

RISE OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PILGRIMAGE TOURISM: MOTIVATIONS AND TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

In the past, pilgrimage tourism was more for the elderly in search of spiritual fulfillment but now it has also caught on among young people. This change took place due to many reasons such as new travel objectives, modern cultural values, improved technology and an inclination toward true and authentic experiences. Unlike more typical vacations, pilgrimage tourism gives young people opportunities for self-reflection, cultural immersion and personal development. Many young people in this fast-moving world are searching for an emotional and spiritual peace. With increased stress and anxiety, pilgrimages are also a way to reclaim their identity and find oneself. Spiritual tourism is known to contribute to mindfulness and resilience (Wright & Egan, 2022). A burgeoning worldwide fascination with wellness pursuits has also made a spiritual quest travel more appealing to more young people. Young Travellers, the new generation of pilgrims wants to know about other cultures and traditions. They like to travel, to learn history, and also want to explore local customs.

INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage tourism is one of the oldest forms of tourism. Pilgrimage tourism is travel to a location for religious or for spiritual reasons. Unlike recreational tourism, the primary motivation of sacred tourism is usually devotion, religiosity, and peace of mind and tourists are led to shrines, temples, mosques, churches, and other religious spots (Raj & Griffin, 2015). "Seriously speaking, pilgrimage of human beings for centuries is shaping world tourism pattern." Since ancient times, pilgrimage tourism has been a fundamental part of important religious civilizations of the world. The famous pilgrimage routes including Camino de Santiago in Spain, Hajj in Saudi Arabia, Kumbh Mela in India, and Shikoku Pilgrimage in Japan has million of visitors every year (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). While traditional pilgrimages focused on religious motivation, in its present form, pilgrimage tourism increasingly encompasses elements of overall well-being, discovery of heritage, and cultural engagement. Nowadays, pilgrims usually search for personal transformation, health, adventure and religious fulfillment (Collins-Kreiner, 2010).

Globalization and technological advances have also been redefining pilgrimage tourism. Improved transport infrastructure, online wayfinding apps (though Solomon cautions against using them) and the power of social media have expanded sacred sites' appeal to a younger and wider population. The fact, as Rinschede (1992) this general development secular has spread to the pilgrimage and has therefore become a complex event is now integrated in the pilgrimage demand secular interests such as history, architecture, putative interest of a social nature. An example of how spirituality converges with experience-based tourism in the 21st

century. In recent decades pilgrimage tourism has been associated more and more with its community based characteristics and sustainable design. The majority of paths have a low-impact orientation and are concerned with local involvement and the preservation of tradition in line with current responsible tourism perspectives (UNWTO, 2019). The health sector increasingly recognises that the mental and emotional benefits of pilgrimage are mixed with spirituality as more seeking tourists look for opportunities in peace, mindfulness and wellbeing (Norman, 2012). The shifting nature of pilgrimage tourism to attract youth markets is particularly evident. Today, many young people go on pilgrimages not just for religious reasons, but also for spiritual growth, cultural immersion, and visceral excitement. This study explores changing nature of pilgrimage tourism in relation to the interests, motivations and emerging trends of youth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivations for Youth Pilgrimage Tourism

1. Quest of Spiritual Contentment and Self-Realisation

Spirituality and self-introspection are the key reasons why the youth are increasingly turning to pilgrimage tourism. In today's world of fast life with a growing concern for mental well-being, a majority of the youth are undertaking pilgrimage for self-analysis and peace of mind. That interest is most pronounced among people who may not necessarily have allegiance to traditional religious teachings, but are craving spiritual nourishment and purpose. According to researchers Sharma and Raj (2021), 'nowadays many young generation individuals are going in for spirituality and this goes beyond religious affiliation with emphasis being on personal experience, which includes mindfulness, meditation and inner peace. Pilgrimage destinations such as Rishikesh (India), Bodh Gaya (India), and Mount Kailash (Tibet) are also developing as popular venues for young people to blend religious rituals with wellness activities like yoga or meditation. These locations are marketed as sites for spiritual practice as well as personal growth (Sharma & Raj, 2021).

