

Motivations as predictors of religious tourism: the Muslim pilgrimage to the city of Mecca

The Muslim
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the city of
Mecca

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Abstract

Purpose – Religious tourism is one of the oldest and fastest-growing segments. This study analyzes religious tourism through the pilgrimage of Muslims to the holy city of Mecca and has the following objectives: (1) establish the motivational dimensions of religious tourism; (2) identify the motivational dimensions that predict the satisfaction of religious tourism and (3) determine the motivational dimensions that predict return, recommend and say positive things about religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage to a sacred city.

Design/methodology/approach – The sample consisted of Muslim pilgrims who had visited Mecca. The sample was collected in Bahrain, a country located on the Persian Gulf, where most of its population is Muslim. A total of 380 valid questionnaires were obtained online. For the data analysis, factorial analysis and the multiple regression method were performed.

Findings – The results show that religious motivations are more important when visiting a sacred city than secular ones. Three motivational dimensions were found: religious, social and cultural and shopping. The three dimensions found have a significant relationship with satisfaction and loyalty. Likewise, it was found that the religious motivational dimension is the factor that most predicts satisfaction and loyalty in the behavior of religious visits to a sacred city.

Research limitations/implications – The main limitation of the present study was the temporality in which the sample was taken because the demand may vary at another time of the year and therefore vary its results.

Practical implications – The authors of the study recommend that holy cities increase the religious motivations of these travelers by periodically researching their needs and organizing services to suit their desired spiritual experience. Also, to improve the social and cultural part, travel agencies and tourist companies to Mecca should promote social and cultural motivation among travelers in an appropriate way by providing service packages that involve visits to cultural and social sites such as museums and cultural centers.

Social implications – This research will serve as a management guide for public institutions and private companies to develop more efficient planning in religious destinations and sacred cities.

Originality/value – This study is the first to analyze the construct of motivations in the pilgrimage to the city of Mecca, to then establish what the main motivations are that predict satisfaction and loyalty in a religious city. Thus, its results provide important information for tourist destination managers and tourism service providers.

Keywords Motivations, Behavior, Religious tourism, Mecca, Muslim pilgrimage

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1. Introduction

Religious tourism is a topic of interest for academics, and it is the oldest type of tourism in the world that witnessed a remarkable development with the emergence of religions (Irimias *et al.*, 2016; Apleni *et al.*, 2017). Religious tourism is defined as the form of travel associated with religious purposes or with a religious orientation (Kim *et al.*, 2020). In Islam, religious

tourism includes visiting holy places such as shrines in Iraq and Iran on the one hand and Masjid al-Haram (The Great Mosque of Mecca) on the other.

Religious tourism can be investigated in terms of three essential concepts: motivation, satisfaction and loyalty and the interrelationship among them. In previous findings, several authors used the push and pull construct, establishing that the push motives are those forces that make the tourist travel, while the pull motives are related to the attraction power of the visiting destination due to its appealing attributes (Verma and Sarangi, 2019). Satisfaction in religious tourism occurs when the positive experience of tourists during their visit exceeds their expectations (Kim and Perdue, 2011). Finally, loyalty is defined as the intention of the tourist to repeat the visit to the travel destination that is characterized by positive word of mouth and satisfaction from the positive experience lived (Tanford and Jung, 2017).

The holy city of Mecca is considered the most important of Islamic religion and culture; since it is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the seat of Masjid al-Haram. Also, Muslims have to make a pilgrimage to perform Hajj and Umrah. Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam, and it is mandatory for all Muslims around the world to perform Hajj once in a lifetime during the specific time of the Islamic calendar. On the other hand, Umrah is voluntary and can be performed at any time of the year (Almuhri and Alsawafi, 2017).

The city of Mecca is located in western Saudi Arabia. It consists of different religious sites, including Masjid al-Haram (The Great Mosque of Mecca), the largest mosque in the world where the Hajj and Umrah take place. The location comprises Ka'bah – where Muslims have to bypass; Maqam Ibrahim the highest place where Ibrahim stood during the construction of the Ka'bah; Safa and Marwa – two mountains where Muslims have to walk in-between during Hajj and Umrah as a tribute to Hajar when she lack water during Ibrahim's departure to fulfill God's demand. Lastly, the cave of Hira'a, where the Prophet Muhammad first received God's revelation through the angel Gabriel (Almuhri and Alsawafi, 2017).

The importance of studying the travel to Mecca stems from the fact that the travel to Mecca is of vital importance to Muslims. Second, visiting Mecca involves the performing of Hajj that is the fifth pillar of Islam and it is a duty to visit it at least once in a life for people who are financially and physically stable. Furthermore, performing Hajj is a way for repentance of sins (Rybina, 2018). Finally, according to the researchers' knowledge there are scarce of studies that investigated the travel to Mecca which could lead to less understanding of motivations to visit this sacred site.

