

Exploring the Distinction between Pilgrims and Tourists at Religious Heritage Sites

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Abstract

Traveling to religious heritage sites is a complex phenomenon attracting religious and non-religious visitors. This study aims to provide an analytical framework that bridges convergence and divergence theories to differentiate between religious and non-religious visitors by analyzing motivations, experiences, behaviors, and interlinkages. A comprehensive literature review of databases from 2001 to 2022 discussed the distinction between pilgrims and tourists to religious heritage sites was conducted. The findings indicated that the convergence hypothesis points to significant similarities between pilgrims and tourists due to convergence in motivations. Behaviors at religious sites also demonstrate the similarity between pilgrims and secular visitors, and traveling experiences can blend aspects of pilgrimage and tourism for both pilgrims and tourists. However, divergence theories emphasize substantial differences in motivations, experiences, and behaviors between religiously motivated pilgrims and secular visitors. Pilgrims are driven by devotion and spiritual experiences, while secular tourists prioritize entertainment and culture. The study concludes that religious travel encompasses multiple dimensions. Thus, classifying religious visitors and secular tourists is a complex task due to the interplay of personal levels of devotion, spiritual practice, and interpretive system qualities across various sites. This interaction leads to intertwining and evolving motivations, behaviors, and experiences throughout the journey.

Keywords: religious tourism; religious heritage sites; pilgrimage; visitors experience; motivations; behaviors

1. Introduction

Tourism manifests in various forms, including religious tourism, which constitutes a distinct category. Throughout history, visiting sacred sites has been recognized as one of humanity's earliest forms of tourism (Kamenidou & Vourou, 2014).

Religious tourism encompasses a range of activities, including pilgrimage excursions, visits to holy sites, participation in religious festivals, and engagement in religious missions (Božice et al., 2016). In recent years, spiritual travel has grown significantly, emerging as a prominent segment within the global tourism industry (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). Research indicates that the international religious tourism sector was valued at \$18 billion in 2017, attracting millions of travelers annually (Vidal-Casellas et al., 2019).

Due to this growing trend, revered religious sites are increasingly perceived as tourist assets that can be commodified for individuals interested in cultural and historical attractions (Bond, 2013). As a result, tourist advertising materials extensively feature mosques, cathedrals, temples, and other religious landmarks (Olsen & Timothy, 2006).

Visitors to religious heritage sites can be classified into two primary target groups: believers and non-believers. Both groups are integral to tourism but necessitate distinct strategies (Rojo, 2007). The attraction of secular tourists to religious heritage may even surpass their religious counterparts in numbers (Shackley, 2001; Bond, 2013; Bİllm & Düzgüner, 2015; Oreckat, 2016).

Classifying visitors to sacred heritage sites has generated significant interest and debate among researchers exploring religious heritage sites, as these groups play a pivotal role in the connection between religion and tourism (Blackwell, 2007). The core question revolves around whether pilgrims/ religious visitors and non-believer tourists should be considered as distinct groups or if they share more commonalities than initially perceived (Oreckat, 2016). This study aims to contribute to this ongoing debate by providing further insights and enhancing the existing opinions presented in the literature review. By analyzing the motivations, behaviors, and experiences of individuals visiting religious sites, this research unravels whether pilgrims and tourists are inherently identical or if significant variations exist between them. The findings of this study will enrich the discourse on religious tourism and deepen our understanding of tourist behavior at sacred heritage sites.

2. Objectives

- To synthesize perspectives on convergences and divergences between religious and secular tourists.
- To contribute to the existing discussion by proposing a framework for classifying and understanding the nature of religious and secular tourists in terms of motivations, behaviors, and experiences.

3. Methodology

The study used a comprehensive literature review to analyze and compare the characteristics of religious and secular tourists visiting sacred heritage sites. The search was performed on various databases, including Google Scholar and Scopus, for academic papers.

Search terms are created iteratively by combining keywords like "pilgrims," "religious tourists," "religious tourism," "motivations," and "visitor behavior and experience at religious sites." Both title/abstract and full-text screenings were conducted according to specific criteria based on peer-reviewed English-language studies published between 2001 and 2022 that directly investigated the proposed concepts.

