

EFFECT OF RELIGIOSITY, RELIGIOUS MOTIVATION AND CULTURAL MOTIVATION ON DESTINATION LOYALTY AND EMOTIONAL CONNECTION. EXPLORING MEDIATING EFFECT OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM

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Abstract: The economic advancement of any nation hinges significantly upon the phenomenon of tourism. Hence, the primary objective of this study was crafted to scrutinize the influence of religiosity, religious motivation, and cultural motivation on religious tourism, destination loyalty, and emotional attachment. Moreover, this research delved into the mediating role of religious tourism in elucidating the relationship between religiosity, religious belief, cultural belief, destination belief, and emotional attachment. Employing a cross-sectional research design, data were gathered from respondents utilizing a 7-point Likert scale, comprising tourists from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), employing a simple random sampling technique. The study achieved a response rate of 75.12%. Analysis of the collected data was conducted utilizing Smart PLS 4. The findings substantiate the assertion that religious motivation, cultural motivation, and religiosity exerted notable impacts on religious tourism. Furthermore, religious tourism demonstrated a positive influence on both loyalty and emotional attachment. This study contributes to filling the void in the literature concerning research on religious tourism.

Keywords: Religion, Cultural Motivation, Religious Motivation, Emotional Connection, Religious Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism, recognized as a significant economic driver in numerous nations (Sofronov, 2018), encompasses various forms, among which religious tourism emerges as both vital and burgeoning. Its expansion is attributed to significant socio-

cultural transformations in recent years, alongside heightened commercialization, advancements in transportation, and the forces of globalization. Religious tourism entails pilgrimages to sacred sites, undertaken primarily to fulfil the spiritual and religious aspirations of travellers (Terzidou et al., 2018). This form of tourism offers several benefits, including opportunities for cultural immersion at religious locales and facilitating interfaith understanding and dialogue among visitors of differing religious backgrounds (Parsons, Houge Mackenzie, & Filep, 2019). Moreover, religious tourism fosters connections and interactions among adherents of the same faith, as well as showcases a rich array of religious minorities, economic activities, traditional ceremonies, and ritual practices. Consequently, it serves as a potent catalyst for bolstering national economies by attracting a diverse array of visitors (Budovich, 2023).

Emotional attachment, connection, and affinity represent the individual's sentiments toward a particular destination, organization, product, or service. Such attachment typically develops when customers or tourists have positive experiences, fostering the potential for enduring relationships and affection toward the destination (Hosany et al., 2017). Extensive scholarly inquiry has explored the interplay of emotions within religious contexts, underscoring the significance of emotions and tourist religiosity as key attractors. Religious practices and beliefs are intricately intertwined with individuals' emotional experiences, thereby influencing their inclination towards religious tourism (Hiebler-Ragger et al., 2018). Moreover, previous research has examined the roles of self-control and self-efficacy in shaping religious tourism behaviour (Łowicki et al., 2020).

The cultural upbringing and beliefs of individuals are profoundly influenced by their cultural milieu, which in turn shapes their aspirations and motivations. Cultural motivation manifests in various forms, including a desire to explore specific locales driven by interests in group dynamics, regional nuances, community life, arts, and historical legacies (Yan & Halpenny, 2019). Cultural tourism, distinguished as a significant form of experiential and specialized interest-based travel, offers individuals opportunities to encounter novel experiences. Thus, understanding the factors that underpin cultural motivation is paramount in elucidating the drivers of cultural tourism (Báez-Sánchez & Bobko, 2021; Chen & Rahman, 2018).

Religion and religiosity are fundamental aspects of individuals' lives, exerting significant influence on cultures worldwide. Researchers have shown a keen interest in exploring the impact of religiosity on tourism (Kocyigit, 2016). Previous studies have predominantly focused on general dimensions of religiosity (Patwardhan et al., 2020), with modern scholarship emphasizing experiential facets while neglecting traditional dimensions. Religiosity notably shapes individuals' experiences at

religious sites, underscoring its pivotal role in shaping individual lives (Cugini, 2021). Effective management of destinations is essential for cultivating tourist loyalty, a primary concern for all tourism destinations, including those of religious significance (Rashid et al., 2020). Destination managers must prioritize fostering loyalty among visitors, which hinges on effective management strategies (Leo et al., 2021). Indicators of tourist loyalty include prolonged stays, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and willingness to revisit religious destinations in the future. Various factors, including religiosity, value creation, service quality, tourist engagement, and satisfaction, influence tourists' choice of destination.

