

The Moderating Impact of Social Media in Decision-Making on Visitors' Intentions to Religious Places: Special Reference of Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh

Dr. Hemendra Sharma¹, Mr. Shankar Singh Bhakuni², Dr. Himanshu Pandey³, Dr. Shruti Pandey⁴,

Ms. Shalini Srivastava⁵, Dr. Saurabh Bajpai⁶

¹Registrar, T S Mishra University, Lucknow-India

^{2,6}Associate Professor, SOM, BBD University, Lucknow-India

^{3,4,5}Assistant Professor, SOM, BBD University, Lucknow-India

Email IDs: ¹principal.schoolofbusiness@tsm.edu.in, ²ssbhakuni19@bbdu.ac.in, ³himanshupandey2009@bbdu.ac.in,
⁴shrutipandey.lucknow@bbdu.ac.in, ⁵shalini.sitm@bbdu.ac.in, ⁶saurabhbajpai@bbdu.ac.in

Abstract

Religious tourism is a significant sector of the tourism business, and understanding what drives for this type of travel might help one better grasp what it's like to be a visitor in this region. The current study attempts to identify the driving forces for future pilgrimage tourism in Ayodhya. Understanding the complicated and varied factors that lead individuals to take religious tours is crucial to creating marketing plans that work and creating travel regulations that suit the interests and demands of this particular traveller demographic. Ayodhya is a major destination for religious tourism because it is home to many holy sites that draw millions of visitors annually.

This study investigates the determinants of tourist visit intentions for religious places in India especially Ayodhya, through a rigorous data analysis through Smart PLS- SEM model, the study reveals several key findings. Government policies were found to significantly influence tourist attitudes, suggesting that favorable government policies contribute to positive attitudes and an increased likelihood of visitation. Infrastructure facilities were identified as a critical factor in shaping tourist attitudes, emphasizing the importance of investment in transportation, accommodation, and accessibility. Visitor knowledge was linked to positive tourist attitudes, emphasizing the need for education and information dissemination. Social-cultural factors significantly influence tourist attitudes, highlighting the importance of creating authentic cultural experiences for visitors.

Keywords: Tourist visit intentions, Government policies, Social media interactions, Religious tourism development

Introduction

The term "pilgrimage" comes from the Sanskrit word "Tirtha," which meaning "steps to river" or "river ford." The act of travelling to holy and sacred locations is known as a "Yatra" or "Tirtha." Nearly 70% of Indians travel on pilgrimages out of faith and belief. It is documented that in 2022, the Vaishno Devi Shrine alone saw visits from around 91 lakh visitors. There are a lot of other shrines and locations of such sacred significance throughout India, which generates a lot of cash and a significant number of job opportunities. Many tiny areas have grown and became large towns as a result of pilgrimage tourism. Some of the most important examples of such locations are Banaras, Ujjain, etc. Though there have always been obstacles in the way of the facilities that could serve as a catalyst for promoting pilgrimage tourism in India, such as poor infrastructure, difficult-to-use roads and transportation, subpar lodging and hospitality, inadequate safety, etc., Indians, in their religious convictions, do not compromise on their pilgrimages in spite of these difficulties. By focusing on its roots, India's pilgrimage tourism not only helps the country's economy but also helps it project a positive image globally.

Ayodhya city as birthplace of Lord Rama is an important place for Hindu pilgrimage and is counted as one of the most sacred and important religious heritage cities of India. The historic city of Ayodhya is surrounded by the medieval city of

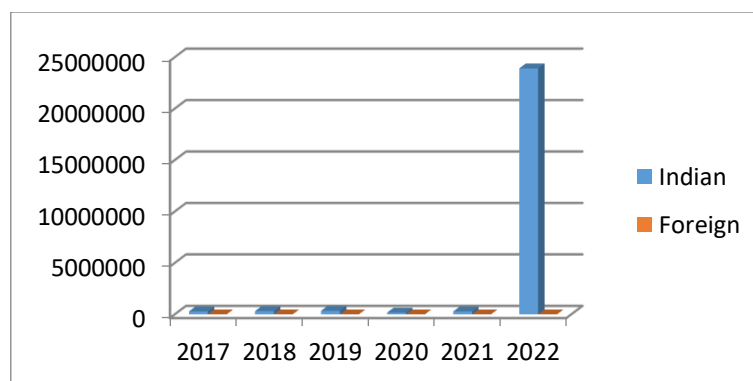
Faizabad founded by Ali Vardan Khan, the Nawab of Bengal in 1730 (Directorate of Census Operations, UP 2011). For administrative purposes, both the cities were merged to form Ayodhya city by the UP government in 2017 (The Economic Times 2018).