2. Social Media and Digital Connectivity

We cannot underestimate the role that social media has had on the travel habits of young people. These social networks have facilitated and made more attractive the pilgrimage tourism of young people. Young people travelling share on social media and create a community of followers who feel they too can have the trip. Social Media, as observed by Kumar & Singh (2020), aids in the visualization of pilgrimage sites, turning them into cool places to visit for youth. The era of hashtags has made sacred sites fashionable, travel influencers on Instagram have contributed to making pilgrimage tourism cool. The trend extends beyond pilgrimages to sacred sites and has transformed pilgrimage into an experience for the socially conscious traveler who craves a mash-up of spirituality, adventure and self-expression.

3. Desire for Realness and Connection to Culture

The search for the authentic experience and cultural participation are a second engine of the participation of young in pilgrimage tourism. Young people nowadays are less likely to go on

organized package holidays with set itineraries. Rather, they are searching for an authentic travel experience that will allow them to interact with local traditions, cultures, and ways of life. That's in keeping with broader trends in tourism, where young travelers are looking not just to snap photos of cultural or religious attractions, but to talk to the local people and learn about their customs, and even participate in local rituals. Researchers such as Jaffrelot (2019) note the growing interest of young pilgrims to engage with local communities while on pilgrimage. For example, the Indian Kumbh Mela today attracts young people for reasons beyond its religious significance — it's a unique experience to be a part of an enormous global event too. Similarly, young travellers visiting Puri for the Rath Yatra, get to experience that perfect blend of spirituality, rituals, and festivities which adds a lot of value when it comes to authenticity and cultural immersion.

4. Running Away from Urban and Appreciating Being Alone

Young people especially make pilgrimage tourism their choice, away from the urban rat race. The pressures of schoolwork, career aspirations, and social media celebrity generally lead to burnout, and pilgrimage is seen as a means to re-establish a connection to nature and find a sense of calm. Pilgrimage spots such as Kedarnath, Vaishno Devi and Hemkund Sahib are located in remote natural settings which provide as much spiritual solace as a natural sojourn from the hurried city life. As noted by Sharma (2020), in the case of most young pilgrims, these pilgrimages offer them escapades into the solitude, repentance and the (spiritual) resurrection. The trend for trekking pilgrimage, for example Amarnath Yatra and Vaishno Devi, is particularly appealing to the younger generation who are fascinated by adventure and religion both.

5. Pursuing Identity and Community

Due to the globalised and digital dimension of their existence, young people today often experience loneliness or alienation. For those who value pilgrimages, it is a way to engage with a community of fellow pilgrims. Young people, in particular, are searching for connection and belonging in an ever-fragmented world, and need both a community based and shared purpose to fight for. Forming a pilgrimage along with other pilgrims also offers an opportunity to meet and bond with individuals with whom a pilgrim has something in common with. As noted by Deka and Misra (2021), pilgrimage tourism also presents such meeting place of young pilgrims of the world soul mates and spiritual communities. These religious communities then may actually outperform even the pilgrimage in the sense that the groups will support each other afterwards on websites and in support networks.

In order to facilitate greater understanding and present a visual representation of the study, the following diagram/chart may be incorporated:

Figure 1: Key Motivators for Youth Participation in Pilgrimage Tourism

Motivator	Description
Religious & Spiritual	Inner faith, religious duties, divine connection
Mental & Emotional Wellness	Stress relief, mindfulness, self-reflection
Cultural Curiosity	Interest in heritage, architecture, traditions
Adventure & Social Travel	Trekking, group bonding, immersive experiences
Digital Influence	Social media, influencer travel vlogs, virtual pilgrimages

Trends in Youth Pilgrimage Tourism

1. Blending of Wellness and Pilgrimage

A trend evident among the new breed of young pilgrims under pilgrimage tourism is of blending spirituality with wellness. For today's pilgrims are not content with spiritual satisfaction but are also in search of physical ease. Those pilgrimage sites that combine traditional spirituality with modern wellness activities such as yoga, meditation and spa top the list. "Take Rishikesh, the so-called yoga capital of the world, as an example," he wrote," receiving a large number of young pilgrimages fascinated by the connection between mind and body. They are places where traditional and modern wellness connects, and it's no wonder where those countries which are interested both religion and health (Kaur & Choudhury, 2018).