Therefore, it is imperative for destination management authorities and governments to implement initiatives that attract more tourists and cultivate loyalty (Solís-Radilla et al., 2019). Implementing loyalty programs is equally crucial, as tourist loyalty significantly contributes to the success of countries in the tourism sector. Motivation constitutes a significant psychological state characterized by hope, determination, and mental fortitude, often synonymous with loyalty, enthusiasm, and self-assurance. Scholars in literature have conceptualized motivation as an intangible force driving individuals to exert maximal effort in pursuing their objectives (Bayih & Singh, 2020). The belief systems inherent to individuals serve as foundational sources of motivation, permeating their daily activities and thought processes (Parsons, Houge Mackenzie, & Filep, 2019).

Motivation serves as a driving factor prompting individuals to visit specific destinations, profoundly impacting destination planning, promotion, and design. Various factors, such as satisfaction levels and socio-demographic characteristics, can influence religious tourism experiences (Hassan et al., 2023), necessitating a thorough examination of factors influencing motivation and its interplay with religious tourism. Thus, this study seeks to investigate the effects of religious motivation, cultural motivation, and religiosity on religious tourism, destination loyalty, and emotional attachment among tourists visiting the KSA.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

- *Religious tourism and Destination Loyalty*

Religious tourism entails the pilgrimage to sacred sites, undertaken with the intention of fulfilling the spiritual and religious needs of individuals embarking upon such journeys (Roszak, 2020). It revolves around the notion of traveling to locations imbued with religious significance, driven by motivations to engage with these revered sites (Parsons, Houge Mackenzie, & Filep, 2019). While religious motives

predominate, other motivations such as leisure, relaxation, and cultural exploration may also influence tourists' decision-making. Some scholars suggest that tourists may visit destinations for shopping or spending time with friends and family, contributing to overall satisfaction (Rahman, Zaman, Hassan, & Wei, 2018). Destination loyalty, as depicted in the literature, encompasses tourists' perceptions of a destination as one they would willingly revisit and recommend to others (Stylidis et al., 2020). Within the realm of religious tourism, loyalty manifests as individuals' inclination to recommend and revisit a religious destination, indicating their commitment and intention to return in the future (Stylos & Bellou, 2019). The dedication of tourists to revisit and recommend the destination underscores their loyalty toward it.

Tourists who develop favourable perceptions of a destination are more inclined to revisit it in the future, indicating their loyalty to that particular place (Tan & Wu, 2016). They endeavour to satisfy their needs associated with the destination, with their experience significantly influencing their loyalty towards it (Jaelani, 2016). Destination planners must strive to meet tourists' needs and provide positive experiences to shape individual behaviour and attitudes (Attiq & Moon, 2022). Scholars have affirmed that satisfied tourists are more likely to exhibit loyalty towards a destination, thereby increasing the likelihood of revisits and recommendations to others (Vada et al., 2019). Consequently, researchers emphasize that the tourist experience is pivotal in cultivating destination loyalty, particularly in the context of religious tourism (Bagheri et al., 2023). Numerous studies highlight the role of tourists' co-creation habits in fostering customer loyalty, particularly within the realm of religious tourism (Wu & Mursid, 2020). Scholars have explored the relationship between destination loyalty and Halal tourism experiences, underscoring the significance of religious destination experiences in nurturing loyalty (Suhartanto et al., 2020). Consequently, the experience of religious tourism is intricately linked to tourists' experiences, especially for individuals with strong religious inclinations who seek to establish connections with the divine (Abror et al., 2023). Thus, religious tourism is reported to have a positive effect on destination loyalty, further highlighting its significance in shaping tourists' loyalty towards religious destinations (Patwardhan et al., 2020). Thus, we hypothesise that

H1. Religious Tourism has positive effect on destination loyalty.