In religious tourism, motivations for academic research are still scarce. So far, no studies that analyze the motivations and their relationship with satisfaction and loyalty in religious tourism applied to a pilgrimage to a sacred city have been found. In light of this research gap, the present study analyzes religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca as the central place of visitation and pilgrimage of the Muslim religion. Thus, this study establishes the following objectives: (1) establish the motivational dimensions of religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage of a sacred city; (2) identify the motivational dimensions that predict the satisfaction of religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage of a sacred city and (3) determine the motivational dimensions that predict the return, recommend and say positive things about religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage of a holy city.

This study contributes to expanding the academic literature on religious tourism related explicitly to the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. First, this study identified the motivational factors of Muslim pilgrims in deciding to travel to Mecca. Second, the knowledge on the effects of motivational factors on the general satisfaction of religious pilgrims was expanded. Third, this study investigated the relationship between pilgrim satisfaction and fidelity, which has been scarcely studied in the Muslim context. In practice, this study will serve as a management guide for administrators of religious destinations to direct plans according to the demand of the pilgrims. Thus, this will help them improve services, including accommodation, transportation and security, and ensure the satisfaction and loyalty of the pilgrims.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Religious tourism

Religious tourism is considered the most growing and developing tourism sector due to the socio-cultural changes during the new millennium, including transport, technology and globalization (Liro, 2021). Today, religious centers are witnessing the development and have become multifunctional, offering cultural and recreational facilities for visitors of different motivations, including religious and leisure tourists (Liro *et al.*, 2017).

The academics claimed that religious tourism is beneficial to all concerned. Religious sites can get donations and charity and help revive the handicrafts that travelers buy as souvenirs during their visit. Economically, religious tourism increases the income of tourism companies that provide hospitality services in the area (Fernandes *et al.*, 2012; Durán *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, religious tourism is the spiritual journey to a sacred place or sanctuary with the total or partial motivation for religious reasons (Puşcaşu, 2015). It is essential to study the motivation of religious tourism because it helps to improve travel services and better understand this type of tourism (Najib *et al.*, 2020).

2.2 Tourist motivation

Tourist motivation is an essential determinant for tourist travel. Tourist motivations can be defined as a set of wishes that influence tourist participation in Rybina trips (2018). The wishes include tourists' reasons for traveling, desires to fulfill from the trip and reasons for choosing a specific destination (Jones, 2011). Among the different theories that address motivations, travel career ladder proposed the five levels model of needs based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. These levels are psychological, security, relationship, self-esteem and fulfillment to understand the travelers' motivations of (Rybina, 2018, p. 7).

Another theory of tourist motivation is the Iso-Ahola escape/search, which proposed that two motivations influence the behavior of tourists in a quadrant model consisting of personal escape, interpersonal escape, personal search and interpersonal search (Rybina, 2018). Moreover, the push and pull theory of motivation assumed that tourists select their travel destinations according to push and pull factors. First, people are pushed by emotional and internal factors to travel such as relaxation, enjoying the natural environment, sports, adventure and the union of family and friends. Then, they are dragged by external factors and attributes of the destination such as expense, low cost of travel, natural environment and historical attractions that make them prefer one destination over another when deciding to travel (Battour *et al.*, 2012).

2.3 Motivations in religious tourism

The motivations for religious tourism are varied. In this regard, the visitor may be motivated by the search for life meaning rarely found in daily life and by the aim of achieving personal values on a physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual level (Liro, 2021). Moreover, the trip to religious places entails having a spiritual experience, obtaining a positive long-term impact, unveiling the meaning of life, spending free time with family and friends, relaxing and participating in religious festivals and visiting social, historical and cultural places (Herzog *et al.*, 2011; Bond *et al.*, 2015; Canoves and Forga, 2016; Amaro *et al.*, 2018).

Available studies on the reasons for religious tourism showed no consensus among scholars. Liro *et al.* (2017) studied a pilgrimage center in Krakow (Poland). The study's results showed that tourists visit this center, motivated by three reasons: tourist motivation, religious motivation and recreational motivation. However, another study by Liro (2021) on the reasons for visiting eight of the most famous Roman Catholic shrines in Poland found other motivations. This study classified the motivations of religious tourists according to their importance into five reasons: religious motivations, tourist motivations, recreation

social and family motivation, and commercial and shopping motivation. These findings coincide with other previous studies by [Lois-González and Santos \(2015\)](#) and [Abad-Galzacorta and Guereño-Omil \(2016\)](#), who pointed out that religious motives are accompanied by tourist, cultural, socio-cultural and recreational motives.

