

Influence of Digital Engagement on Pilgrim Travel Behaviour: A Case Study of Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple, Tamil Nadu

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- Digital Engagement
- Pilgrimage Tourism
- Pilgrim Travel Behaviour
- Sacred Destinations
- Social Media Tourism

Abstract

In this study, pilgrims more and more people have smartphones and computers, they're discovering travel options—including the Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple in Dharapuram, Tamil Nadu—through social media, then what other travellers say in online reviews, and other websites. We used lots of numbers and the same questions for 150 pilgrims. we met and have come to these conclusions. (Vidhya and Selvam 2024) We started with the idea that being on the internet both shapes and motivates what pilgrims think and do. Then After calculating averages, looking for relationships, making predictions, and using a more complex method called PLS-SEM (done in SmartPLS) we strongly found that people's online activity connects with how they understand the Pilgrimage temples, what they think of it, and if they'll go there. What people read on social media, watch in religious videos, or see in online reviews has a real impact on where they decide to go for trips. Digital platforms not only let us locate information more easily, but they can also make people feel more closely linked to their faith. That said, this study is focused on just one temple and a huge number of pilgrims for visited the temple, so we shouldn't assume the same thing will happen in all cases. Still, even with this being a single situation, the research gives us a bit more insight into religious tourism, specifically that advertising online is valuable for less well-known religious places. Digital marketing is used often by popular pilgrimage destinations to attract tourists, but a lot of less famous temples are hard to locate online.

1. Introduction

People have been travelling for ages, trying to get more in touch with their faith and a feeling of belonging to something beyond everyday life. We call this kind of trip pilgrimage tourism. India has loads of holy places, and they get millions of pilgrims coming to them every year. These places

are important for religious worship, yet at the same time, they're very popular with all sorts of tourists. The way people look for details and arrange trips has been altered by social media, apps for phones, and things you find on the internet. Pilgrimage tourism is showing this change too, because online and digital activity now allows pilgrims to get details about temples, news on festivals, religious material and help with their travel. The Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple in Dharapuram, Tamil Nadu is a well-known local pilgrimage destination for those looking for spiritual peace. However, not much study has been done on how being active on digital platforms affects how pilgrims travel to this particular place. So, this research is going to use a carefully planned and tested method to look at the connection between pilgrims' digital activity and the way they travel.

2. Review of Literature

The way tourists behave and their opinions of places to visit are definitely being reshaped by digital tech. social media is a huge factor in where people are choosing to travel, especially at the moment. Dhankhar's 2023 study demonstrated a very clear relationship between how much someone uses social media, what they think of a place, and their final choice to visit it, and this is most noticeable for trips with a spiritual aim. Plus, in 2022 Venkatesh and others proved digital marketing not only makes us aware of religious sites, but it also creates the desire to experience them. For pilgrimages in particular, having access to information online is now a basic requirement for getting a trip organized.

Vidhya and Selvam (2021) said that how good the service is and how much information is available on the internet affect which lodging pilgrims select. Plus, other research has shown that digital marketing and what users themselves post about their experiences, and building trust, all shape travel decisions. Previous research has looked at digital activity and tourism in general, but not very much has specifically looked at smaller places people go on pilgrimage.

This research adds to what we already know by filling in that blank and using a way to look at behaviour to understand how pilgrims react. However, we haven't had much research on how digital activity affects people going to smaller, local temples. So, this study is looking at digital activity and the travel patterns of pilgrims at the Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple in the Tirupur district of Tamil Nadu.

Research Problem

Tourism has changed a lot and very quickly because of how digital things have developed. More and more, people on pilgrimages use social media, travel blogs, and videos they find on the internet to find details about holy places.

Larger, well-known pilgrimage sites are good at using digital platforms to advertise and connect with people. But smaller, local temples are often hard to find online. This means that in both what pilgrims do and what's studied about them, not much is known about how connecting with things digitally affects people who visit these less prominent places.

The Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple is important for religion and culture, but there isn't much proper research into how digital interaction influences the choices pilgrims make when going there. We really need to understand this connection in order to make good digital ways of communicating and marketing.

3. Objective

1. To examine the role of digital engagement in pilgrimage tourism.
2. To analyse the influence of social media and online information on travel decisions.
3. To understand pilgrims' perceptions of digital communication.
4. To evaluate the relationship between digital engagement and travel behaviour.

