aman et al., 2019). Among the province's most famous religious sites are the Mansehra Shiva Temple, Dargah Pir Ratan Nathjee, Goraknath Temple, Mahabat Khan Mosque, Peshawar Museum, Sphola Stupa, Shahi Mosque, and the Buddhist remains of Takht-Bahi. Every year, thousands of tourists, both local and foreign, visit these religious sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. This is large because of the region's rich cultural past and abundance of places of worship (Abbasi & Khan, 2022). However, tourism to religious sites is a vital source of income and cultural promotion for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. To study the behavior of tourists visiting religious sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it is important to observe and understand their motivations for visiting. For many tourists, the primary reason is spiritual fulfillment. They visit these holy religious sites to get engaged in religious practices such as prayer and meditation (Younas, Kamal, Sabih, & Mushtaq, 2020), while others are motivated primarily by cultural curiosity. They are curious about the local culture and history, and one way to fulfill their curiosity is to visit religious sites. Some tourists come to explore historic holy monuments and learn about their importance because they are interested in history (Ismagilova et al., 2015).

The tourists visiting the religious sites display distinct types of behavior during their visit. However, the behavior of these visitors has yet to be studied in detail (Naqvi et al., 2018). It is essential to understand the behavior of tourists visiting religious sites (Tsironis, 2022). While the great majority of visitors to these places respect them, a few have been known to behave improperly owing to their inability to recognize their religious significance. In this regard, climbing on stupas, taking photos inside temples and shrines without permission, and even stealing from these

sites of devotion have all been reported (Jangra et al., 2021). This kind of behavior is not only disrespectful but can also damage the fragile structures of these ancient sites (K. Huang & Pearce, 2019). The officials in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province are striving to educate tourists about the importance of respecting religious monuments and cultural assets. However, with a rising number of people visiting these locations each year, everyone is expected to contribute to their preservation for future generations (Hayat et al., 2021). Religious sites are the most popular local and international tourist attractions. Unfortunately, there is a lack of understanding regarding basic manners while visiting religious sites. In this regard, visitors frequently engage in actions that adhere to religious ethics and are disrespectful to religious sites and authorities, which causes locals and religious sites to receive bad press and lose income.

Related Study

This section examines the various behaviors of tourists visiting religious sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with an emphasis on previous research that assessed the motives, preferences, and actions of tourists at these religious sites. Throughout the last several decades, much study has been conducted on the behavior of tourists. Most of this study has taken place in Western countries, with minimal focus on religious tourist destinations in other regions of the globe. In this regard, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in Pakistan is one such destination (Ullah et al., 2021). In recent years, both domestic and international tourists have visited more religious sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, increasing the total number of tourists that visit the region (Yasuda et al., 2018). Tourists who visit religious sites are often interested in learning more about the culture and religion of the area they are visiting. However, it is critical to understand these tourists' behavior to give them the best possible experience and aid them in making the most of their vacation (Liro, 2021). However, the goal of this study was to give tourists more information and help them understand how important these places of worship are.

According to studies, tourists to religious sites are more inclined to behave with great respect, show greater wonder and astonishment, and adhere to local norms and regulations (Baek et al., 2022). Also, tourists are increasingly conscious of the underlying significance behind these locations' spirituality (Aulet & Vidal, 2018). This behavior is often explained by the improved spiritual experience that might be had by going to a religious site. So, this kind of visit could be a rare chance to learn about and understand different cultures (Villani et al., 2019). It's interesting to note that the outcomes of several studies show that, depending on the situation, tourists' actions at religious sites might vary. In this regard, someone visiting with friends, for instance, could behave differently than someone visiting alone. This shows how important it is to understand people's experiences when studying how people act as visitors (K. Huang & Pearce, 2019). Moreover, previous research by (us Saqib et al., 2019) shows that there are certain unexpected implications for visitors to religious sites. The study also showed that when a lot of people visit a religious site in a small town, hamlet, or village, it can cause problems like trash and noise pollution and

change the way people live there. However, respecting local customs and traditions is a common favorable behavior of visitors to religious sites (Stankova & Vassenska, 2015). Tourists somehow ignore cultural and religious norms. In this regard, tourists and the local community may clash over this practice. However, tourists visiting religious sites also dress inappropriately. In this regard, the author asserted that tourists who break dress regulations at religious sites might insult locals and disrespect the religious site (J. Huang & Chu, 2020). In addition, tourists' disrespectful behavior toward religious sites is also unacceptable; many religious sites are significant to local people for their history or culture, so tourists who don't respect these places risk offending locals (Heung et al., 2011). Some studies also found that tourists often trash and vandalize holy sites, and this disrespectful action may be unlawful and result in penalties or jail (Shabbir et al., 2020). However, these are some of the minor negatives noted by earlier research, although both local and international visitors visiting religious sites contribute much-needed jobs and income to local people (Khan et.al, 2020).