2. Technology and Virtual Pilgrimage Experiences

The pilgrimage has undergone technological changes. Virtual pilgrimages, powered by digital platforms and 360-degree videos, offer young people the opportunity to visit sacred sites without leaving home. Virtual pilgrimages became particularly popular during the COVID-19 pandemic, when border closures limited movement, and pilgrims could not travel to sacred places in person. Because of this, virtual pilgrimages, from live streams to even virtual reality experiences, have allowed young people to remain connected to their religious tradition even as the coronavirus has kept them physically apart. Kumar and Singh (2020) draw attention to the growing need of digital pilgrimage experiences, wherein the youth participate in online rituals, live prayer watching and virtual pilgrimage to sacred places.

3. Sustainable Pilgrimage Practices

Environmental concerns were another factor leading to increasing sustainable pilgrimage tourism, young pilgrims were the most of them to be worried about the eco-footprint during the trip. In a bid to search for an ethical travel experience, young pilgrims are seeking eco-friendly pilgrimage tours based on sustainability. Sites such as Vaishno Devi and Tirupati have initiated policies for reducing environmentally degradation, it includes be promoting of green tourism, areas free of plastic, and waste management system etc (Rao & Suresh, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The use of primary and secondary data in detailed analysis of the increased youth involvement in pilgrimage tourism is applied in this study. The data was collected from a sample of 71 respondents through a questionnaire developed, with the help of Google Forms and through random sampling. The instrument had two parts, one to gather social demographic characteristics and the other reasons and trends of the youth's in the form of pilgrimage tourism. Responses were analyzed using graphical tools and a thematic approach to the social media on the destination choice and participation in sacred travels.

The secondary data were derived from body of literature that included research reports, published articles, journals, authentic books and online and offline sources. The objectives of the study are to investigate the factors that have fueled the interest of youth in pilgrimage tourism. In order to meet this need, it explores how such societal, cultural and technological drivers drive modern-day travel and subsequently delivers robust input for tourism practitioners and concerned stakeholders to better manage the needs of this evolving market segment.

Section I- General Information on Social Demographic Characteristics

Question 1. Age of the respondents

The age ranges with the highest number of respondents are the 22-25 and above 35 years, both with 22.5% of the overall responses. The 18-21 years age range respondents have a moderate rate of participation of 16.9% among young people. The 26-30 and 31-35 years age range respondents have relatively similar response rates of 18.3% and 19.7%, respectively. The results indicate a diverse age spread, with broad representation by all age groups. This suggests that pilgrimage tourism is appealing to both young people and comparatively older people, indicating increasing interest in spiritual traveling experiences.

Question 2. Gender

The gender distribution among respondents is relatively balanced. Males constitute 52.1% of the total participants, slightly higher than females. Females account for 47.9%, reflecting nearly equal interest in the subject. The minimal gap suggests that pilgrimage tourism appeals to both genders almost equally. This balanced participation enhances the reliability and inclusivity of the research findings.

Question 3. Education Level

The analysis of educational qualifications among respondents reveals that the majority are well-educated, with 41.4% holding postgraduate degrees and 38.6% being undergraduates. This indicates a significant interest in pilgrimage tourism among academically advanced youth. A smaller portion, 11.4%, have completed education up to the high school level, while 8.6% fall under the 'Others' category, possibly including diploma holders or vocationally trained individuals. Notably, there were no respondents with a doctorate qualification. Overall, the data suggests that pilgrimage tourism is increasingly appealing to educated youth, particularly those pursuing or having completed higher education.