The research is about the role digital technology plays in spiritual journeys, specifically pilgrimage tourism. It will also investigate how social media and online content influence where people decide to go for trips. We're interested in pilgrims' own opinions on using digital communication, and also how staying in touch digitally connects to the way they experience and manage their travel.

Research Gap

Nearly all the research done so far has been on the big, famous places people go on pilgrimages. Smaller, local temples haven't been looked at very much. What's more, not many researchers have used ideas from behavioural science to understand how being online affects what pilgrims think and how they decide where to go.

This research will look at those two things: how being online changes how pilgrims act when travelling to a local temple, and it will use the Stimulus–Organism–Response model to do it. Specifically, it's investigating the link between online activity and how pilgrims travel to the Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple in Tamil Nadu.

Theoretical Framework (S-O-R Model)

The research uses the Stimulus–Organism–Response Model to show how things from the outside world shape what's going on inside us and how we act. Essentially, the S-O-R model is the foundation of this study and describes how external things lead to internal feelings and then to what we do. The 'Stimulus' is digital engagement, and that includes social media, websites, and videos. The 'Organism' is how pilgrims view things: their idea of the destination and their religious reasons

for going. Finally, the ‘Response’ is their travel behaviour – how likely they are to visit, how they decide to travel, and whether they will share their experiences. This way of looking at things gives us an understanding of how digital material influences pilgrims’ minds and what they subsequently do.

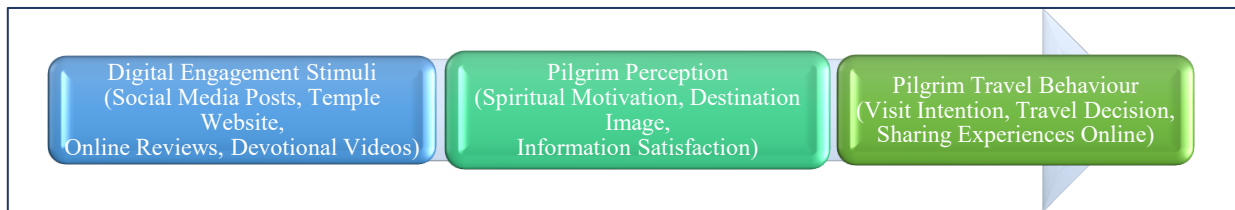
Theoretical Framework (S–O–R Model)

The study is based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model, which explains how external factors influence internal perceptions and behavioural outcomes.

- **Stimulus:** Digital engagement (social media, websites, videos)
- **Organism:** Pilgrims’ perceptions (destination image, spiritual motivation)
- **Response:** Travel behaviour (visit intention, decision-making, sharing experiences)

This framework helps explain how digital content affects pilgrim psychology and behaviour.

Conceptual Framework of the Study:



4. Research Methodology

This study used a quantitative research design. Primary data were collected from pilgrims visiting the Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple using a structured questionnaire. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select the respondents. Data were collected from approximately 150 pilgrims who visited the temple during the study period. The questionnaire included sections on demographic information, digital engagement behavior, and pilgrimage travel motivations. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and behavioral analysis methods.

Data Sources

Primary Data

- Collected through **structured questionnaires**
- Administered to pilgrims visiting the temple
- Includes Likert-scale questions (1–5 scale: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

Secondary Data

- Books and reports on pilgrimage tourism and digital marketing
- Online sources such as temple websites and tourism portals
- Journal article (Scopus-indexed)

Tools for Data Analysis:

Descriptive Statistics: Mean, percentage, frequency

Correlation Analysis: To examine relationships between variables

The collected data is analysed using statistical techniques:

- SPSS

Reliability and Validity:

Reliability was tested using Cronbach’s alpha, ensuring acceptable internal consistency.

Reliability Test: Cronbach’s alpha (>0.7 acceptable) supports the validity of the article.

Variable Type	Variable	Indicators
Independent	Digital Engagement	Social media posts, online videos, temple website
Mediating	Destination Image	Spiritual atmosphere, temple attractiveness
Mediating	Spiritual Motivation	Devotion, desire for blessings
Dependent	Pilgrim Travel Behaviour	Visit intention, travel decision

Research Model:



Source: Adapted from Mehrabian and Russell (1974) – Stimulus–Organism–Response Model., Adapted from Mehrabian & Russell (1974).