Moreover, due to the growing number of tourists who visit religious sites, it is also becoming more important to understand how tourists act when they are at these sites. According to the tourism ministry in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 3.6 million tourists visited various religious sites in the province in 2022 (Express tribune, 2022). However, the law and order situation in some parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is also an important factor in assessing the risks associated with visiting religious sites (Hasan et al., 2017). According to a previous study, one of the most important factors that tourists consider when choosing a religious site to visit is the degree of safety (Adom et al., 2000). In addition, both local and foreign tourists are more likely to visit destinations that can guarantee their safety and well-being. In this context, the tourism safety management system is an effort to lessen the likelihood of dangers, accidents, and any other bad experiences that might befall tourists. Furthermore, the number of people who visit religious sites will increase if they are seen to be risk-free and secure (Hermawan et al., 2019).

When it comes to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there are some ways to see how tourists act at religious and cultural heritage sites. This can be seen in how they dress modestly, do not smoke or eat in religious or cultural heritage sites, respect other tourists, and do not take pictures of people, especially women, without prior permission, which is against the local cultural code and code of conduct (Davis et al., 2017). However, the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are known for being friendly, and the area is known for being warm and welcoming. As a result, when domestic and foreign tourists visit religious sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, they frequently find the locals to be incredibly kind. They go out of their way to make sure tourists have a good time and feel comfortable. Despite this, one of the main reasons why Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is such a popular tourist and commercial destination is because of the kind of people that live there. In this way, it has to do with the spiritual connection that can happen directly or indirectly between tourists and the local community. Still, it's important to look at how both tourists and the local community in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa behave at religious sites. This will help find ways to protect the integrity of religious sites and give more suggestions to the relevant authorities.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this study is to look at tourist behavior at religious sites in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. In light of the aforementioned goal, the following research questions were investigated:

- How do tourists' attitudes toward religious diversity influence their behavior while visiting religious sites?
- How do tourists' personal beliefs and prejudices influence their behavior while visiting religious sites?
- How does a lack of awareness and sensitivity impact tourists' behavior while visiting religious sites?
- How does the observation and participation approach change how tourists act and what they do when they visit religious sites?
- How do local communities impact tourists' behavior while visiting religious sites?

Methods and Procedures

Design

A qualitative research approach is used to contextualize the investigation. A qualitative, descriptive study was conducted to discover more about how individuals behave while visiting religious sites and how this influences their experience. The textual presentation of information in the qualitative research design focuses on an in-depth analysis of a topic.

Data Collection:

Qualitative methods like interviews, field notes, and focus groups were used to get the information. Data for this study were gathered from both tourists to religious sites and local communities.

Sampling

For this study, we used purposive sampling because it allowed us to locate individuals who were likely to behave in the manner we were looking for (Sibona, Walczak, & White Baker, 2020). In this regard, a total of 20 people was drawn from various religious sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Analysis

The thematic analysis approach was used to examine the data. Thematic analysis is an important qualitative research tool for analyzing qualitative data and identifying recurrent themes and patterns. It is a crucial tool for researchers since it helps them get rich and in-depth insights into complicated issues and acquire a thorough grasp

of human behavior and attitudes (Terry et al., 2017). The thematic analysis looks for patterns and themes in the data and gives a full picture of the reasons and things people do when they visit religious sites.

Findings

Several issues about tourists and local community activities developed throughout the thematic analysis process. Below are some of the most notable themes that have been discovered.

Tourist behavior and attitudes toward religious diversity

The religious beliefs of tourists may influence their behavior. Tourists who are opposed to the world's faiths are more likely to shun religious sites and cultural activities. Tourists who are passionate about the presence of other faiths are more likely to visit spiritually important sites and learn about and engage in religious and cultural events (Poria et al., 2003). Moreover, tourists who follow a variety of religious traditions are also more likely to respect local customs and avoid offending the community they are visiting. In addition, tourists' attitudes about other faiths may influence their conduct while traveling. In this regard, tourists are expected to have an open mind, respect the many cultural and religious traditions encountered, and actively seek out opportunities to learn about and interact with people (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). Furthermore, tourist behavior and attitudes regarding religious diversity affect travelers' participation in various faiths' religious sites. This study found that religious views may influence tourists' conduct at other faiths' religious sites. For instance, devout believers may be wary about visiting other faiths' religious sites. A respondent replied:

I'm allergic to religious diversity, which I don't like, and I think it could lead to conflict and confusion.

Yet, less devout tourists may approach religious sites of other faiths with more openness and curiosity, ready to learn and experience new things when they visit politely. An interview excerpt:

I accept the diversity of religious ideas and practices and have good attitudes toward that diversity, and I also feel that it is vital to learn and respect the variety of religious beliefs and practices.