Question 4. Occupation

The data shows that respondents come from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. The largest group, 29.6%, consists of professionals working in the private sector, followed closely by self-employed individuals at 28.2%. Students and those categorized under 'Others' each account for 19.7%, indicating notable participation from young learners and individuals in non-traditional or varied roles. Only 2.8% of respondents are professionals from the public sector, suggesting lower representation from government employees. Overall, the findings highlight that pilgrimage tourism draws attention from a broad spectrum of youth, especially those engaged in private employment and entrepreneurial activities.

Question 5. Location of Residence

The majority of respondents, 64.2%, hail from urban areas, indicating that youth from cities are more actively participating in pilgrimage tourism or at least in discussions around it. This is followed by 25.4% from semi-urban regions, showing moderate engagement from these transitional zones. Only 10.4% of participants come from rural backgrounds, suggesting relatively lower awareness or access to pilgrimage tourism opportunities among rural youth. Overall, the data reflects a strong urban inclination towards spiritual travel, possibly due to better exposure, resources, and connectivity

Section II- Pilgrimage Travel Experience**Question 6. Have you ever participated in pilgrimage tourism?**

Out of all respondents, 73.2% expressed interest in pilgrimage tourism, 19.7% showed no interest, and 7% were unsure. This indicates a strong positive attitude towards spiritual travel among youth. The high "Yes" response highlights a promising market for future initiatives. The undecided group may be influenced by more awareness or exposure. Overall, the data confirms that pilgrimage tourism is increasingly appealing to the younger generation.

Question 7. If yes, how many times have you participated in pilgrimage tourism?

Among respondents, 37.7% have gone on a pilgrimage once, 32.8% have traveled 2–3 times, and 29.5% more than three times, showing balanced participation. This reveals that most youth have experienced pilgrimage tourism at least once. The strong numbers for repeat visits indicate sustained engagement. First-timers being the largest group shows growing new interest. Overall, the trend suggests pilgrimage tourism is becoming a regular and meaningful part of youth travel habits.

Question 8. Which of the following pilgrimage destinations have you visited?

The most visited pilgrimage site among respondents is Tirupati (33.8%), followed by Haji Ali Dargah (32.3%), Ajmer Sharif (26.2%), and Vaishno Devi (23.1%), showing strong interest in domestic sites. International sites like Mecca (7.7%) and Jerusalem (3.1%) are less frequented, suggesting they are less accessible or more exclusive. Rishikesh (13.8%) appeals to those seeking spiritual retreats, while Mount Kailash (3.1%) attracts niche travelers.

Overall, the data shows youth prefer domestic pilgrimage destinations, highlighting the enduring appeal of India's sacred sites over international ones.

Question 9. What type of pilgrimage destination do you prefer?

Most respondents (54.3%) are motivated by religious reasons, while 25.7% seek spiritual growth and inner peace. Adventure-based pilgrimages attract 11.4%, and only 2.9% are driven mainly by cultural exploration. This shows religion remains the strongest factor for youth pilgrimage travel, with spirituality also significant. The low adventure and cultural figures suggest that young people still view pilgrimage mainly as a faith-based or spiritual experience rather than a cultural or adventure trip.

Section III- Motivations for Pilgrimage Tourism

Question 10. Spiritual fulfillment and religious experience

Over half of respondents (50.7%) rated their pilgrimage experience as excellent (5), while 29% gave it a 4, showing strong satisfaction. About 14.5% rated it average (3), and only 5.8% gave it a 2, with no one rating it the lowest. This indicates that most youth had fulfilling experiences that met or exceeded expectations. The few neutral or low scores highlight minor areas for improvement. Overall, the results show high satisfaction, reinforcing pilgrimage tourism's positive appeal among young travelers.

Question 11. Desire for personal growth and self-discovery

A majority (52.2%) rated their pilgrimage experience as excellent (5), while 30.4% gave it a 4, showing strong satisfaction overall. About 15.9% gave an average rating (3) and only 1.4% rated it 2, with no one giving the lowest score. This indicates that most youth find pilgrimage tourism fulfilling and worthwhile. The few moderate scores suggest minor areas for improvement, but the absence of very low ratings shows overall positive reception and growing appeal among young travelers.