In Western societies, churches are considered cultural buildings visited for tourist reasons ([Riegel and Lindner, 2020](#)). Some studies in the UK indicated that tourists are motivated to visit churches for historical and cultural reasons rather than religious reasons ([Hughes *et al.*, 2013](#)). Likewise, [Gutic *et al.* \(2010\)](#) analyzed the visit to Chichester Cathedral from England and found that history, architecture and curiosity were the main reasons. However, spiritual reasons such as praying or finding inner peace were less important. [Francis *et al.* \(2010\)](#), who studied St. David's Cathedral, Wales, also supported. The scholars found that tourists visit the cathedral to explore the national heritage. Hence, Church visits are primarily motivated by historical and architectural reasons rather than religious reasons. In this sense, a study of visitors, who went to a Christian event for the 17th exhibition of the Holy Relics of Saint Francis Xavier in Goa, India, found that the factors that motivated visiting the sacred sites were: religion, social exploration, escape, belief and shopping ([Pillai *et al.*, 2017](#)).

Furthermore, [Rebenstorf and Körs \(2018\)](#) in their study on the reasons for visiting the churches of cities in Germany and Switzerland, found that the historical importance of the building, its architecture and the atmosphere inside the building were more important than religious reasons. On the contrary, [Božic *et al.* \(2016\)](#) studied the main reasons for visiting the Vujan monastery (Serbia), and the researchers found that religious reasons were more relevant than secular ones. The arguments mentioned above indicated that the motives for Church visits were divided into two main types: religious motives and non-religious or secular motives (architecture, culture and history).

Regarding the pilgrimage to Mecca, [Raj \(2012\)](#) and [Luz \(2020\)](#) indicated that Muslim pilgrims make the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia for various reasons. The first motivation is to pray in Masjid al-Haram (The Great Mosque of Mecca) and Masjid-e-Nabawi in Medina because they get rewards such as forgiveness of sins. The second reason is finding love and pleasure. Muslim pilgrims travel to Mecca because of their love for the Prophet Muhammad who visited these places. Thus, Muslims show respect and love for those places to demonstrate their love for the Prophet. Third, Muslims visit these places for pilgrimages allowing them to respect the values and cultural differences of other pilgrims who come to perform Hajj in Mecca and visit Masjid-e-Nabawi in Medina ([Raj, 2012](#)). However, some researchers have found that Muslims' visits to Mecca Halal packages offered to Muslim pilgrims. Hence, the reasons for visiting Mecca are multidimensional, ranging from religious to secular, such as leisure and shopping.

Moreover, studies exploring the reasons for visiting Buddhist sites are few. For example, [Piramanayagam *et al.* \(2021\)](#) studied the Buddhist site Bodhgaya in India. This study identified three reasons: religious beliefs, history, architecture and culture and quality of service. They stated that the quality of service was the most important reason for visiting Bodhgaya. In a study on religious tourism motivation in Buddhist Mountain (China), [Wang *et al.* \(2016\)](#) found that religious beliefs and mental relaxation were classified as driving motives, while cultural enjoyment was classified as attraction motive for visiting the site.

Previous discussion and research on religious tourism noted that academics agreed that the motives are multidimensional, or in other words. Particularly, tourists have multiple motives for visiting Mecca. Thus, knowing the motives behind tourists' motivations can help improve the services provided by both the government and the travel provider ([Najib *et al.*, 2020](#)). The earlier discussion on religious tourism showed religious and secular reasons for visiting holy places. Prayer and repentance of sins were found among the religious motives. Nonetheless, non-religious or secular motives include sightseeing, identifying culture and

history, shopping and meeting family and friends. Since the motivations in the pilgrimage to a sacred city have not been found, our first research question arises.

RQ1. What are the motivational dimensions of religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage of a sacred city?

2.4 Satisfaction and loyalty in religious tourism

Satisfaction is defined as the agreement between the travel destination's previous experience and current performance of. Tourist satisfaction is vital in marketing the travel destination. Furthermore, satisfaction is important because it is related to the choice of destination, the consumption of products or services and repeated visits ([Li et al., 2010](#); [Khan et al., 2017](#)). It is essential to understand the relationship between religious tourism motives and tourist satisfaction. Religious tourism studies agreed that satisfaction among religious tourists and pilgrims is affected by the infrastructure of the religious site, including accommodation, souvenir shops, restaurants and people's social skills, such as the friendliness of the locals as well as people and staff hospitality ([Krešić et al., 2013](#)). Similarly, [Kumar and Singh \(2015\)](#) and [Gupta and Basak \(2018\)](#) indicated that the satisfaction of religious tourists is affected by security, transportation facilities, food, accommodation, shops, the religious environment in hotels, room decoration and personal safety.