The review examined several aspects, such as motivations, behaviors, and visitors' experiences. Key issues and concepts regarding the differentiation between pilgrims

and visitors were discovered and thoroughly analyzed. A comparative analysis determined the similarities and differences between these two groups.

4- The Nature of Religious Heritage Sites and Religious Tourism

Undoubtedly, religion has profoundly impacted human civilization (De-Caro, 2017). This is because cultural expression serves as a human response to values, beliefs, and conflicts, reflected through music, art, literature, symbols, and places of worship, allowing religion to reveal the most profound meanings of human existence (Abdulla, 2018). The profound association between religion and heritage is exemplified by the significant number of world heritage sites intricately tied to religious or spiritual significance (De-Caro, 2017). Approximately 20% of the properties on the World Heritage List have religious connections, and many other listed sites possess "Outstanding Universal Values" rooted in their spiritual connotations (Rico, 2021).

Religious heritage sites have significant cultural and spiritual importance due to their representation of diverse religious communities' traditions, beliefs, and values (Aulet & Vidal, 2018). According to the Universal Law on Holy Sites, "holy places" are "locations that have religious significance for certain religious groups." This includes places of worship, cemeteries, and temples (Kayadibi et al., 2013). These sites provide evidence of many civilizations' historical and social progress and offer a valuable understanding of the lifestyle linked to religious rituals (Aulet & Vidal, 2018).

Religious heritage sites hold significant values on multiple levels, serving as meeting points for diverse faith groups and fostering understanding among different cultures (Cohen, 2006; Blackwell, 2010; UNWTO, 2015). These sites unite communities through various religious and non-religious activities, promoting a positive image of religion and local culture (Carlo-Stella, 2003). Moreover, they serve as dynamic platforms for interreligious dialogue, mutual appreciation, and cultural cooperation (Almpanaki, 2019).

Traveling to religiously significant destinations offers educational experiences encompassing religious and cultural dimensions (Cohen, 2006). Visitors gain insights into history, culture, spirituality, and entertainment through engagement with the external aspects of religion, such as sculptures, structures, holy relics, and artifacts, as well as interactions with site guides and managers (Olsen, 2006; Aulet & Vidal, 2018). These interactions provide opportunities to appreciate unique architectural and aesthetic settings and encounter individuals with diverse worldviews at sacred locations (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010). Such encounters facilitate mutual learning and the development of tolerance for different beliefs. Secular visits to religious heritage sites help dispel stereotypes and promote the religious goals of the staff, while religious visits strengthen the religious identities of those involved (Bilim & Düzgüner, 2015).

In addition to the preceding value, religious heritage sites have significant economic value (Kim et al., 2013; Jaafar et al., 2015). They attract various types of tourists. Religious tourists are not the only ones who visit religious shrines and centers or who participate in religious festivals and activities; secular visitors are also famous at

religious locations (Olsen & Timothy, 2006; Rojo, 2007; Bİllm & Düzgüner, 2015). Interestingly, according to the World Travel and Tourism Organization, tourists at religious heritage sites, in all their different forms, are responsible for 26% of all global tourism (Mahmoudi et al., 2015). Also, five of the ten most-visited places in Europe are religious heritage sites, which are very important to tourism and the well-being of communities (Olsen, 2006). This shows that while religious communities initially establish these sites as places for spiritual connection, tourism practices can transform them into worthwhile destinations (Aulet & Vidal, 2018).

Religious tourism plays a significant role in community development, offering cultural and economic benefits through the engagement of religious heritage sites (Bİllm & Düzgüner, 2015). It is defined as "special tourist activities orientated by religious culture, with the help of a specific eco-cultural environment, and it refers to such special tourist activities as worshipping, research, sightseeing, and culture carried out by religious followers and lay tourists" (Terzidou & Stylidi, 2008). The concept of pilgrimage, from which the idea of religious tourism originates, can be traced back to the Latin term "peregrinus," meaning stranger. It is closely connected to the Latin word "tornus," associated with the notion of circular motion or a turner's wheel, giving rise to the term "tourism" (Collins-Kreiner, 2006).