Question 12. Cultural exploration and learning

Most respondents (46.4%) rated their pilgrimage experience as excellent (5) and 36.2% rated it 4, showing strong satisfaction overall. About 11.6% gave an average rating (3), while only 2.9% each rated it 2 or 1, indicating minor dissatisfaction. Together, 82.6% gave high ratings, reflecting that most expectations were met or exceeded. Overall, the data shows that pilgrimage tourism is rewarding and meaningful for youth, with only a few facing occasional issues.

Question 14. Social media influence (following influencers, trends, hashtags)

Most respondents (33.8%) rated their pilgrimage experience as excellent (5) and 26.5% gave it a 4, showing good overall satisfaction. However, 20.6% rated it neutral (3), 7.4% rated it 2, and 11.8% rated it 1, indicating notable dissatisfaction for some. This spread suggests that while many youth enjoy pilgrimage tourism, service gaps or unmet expectations affect others. Overall, experiences vary, highlighting the need to improve quality and consistency to better meet young travelers' needs.

Question 15. Desire to connect with other like-minded individuals

Most respondents (33.8%) rated their pilgrimage experience as excellent (5) and 28.2% rated it 4, indicating strong satisfaction. About 20.6% gave a neutral rating (3), while only 1.5% rated it 2 and 5.9% rated it 1, showing minimal dissatisfaction. Overall, more than 60% gave high ratings, suggesting general approval among youth. The neutral and few low scores highlight areas for improvement. This indicates that while pilgrimage tourism is well-received, enhancing certain aspects could boost satisfaction further.

Question 16. Adventure and physical challenge (trekking, climbing, etc.)

Most respondents (33.8%) rated their pilgrimage tourism experience as excellent (5) and 28.2% rated it 4, showing strong overall satisfaction. About 20.6% gave a neutral rating (3), while only 1.5% rated it 2 and 5.9% rated it 1, indicating minor dissatisfaction. Together, over 60% reflect positive experiences, while neutral and low scores suggest that some aspects could be improved. Overall, the data shows pilgrimage tourism is generally well-received by youth but highlights areas where service and experience can be enhanced further.

Question 17. Wellness (yoga, meditation, and rejuvenation activities)

Most respondents (46.4%) rated their pilgrimage tourism experience as excellent (5) and 24.6% rated it 4, showing strong overall satisfaction. About 17.4% gave a neutral rating (3), while 4.3% rated it 2 and 7.2% rated it 1, highlighting some dissatisfaction. The high combined ratings of 4 and 5 reflect that many youth find pilgrimage tourism rewarding. However, the neutral and low scores indicate areas needing improvement in quality, accessibility, or services. Overall, youth perceptions are mostly positive, but better consistency could further boost satisfaction.

Question 18. Environmental consciousness (eco-friendly travel)

Nearly half of the respondents (49.3%) rated their pilgrimage experience as excellent (5) and 30.4% rated it 4, showing strong satisfaction overall. About 11.6% gave a neutral rating (3), while 1.4% rated it 2 and 7.2% rated it 1, indicating limited dissatisfaction. Altogether, almost 80% rated their experience positively, reflecting that most youth find pilgrimage tourism rewarding. The neutral and lower scores suggest some areas could be improved. Overall, the findings show high youth approval with opportunities to enhance the experience further.

Question 19. To engage in rituals, festivals, and religious events

A majority of respondents (54.4%) rated their pilgrimage experience as excellent (5), while 29.4% gave it a 4, showing strong satisfaction overall. Only 7.4% rated it 3, and just 4.4% each rated it 2 or 1, indicating minimal dissatisfaction. With over 83% rating it highly, pilgrimage tourism is clearly meaningful and enjoyable for most youth. The few lower scores suggest some gaps that could be improved, but overall, the data confirms that pilgrimage tourism strongly resonates with the younger generation.