Previous studies agreed on the importance of the relationship between religious tourism motives and tourist satisfaction. For example, [Battour et al. \(2012\)](#) examined the motivation and satisfaction of traveling for Muslims in Malaysia. They found that the motivations are significantly and positively related to the satisfaction of Muslim tourists. [Hsiao-Ming et al. \(2020\)](#) indicated that satisfaction, the image of the destination, the perceived value and the quality of the service positively impact on the behavioral intention of religious tourists. Along the same lines, [Preko et al. \(2020\)](#) studied motivation, satisfaction and word of mouth among Muslim tourists in Ghana and found that Muslim tourists' push and pull motives of from Ghana significantly impact satisfaction.

Loyalty in religious tourism takes shape by repeating visits and recommending the destination to other people. Studies found that loyalty is related to religious tourism both directly and indirectly. For example, [Rybina and Lee \(2021\)](#) explored traveler motivation and destination loyalty to visit holy sites in Central Asia. The authors identified five reasons for visiting these sites: spiritual and religious reasons, cultural and historical reasons, and wellness and healing, nature, fun and social contact. Among those reasons, only three (spiritual and religious, cultural and historical and well-being and healing) have a significant relationship with loyalty to visit sacred places in Central Asia. Another study by [Siregar et al. \(2019\)](#) on the influence of tourist motivation on tourist satisfaction and its impact on destination loyalty among Muslim travelers in Aceh found that motivations and satisfaction significantly impact on destination loyalty. Along the same lines, [Verma and Sarangi \(2019\)](#) investigated religious tourism in Kumbh Mela, India and found that motivation toward the religious site directly influence satisfaction. Thus, loyalty is directly and positively influenced by satisfaction.

Few previous studies investigated satisfaction and fidelity in religious tourism. The available studies showed an interrelated relationship between motives, satisfaction and loyalty. However, more research is needed to confirm the relationship mentioned. Thus, our second and third research questions arise:

RQ2. What motivational dimensions predict satisfaction in religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage to a sacred city?

RQ3. What motivational dimensions predict return, recommend and talk about positive things in religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage to a sacred city?

From the aforementioned discussion about motives, loyalty and satisfaction it can be inferred different conclusions. First, the motivations to visit sacred places differ from one religion to other. For instance, in Christianity religious places such as churches are considered as cultural centers and so the motivations to visit them is mainly for cultural and touristic reasons more than religious ones. On the other hand, visiting religious places in Islam is motivated most by religious reasons. For example, Muslims visit Mecca mainly for religious reasons such as to perform Hajj and pray in the Great Mosque of Mecca which stems from the fact that Hajj is the fifth pillar in Islam and that Muslim should perform it at least once in their life for the purpose of repentance of sins. In terms of the relationship between satisfaction, motivation and loyalty of Muslim travelers, it is found that motivation is significantly related to satisfaction which at the end affects loyalty.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study area

Mecca is the holy city of Islam, and it is located in western Saudi Arabia at a distance of 70 km from Jeddah on the Red Sea. It has the third-largest population after Riyadh and Jeddah. Mecca is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the place where the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet. Visiting Mecca is obligatory for Muslims who can perform Hajj once in their life. It has important sites for Muslims prayers, including the Great Mosque of Mecca (Masjid al-Haram), where Ka'bah is located. People make pilgrims to Mecca to perform Hajj in the last Islamic month of Dhu al Hijjah, where millions of pilgrims from different countries gather. Muslims also make the pilgrimage to Mecca to perform Umrah at any time of the year (Figure 1).

The origin of Hajj is backed to 2,000 B.C. when Hager (the wife of Prophet Ibrahim: Abraham, as called in the Old Testament) and her son Ishmael were stranded in the desert of Mecca. Ismael was close to death and Hager search for water by going back and forth between the mountains of Safa and Marwa. Then angel Jibril (Gabriel) touched the Earth and a spring of water appeared called Zemzem for Hager and his son to drink from. Then, Ibrahim built a monument at the site of the spring called the Ka'bah in response to God's order.



Figure 1.
The location of Mecca

Source(s): https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mecca_Saudi_Arabia_locator_map.png (accessed 12 December 2021)

Prophet Mohammed led Muslims to this holy site during their first official Hajj after the conquest of Mecca. The rituals Prophet Mohammed performed during that time including walking between the mountains of Safa and Marwa, stoning the wall of Satan that tempted Ibrahim to disobey God, slaughtering the sheep in honor of Ibrahims' sacrifice of his son and climbing the Mount of Arafat following Prophet Mohammed made in his last sermon before his death considered the main spiritual stages in performing Hajj (Almuhrzi and Alsawafi, 2017).