When travelers visit religious heritage sites, they engage with the available amenities and facilities and interact with the host community while respecting the religious and cultural values associated with the site (Shackley, 2001). These interactions have significant economic, social, and environmental impacts on the travelers, the site, and the local community (Shackley, 2001). Religious tourism differs from other forms of tourism due to the distinct behavioral patterns and motivations exhibited by visitors at religious heritage sites, influenced by the religious and heritage values of the site, as well as the visitors' own religious and cultural characteristics (Digance, 2003; Blackwell, 2007).

Therefore, religious tourism contributes to global citizenship by showcasing the splendor of the universe, the richness of human cultures and civilizations, and the importance of addressing differences politically and peacefully (Wintersteiner & Wohlmuth, 2013). It enables direct knowledge acquisition and cultural dialogue, eliminating mediators and allowing tourists and hosts to appreciate their unique richness (Wintersteiner & Wohlmuth, 2013; Aulet & Vidal, 2018). Unlike media sources such as periodicals, television, or the internet, which provide a mediated world experience, tourism fosters genuine and direct encounters, influencing how people think and providing benefits of intercultural contact (Wintersteiner & Wohlmuth, 2013).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Visitors of Religious Heritage Sites

As mentioned earlier, visitors to religious heritage sites can be classified into distinct groups: religious or believer visitors and secular or non-believer tourists. The discussion surrounding the similarities and differences between these two groups can be categorized under the concepts of convergence and divergence. These notions have

been explored by various scholars, who have examined the motives, behaviors, and experiences of religious and non-religious tourists (Bremer, 2004; Olsen & Timothy, 2006; Blackwell, 2010; Bond, 2013; Kamenidou & Vourou, 2014; Orekat, 2016; Eade, 2019).

5.1.1. Convergence of Motivations, Behaviors, and Experiences of Visitors

The first and most common opinion regarding the relationship between secular tourists and pilgrims is that they are essentially the same, if not identical (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). From a tourism standpoint, religious and secular tourists share similarities in structure and geography (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). Describing the matter in dichotomous terms of "pilgrim and tourist" often indicates a lack of understanding about the nature of tourism and what defines a tourist (Olsen & Timothy, 2006).

The widely recognized definition of a tourist, as provided by the World Tourism Organization, refers to a person who travels away from their home for a period ranging from 24 hours to less than a year (Digance & Cusack, 2002). This definition does not explicitly include travel motivations (Blackwee, 2007). Different motivations give rise to various types of tourists, such as volunteer tourists engaged in humanitarian missions or business tourists attending conferences and meetings (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). Similarly, individuals travelling for leisure, such as enjoying beaches or exploring cultural heritage, are considered beach tourists or cultural tourists. No single motivation is deemed more significant than another in defining a tourist (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). Applying the same standard, a "pilgrim" can be considered a tourist, specifically a religious tourist, motivated by spiritual or religious considerations (Orekat, 2016).

The notion that tourists travel solely for pleasure and pilgrims solely for religious reasons has long been questioned (Digance & Cusack, 2002). Sacred heritage sites attract visitors of various types, and some individuals may visit such sites for personal development or non-religious experiences (Bremer, 2004). Consequently, the boundaries between religious and secular motivations can become blurred (Matthew, 2013).

Differentiating between pilgrims and other visitors presents challenges in official statistics of many countries, as they often mix religious visitors with different types of visitors at sacred heritage sites (Matthew, 2013; Durán-Sánchez et al., 2018). The travel patterns of religious visitors or pilgrims exhibit similarities to those of secular tourists. For example, Gupta (1999) reports that pilgrimage, broadly understood beyond its spiritual aspect, involves sightseeing, travel to other sites, and sometimes air or sea travel, as well as the purchase of local artifacts (Olsen and Timothy, 2006).

Empirical research conducted by Özkan (2013) on Buddhist pilgrims and secular visitors at Tai and Mountain Putuo in China indicates the difficulty in segregating them. Özkan argues that pilgrimage can be considered a form of tourism, as pilgrims and secular visitors are interested in the spiritual aspects of religious heritage sites.

Thus, the distinction between pilgrims and other visitors becomes practically impossible.