The cultural landscape and heritage sites significantly exhibit temple architecture style in Ayodhya city, while Iranian style is pervasive in Faizabad. From historical and pilgrimage point of view, Ayodhya has innumerable heritage assets, the most famous heritage sites being Ram Janambhoomi, Hanuman Garhi and Kanak Bhawan Temples; Svaragadvara Ghat (near Nageshvarnath Temple) where pilgrims take a holy dip and perform rituals; Guptaar Ghat known for Jal Samadhi of Lord Rama and various kunda(pond) like Vidya kunda, Sita Kunda, Brihaspati Kunda. Monuments like Gulab Bari, Tomb of Bahu Begam and Shuja-ud-Daula exemplify the Awadh Nawabi architecture (Kumar and Singh, 2015). Out of 84 hertiage sites only Tomb of Bahu Begum has been protected by Archacological survey of India (ASI) and another two, namely Haweli Avadh and Guptar Ghat are protected by Directorate of Archaeology, UP.

Being a city of religious importance, it is a major tourist attraction for both Indian and foreign tourist in Uttar Pradesh. After COVID and Starting of Ram Mandir in number of tourists in Ayodhya (Fig:)

Year	Indian	Foreign	Total
2017	283084	1215	284299
2018	317253	1292	318545
2019	340967	1365	342332
2020	173356	174	173530
2021	283208	0	283208
2022	23909014	1465	23910479

Table1: Numbers of visitor visit Ayodhya in Last 6 years (Source : UP tourism website)



Source: UP Tourism website (uptourism.gov.in/en/post/Year-wise-Tourist-Statistics)

The construction of the Sri Ram Mandir has just recently brought the city out of at least a millennium of neglect. By default, it will draw far more adherents and visitors than it can handle from all over the nation and the world. Will the city be able to accommodate this volume of visitors now? Everyone has a question like this one. It is being handled with a great deal of rigorous infrastructure work. Tourism-related economies naturally acquire the skills necessary to manage incoming business. As demand increases, creative solutions will emerge (Goyal A, 2021).

Literature Review

A growing number of governments, non-governmental organisations, academics, researchers, and other stakeholders are studying tourism and its connected topics. There are several aspects of tourism, including its implications and effects. Many research encompassing a range of dimensions have been conducted. Mackintosh (1977), a notion for social science study, has been discussed by numerous scholars. According to Mackintosh, tourism was first planned in the years between the two World Wars. Numerous definitions of tourism have been proposed since then. Mackintosh provides all of the events and interactions resulting from the engagement of tourists, businesses, host governments, and host

communities in the process of luring and entertaining these tourists and other visitors. Pilgrimage is a popular tourist activity for both domestic and international travellers. Visiting temples and other places of pilgrimage is a big draw. A large portion of it is said to be commonplace as notions of paradise and good fortune from pilgrimages. Many studies have found pilgrimage feature in diverse context and perspective. Hindus visit pilgrimage sites such as Amarnath, Vaishno Devi, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Varanasi, Ujjain, Haridwar-Rishikesh, and so on a regular basis.

The history and evolution of pilgrimage tourism management were the main topics of Vijayanand's (2012) research. The study also looked at how pilgrimage tourism has developed and how it might be used to investigate ideas like truth, belief, and morality that are usually either disregarded or contested. Another sign of the growing acceptance of unique human identity constructions is pilgrimage tourism. The study has clarified the origins, purposes, and economic effects of pilgrimage travel in south India. The statistical data presented in this research suggests that pilgrimage tourism has room to grow. The analysis indicates that it ought to be able to increase pilgrimage tourism to more locations in the area.