During the pilgrimage to Mecca, pilgrims can visit cultural attractions such as the Mecca Museum and the exhibition of two holy mosques. The Mecca Museum was formerly known as Al-Zahir Palace. It contains a collection of archaeological discoveries related to the pre-Islamic era, an Islamic art room, and a presentation on Islamic calligraphy. The Two Mosques Exhibition contains marble insignia, pillars, historical photos and the ancient golden metal gate of the Ka'bah of Al Masjid Al Haram in Mecca and the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina. Finally, the Al-Kiswah (cloth of the Ka'bah) Factory is where the Ka'bah cloth was made. This curtain is made of pure black silk and accented with Quranic verses in Arabic calligraphy.

Travelers who interested in old items can also visit to Mecca auction. It has a great collection of jewelry, old currencies of old Arabic era where they bid on the items displayed. They can also visit the Al-Zaher Palace Museum. This is museum exhibits Mecca's history and archaeological collections from different Islamic history in the region. It is constructed in 1944 in Islamic style. It was first used as the King Abdul Aziz headquarters in Mecca where he met delegates of Muslim pilgrims from different part of the world. Then, it was transformed to a museum for Islamic history.

For pleasure and shopping, pilgrims can visit the many restaurants available in Mecca. Among those restaurants is Paradise Restaurant, which is close to Al Masjid Al Haram. It is open at night and serves traditional cuisine. Another famous restaurant is Al Tazaj, known in all the governorates of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is famous for serving different barbecue cuisines like hamburgers. In terms of shopping, tourists can visit Mecca Mall. It is a large shopping center that offers families a quiet and friendly environment. It offers brands of products, supermarkets and restaurants both local and international (Plates 1 and 2).

3.2 Survey, data collection and analysis

The researchers surveyed tourists over the age of 18 who made a pilgrimage to the city of Mecca. The survey had three sections: sociodemographic, visitor motivations, satisfaction



Source(s): <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mecca> (accessed 12 December 2021)

Plate 1.
The Great Mosque
in Mecca



Plate 2.
The city of Mecca

Source(s): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mecca> (accessed 12 December 2021)

and loyalty to the visit. Several research papers were reviewed, and the validation of their scales was considered during the elaboration stage of the questionnaire used in this study. The first part contained 12 closed questions on the sociodemographic characteristics of the pilgrims, which were adapted from the study by Lee *et al.* (2014). The second section addressed the motivation of the religious trip, and it was measured through 23 items from the study by Pillai *et al.* (2017). These questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 not very important and 5 very important). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the final motivation scale reached a value of 0.92, indicating a good internal consistency between the scale elements. The third part analyzed the items referring to satisfaction and loyalty were taken from the study by Kim and Park (2017), which were also measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 being not very important and 5 very important).

The questionnaire was prepared in English and Arabic in the Google Forms program that would be used to complete it online. Then a pilot test of 25 surveys was conducted to find errors and validate the questions. The survey was published through WhatsApp in Bahrain, located in the Persian Gulf, where most of its population is Muslim.

Convenience sampling was used to determine the willingness of travelers to answer the online questionnaires. Visitors completed the survey voluntarily. The sample size was established in 350 valid surveys, and the infinite population was used, considering that there is no official number of pilgrims visiting the destination of Mecca. The sample collection period was from May to July 2021. A margin of error of $\pm 5\%$, a confidence level of 95% and a variation of 50% was proposed.

As there is no theoretical model of motivations in religious tourism, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used for data analysis, which allowed us to reduce and better interpret the motivational variables. For the extraction of the factors, they were changed to the analysis of

the main components. In addition, the varimax rotation method was introduced to order factor loadings. Likewise, the Kaiser criterion was obtained to choose the number of factors. In addition, the KMO index (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin) and the Bartlett sphericity index were obtained to analyze the proposed model. Then, in the second stage, the enter multiple regression method was implemented to find the most important predictors (motivational factors) that influence satisfaction, intentions to return, recommend and say positive things as variables of visitor loyalty. For the multiple regression analysis, the enter method was chosen because through this method all the predictors are entered simultaneously.

In this study, once the data were collected during the field activity, they were organized, tabulated and analyzed using the SPSS version 26 program.