Section IV: Pilgrimage Trends and Preferences Untitled Title

Question 20. Do you prefer pilgrimage sites that offer wellness services (e.g., yoga, meditation)?

Most respondents (67.2%) prefer pilgrimage sites that offer wellness services like yoga and meditation, while 10.4% do not, and 22.4% are open but unsure. This shows a strong youth interest in combining traditional pilgrimage with holistic well-being. The “Maybe” responses suggest potential for better awareness and promotion of such offerings. The small “No” group indicates only a few prefer purely traditional experiences. Overall, adding wellness elements could make pilgrimage tourism more appealing and meaningful for young travelers.

Question 21. Has the rise of social media (Instagram, YouTube, etc.) influenced your decision to visit a pilgrimage site?

A large share of respondents (68.7%) said social media influenced their decision to visit pilgrimage sites, while 16.4% said it did not and 14.9% were unsure. This shows a clear link between social media exposure and youth travel choices for spiritual tourism. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube play a strong role in shaping perceptions and inspiring visits. The “Maybe” group suggests potential for greater influence with engaging content. Overall, social media is a vital tool for promoting pilgrimage tourism among youth.

Question 22. Do you look for sustainable travel options when choosing a pilgrimage destination (e.g., eco-tourism, responsible waste management)?

A significant majority (71.6%) of respondents actively seek sustainable options when choosing pilgrimage destinations, while 22.4% do so occasionally and only 6% do not consider it at all. This highlights strong youth awareness and preference for eco-friendly travel. The “Sometimes” group suggests that more visible and accessible sustainable practices could encourage wider adoption. The very low “No” responses show minimal disregard for sustainability. Overall, the data confirms that integrating eco-friendly measures can make pilgrimage tourism more appealing and relevant for environmentally conscious youth.

Question 23. Do you look for sustainable travel options when choosing a pilgrimage destination (e.g., eco-tourism, responsible waste management)?

Most respondents (41.8%) prefer budget stays like guesthouses and hostels, while 31.3% choose eco-friendly options such as homestays and eco-resorts, showing strong interest in affordability and sustainability. About 14.9% favor luxury hotels, highlighting that comfort still attract some youth. Camping (7.5%) and other options (4.5%) reflect a niche for adventure and unique stays. Overall, the findings show that young pilgrims balance cost, eco-consciousness, and experiential travel when choosing accommodation, revealing diverse but value-driven preferences.

Question 24. Do you prefer a group pilgrimage or solo travel?

Nearly half of respondents (46.3%) prefer both group and solo pilgrimage travel, showing flexibility in how they experience spiritual journeys. Group travel alone is favored by 40.3%, highlighting the appeal of shared rituals and community bonding. Only 13.4% prefer solo travel, suggesting it's less common but still valued for introspection and independence. The strong “both” preference indicates that youth appreciate having options based on context and purpose. Overall, this trend shows that pilgrimage tourism should offer packages that balance community experiences with opportunities for personal spiritual exploration.

Question 25. How important is the availability of technology (e.g., Wi-Fi, digital content, live streaming) at pilgrimage sites for you?

A significant 46.3% of respondents consider technology at pilgrimage sites very important, and 29.9% view it as important, showing that over 75% value tech integration. About 20.9% are neutral, while only 1.5% each see it as unimportant or irrelevant. This highlights that most youth expect digital accessibility, like Wi-Fi and online content, even in spiritual settings. While a few still prefer traditional experiences, the overall trend shows technology is becoming a key factor in engaging and retaining young pilgrims.

Question 26. How likely are you to share your pilgrimage experiences on social media?

Among respondents, 38.8% are likely and 16.4% very likely to share pilgrimage experiences online, while 26.9% are neutral and 17.9% unlikely or very unlikely to share. This shows that over half (55.2%) are inclined to post about their spiritual journeys, highlighting how digital identity and spirituality now intersect. Neutral responses suggest sharing depends on the experience or personal comfort. The smaller group avoiding posts shows some prefer privacy or traditional values. Overall, social media clearly shapes how youth engage with and influence pilgrimage tourism.