Pilgrimage tourism is defined by Mu et al. (2007) as "a special tourist activity oriented by pilgrimage culture and it refers to such special tourist activities as worshipping, study, sightseeing, and culture carried out by both pious believers and casual visitors" with the help of a specific eco-cultural setting. According to Witt et al. (2013), tourism is one of the rapidly expanding service sectors that require increasing focus from both the public and private sectors in order to boost revenue and draw more travellers to any given location. It offers an introduction of international tourism and strategies for managing tourist-related activities, with a focus on the economic development of a specific location. Hence we study some variable which may be impact on Tourist attitude and intention.

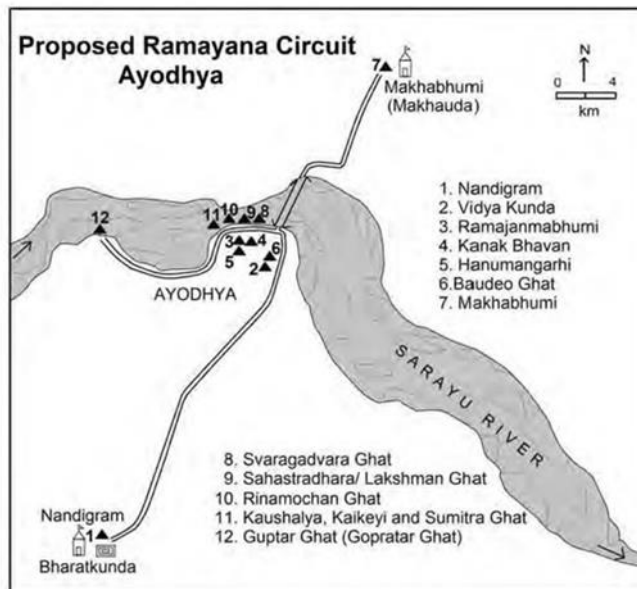
Tourist Visit Intention

According to research by Albarq (2014, p. 14), the hypothesis of tourists' intentions to visit has been compared to their intentions to make visits. Visit intention is the stage at which tourist tend to take action prior to making a final decision. Visit intention and actual Visit is not the same thing. Visit intention is the plan to make a visit on the next occasion when the actual visit is one that the visitor actually makes. The measurement of Visit intention is typically carried out to optimize the forecast of the actual visit itself, even though the transaction may not actually occur in the future (Kinneer & Taylor, 1996, cited in Kurniawan, 2007). Some decisional determinants may be directly and indirectly affect the tourist visit intention. These are:

Government policies

In order to promote alternative tourism, the Central Government and state government enacted a resolution in June 2014 that identified theme-based pilgrimage circuits around India's ancient holy sites connected to Vishnu, the god of incarnations, including Rama and Krishna. The Committee suggested 11 locations for the "Ramadyana Circuit" in six states: Sitamarhi, Buxar, and Darbhanga in Bihar; Jagdalpur in Chhattisgarh; Bhadrachalam in Telangana; Hampi in Karnataka; Rameshvaram in Tamil Nadu; and Ayodhya, Nandigram, Shringaverpur, and Chitrakut in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. A unique sub-circuit at Ayodhya is suggested under this programme, with the cooperation of the state government, to consider the twelve sites that are locally significant and physically manifested, as well as pan-Indian sites like Ramajanmabhumi (Ramkot) and Nandigram (Figure 2). The pilgrim experiences the force of place and encounters the living presence of gods as a result of these visible "sacred landscapes," which perpetuate and authenticate myths and stories that go far beyond oral and written traditions. Tourist faith and belief in religious texts are strengthened through encountering the reality of landscape (sacred sites), temples, rituals, and fellow pilgrims" (Sinha 2006, p. 73). In this factor we check the effectiveness of Government policies, safety and security of Tourist and preservation of heritage on decision of Tourist to visit Ayodhya. Hence the hypothesis is

H1: Government policies have significantly impact on Tourist Attitude.