- *Religious Tourism and Emotional Connection*

Scholars have delineated emotional connection as an informal sense of belonging shared among individuals who harbour common goals and interests, enabling them to better comprehend individual behaviour (Haim-Litevsky et al., 2023). Emotions

are deemed pivotal in the construction of religious experiences, indicating that religious beliefs, practices, and institutions possess the capacity to influence and regulate individual emotions (Kocyigit, 2016). Within the realm of tourism, literature portrays the tourism experience as the attainment of personally valued experiences, significant at an emotional level (Hosany et al., 2020). Various events associated with an individual's religion foster emotional connections with tourist destinations (Vishkin, 2021). Scholars posit that emotions, as subjective feelings, exert a profound influence on individual behaviour, exhibiting variations throughout the course of a journey. Moreover, tourists' emotional reactions are outcomes of destination evaluations, encompassing aspects such as behavioural intentions, overall destination image, destination attachment, and satisfaction (Hosany et al., 2020). Researchers assert that religiosity emanates from fundamental religious experiences, ranging from personal religious encounters to broader religious aspects within one's community or affiliation. Individuals inclined towards religion often seek out religious destinations to forge emotional connections, driven by a pursuit of sanctity deeply intertwined with their emotions and feelings. Scholars underscore the inseparability of religious experiences and emotions, with certain studies exploring the relationship between religious tourism experiences and emotional responses (Sestino et al., 2023).

Visiting religious destinations enables individuals to cultivate religious experiences, which, in turn, positively influence their emotions, aligning with their religious beliefs and contributing to a deeper emotional connection (Kim & Kim, 2019a). Scholars have documented a significant positive effect of religious destinations on emotional connections (Taheri, 2016). Religiosity demonstrates a favourable influence on individuals' religious experiences, triggering various factors such as religious and spiritual encounters, social interactions, and physical surroundings. Consequently, there exists a positive correlation between religious destinations and emotions. (Hughes et al., 2013) conducted a study indicating that visitors to religious sites establish emotional connections, corroborated by similar findings from (Kim & Kim, 2019a), who demonstrated that religious tourism experiences positively affect individuals' emotions by inducing emotional changes. Thus, it is hypothesised that

H2. Religious tourism has significant effect on emotional connection.

- *Religious Motivations and Religious Tourism*

The inclination of individuals to travel for religious purposes is a longstanding phenomenon, wherein they are drawn to destinations that hold significant religious

and spiritual value in accordance with their beliefs. Scholars have proposed various definitions of religious tourism, characterizing religious tourists as individuals primarily motivated by religious reasons, with secular motives serving as secondary considerations. Within academic discourse, motivation emerges as a crucial factor distinguishing religious tourism from secular tourism, categorized into two types: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, both of which compel individuals to visit particular destinations (Lee, 2018). While past studies have predominantly associated religious motivation with intrinsic factors rooted in religious beliefs, others have conceptualized it as an instrumental motive driven by desires for comfort, social support, security, and self-justification (Park, 2021).

Motivation serves as a primary driver of religious tourism, with scholars offering diverse perspectives on the motivating factors prompting individuals to visit such destinations (Robina Ramírez & Fernández Portillo, 2020). According to (Terzidou et al., 2018), tourists are motivated by both push and pull factors when visiting religious sites. Push motivation arises from internal emotional factors, such as the desire for spiritual fulfilment, relaxation, and social interactions with friends and family.

Conversely, pull motivation is characterized by the allure of destination attributes, including historical significance and affordable travel costs (Said & Maryono, 2018). Motivation thus emerges as a fundamental catalyst for religious site visitation, as indicated by the study conducted by (Hassan et al., 2022), which found that individuals belonging to specific religious affiliations are drawn to their holy sites due to motivational factors. Hence, motivation exerts a positive influence on religious travel.