4. Results

4.1 Sociodemographic aspects of the sample

For the present study, carried out *in situ* in Bahrain, the sample consisted of national tourists (13.8%) and international tourists (86.2%). The smallest group of visitors came from Europe (1.3%), followed by Asia (4.4%), while the highest percentage of the sample came from other continents (94.3%). In addition, most tourists were men (76.3%), followed by women (23.7%). 71.1% were married, while 16.9% were single regarding their marital status. Most of the tourists were between 21 and 30 years old (39.1%), followed by tourists who were between 41 and 50 years old (29.2%). Regarding education, university students were the most extensive sample (60.7%), followed by tourists with secondary studies (29.4%). Regarding their occupation, the majority are private employees (44.3%) and public employees (29.7%). For most tourists, it was the second time they traveled to the destination (48.2%), followed by those who had visited it more than four times (25.4%). Also, they would like to travel with family (76.8%) and with friends (14.8%). Regarding the stay in the destination, most tourists spent four days and three nights (28.1%) and three days and two nights (24.0%). Most tourists earned between \$ 2001 and \$ 2,500 (47.7%), followed by those who earned between \$ 1,501 and \$ 2000 (16.1%). Finally, most tourists spent between \$ 60.01 and \$ 90 per day (36.5%), followed by those who spent between \$ 30.01 and \$ 60 per day (24.0%).

4.2 Motivations

An EFA has been carried out to reduce the items in smaller factors to be able to interpret the data. For data extraction, the principal component analysis has been used. In contrast, the varimax rotation method was used to order the factors, with very high or low factor loads. The factors found represented 82.92% of the total variance. The Cronbach's alpha of the factors ranged from 0.987 to 0.935, fair values. The factor loadings ranged from 0.507 to 0.939. Thus, all were above the critical value of 0.50 suggested by [Hair et al. \(2010\)](#). The KMO index was 0.90, indicating a good relationship between the variables, so it was appropriate to perform the factor analysis. In addition, Bartlett's sphericity test was significant ($p < 0.05$), so the use of factor analysis was adequate. Results are shown in [Table 1](#).

In [Table 1](#), the first dimension was “religious” and it was related to religious motivations such as: to seek peace, appreciate/experience the greatness of the churches, attend the religious festival and relieve daily stress, among others. This dimension reached a percentage of explained variance of 68.99%, so it was the most important factor in relation to the rest. The second dimension has been called “social and cultural” and included: to satisfy my curiosity, experience a different culture, fulfill a lifelong wish, appreciate and experience ancient architecture, accompany friends or relatives. This dimension had an explained variance percentage of 10.16%.

The third dimension, “shopping,” comprised buying religious and local items. This dimension reached 3.78% of explained variance.

Table 1.
Factor analysis of
the motivations of
religious tourism

Variable	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Component			Factors
			1	2	3	
To seek peace	4.823	0.808	0.939			Religious
To appreciate/experience the grandeur of the churches	4.836	0.776	0.936			
To attend the religious festival	4.839	0.744	0.928			
To relieve daily stress	4.852	0.671	0.916			
To see Mecca	4.831	0.754	0.912			
To pay respect to the Saint's relics	4.857	0.641	0.907			
To relieve boredom	4.854	0.654	0.906			
To escape from routine life	4.833	0.743	0.903			
To seek spiritual comfort	4.857	0.725	0.889			
To share experience with other believers/pilgrim	4.818	0.780	0.873			
To encounter religious fulfillment	4.852	0.659	0.869			Social and cultural
To experience the mystery of religion	4.802	0.829	0.867			
To redeem myself	4.867	0.614	0.843			
To feel the holy atmosphere	4.813	0.769	0.775			
To spend holiday	4.698	1.005	0.634			
To satisfy my curiosity	3.872	1.636		0.902		
To experience a different culture	3.964	1.643		0.840		Shopping
To fulfill a life-long desire	4.503	1.133		0.587		
To appreciate and experience ancient architecture	4.557	1.179		0.523		
To accompany friends or family	4.547	1.242		0.507		
To purchase religious items	4.414	1.155			0.848	
To purchase local items	4.555	1.051			0.838	
Cronbach's α			0.987	0.83	0.935	
Variance explained (%)			68.989	10.157	3.776	
Cumulative variance explained (%)			68.989	79.147	82.922	

4.3 Motivations and satisfaction

A multiple regression enter was used to analyze the most important predictors of satisfaction. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 3 shows that all the motivational dimensions were predictors of satisfaction. Thus, they had significant values ($p < 0.05$). The adjusted R^2 was high, 67.9%, indicating the high percentage of variation of the satisfaction variable concerning the motivational dimensions. The F test was significant ($p < 0.05$), which indicated a fundamental relationship between the significant predictors and satisfaction. Furthermore, the tolerance values indicated no

Table 2.
Motivations and
satisfaction

Variable	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance
Religious	0.784	27.116	0.000	1.000
Social and cultural	0.217	7.497	0.000	1.000
Purchases	0.140	4.825	0.000	1.000
(Constant)		222.125	0.000	
R^2 fitted	0.679			
F	271.586			
Sig.	0.000			

multicollinearity between the independent variables (tolerance = 1). The model was adequate, and the “Religious” dimension most predicts satisfaction with a beta value = 784. Hence, religious motivations should be boosted to improve the satisfaction level of visitors. Despite being significant, the other dimensions have a low beta value, so their influence on the dependent variable “satisfaction” is low.