Infrastructure Facility

Ayodhya's prevailing tourism industry contributes to a rise in mixed-use and commercial properties. Additionally, there has been a 63% increase in the conversion of recreational areas into public and semi-public spaces (ADA, 2021), which is suggestive of a rise in the potential for tourism. According to ADA's definition from 2022, "Infrastructure and Tourism are a subset of Economy." Infrastructure upgrades and retrofitting are necessary because it is crucial to preserving the equilibrium between tourism and the economy. The current study focuses on solid waste management, transportation, and lodging as infrastructural elements that have a direct impact on travellers' intentions to come. Hence the hypothesis is

H2: Infrastructure facility has a positive impact on Tourist attitude regarding visit Place.

Visitor Knowledge

Ayodhya, an old city, is probably going to be the newest and most popular tourist destination in India. With the Supreme Court clearing the way for the construction of a large temple at the location that Hindus believe to be the birthplace of Lord Ram, the city's temporary Ram temple already draws more than 3 million tourists annually from all across the nation. The evolution of the Ram temple and historical awareness both have a significant influence on tourists' intentions to visit. Hence the hypothesis is

H3: Visitor knowledge has a positive impact on Tourist attitude.

Conveniences

"Conveniences" was determined to be the next element influencing tourist satisfaction. Conveniences were heavily weighted in three destination attributes: shopping; dining; and visiting tourist attractions like temples and monuments, which are both directly and indirectly important for tourism. Basic tourist amenities like drinking water, restrooms, and parking for vehicles are also included in this category. hence the hypothesis is

H4: Convenience has positive impact on customer attitude regarding tourist place.

Socio cultural factor

Socio-cultural factors, such as social norms, family influences, and community traditions, play a role in shaping visit intentions for pilgrimage tourism. Family and peer pressure, as well as a sense of belonging to a particular religious community, can strongly influence the decision to embark on a pilgrimage (Dann, 1996). Hence the hypothesis is

H5: Socio cultural has significant impact on Customer Attitude regarding tourist place.

Tourist Attitude

Studies that concentrate on attitudes have always been significant. This is because studies on attitudes are conducted in order to forecast human behaviour. Research on the question of whether attitudes cause behaviour has now been conducted (LaPierre, 1934; Minard, 1952), and the results have shown that attitudes do not necessarily cause behaviour. This is because people occasionally choose to conceal or repress their attitudes for a variety of reasons (social pressure, group membership, personality, etc.) (Hogg & Vaughan, 2007). Hence the hypothesis is

H6: Tourist attitude has significant impact on tourist visit intention.

Social media as a moderating role

The growing number of tourists planning trips attests to the usefulness of social media in analyzing visitor attitudes. In order to develop a successful service-based brand in the travel industry, every offer must have a special value proposition based on the experience of the client. In order to minimize ambiguity and establish expectations about what they will discover at a destination, tourists must be informed by trustworthy sources about what to expect from their trip (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

Given the unpredictability of tourism services, a visitor should gather the knowledge they need to make an informed decision about their trip. Travellers today place greater credence in the recommendations of other travellers on social media than they do in official marketing campaigns. Tourists occasionally update their social media profiles about infrastructure development and facility availability, which somewhat influences their intention to visit. Thus, the Hypothesis is

H7: Social media create moderate effect between tourist attitude and Tourist visit intention.

Research Method and Design-

4.1 Sampling and sample framework tools

A convenient sample of 325 respondents responses get through goggle form and other social platform where 37 questionnaires reject due to incomplete and missing issues, Finally, 288 complete responses were obtained for processing to determine Tourist intention regarding Religious Tourism. The questionnaire was to be completed by the respondents and returned right away to the researcher. The theoretical framework, which emphasizes multiple factor impact Tourist attitude for Tourist place, has been modified from Aryal et al., 2009, in this article. Based on factors including government policies, tourist knowledge, Infra development etc. impact the tourist attitude and finally social media role in Tourist visit intention. Questionnaire first part contains demographic characteristics of respondents in term of age, income and gender base. In second part include all questions related to independent variable like Government policies for tourist place, Convenience, tourist knowledge, social cultural factor. Lastly we took moderating role of social media in between tourist attitude and tourist visit intention.

4.2 Data analysis tools

Descriptive statistic and inferential statistics were used in data analysis with data frequency table, percentage, and mean value, t-test and factor analysis with model fitness through Smart-PLS 3 software.