H3. Religious motivations have significant effect on Religious tourism.

- *Cultural Motivations and Religious Tourism*

Motivation stands as a pivotal determinant influencing individual decision-making processes. Culture emerges as a significant motivational factor guiding destination choices (Liu et al., 2018), indicating variations in motivation among individuals based on cultural backgrounds. Culture encompasses an individual's upbringing and beliefs, exerting a profound influence on their aspirations and objectives. It is imperative for countries to leverage cultural promotion as a means to foster tourism at the national level. Therefore, policymakers must grasp the factors that engender motivation among individuals (Soldatenko & Backer, 2019).

One of the primary challenges faced by researchers lies in defining cultural tourism. Scholars have conceptualized cultural tourism as travel centred around

cultural products and processes (Al-Ababneh, 2019). Some researchers assert that tourists may visit destinations for religious purposes, while others travel for leisure, recreation, and cultural exploration (Hassan et al., 2022). Scholarly literature has underscored tourism as a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors. Recent studies have begun to explore secular influences as additional drivers of tourism. Personal inclinations and cultural considerations compel tourists to seek out new destinations (Rebuya et al., 2020), often tied to tourism activities revolving around cultural heritage. While some tourist groups may prioritize religious motives for their travels, culture emerges as a prominent religious dimension attracting tourists to destinations (Huang & Pearce, 2019). Similarly, (Wang et al., 2016) revealed that tourists' emotions are significantly influenced by cultural motives.

The primary motivation for tourists to visit sacred destinations lies in cultural enrichment, wherein cultural factors significantly shape the inclination to explore holy or historical sites. Greater familiarity with a destination's cultural products and history tends to increase visitation frequency. (Robina Ramírez & Fernández Portillo, 2020) further demonstrated in their study that cultural motivation exerts a noteworthy influence on religious tourism.

H4. Cultural motivations have significant effect on Religious tourism.

- *Religiosity and Religious Tourism*

Scholarly investigations have delineated religiosity as encompassing religious involvement and beliefs, with past scholars predominantly focusing on religious attendance as a core component of this concept (Sholihin et al., 2022). Religiosity emerges as a significant factor impacting various aspects of individuals' lives, as evidenced by its associations with social involvement, health engagement, happiness, well-being, and satisfaction (Krause et al., 2018). Researchers have explored religiosity in conjunction with numerous other factors, such as social engagement, health participation, and overall happiness. Scholars posit that religion serves as a vital structural framework comprising symbols, beliefs, and rituals, facilitating individuals' sense of proximity to the divine (Souiden & Rani, 2015). Religiosity, in essence, offers ethical guidance for fostering connections with others, reflecting the extent to which individuals incorporate religious practices into their daily routines (Shah et al., 2020).

Thus, religiosity signifies the degree to which an individual embraces the teachings and guidance of their faith. Furthermore, religiosity exerts influence on the consumption and utilization of products and services (Wang et al., 2020).

Researchers have posited that religiosity plays a significant role in shaping the behaviour, intentions, and attitudes of individuals based on their religious beliefs. When individuals perceive it as important to visit a specific place for religious reasons, they tend to develop positive sentiments towards it (Kusumawati et al., 2020).

Previous studies have explored the influence of halal services and products on religiosity and customer experiences within the context of Islamic banks (Raksayudha & Suhartanto, 2019). Similarly, (Suhartanto et al., 2021) have discussed how the religiosity of tourists positively impacts religious tourism.

H5. Religiosity has significant effect on Religious tourism.

Following hypotheses of mediation are drawn from the above literature:

H6: Religious tourism is a significant mediator between Religious Motivation and Destination Loyalty.

H7: Religious tourism is a significant mediator between Religious Motivation and Emotional connection.

H8: Religious tourism is a significant mediator between Cultural Motivation and Destination Loyalty

H9: Religious tourism is a significant mediator between Cultural Motivation and Emotional connection.

H10: Religious tourism is a significant mediator between Religiosity and Destination Loyalty.