Eade's (2019) study on pilgrimage and tourism in Lourdes, France, also highlights how pilgrims engage in the same tourist activities, dress like tourists, and cannot be differentiated from other visitors regarding shopping and nightlife. Eade suggests that tourists and pilgrims share standard travel requirements such as free time, financial resources, and infrastructure.

Scholars like Liebersohn (1996) and Graburn (1989) propose that tourism can be viewed as a quasi-pilgrimage, where tourists seek authentic experiences and engage with other cultures (Swatos Jr., 2011). Graburn describes tourism as a "holy trip" providing thrills, invigoration, and self-fulfillment. Both secular and religious visitors seek life-changing experiences to fulfil their psychological needs (Swatos Jr., 2011).

MacCannell (1976) further argues that tourism is a modern substitute for religion, as both endeavors seek meaning and a sense of belonging. People travel to locations associated with their culture or religion to strengthen their religious or spiritual identity and connect with their cultural heritage (Olsen and Timothy, 2006). Turner and Turner (1978) support this viewpoint, stating that "a tourist is a half-pilgrim if a pilgrim is a half-tourist" (Ulak, 2022).

Moreover, according to Olsen and Timothy (2006), visiting religious heritage sites is a condition of experience between the secular and the holy. Visitors can transition from secular tourists to pilgrims and vice versa at these sites. For instance, a religious traveler might enjoy a particular view at a site beyond their religious rituals.

Consequently, the convergence hypothesis suggests that distinguishing between pilgrims and tourists is challenging due to significant similarities in motivations, experiences, and behaviors. The widely accepted definition of a tourist overlooks motivations, leading to religious travelers being categorized as religious tourists. Behaviors at religious sites show similarities between pilgrims and secular visitors, and travel experiences can transition between tourism and pilgrimage aspects. This blurs boundaries and highlights how pilgrimage can be seen as a form of religiously motivated tourism.

5.1.2. Divergence of Motivations, Behaviors, and Experiences of Visitors

According to proponents of divergence theories, religious travelers and secular tourists are fundamentally distinct in many aspects (Orekat, 2016). Advocates of divergence theories argue for the separation of pilgrims from other types of tourists due to the distinct nature of sacred heritage properties that cannot be managed solely in secular terms (Digance, 2003). Notably, Boorstin (1961) and Barthes (1973) are credited with pioneering divergence theories (Blackwell, 2010).

Shackley (2001) classifies visitors to religious heritage destinations based on their motivations, distinguishing between those driven solely by religious reasons, like pilgrims, and those seeking historical and cultural experiences, like secular tourists. According to Shackley, the primary motive of each type of visitor can indicate

whether they are secular tourists with additional secular objectives or pilgrims with primarily religious motivations.

Olsen (2006) similarly states that religious travelers seek to transcend the known world and immerse themselves in a spiritual realm, where they can have religious experiences that rejuvenate their minds before returning to their everyday lives. Olsen and Timothy (2006) argue that despite societal changes altering perceptions of what is holy and reducing religious restraints, pilgrims maintain a solid spiritual purpose. Conversely, secular tourists may prioritize modern attractions such as luxurious hotels and shopping malls. In other words, secular visitors to holy sites often have motivations that are not explicitly religious (Blackwell, 2007).

Shuo Yeh et al. (2009) identify distinct motivations among non-religious visitors compared to religious tourists or pilgrims, which include seeking exciting adventures, experiencing novelty, cultural enrichment, and curiosity.

Gupta (1999) adds a critical perspective by highlighting the characteristics of pilgrims, typically viewed as religious, modest, and respectful of host traditions, and tourists, who seek pleasure and require amenities and services (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). Pilgrims often demonstrate a more dedicated approach to practicing their religious beliefs, whereas any particular religious framework does not bind secular tourists (Özkan, 2013).

Similarly, Di Giovine & Garcia-Fuentes (2016) confirm that religious foundations often perceive tourists as holidaymakers, while pilgrims are regarded as devout visitors. Furthermore, pilgrimage may involve acts of penance and austerity. For instance, some Hindu pilgrimage destinations are situated in remote locations, and adherents value the hardships endured on the journey, often traversing barefoot to earn divine acceptance and blessings (Coleman and Eade, 2004). Such experiences are typically absent for secular tourists at religious heritage destinations (Coleman and Eade, 2004).