Data analysis results and discussion

5.1 Demographic analysis

Out of 288 sample size majorly are male respondents (71%) and (29%) are females. 25% of respondents were between the ages of 21 and 30; 45% of the respondents between 30-40 years while 30% of the respondents are above 41 years. In term of education 87 percent respondents are Graduate and 13 percent are up to Intermediate. Base on the income category majorly are 70 percent those respondents who's income up to 40000 per month, 15 percent are income between 40001 to 60000 per month and 10 percent are above 60000 per month. These all the respondents are fully aware about importance of Ayodhya and Religious tourism.

Tourist were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with a set of statements linked to various elements of Religious tourism on a Five-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree-1, Disagree-2, Neutral-3, Agree-4, strongly agree-5). The 30 variables were subjected to more exploratory factor analysis. KMO statistics were 0.897, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was important, indicating that the extracted variable which appropriate for factor analysis.

Reliability and Validity Analysis

Table2 shows the reliability coefficients for the scale items. Cronbach's coefficients for all variables are substantially over the 0.7 cut-off point. The amount of correlation between the variables is computed using Pearson's correlation coefficient, and the value of the correlation coefficient, level of significance, and discriminant validity are all shown in Table 3. The constructs government policies, Infrastructure facility, Social cultural factor, Visitor knowledge, convenience, tourist Attitude, Tourist visit intention and social media all show strong positive connections.

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Convenience	0.750	0.817	0.846	0.647
Gov. Policies	0.733	0.757	0.829	0.551
Infrastructure Facility	0.869	0.872	0.910	0.718
Social Media	0.802	0.811	0.885	0.722
Social cultural factor	0.884	0.926	0.927	0.809
Tourist Attitude	0.840	0.847	0.903	0.757
Tourist Visit Intention	0.913	0.917	0.945	0.852
Visitor knowledge	0.889	0.940	0.917	0.735

Table 2: Reliability and Validity table

	Convenience	Gov. Policies	Infrastructure Facility	Social Media	Social cultural factor	Tourist Attitude	Tourist Visit Intention	Visitor knowledge
Convenience	0.805							
Gov. Policies	0.362	0.742						
Infrastructure Facility	0.313	0.500	0.847					
Social Media	0.226	0.625	0.836	0.850				
Social cultural factor	0.593	0.520	0.721	0.680	0.899			
Tourist Attitude	0.475	0.681	0.756	0.801	0.711	0.870		
Tourist Visit Intention	-0.023	0.443	0.694	0.844	0.536	0.609	0.923	
Visitor knowledge	0.153	0.586	0.683	0.634	0.715	0.443	0.637	0.857

Table 3: Discriminant Validity Table

		Convenience	Gov. Policies	Infrastructure Facility	Social Media	Social cultural factor	Tourist Attitude	Tourist Visit Intention	Visitor knowledge	Social Media x Tourist Attitude
Convenience	COV2	0.816								
	COV3	0.871								
	COV4	0.720								
Infrastructure Facility	FC1			0.840						
	FC2			0.892						
	FC3			0.804						
	FC4			0.851						
Gov. Policies	GP1		0.742							
	GP2		0.662							
	GP3		0.860							
	GP4		0.690							
Social Cultural factor	SC1					0.899				
	SC2					0.954				
	SC3					0.842				
Social Media	SM1				0.735					
	SM2				0.908					
	SM3				0.895					
Tourist Attitude	TA1						0.872			
	TA2						0.853			
	TA3						0.885			
Tourist visit intention	TVI1							0.937		
	TVI2							0.897		
	TVI3							0.935		
Visitor Knowledge	VK1								0.874	
	VK2								0.932	
	VK3								0.850	
	VK4								0.764	
Social Media x Tourist Attitude	Social Media x Tourist Attitude									1

Table 4: Factor loading table

Conclusion

The data analysis has provided valuable insights into the factors influencing tourist visit intentions for religious places in India. The research hypotheses were tested to understand the relationship between various factors and tourist attitudes and visit intentions. Here's a conclusion based on the results.