4.4 The motivations and intentions to return

A multiple regression enter was used to analyze the most important predictors of return intentions, and it included the motivational dimensions that influenced return intentions. The results are presented in Table 3.

According to Table 3, the adjusted R^2 was 78.7%, indicating the high percentage of the return intentions variable variation about the motivational dimensions. The model presented a significant F test ($p < 0.05$), which indicated an evident relationship between the significant predictors and the response variable (intentions to recommend). The tolerance values indicated that there was no multicollinearity between the independent variables. All motivational dimensions were predictors of return intentions. The religious dimension, with a beta value = 0.859, was the one that most influenced return intentions of tourists. As a result, the religious variable should be improved to foster the return of tourists to this destination.

4.5 Motivations and recommendation intentions

The analysis of the most important predictors of recommendation intentions was made with a multiple regression enter, which included the motivational dimensions predicted by recommendation intentions. The results are presented in Table 4.

According to Table 4, the adjusted R^2 was high, 77.5%, indicating a high percentage of variation between the motivations independent variables and the recommendation intentions dependent variable. The model presented a significant F test ($p < 0.05$), and the tolerance values indicated no multicollinearity between the independent variables. All motivational dimensions were predictors of recommendation intentions. Despite this outcome, the

Variable	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance
Religious	0.859	36.380	0.000	1.000
Social and cultural	0.207	8.772	0.000	1.000
Purchases	0.088	3.719	0.000	1.000
(Constant)		370.413	0.000	
Adjusted R^2	0.787			
F	471.429			
Sig.	0.000			

Table 3.
The motivations and
intentions to return

Variable	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance
Religious	0.853	35.210	0.000	1.000
Social and cultural	0.208	8.596	0.000	1.000
Purchases	0.085	3.491	0.001	1.000
(Constant)		365.614	0.000	
Adjusted R^2	0.775			
F	441.953			
Sig.	0.000			

Table 4.
Motivations and
recommendation
intentions

religious dimension, with a beta value = 0.859, is the one that most influenced the recommendation intentions of tourists. Hence, it is essential to improve the recommendation of tourists in the destination.

4.6 Motivations and saying positive things about destiny

With a multiple regression enter, the most important predictors in the intentions to say positive things about the destination were analyzed. The motivational dimensions that influenced the saying positive things about the destination were included. Table 5 presents the results.

In Table 5, the adjusted R^2 was high, 74.7%, indicating a high percentage of variation between the independent variables (motivational dimensions) and the dependent variable (saying positive things about the destination). The model presented a significant F test ($p < 0.05$) the tolerance values indicated that there was no multicollinearity between the independent variables. All the motivational dimensions were predictors in saying positive things about the destination. Thus, the religious dimension, with a beta value = 0.859, t most influenced the tourists' return intentions, being the most influential to improve saying positive things about destiny.

5. Discussion

The present study has its first objective to establish the motivational dimensions of religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage of a sacred city. The results show three motivational dimensions: religious, social and cultural and shopping. Based on previous studies, the religious motivation of our study was found as religious by Liro *et al.* (2017), Liro (2021), Božic *et al.* (2016), Rybina (2018), Piramanayagam *et al.* (2021) and Pillai *et al.* (2017). Amaro *et al.* (2018) named it spiritual and Wang *et al.* (2016) identified it as religious beliefs. The social and cultural dimensions, second found in the present study, was found by Amaro *et al.* (2018), Liro (2021) as how to spend free time with family and friends; and Abad-Galzacorta and Guereño-Omil (2016) called it sociocultural reasons. Other authors such as Hughes *et al.* (2013) found it as cultural; Rebenstorf and Körs (2018) historical importance of the building and architecture. The third dimension of the present study is shopping, which was found by Pillai *et al.* (2017) and Rybina (2018) as purchases. Moreover, Liro (2021) identified it as commercial and purchasing.

Regarding which motivations are the most relevant religious or non-religious, the present study found religious motivation as the most important, followed by non-religious as social and cultural motivation and shopping motivation. In several previous findings, religious motivation is the main one, as Božic *et al.* (2016) (Lois-González and Santos, 2015; Abad-Galzacorta and Guereño-Omil, 2016). In contrast, other previous findings and mainly in Western societies, revealed that non-religious motives are the most important (Riegel and Lindner, 2020; Hughes *et al.*, 2013; Gutic *et al.*, 2010; Francis *et al.*, 2010; Rebenstorf and Körs, 2018; Piramanayagam *et al.*, 2021).