Pilgrims have unique experiences during their journeys and while on-site (Digance, 2003). York (2002) further distinguishes between pilgrims and other visitors by highlighting the pilgrims' more excellent organization, well-defined itineraries, and more apparent purpose upon reaching their destination. In contrast, secular tourists may need more specific goals or plans beyond the scheduled activities of their trip.

The distinctions between pilgrims and other types of tourists extend to their expectations for the visit. Due to their heightened religious motivations, pilgrims may have greater expectations than visitors with secular objectives (Blackwell, 2007). According to Olsen and Timothy (2006), a pilgrim embarks on a journey in pursuit of sacredness, sanctity, and truth, believing that supernatural aid can be obtained. This indicates that pilgrims anticipate more profound experiences than other visitors at religious and historical sites, as pilgrimage holds immense significance for those seeking authenticity and personal transformation.

Blackwell (2007) argues that the differences between pilgrims and other visitors go beyond motivations and behaviors exhibited on-site. For example, she notes that

Hindu pilgrims traveling by bus to the Garhwal Himalayas often chant religious hymns during the journey, while other travelers do not. Similarly, in the Islamic world, pilgrims adhere to specific traditions on their way to Mecca, such as praying, wearing pilgrimage garments, and shaving their heads at the journey's beginning.

Another aspect discussed by intellectuals is the unique social impact of pilgrimage compared to other forms of tourism. Pilgrimage is considered a communal ritual that fosters interaction among believers and facilitates encounters with spiritual forces (Blackwell, 2007; Shackley, 2001). According to this hypothesis, religious visitations or pilgrimages contribute to spiritual development, self-actualization, recognition, and increased prestige within the religious community (Blackwell, 2007).

Van Gennep (1960) emphasized the social significance of pilgrimage as a ritual or socially constructed mechanism that promotes social cohesion within communities. He referred to pilgrimage as a form of "liminality" outside of regular time and place (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). For instance, Catholic pilgrims visiting the Vatican anticipate an elevation in social status through their pilgrimage. Turner (1977) also explored "liminality" and proposed the concept of "communitas," which refers to the sense of community and solidarity experienced by pilgrims during their journey (Olsen & Timothy, 2006).

In contrast, secular tourists are often seen as individualistic in their motivations and experiences, seeking personal pleasure, relaxation, and entertainment (Digance, 2003). They may engage in sightseeing, shopping, and leisure activities focusing on enjoyment rather than spiritual or transformative experiences (Ulak, 2022).

Overall, theories of divergence highlight fundamental differences between religious pilgrims and secular visitors in motivations, experiences, and behaviors. Pilgrims are driven by devotion and spiritual experiences, seeking personal transformation and a stronger religious bond. In contrast, secular tourists prioritize leisure, novelty, and cultural enrichment.

5.2. The Multidimensional Nature of Religious Travel

It is essential to acknowledge that convergence and divergence theories provide generalized frameworks and that individual experiences and motivations can vary significantly. Sacred heritage sites attract diverse visitors, ranging from devout pilgrims to casual tourists (Orekat, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to consider the multidimensional nature of religious travel and the complex interactions between religious and secular aspects. The Multidimensional Theory of Religious Travel suggests that religious travel exists on a continuum, with pilgrimage and tourism at opposite ends but with significant overlap and fluidity between them. This overlapping comes from the nature and intentions of religious and secular visitors. Here are key aspects to consider:

Motivations for religious travel can vary along a spectrum, from purely religious (pilgrimage) to fully secular (tourism), with many individuals blending spiritual and other motives. Various factors, including religious tradition, cultural background, and individual preferences influence these motivations. In other words, pilgrims may have

the intention to seek a purely spiritual experience, yet their sub-motivations may also include engaging in activities such as shopping and enjoying sightseeing (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). Similarly, secular visitors may have the intention to practice certain spiritual activities within the holy site, such as meditation or prayers, in order to gain different spiritual insights (Olsen & Timothy, 2006).