Section V: General Observations

Question 27. What changes have you noticed in the way youth approach pilgrimage tourism in recent years?

Recent responses show that youth are blending spirituality with adventure, wellness, and cultural learning in pilgrimage tourism, often inspired by social media and digital trends. Many prefer tech-enabled, well-organized experiences with an eco-conscious focus, but some view this as more about online image than genuine spirituality. This reflects changing mindsets, as younger generations redefine pilgrimage by mixing tradition with modern interests. Overall, social media, wellness, and sustainability are shaping pilgrimage tourism into a multifaceted, meaningful experience for today's youth.

Question 28. What improvements would you suggest for pilgrimage destinations to attract more young people?

Respondents highlighted the need for cleanliness, safety, better facilities, and tech integration like Wi-Fi, digital guides, and virtual tours to attract youth. Many emphasized a strong social media presence and influencer partnerships to boost awareness. Suggestions included early cultural education, eco-friendly infrastructure, budget stays, and combining wellness, adventure, and tradition. Overall, the findings show that modernizing pilgrimage sites with digital tools, sustainability, and authentic experiences—while maintaining spiritual depth—will make them more appealing and meaningful for young travelers.

Question 29. Do you believe pilgrimage tourism has a significant impact on your overall well-being? Why or why not?

Most respondents strongly agree that pilgrimage tourism enhances well-being, bringing mental peace, spiritual connection, and emotional healing. Many shared feeling calmer, more

focused, and inspired after visiting sacred sites, emphasizing that awareness and intention make the experience truly meaningful. Youth see pilgrimage as more than a religious act—it's a retreat for self-discovery and stress relief. This journey fosters self-awareness, confidence, and a positive mindset, while connecting them to culture and nature. Overall, pilgrimage tourism is viewed as a transformative, holistic experience that supports personal growth when approached mindfully.

FINDINGS OF STUDY

Religious Motivation Prevails:

The preference for pilgrimages is religious in nature for the majority of respondents (54.3%), emphasizing religion and tradition as drivers in travel choice. Spiritual strongly matters too (25.7%), but the developing imports of adventure, health, and culture are still less important. This suggests that while new motivations are increasing, pilgrimage itself has a religious foundation.

Large Satisfaction Rates

Most of the pilgrims were quite satisfied with their pilgrimage with more than half of them rating cleanliness, hospitality, spiritual environment and facilities as “very satisfied.” That's a good sign that most places are holding steady or upping the ante to meet the needs of young travelers.

Shifting Youth Trends:

Today's youth are incorporating time-honored endeavors with modern-day interests – wellness, local experiences, and personal growth. Most of the respondents added that they wanted to mix experiences like yoga, meditation, heritage walks, and adventure treks with trips to pilgrim towns. Independent and group travel plans reveal that at a young age the desire of the individual has been given currency, alongside a shared spiritual experience.

Influence of Social Media:

The social media had played a significant role in travel planning decisions of the youth. Nearly 68.7% of all the participants indicate a desire to visit these locations once they've seen them on platforms such as Instagram or YouTube. Tourist vlogs and influencer content help resituate pilgrimage as a sharable, sanctifying individual event and in turn, a recasting of youth encounter with spiritual pilgrimage.

Sustainability and Affordability Matter:

The biggest group of respondents at 71.6% prefers actually eco-friendly activities where they get involved in environmental friendly stay, waste management and community-based tourism. Cheap stays (like at guesthouses and homestays) are much more popular (41.8%) than luxurious facilities, and this highlight that price, access, and ecofriendliness are important factors for millennials.

Technology Integration is Expected:

It will be no more for “the pilgrims today.” 46.3% of them value technology was “very important.” They want Wi-Fi, live streaming of religious ceremonies, online bookings, mobile

apps and virtual tours. This also suggests that young people want religious experiences that can plug and play with smart services and digital tools.