The research hypotheses examined the impact of several critical factors on tourist attitudes and visit intentions for religious places in India. The statistical analysis of the data reveals significant findings through Figure 1-3 and table 5 and 6 are:

Government Policies (H1) ($\beta=0.523$, $P=.00$): The data analysis strongly supports the hypothesis that government policies have a significant influence on tourist attitudes. This suggests that favorable government policies can contribute to positive tourist attitudes, thereby increasing the likelihood of tourist visit intentions.

Infrastructure Facility (H2) ($\beta=0.599$, $P=.00$): The analysis also provides strong support for the hypothesis that infrastructure facilities play a crucial role in shaping tourist attitudes. When tourists perceive that the infrastructure is well-developed, it positively impacts their attitudes and visit intentions.

Visitor Knowledge (H3) ($\beta=-0.624$, $P=.00$): Visitor knowledge was found to have a significant effect on tourist attitudes. When tourists are well-informed about the religious place they intend to visit, it contributes to positive attitudes and a greater inclination to visit.

Convenience (H4) ($\beta=-0.123$, $P=.137$): While the data analysis does not support the hypothesis that convenience significantly influences tourist attitudes, the relationship is not entirely negated. Convenience might not be the sole determining factor, and other variables could come into play.

Social-Cultural Factors (H5) ($\beta=0.566$, $P=.00$): The analysis supports the hypothesis that social-cultural factors have a notable influence on tourist attitudes. The cultural and social environment surrounding a religious place affects tourists' attitudes and visit intentions positively.

Tourist Attitude (H6) ($\beta=-0.174$, $P=.004$): Tourist attitude was found to be significantly related to tourist visit intentions. A favorable attitude towards the religious place increases the likelihood of a tourist's intention to visit.

Social Media Interaction (H7) ($\beta=-0.093$, $P=.008$): Social media's interaction with tourist attitudes was also found to be significant. This suggests that social media can play a significant role in shaping attitudes, which, in turn, influence tourist visit intentions.

In summary, the data analysis indicates that government policies, infrastructure facilities, visitor knowledge, social-cultural factors, tourist attitudes, and social media interactions are essential factors in shaping tourist visit intentions for religious places in India. These findings can guide policymakers, destination managers, and tourism stakeholders in developing strategies that enhance the overall tourist experience and boost visitation to religious destinations. While convenience was not found to be statistically significant, it should not be entirely disregarded, as it may still play a role in some specific contexts. These insights are valuable for promoting religious tourism and facilitating the sustainable development of religious destinations in India.