H11: Religious tourism is a significant mediator between Religiosity and Emotional connection.

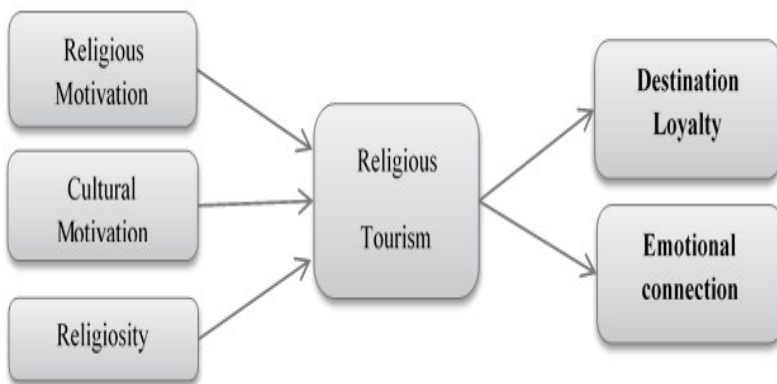


Figure 1: Research Framework

3. METHODOLOGY

To examine the proposed hypotheses and model outlined in the preceding section, this study employed a quantitative method and adopted a cross-sectional approach. This methodology was chosen to gather data from tourists who had visited KSA. Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire comprising two sections.

The first section aimed to gather demographic information about the respondents, while the second section focused on the variables proposed in the study. The latter portion of the questionnaire utilized a 7-point Likert scale to gauge respondents' perspectives. The utilization of the 7-point Likert scale was preferred due to its facilitation of easy expression of respondents' views, reduction of respondent frustration, enhancement of response quality, and potential increase in response rates.

The data was collected from 357 respondents through simple random sampling, resulting in 291 returned questionnaires. The exclusion of incomplete questionnaires, where a significant portion was left unfilled by respondents, led to the removal of some data points, yielding a response rate of 75.91%. Subsequently, the collected data underwent a screening process to identify outliers and missing values. No missing data was detected in the remaining questionnaires, which were then utilized for further analysis employing Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

Smart PLS 4 was employed as the tool for SEM analysis. Initially, the collected data underwent screening using SPSS, followed by the application of PLS-SEM to examine both the structural and measurement models. The choice of PLS-SEM for data analysis was driven by its efficacy in handling complex models, offering a more efficient approach compared to linear regression and multiple regression methods.

4. RESULTS

The initial phase of the study involved a demographic analysis of tourists visiting KSA for tourism purposes. The findings indicated that 28.5% of the respondents were female, while 71.5% were male. Regarding the age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents (47.28%) fell within the 18 to 30 years' age bracket, followed by 32.11% in the 31 to 40 years age group, with the remaining respondents being over 40 years old. Concerning educational attainment, 70.9% of the respondents held bachelor's degrees, 11.5% had master's degrees, 7.1% had doctorates, and the remaining respondents selected other educational levels.

Table 1: Composite Reliability.

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	(AVE)
CULM	0.724	0.879	0.784
DESTL	0.867	0.909	0.714
EMC	0.876	0.915	0.729
RELI	0.881	0.918	0.737
RELM	0.752	0.857	0.667
RELT	0.887	0.922	0.748

Subsequently, this study proceeded to assess the measurement model, commencing with tests of validity and reliability. CR and Cronbach's Alpha tests were conducted for these evaluations. According to (Hair et al., 2017), the benchmark threshold value for both CR and Cronbach's Alpha is 0.70. The results presented in Table 1 indicate that this threshold is met by all CR and Cronbach's Alpha values, signifying strong reliability of the scale. Furthermore, for validation purposes, factor loading was examined. According to (Hair et al., 2017), the minimum acceptable value for factor loading is 0.70. The factor loading values provided in Table 2 demonstrate compliance with this criterion, as all factor loading values exceed 0.70. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) test was employed to validate convergent validity, as proposed by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The acceptable range for AVE values is greater than 0.50. Table 1 illustrates that the condition stipulated by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) is satisfied, as all AVE values exceed 0.50. Consequently, this confirms the presence of convergent validity.