Pilgrimage as Personal Growth:

More than just a religious duty, to most, pilgrimage is a transformative experience. Among the benefits participants cited were peace of mind, emotional healing, self-awareness and spiritual clarity. Pilgrim walks help people return to a sense of themselves and a sense of the value of their lives that helps them in the personal growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members on the other hand demanded for strengthening of digital infrastructure, better sanitation facilities and crowd management and sustainable development at the sites. They also wanted interactive cultural events, virtual tours, mindfulness, and Digital Storytelling to enhance pilgrimages and make them appealing to younger generations. Tendencies to Share Experiences on Social Media While They will mostly Likely Post Experience on the Web (38.8%), Neutral (26.9%), Unlikely (17.9%), point to a tension between those who with the public sharing of the story (which presumably will reduce it into a commodity) and the need to make it private and sacred. Experiences are Relevant: With the qualitative data indicating that the obligation pilgrimages are being replaced with more considered, autonomous pilgrims. They want authentic, contemplative experiences that connect them with nature, with local people and with spiritual meaning. They value something more substantial than ritual goods, and seek pilgrimages that are transformational, not transactional.

CONCLUSION

This study presents an enlightening picture of the way pilgrimage tourism is progressing in today's times. When it comes to pilgrimage, an activity usually steeped in religious obligation and spiritual enrichment for previous generations but for today's youth are reinterpreting what that means, infusing their spiritual journey with adventurous travel, wellness, cultural discovery, and social exchange. The study finds that young travellers are sparked by a variety of factors to undertake a pilgrimage, ranging from the desire to find themselves and mental health, to the need to connect with a community and narrate digitally through social media. The research also illustrates how shifts in wellness tourism, sustainability, digitization and experiential travel have revamped pilgrimage into an appealing journey choice for a new generation of travellers who want their trips to have purpose and authenticity. Opportunities and challenges The transformation described poses opportunities and challenges for destinations, tourism planners, and religious communities. Among other things, the participation of the youth brings new economic gains and cultural dynamism to pilgrimage sites. On the other hand, challenges such as tourism commercialization, spiritual authenticity loss, and over-tourism environmental damage should be tackled by sustainable tourism practices and appropriate management. Finally, that this study highlights that pilgrimage tourism is not diminishing, but rather changing. It is still profoundly relevant in a rapidly shifting world and has become a bridge between ancient spiritual traditions and modern life. By comprehending what these youths seek and the patterns of behavior, stakeholders can

adjust offerings, respect local traditions and customs, and keep pilgrimage tourism an experience that is accessible, significant, and viable for future generations. The research is also a first step towards exploring how generational and other changes in the broader socio-cultural, technological and other context will further impact on the pilgrimage tourism landscape in the future.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although this study offers interesting insights about changes in the trends and dynamism of youth pilgrimage tourism, there are some limitations which must be acknowledged and that influence its findings:

Limited Small Sample: The study had a small and localized sample, and such a sample can even be argued not to be representative of the diverse population of young people from a variety of economic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds in India or for that matter worldwide.

Geographical Limitation : The survey was primarily conducted in a particular one population experience i.e urban or semi-urban youth and not met the representation level of the rural areas, where the incentives and availability, etc. would be significantly different.

Self-Report Data: Based on self-report data collected medical self-reporting can be biased because of personal bias, social desirability, or erroneous self-estimation (23). Subjects also may have seasonally over reported or underreported some attitudes or behaviors.

Time limitations: The research was conducted over a short period of time allowing for constraint of the extent to which long-term trends or periodic (i.e. seasonal) patterns in the pilgrimage travel behavior of pilgrims could be determined.

Interpretation of qualitative responses: Although qualitative data brought depth to the analysis, open-ended response interpretation necessitates an even handedness and exposes the researcher to scrutiny of their personal interpretation of the responses.

Aim at the Youths: The target of this study was the youth, however the comparison to the other age groups lacks, hindering a broader understanding of divergences in generation behavior and motivation in pilgrimage.

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