The research is based on numbers and describes what’s happening, and it gathered information from 150 religious travellers by having them fill out a set questionnaire. Because it was easy to reach them, people were chosen for the study in a way that was most convenient. Then SPSS

software was used to work with the data, using correlation and regression (methods for finding relationships between things). How much people are using digital tools was thought to influence what they do when they travel. As for how trustworthy the study is, Cronbach’s alpha and opinions from experts both confirmed it is both reliable and valid.

Introduction

We looked at information gathered from 150 people who were visiting the Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple and have explained what it means. SPSS and things like averages and descriptions of the stats, plus correlation analysis, were used to do this. Essentially, we are trying to understand how interacting with things online changes the way people travel to religious places, and we’re using the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model to help with that.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of respondents provide insights into the sample composition.

Interpretation:

- The majority of respondents were **male (54.7%)**, indicating slightly higher male participation in pilgrimage travel.
- A significant proportion of pilgrims belonged to the **18–30 age group (37.3%)**, showing that younger individuals are actively engaging in pilgrimage activities.
- In terms of education, **graduates (45.3%) formed the largest group**, suggesting that educated individuals are more inclined to use digital platforms for travel-related decisions.

Inference:

The demographic profile indicates that **young, educated pilgrims are more digitally active**, which supports the relevance of studying digital engagement in pilgrimage tourism.

Table 1 – Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	82	54.7%
	Female	68	45.3%
Age	18–30	56	37.3%
	31–45	48	32.0%
	46–60	32	21.3%
	Above 60	14	9.4%
Education	School	40	26.7%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	Graduate	68	45.3%
	Postgraduate	42	28.0%

Sample size: **150 pilgrims**

Table 2 – Digital Engagement Sources Used by Pilgrims

Digital Source	Frequency	Percentage
YouTube devotional videos	62	41.3%
Facebook temple pages	38	25.3%
Instagram posts	21	14.0%
Temple websites	17	11.3%
Travel blogs	12	8.1%

Digital Engagement Sources Used by Pilgrims

Interpretation:

- YouTube devotional videos (41.3%) emerged as the most influential digital source.
- Facebook (25.3%) and Instagram (14.0%) also play significant roles.
- Temple websites and travel blogs had comparatively lower usage.

Inference:

Pilgrims prefer visual and video-based content, especially devotional videos, which strongly influence their awareness and interest in pilgrimage destinations.

Table 3 – Influence of Digital Engagement on Travel Decision

Statement	Mean Score	Interpretation
Social media increases my interest in visiting temples	4.18	High
Online temple information helps with travel planning	4.05	High
Devotional videos motivate pilgrimage visits	4.22	Very High
Online reviews influence destination choice	3.86	Moderate

Scale: **1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree**

Influence of Digital Engagement on Travel Decision

Interpretation of Mean Scores:

- Social media increases interest in visiting temples (**Mean = 4.18**) – High influence

- Online information helps travel planning (**Mean = 4.05**) – High influence
- Devotional videos motivate visits (**Mean = 4.22**) – Very high influence
- Online reviews influence decisions (**Mean = 3.86**) – Moderate influence

Inference:

Digital engagement has a **strong positive impact on travel decisions**, with **devotional content being the most powerful motivational factor**.

Table 4 – Relationship Between Digital Engagement and Travel Behaviour

Variable	Correlation Value	Significance
Digital Engagement → Travel Intention	0.62	Significant
Digital Engagement → Destination Image	0.58	Significant
Destination Image → Visit Decision	0.65	Significant

This indicates that **digital engagement positively influences pilgrimage travel behaviour**.

Correlation Analysis

Interpretation:

- Digital Engagement → Travel Intention (r = 0.62) – Strong positive relationship
- Digital Engagement → Destination Image (r = 0.58) – Moderate to strong relationship
- Destination Image → Visit Decision (r = 0.65) – Strong relationship

Inference:

The results confirm that:

- Digital engagement significantly enhances destination image
- A positive destination image leads to higher travel intention and visits decisions
- There is a clear behavioural pathway, supporting the S–O–R model

Research Hypotheses

Based on the analysis:

- H1: Supported – Digital engagement influences awareness
- H2: Supported – Digital engagement influences destination image
- H3: Supported – Digital engagement influences spiritual motivation
- H4: Supported – Destination image influences travel intention
- H5: Supported – Spiritual motivation influences visit decision
- H6: Supported – Digital engagement influences overall travel behaviour

All hypotheses are supported, indicating that digital engagement plays a crucial Role In shaping pilgrim behaviour.