Table 2: Factor Loading

	CULM	DESTL	EMC	RELI	RELM	RELT
CULM1	0.886					
CULM2	0.884					
DESTL1		0.872				
DESTL2		0.845				
DESTL3		0.876				
DESTL4		0.785				
EMC1			0.862			
EMC2			0.846			
EMC3			0.837			
EMC4			0.869			
RELI1				0.857		
RELI2				0.842		
RELI3				0.873		
RELI4				0.861		
RELM1					0.842	
RELM2					0.839	
RELM3					0.767	
RELT1						0.870
RELT2						0.841
RELT3						0.876
RELT4						0.872

Subsequently, the evaluation of discriminant validity was conducted as the final assessment of the measurement model. To achieve this, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) technique was employed, as proposed by (Henseler et al., 2015). According to this method, an acceptable value of HTMT in the correlation matrix is less than 0.90. Table 3 presents the HTMT values, all of which fall below the 0.90 threshold. Hence, no issues of discriminant validity were observed in the data. This signifies that there are no variables closely related to one another within the study.

Table 3: HTMT

	CULM	DESTL	EMC	RELI	RELM	RELT
CULM						
DESTL	0.571					
EMC	0.514	0.695				
RELI	0.583	0.722	0.602			
RELM	0.249	0.499	0.442	0.303		
RELT	0.643	0.869	0.776	0.764	0.521	

Subsequently, the study employed a structural model to validate the proposed model and examine the proposed hypotheses. The hypotheses were assessed based on t-values, p-values, and Beta coefficients.

Table 4: Direct Results.

	B	SD	T-value	P-value
CULM -> RELT	0.232	0.046	4.999	0.000
RELI -> RELT	0.503	0.046	10.849	0.000
RELM -> RELT	0.261	0.046	5.739	0.000
RELT -> DESTL	0.768	0.026	30.018	0.000
RELT -> EMC	0.687	0.033	20.709	0.000

The results indicate that CULM exerts a positive influence on RELT, with a Beta coefficient of 0.232, a t-value of 4.999, and $p=0.000$. Similarly, RELI demonstrates a positive effect on RELT, with a Beta coefficient of 0.503, a t-value of 10.849, and $p=0.000$. Furthermore, the findings support the assertion that RELM positively impacts RELT, with a Beta coefficient of 0.261, a t-value of 5.739, and $p=0.000$. Additionally, the results suggest that RELT significantly affects DESTL, with a Beta coefficient of 0.768, a t-value of 30.018, and $p=0.000$. Lastly, in terms of direct relationships, RELT exhibits a positive effect on EMC, with a t-value of 0.687, a Beta coefficient of 20.709, and $p=0.000$.

The findings further affirm the mediating role of RELT, as indicated by the statistical outcomes of the study. Specifically, RELT is observed to mediate between RELM and EMC, with a t-value of 5.764. Similarly, RELT acts as a mediator between CULM and DESTL, with a t-value of 4.860. Additionally, RELT serves as a mediator

between CULM and EMC, with a t-value of 4.808. Furthermore, RELT is identified as a mediator between RELI and DESTL, with a t-value of 10.153. It also mediates between RELI and EMC, with a t-value of 9.048. Moreover, RELT mediates between RELM and DESTL, with a t-value of 5.578.

Table 5: Mediating Results.

	Beta	SD	T-value	P values
RELM -> RELT -> EMC	0.180	0.031	5.764	0.000
CULM -> RELT -> DESTL	0.178	0.037	4.860	0.000
CULM -> RELT -> EMC	0.159	0.033	4.808	0.000
RELI -> RELT -> DESTL	0.387	0.038	10.153	0.000
RELI -> RELT -> EMC	0.346	0.038	9.048	0.000
RELM -> RELT -> DESTL	0.201	0.036	5.578	0.000

Table 6: R-Square.