Table 5.
Motivations and
saying positive things
about the destination

Variable	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.	Tolerance
Religious motivations	0.840	32.703	0.000	1.000
Social and cultural	0.201	7.808	0.000	1.000
Purchases	0.063	2.456	0.015	1.000
(Constant)		353.585	0.000	
Adjusted R^2	0.747			
F	378.829			
Sig.	0.000			

The contribution of the present study to the academic literature on religious tourism consists in identifying that the motivations in religious tourism are multi-dimensional, and their visit is motivated by three different dimensions: religious, social and cultural and shopping. This study is the first to identify social and cultural motivations together in one dimension, forming a single factor. The study also reveals that, when visiting a sacred religious city, the main motivation is religious, followed by non-religious ones such as social and cultural and shopping.

Furthermore, the second objective of the study was to identify the motivational dimensions that predict the satisfaction of religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage of a sacred city. In the present study, three dimensions have a significant impact on the satisfaction of religious tourism, similar results to [Preko *et al.* \(2020\)](#). Our study also finds that the religious motivational dimension is the factor that predicts satisfaction in religious tourism when visiting a sacred city, a finding analogous to [Verma and Sarangi \(2019\)](#). Hence, the present study contributes to the literature by identifying that the motivational dimensions have a significant relationship with satisfaction, and the primary motivation that predicts satisfaction in visiting a sacred city as part of religious tourism is religion.

The third objective determined the motivational dimensions that predict return, recommend and say positive things about religious tourism applied to the pilgrimage of a sacred city. The findings show that the three dimensions are essential to the loyalty variables. Additionally, the primary motivation that predicts loyalty variables is religion, becoming the most important variable to predict the future behavior of religious tourism in a sacred city, another relevant contribution to the academic literature.

6. Conclusions

Religious tourism consists of a spiritual journey to a sacred place or sanctuary with religious and non-religious motivations. Studies on motivations in religious tourism are crucial to understanding the visits of its pilgrims and faithful to adapt the offer of products and services according to demand. The analysis of religious tourism in a holy city like Mecca provided a look at the motives of travelers and how they could affect their satisfaction and loyalty, which could help improve the services provided to each other and improve the image of the traveler's destiny.

The present study found three motivational dimensions related to the religious tourism in a sacred city: religious, social, cultural and shopping. Moreover, the three dimensions found have a significant relationship with satisfaction and loyalty variables such as recommendation, return and saying positive things about religious destiny. Likewise, it was found that the religious motivational dimension is the factor that most predicts satisfaction and loyalty in the behavior of religious visits to a sacred city. In terms of management implications, it is important to understand the motivation and expectation of travelers to the Holy city of Mecca. In order to improve travelers' satisfaction and loyalty, destination managers should address the religious, social, cultural and shopping motivations. Both religious and secular motivations and their positive relationship to intention to visit should be considered to attract travelers and build the destination loyalty and satisfaction.

Concerning theoretical implications, similar studies have found that religious motivation is the main one in this type of tourism and others indicate that the main motivations are non-religious. Nonetheless, the present study contributes by identifying that religious motivation is the most important in the pilgrimage to a sacred city. The present study also contributes to the academy by finding three dimensions: the religious one, followed by social and cultural motivations, which were found in only one dimension. However, other authors have found the social and cultural aspects separately. Likewise, the present study contributes to the existing theory by identifying that the religious factor is the primary motivation that predicts satisfaction and loyalty to a sacred city.

Furthermore, as practical implications, the authors of the study recommend that holy cities increase the religious motivations of these travelers by periodically researching their needs and organizing services to suit their desired spiritual experience. The results of this study could give the municipal of the city of Mecca insights of what motivates pilgrims to visit the holy destination of the Grand Mosque and this could encourage government to set strategies to ensure a better hosting of travelers. Also, to improve the social and cultural part, travel agencies and tourist companies to Mecca should promote social and cultural motivation among travelers in an appropriate way by providing service packages that involve visits to cultural and social sites such as museums and cultural centers. Also, to increase motivations for shopping, holy cities such as Mecca could build more shopping malls, traditional markets and restaurants offering high-quality local and international products, especially religious ones such as the Holy Quran, the rosary and dates. It could increase travelers' satisfaction, make them prone to repeat visits, and recommend the destination to others.

Finally, the main limitation of the present study was the temporality in which the sample was taken because the demand may vary at another time of the year and therefore vary its results. As a future line of research, it could be possible to carry out a study that analyzes the image of a sacred city to improve its satisfaction and loyalty as future behavior. This study contributes to the academic literature on religious tourism related to visits to sacred cities and will serve as an action guide for developing plans and programs in these sacred destinations.

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