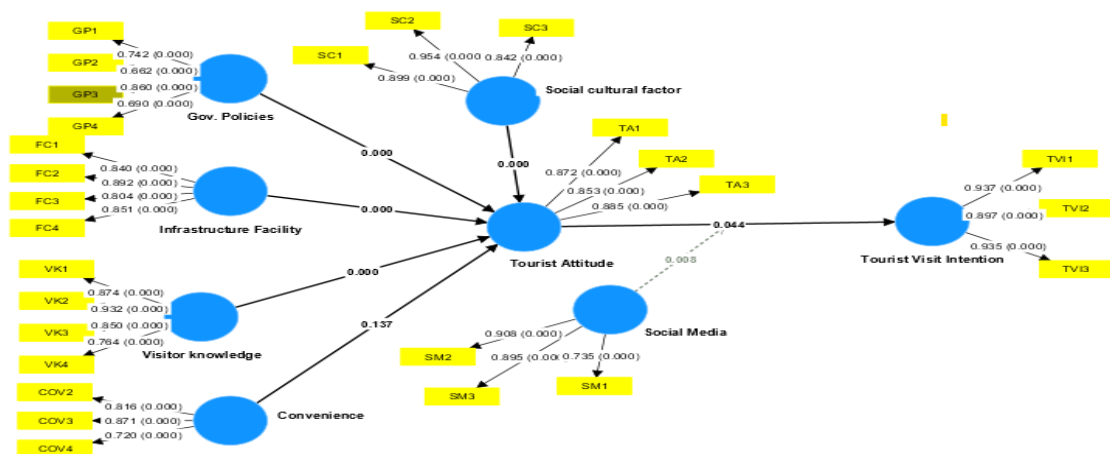


Fig1: PLS Model with P value

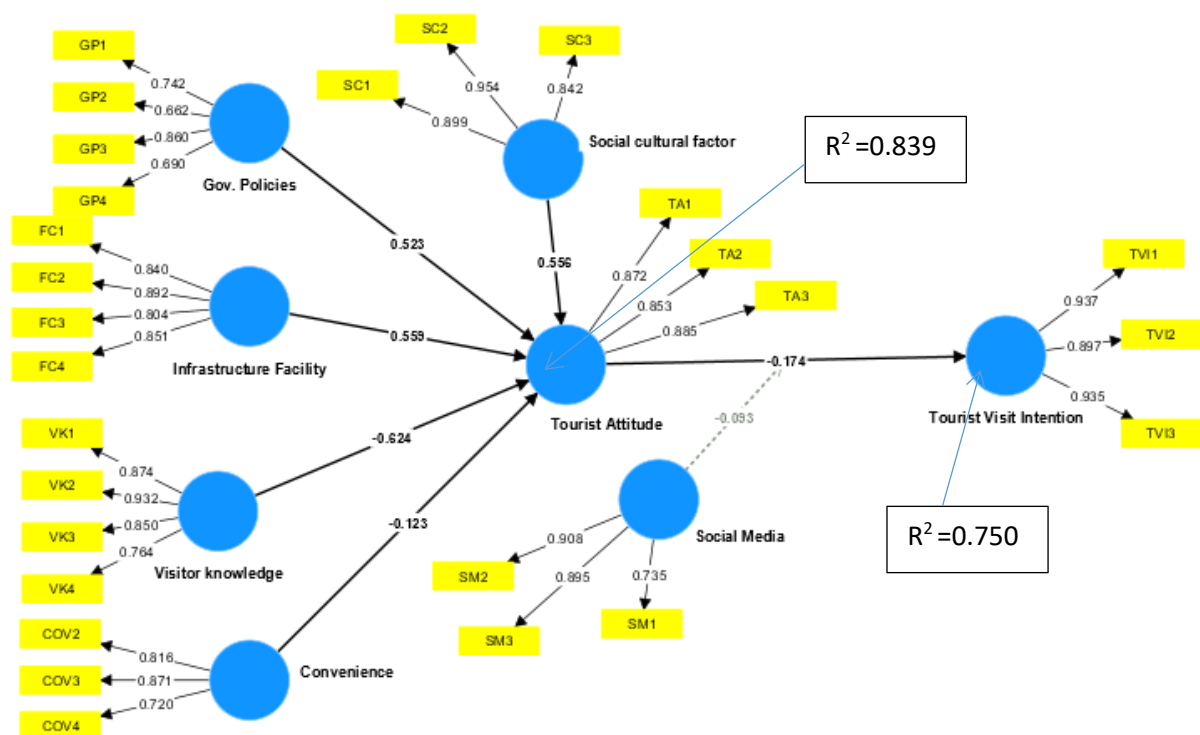


Fig 2 : PLS model with path Coefficient

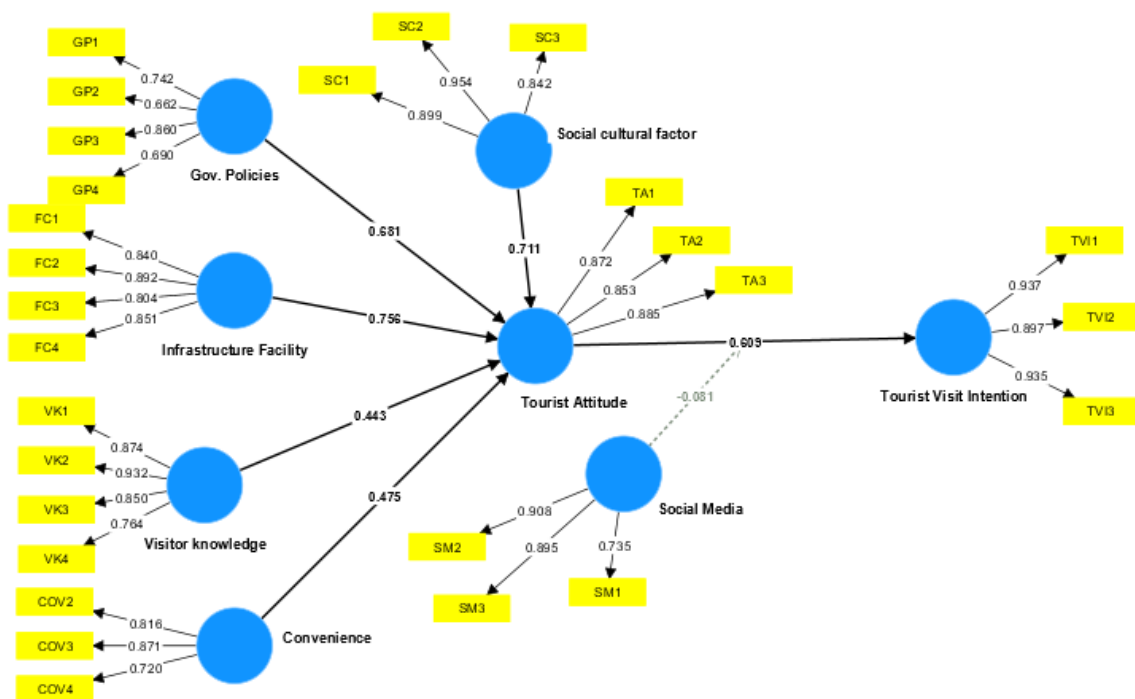


Fig3 : Correlation between the variables

Hypothesis		Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Result
H1	Gov. Policies -> Tourist Attitude	0.523	0.525	0.066	7.919	0	Support
H2	Infrastructure Facility -> Tourist Attitude	0.559	0.555	0.052	10.757	0	Support
H3	Visitor knowledge -> Tourist Attitude	-0.624	-0.608	0.099	6.32	0	Support
H4	Convenience -> Tourist Attitude	-0.123	-0.108	0.083	1.488	0.137	Not Support
H5	Social cultural factor -> Tourist Attitude	0.556	0.537	0.119	4.672	0	Support
H6	Tourist Attitude -> Tourist Visit Intention	-0.174	-0.181	0.086	2.016	0.044	Support
H7	Social Media x Tourist Attitude -> Tourist Visit Intention	-0.093	-0.091	0.035	2.666	0.008	Support

Table 5: Hypothesis Table

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Tourist Attitude	0.839	0.830
Tourist Visit Intention	0.750	0.742

Table 6: R- square table

Recommendation and future scope

Given the significant influence of government policies on tourist attitudes and visit intentions, it is essential for authorities to continue and expand efforts to create favorable policies for religious tourism in Ayodhya. This includes supporting infrastructure development, safety measures, and preservation of cultural heritage. Collaboration between government agencies and religious institutions can further enhance the visitor experience.

The strong relationship between infrastructure facilities and tourist attitudes underscores the importance of investing in infrastructure development around religious places. Continued improvements in transportation, accommodation, and accessibility are crucial to attract and retain tourists. Public-private partnerships can be explored to expedite infrastructure development.

Visitor knowledge plays a vital role in shaping tourist attitudes. Destination management organizations should focus on educating tourists about the historical, cultural, and spiritual significance of religious places. Information centers, guided tours, and informative materials can contribute to a more informed and engaged visitor base.

The support for social-cultural factors as influencers of tourist attitudes implies that creating an authentic and immersive cultural experience is paramount. Encourage local communities to actively participate in tourism initiatives, such as cultural events and sharing traditions, to enrich the visitor experience.

As tourist attitudes strongly affect visit intentions, destinations and stakeholders should aim to create a welcoming and positive environment for visitors. Ensuring that tourists feel respected, valued, and safe is essential. Training programs for service providers and community engagement can contribute to creating positive attitudes.

Recognizing the impact of social media on tourist attitudes and visit intentions, destinations should harness the power of digital platforms for promotion and engagement. Developing an active and informative social media presence can help in shaping favorable attitudes and attracting more visitors.

In conclusion, the current findings offer valuable insights for enhancing religious tourism in India. Implementing the recommended strategies and exploring the suggested areas of future research can contribute to the sustainable development of religious destinations, improved visitor experiences, and increased tourism revenues in Ayodhya.

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