	R-square
DESTL	0.590
EMC	0.472
RELT	0.572

5. DISCUSSION

Tourism stands as a pivotal sector contributing significantly to a nation's growth trajectory. This study was crafted to delve into the influence of religious and cultural factors on religious tourism and destination loyalty, focusing specifically on Saudi tourists. The findings underscore the pivotal role of religious tourism in fostering destination loyalty, aligning closely with prior research by (Patwardhan et al., 2020). The underlying rationale behind these findings lies in the profound impact of religious beliefs on individuals' destination selection criteria. Often, tourists make decisions based on the religious significance of a destination, driven by its cultural heritage and traditions. Saudi Arabia, being a prominent tourist destination for Muslims, holds immense religious importance with numerous sites deeply rooted in Islam. Consequently, tourists are inclined to revisit these sites due to their religious affiliations, prolonging their stays and endorsing these destinations to their acquaintances. In essence, they aspire to serve as advocates, expressing positive word-of-mouth sentiments regarding these sacred locales.

On the contrary, findings indicated a positive correlation between religious tourism and the emotional connection experienced by tourists. Religion embodies a profound link between individuals and the divine. Pilgrims feel a sense of closeness to God when they embark on journeys to spiritual or sacred sites, where they engage in prayers and seek divine mercy. Such visits foster a

spiritual bond between individuals and the divine. Moreover, these sacred excursions evoke memories of loved ones, both present and departed, prompting a heightened sense of connection with the creator. The richness of experience accrued from visiting these holy sites often encourages individuals to extend their stays. Respondents in the study expressed that their faith and religious beliefs are visibly manifested during these visits to sacred places. Additionally, tourists discern profound meanings in various aspects of their surroundings while visiting these religiously significant destinations. Interactions with fellow visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds enable tourists to glean insights into different cultural nuances. This outcome resonates with previous findings by (Kim & Kim, 2019a), underscoring the consistency of the present results.

This study also explores the factors contributing to the emergence of religious tourism among individuals. One such factor is religious motivation, whereby individuals are driven by their religious convictions to embark on journeys to religious sites. These pilgrims seek to engage in prayer and spiritual devotion at these revered locations. Another compelling motive for visiting these sites is the desire among religious tourists to glean insights from the legacies of religious figures. These individuals aspire to gain a deeper understanding of the life and teachings of seminal figures in their faith traditions by visiting their homes and other significant sites associated with their religious heritage. Such visits afford pilgrims an intimate glimpse into the lives of revered religious figures, revitalizing and fortifying their faith. Notably, a prior study by (Hassan et al., 2022) similarly corroborated these findings in their research.

Another determinant that draws individuals toward religious tourism is the cultural factor. The cultural identity of individuals is intricately tied to their religious beliefs, shaping the customs, traditions, and practices of a particular locale. Participants in the study expressed a desire to visit religious sites due to the presence of ancient structures that serve as cultural landmarks. These historic edifices not only embody cultural heritage but also serve as a tangible link to religious faith. Moreover, many of the religious sites visited are steeped in antiquity, spanning thousands of years and associated with revered prophets and messengers of God. By immersing themselves in these sacred spaces, individuals report a strengthening of their religious convictions. This sentiment is echoed in the research conducted by (Robina Ramírez & Fernández Portillo, 2020), who arrived at similar conclusions in their study. Additionally, the empirical findings substantiate the assertion that religiosity serves as a driving force behind religious tourism. Individuals are often motivated to undertake journeys to sacred sites by their deeply held religious beliefs, often accompanied by friends and family

members, reflecting a pull strategy. The rationale underlying these findings may stem from the respondents' belief in the intrinsic importance of religion in their lives. They seek to incorporate religious teachings into their life experiences, viewing religious tourism as a means to enhance their quality of life. The act of supplication and seeking blessings at sacred sites is perceived as an opportunity to invoke divine intervention, bolstered by the exemplary conduct of prophets. Consequently, individuals prioritize visits to spiritual and religious locales that hold significance in their faith tradition. Ultimately, they attribute feelings of relaxation and satisfaction in their lives to their religious affiliations, a sentiment supported by the findings of (Suhartanto et al., 2021).