Some tourists were unconcerned about religious differences. They accept and strive to appreciate religious diversity and make every effort not to offend anyone's religious views. According to one respondent:

I believe that each religion has its own values and meanings, and as a visitor, it is my duty to recognize and understand these differences.

Sensitive tourists were also identified in this study. Such visitors respect cultural sensibilities and religious sites. However, identifying a site as a place of worship shows the tourists' attempt to understand the feelings and beliefs of others. Respondent:

I always remember that any religious site I am attending is a place of worship for other people, and my behavior reflects that fact. This is what I do as a culturally aware tourist.

Personal beliefs and prejudices, and tourists' behavior

The personal beliefs and prejudices of tourists and their behavior may be impacted by their own prejudices. These beliefs and prejudices may be influenced by one's upbringing, culture, and personal experiences (Çelik, 2019). Delays or inefficiency may irritate a tourist who was raised in a culture that values promptness and productivity. Tourists may be impolite or hostile toward locals or service providers. If a visitor develops racial or religious prejudices, it may affect how they interact with locals at a religious site. Because of their preconceptions, they may treat locals unfairly or pass judgment on them (Korstanje). However, tourists are expected to confront their preconceived notions and thoughts and comprehend how they influence their actions. They also expected respect for the cultural heritage, religious sites, and locals, as well as an openness to learning about and appreciating other cultures and points of view. The research found that tourists' behavior at religious sites depends on their beliefs. Some tourists are deeply religious and may behave disrespectfully or rudely. A respondent replied:

I accept that I have said hurtful things about some cultural heritage and religious places that I didn't completely comprehend or with which I disagree.

Tourists to religious sites of other faiths are politer. Such tourists are interested in learning about other religions. They appreciate other religions, notwithstanding their own. A respondent said:

I am a committed Christian who values my religion deeply, and I attempt to visit religious sites of various faiths with respect and an open mind as well as to learn about other people's ideas and customs.

The investigation also found some tourists who had a strong respect for other faiths. This kind of tourist approaches religious places with an open mind and respect. A respondent replied:

As a Muslim, I approach religious and cultural sites with an open mind and respect for other people's beliefs and ways of life.

Some tourists displayed uneasy behavior when visiting a religious site of a different faith than their own, owing to strong personal opinions and convictions. Such tourists were more inclined to be impolite while visiting various religious sites. According to a respondent:

As I have strong personal views, I do not feel comfortable visiting religious sites of other religions, and somehow I feel like expressing my own beliefs while visiting these sites with my friends.

Lack of awareness and sensitivity and tourists' behavior

The insensitivity of tourists may endanger communities and the environment. Tourists who do not explore or study the local culture before visiting may run the risk of annoying locals and be attacked if they do not adhere to local conventions. It is impolite to wear inappropriate clothing or photograph religious activities without authorization, as well as disturb other tourists at the site (Li & Chen, 2019). Furthermore, tourists who disregard local customs may endanger themselves and others (Canosa et al., 2020). In addition, tourists who are unfamiliar with a religious site or city's economy are more likely to be duped. In this regard, some tourists who visited religious sites of various religions were unprepared and did not do any research prior to their visit; they had a limited understanding of the beliefs and practices associated with those sites, which could result in unintentionally disrespectful and inappropriate behavior while visiting religious sites. A respondent said:

I once photographed a mosque during a prayer time because I didn't realize it was disrespectful, but I didn't know about the religion's customs and traditions.

The study also found that some tourists were unaware of the religious customs of the site they were visiting. In other circumstances, tourists behaved disrespectfully because they were unaware that they were doing so. A respondent said:

I once accidentally touched a sacred object in a temple and found out later that it was rude.

There were some other tourists who were totally unaware of the religious site's beliefs and customs. In such instances, tourists may behave badly, unaware that their behavior may insult locals and tarnish the site's image. A respondent replied:

I had no idea how to dress appropriately or what type of behavior is considered inappropriate at a specific religious site.

Yet, many tourists were well-versed in the rituals, traditions, and beliefs of the religious sites. Such tourists endeavor to be prepared, educate themselves about the culture and religion related to the location they are visiting, and use caution while on the grounds. A tourist answered:

It is important for me to respect other people's religious beliefs and practices, which is why I always attempt to learn about the religion's customs and traditions before visiting its sacred site, and I make an effort to follow their principles while I'm there.