Experiences during religious travel can be a blend of pilgrimage and tourism, where some travelers engage in religious rituals while also exploring the cultural and historical aspects of the destination. Moreover, both secular and religious tourists have the potential to encounter authentic spiritual experiences. This could be possible by the presence of knowledgeable religious staff and a robust interpretive system that actively involves secular visitors in practices like prayers, meditations, and religious traditions (Olsen, 2006). Additionally, creating a peaceful and welcoming environment for religious visitors to practice their rituals is essential (Olsen, 2006). This approach seeks to make visits to religious heritage sites memorable, reinforce religious identities, and foster religious tolerance.

Behaviors during religious travel can overlap and are influenced by factors such as the specific religious tradition, cultural context, and individual awareness of visitation instructions to religious sites. Pilgrims typically demonstrate greater religious dedication, commitment, and respect for sacred sites, while tourists may prioritize sightseeing and sometimes neglect certain visitation instructions (Vidal-Casellas et al., 2019). An effective management system at religious heritage sites can shape the behaviors of secular travelers by actively involving them in spiritual activities and ensuring a respectful attitude to the visitation instructions (Vidal-Casellas et al., 2019).

In summary, rather than viewing religious visitors and secular tourists as oppositional, religious travel involves a fluid and evolving relationship between the two, with convergence and divergence existing as part of a complex multidimensional experience.

6. Conclusion

This research delved into the contrasting perspectives regarding the similarities and differences between religious and secular visitors at religious heritage sites. Through an extensive literature analysis on the motivations, experiences, and behaviors of visitors to these sites, the convergence and divergence hypotheses were examined. The findings suggest that religious travel involves a nuanced and intricate connection between pilgrimage and tourism rather than a clear-cut division. Categorizing visitors becomes challenging due to the influence of personal devoutness, cultural background, individual preferences, and the interpretive system at each location. This leads to overlapping and evolving motivations, behaviors, and experiences throughout the trip. Therefore, considering the multidimensional nature of religious travel and the intricate interactions between religious and secular visitors is vital.

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التمييز بين الحجاج والسياح في مواقع التراث الديني

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جامعة كاتالونيا الدولية

الملخص

السفر الى مواقع التراث الديني هو ظاهرة معقدة تجذب الزوار المؤمنين و غير المؤمنين. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى توفير إطار تحليلي يجمع بين نظريات التقارب والتباين التي تفرق بين الزائرين الدينيين والزائرين غير الدينيين من خلال تحليل الدوافع والتجارب والسلوكيات والترابطات بينها. تم إجراء دراسة شاملة للمراجع الأدبية في قواعد البيانات المختلفة لفترة من عام 2001 إلى 2022 والتي تناقش التمايز بين الحجاج والسياح في مواقع التراث الديني. أشارت النتائج إلى أن فرضية التقارب تشير إلى وجود تشابهات كبيرة بين الحجاج والسياح بسبب التقارب في الدوافع. وكذلك السلوكيات في المواقع الدينية تظهر تشابهاً بين الحجاج والزوار العلمانيين، ويمكن أن تمتزج تجارب السفر بين جوانب السياحة والحج سواء للحجاج أو السائحين. ومع ذلك، تؤكد نظريات التباين على وجود اختلافات جوهرية في الدوافع والتجارب والسلوكيات بين الحجاج الدينيين والزوار العلمانيين. يتحرك الحجاج بدافع التفاني والتجارب الروحية، بينما يعطي السياح العلمانيون الأولوية للترفيه والثقافة. تخلص الدراسة إلى أن السفر الديني يشمل أبعاداً متعددة. وبالتالي، فإن تصنيف الزوار الدينيين والسياح العلمانيين هو مهمة معقدة بسبب تداخل المستويات الشخصية للتفاني وممارسه الروحانيات و جودة الأنظمة التفسيرية الموجودة في مختلف المواقع. ويؤدي هذا التفاعل إلى تداخل وتطور الدوافع والسلوكيات والتجارب على مدار الرحلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السياحة الدينية، مواقع التراث الديني ، الحج، تجربة الزوار، الدوافع، السلوكيات