6. LIMITATIONS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The current study is subject to several limitations, which could serve as avenues for future research. One limitation pertains to the adoption of a cross-sectional research design due to time constraints. Future studies could benefit from employing a longitudinal research design to allow for a more comprehensive and in-depth data collection process. Additionally, while the present study focused on tourists visiting religious sites in Saudi Arabia, there are numerous other religious destinations worldwide. It would be valuable for future research to explore the perspectives of individuals who visit religious sites in countries such as Iraq, Iran, and others. Moreover, the present study utilized a self-administered questionnaire for data collection. Future studies could consider utilizing online surveys to reach respondents from diverse geographical locations, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample. Furthermore, while simple random sampling was employed in the current study, future research could employ cluster sampling for a more systematic data collection approach. Another limitation concerns the examination of the mediating role of religious tourism in the proposed framework, with the absence of a moderator. Future studies could incorporate destination image as a moderator variable to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationships within the framework. Lastly, considering the modest value of R square in the current research, future studies could explore the impact of technology-based variables on religious tourism and destination loyalty. This could provide valuable insights into the role of technology in shaping tourists' experiences and preferences in religious tourism contexts.

In terms of theoretical implications, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature by examining religion as a factor that can enhance customer loyalty, a topic that has received limited attention in previous research. Moreover, this

research contributes to the literature by exploring the mediating role of religious tourism, an aspect often overlooked in studies that typically focus solely on its outcomes. Notably, this study is one of the few to investigate both destination loyalty and emotional connection as outcome variables within the context of religious tourism. By proposing a framework that integrates religious tourism as a mediator, along with religiosity and religious motivation as independent variables, and destination loyalty and emotional connection as outcome variables, this research provides a novel perspective in the field. Additionally, this study stands out for its examination of religious tourism specifically within the context of Saudi Arabia. In terms of managerial implications, this research underscores the importance of addressing religious factors to enhance tourism within the country. By recognizing and catering to religious motivations and preferences, decision-makers can effectively boost the country's GDP through tourism development initiatives. This study offers valuable insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders seeking to leverage religious tourism as a strategic tool for economic growth. Furthermore, this study provides a valuable resource for academicians, offering a comprehensive framework for further research in the field of religious tourism. Scholars can build upon the findings of this study to delve deeper into the complex dynamics of religious tourism, contributing to a richer understanding of its implications for both theory and practice.

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APPENDIX: DETAILS OF ITEMS OF VARIABLES

Variable	Items	References
Destination Loyalty	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I will recommend the tour to other people. 2. I will probably visit resort in the next 12 months. 3. I want to visit more destinations of cities. 4. China offers exciting and interesting places to visit. 	(Hussain et al., 2023)
Emotional connection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I was able to feel the spirit of those now passed. 2. I experienced a sense of being close to God. 3. This is a special place that made me reflect on religion and faith. 4. This travel experience made me reflect on the meaning of things. 5. I felt a personal connection with some of the things I saw. 	(Kim & Kim, 2019b)
Religious tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This country has important religious tourism attractiveness. 2. This country is a religious destination that has religious themes. 3. This country is among the important religious tourism destinations in the world. 4. This country is a religious destination. 	(Kocyigit, 2016)
Religious motivations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. you come to pray to God. 2. you come to learn from the religious legacy of religious scholars. 3. you come to this country to restore faith? 	(Robina Ramírez & Fernández Portillo, 2020)
Cultural motivations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. you have come to visit the ancient building ? 2. you like to visit sites located in the twelve ancient paths? 	(Robina Ramírez & Fernández Portillo, 2020)
Religiosity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In my personal life, religion is very important 2. Islam helps me to have a better life 3. The dua' (supplication) supports me (DEL) 4. Prophet Muhammad (sawwm) is the role model for me 5. Performing Hajj is one of my main priorities (DEL) 6. I believe that Allah (God) helps me 	(Shah et al., 2020)