The observation/participation approach and tourist behavior

Researchers can learn about cultural norms, social relationships, and preferences by observing and taking part in tourist activities (Chen et al., 2019). If using the

observation and involvement technique, a researcher may stay in a hotel, take excursions, and talk to residents. The researcher would be able to watch and join tourists in their activities, which would show things like their need for excitement, relaxation, or cultural exposure. The observation and participation approach may help researchers understand visitor motivations and preferences. This knowledge might improve marketing strategy, tourist products and experiences, and sustainable tourism practices that benefit travelers and religious sites (Al Halbasi et al., 2020). However, tourists approach religious sites in various ways. They may regard visiting religious sites of their religion as a time to think, connect with their beliefs, and enhance their spiritual knowledge. In addition, they may have a great desire to engage in religious rituals and give prayers to connect with their religion on a deeper level. A respondent replied:

Going to a religious place gives me peace because I can connect with my beliefs, do rituals, and pray.

It was discovered that certain tourists often show respect for religious sites by avoiding interfering with religious ceremonies and rituals. They may also gain a better understanding of the faith and its practices through observation. A respondent added:

When I go to the religious sites of a different religion, I want to learn about its history, traditions, and beliefs, but I don't take part in its rituals.

Some tourists were taking a more observant approach to the religious site. These tourists were likewise curious about diverse faiths and beliefs, but they were less likely to engage in religious behaviors. A respondent replied:

I try to learn about the history and significance of religious sites, but I don't participate in any ceremonies or customs or speak to locals; I just like to observe from a safe distance.

Other tourists, on the other hand, were fervent believers in their faith. They may believe that by not participating in the ceremonies of other faiths, they are preserving their particular beliefs and ideals. A respondent stated:

I don't go to religious sites or do rituals that go against what I believe.

Tourists' behavior and local community

The behavior of tourists and the local community may differ based on the tourists and the site they visit. They include the unique characteristics of tourists and the local people, as well as cultural and religious landmarks. Tourists, on the other hand, visit well-known religious sites, sample local cuisine, and participate in cultural events. They may also seek directions, purchase products, and services, or converse with locals. In this regard, tourists and the local community are urged to respect religious sites. This includes adhering to local laws and traditions, taking their environmental effects into account, and respecting visitors, local places, and local cultures (Uslu et al., 2020). However, tourists and the local community may disrespect or hurt the

environment or community in this way; they may also act carelessly, which does not contribute to the religious site (Chi & Han, 2021). In this regard, when tourists visit diverse religious sites, the local community may have a significant impact on their behavior. In this sense, tourists' experiences and conduct when visiting religious sites may be influenced by local views and actions. Also, local community behavior may impose social pressure on tourists to act in specific ways. Tourists, on the other hand, are more likely to be at ease and courteous if the local community is warm and welcoming. A respondent added:

The pleasant behavior of the local community improved my experience and made me feel at home.

The study also looked at how the local community may establish expectations for acceptable conduct through their behaviors, such as showing respect for the religious sites and their rituals. This may persuade tourists to do similarly. A respondent replied:

I wasn't told about the rules and expectations for appropriate behavior at the religious site, so I did things that were wrong and offensive by accident to the local community.

This study also discovered that local community behavior, such as pushy or pricey sales methods, impacts tourist behavior by exerting economic pressure on them to spend money or participate in activities that they may not feel comfortable with. In this regard, tourists may react badly if the local community creates a hostile or frightening atmosphere. A respondent added:

The aggressive sales tactics of the locals made me feel like I was being forced to buy gifts that were too expensive, which made me uncomfortable.

The study further elaborates that the reputation and conduct of the local community also have a considerable influence on tourists' experiences and the recommendations they make to others. Tourists who have a negative experience with the local community are more likely not to recommend or promote the religious site to others. In this regard, this act might not benefit the local community and economy. A respondent elaborated:

I wouldn't suggest some sites because I had a bad experience with a local community in the past.

Conclusion and recommendations

Tourists to religious sites must respect the local community's religious customs and traditions and abstain from participating in any activity that may be seen as insulting. In this regard, several cultures, including that of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, forbid the photography of certain individuals, most notably women. As a result, before taking pictures at religious sites, tourists should ensure they have the proper permission and observe any limitations that may be posted. Moreover, tourists' lack of knowledge

or awareness of the local community may be detrimental to them or any religious site they visit. Tourists will have a better time and feel more welcome if they are well prepared, learn about religious sites before visiting them, and respect the cultural norms and practices of the local community they are visiting.

Tourists also offer significant economic benefits, so local communities should be warm and polite to them. In this regard, tourists rely on the local community for accurate information on attractions, restaurants, and other important religious sites. But giving this information requires knowledge and honesty, and the locals must respect tourists' cultures and ecosystems while also appreciating and welcoming them as they would any other member of their community. Moreover, the local community needs to be tolerant of tourists who do not understand the local language or are unfamiliar with local customs and traditions. As a result, if the local community is friendly, polite, and helpful, tourists can have a good time, create special memories, plan a future return to the site, and recommend the site to others.

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