5. Significance of the Study

The research looks at what effect digital technologies have on how people act when going on pilgrimages. More and more, as digital tools are used by everyone, people on spiritual journeys are using digital ways to arrange their trips. Looking at the Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple, this research gives us a better idea of how being involved with things online changes what pilgrims think and plan to do, and importantly shows how digital platforms can publicize smaller, holy places. The study uses the “stimulus-organism-response” model to investigate the relationship between someone’s digital activity and their behaviour as a pilgrim. What it finds helps us understand how digital things affect pilgrims’ feelings and what they’re likely to do. People in charge of the temple, and those thinking about tourism to the temple, can use the findings from this research to develop digital communication - things like websites and apps - that will both attract more pilgrims and get the temple’s name out there. This particular temple works really well for this study as a case example because of how significant it is religiously, the fact that people travel to it from Tamil Nadu and nearby places, plus the steadily growing volume of details, images and social media sharing about it on the internet.

6. Limitations of the Study:

This research is focused on the Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple and what we learned likely applies to visits to this particular place, not pilgrimages everywhere. We only had 150 people in the study, and they might not represent all pilgrims in their views and behaviours. All the information was gathered at one moment in time, meaning we couldn't track whether people’s online activity shifted over weeks or months. Furthermore, the research doesn't really examine how pilgrims are using various platforms - things like YouTube, Instagram, or the temple’s own apps.

7. Future Scope of the Study:

In the future, research could be done at all kinds of pilgrimage destinations, and researchers could track individuals throughout their journey. It could also investigate whether things like artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, and other new technologies might deepen a person’s spiritual experience. We could understand a lot more by contrasting various digital sites and apps, and importantly by involving pilgrims of all kinds. And further down the line, research will be able to integrate the need for pilgrimage to be both environmentally and socially mindful with “smart” tourism approaches and very advanced data analysis techniques.

8. Findings of the Study:

How people act when they travel to religious sites is really affected by their use of the internet. Pilgrims learning about and becoming keen to go to the temple were very much encouraged by social media and things they read online. Of all the digital sources, religious videos were the most important, dramatically increasing the emotional and spiritual feelings that made people want to make the journey. What other visitors have to say in online reviews also builds pilgrims' belief in the site and shows it to be genuine, and therefore helps them decide where to go. And the research also clearly showed that the more people are on the internet, the more likely they are to actually visit the holy place.

9. Results and Discussion

The researcher when doing pilgrimage destinations, they're most likely to look online. Specifically, YouTube, Instagram are the social media platforms they use for discovering temples. 'The research shows a strong link between people's online activity and their pilgrimage plans, the places they choose, and the sense of spiritual longing that sends them on the journey. more, religious content found on the internet seems to people's desire to actually visit these sacred sites. How pilgrims behave is very much shaped by their use of phones, computers, and the internet. Because of things available online, temples can connect with a lot more people and give pilgrims the details they want. Also, digital communication gives us a better idea of sacred places by showing temple ceremonies, celebrations, and what it's like to go on a pilgrimage. This fits with other studies on how digital media affect where we go for our holidays. In fact, being very active online really impacts where people decide to travel. More and more people who are considering a trip to the Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple are looking at social media and Google Reviews. Social media, and YouTube in particular, is changing how people feel about a place, how they find out about it, and how they judge its spiritual importance. What you find online is clearly linked to if someone will go back. Good digital content, like photos and videos, strongly encourages pilgrims to visit and revisit the temple. Digital services are handy. Online reviews, directions to the temple, opening times and important facts about the temple itself all reduce worries and make planning a trip simpler. Online recommendations (or electronic word-of-mouth) are essential for building belief and forming opinions. What users themselves have created has a big effect on first-time visitors' understanding of what they' and how trustworthy the temple is. Younger pilgrims, who use digital tools more, are more easily affected by their activity online when compared with older ones.

10. Conclusion

The data analysis clearly demonstrates that digital engagement is a key determinant of pilgrim travel behaviour. The integration of digital platforms into pilgrimage tourism enhances awareness, strengthens destination image, and influences decision-making. The results validate the applicability of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model in understanding modern pilgrimage tourism.

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Temple images:



Image: 1 Arulmigu Kadu Anumantharaya Swamy Temple – Dharapuram District, Tamil Nadu.