



RESEARCH PAPER

Nation Branding through Religious Tourism in Pakistan by Utilizing Social Media Tools

¹ Muhammad Manshoor Hussain Abbasi ² Dr. Musa Khan

1. Riphah Institute of Media Sciences (RIMS), Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
2. Assistant Professor, Riphah Institute of Media Sciences (RIMS), Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan

PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: February 07, 2022</p> <p>Accepted: May 23, 2022</p> <p>Online: May 25, 2022</p> <p>Keywords: Buddhist Sites, Media-Induced Tourism Nation Branding, Religious Tourism, Social Media</p> <p>*Corresponding Author: manshoor.abbasi @gmail.com</p>	<p>The objective of this research paper is to examine and explore the potential of religious tourism in Pakistan and to address social media's role in the promotion of religious tourism and nation branding. The article further assesses the importance of tourism sector, exploring the strategies to enhance the cultural exportation, cultural interactions, and portraying the progressive image of Pakistan by highlighting religious tourism and its potential. The study focuses on the various religious sites in Pakistan, representing various religions such as Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, and Islam. Following the qualitative method, data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, comprised of 20 different experts in archaeology, religious/Buddhist sites, and social media-induced tourism. Through thematic analysis, the research findings are described, which indicates that the government negligence, interfaith dissonance, security concerns, and poor cultural heritages are the main issues required to be addressed and resolved for the improvement of all concerned aspects.</p>

Introduction

Nation branding is the phenomena about the promotion of a country or site for people to visit, invest in, and build a good image for their excellence of goods and services as well as talent (Soni, 2019). This phenomenon is much more than the application of corporate marketing techniques and concepts to other countries. Soni (2019), further adds that nation branding not only permits a country to rise in the honor of its neighbors, however, attract them to visit and have first-hand experiences regarding the targeted places ultimately make contribution to the economy and developing soft image of the destination. However, a country's nation brand also facilitates the efforts in location branding for corporates (Shepherd, 2018). The earlier research suggests that media content can be an effective source in building a positive image of a location and its economic situations and socio-cultural aspects, a concept that can also guide to nation branding and media induced tourism. For instance, films such as Braveheart (1995), The Sea, Inside (2004), and Troy (2004) have powerfully influenced the movement of tourists to Scotland, Spain, and Turkey, respectively (Khan, Won, & Pembecioğlu, 2021). After the emergence of digital and social media tools the tourism sector has done an exponential growth around the world. Including other types of tourisms, Business, Adventure, Cultural, Food, and religious tourisms are at their peak after the emergence and becoming ubiquitous of digital and social media tools, which are further intensified by the promotion of bloggers and travelers around the world (Khan & Pembecioglu, 2019). Selling tourism products using

social media has proven to be a good strategy. Religious tourism is a spiritual tourism, in which people travel in groups or sometimes individually for missionaries, pilgrimages, and spiritual leisure (Akhter, Jathol, & Hussain, 2019). Tourism and religion can also influence tourist behavior, for example religion influence travel destination choices, tourism product preferences, and the provision of religious opportunities and facilities to tourists (Collins-Kreiner, 2018). All sectors of the tourism, including religious tourism had to constantly work with the media to survive their history (Liu, Mehraliyev, Liu, & Schuckert, 2020). A growing body of literature says that tourism as an industry can use the media to carry out travel programs to wider areas. Travel news and media commentary can influence traveler decisions. The religious events are one of the ancient encounters and should play an important role in promoting tourism in areas where it is held (De Alwis, Andric, & Berislav, 2016). Bringing development in Pakistan's tourism sector can acquire significant benefits to both the local people and the economy, however, at this moment tourism in Pakistan has certain obstacles due to some unfavorable elements such as extremism, lack of facilities, and misrepresentation of things, events and places by national and international media outlets. The ubiquitous nature of social media, however, has changed this tendency in recent years, the image of Pakistan has become not only positive, but the tourism sector is growing rapidly in positive direction. Previous research says that social media users are 50 to 80 percent more flexible about different religious beliefs and practices. Spatial relationship between religion and tourism, tourists and followers often live in the same room so both give meaning and serve to maintain the sacred character of the site, which accepts both casual and enthusiastic visitors (Manzoor et. al., 2019).

In this context, this research paper addresses the capacity of digital and social media in promoting tourism sector in Pakistan. Additionally, the study focusses on the importance of religious tourism, the possible strategies for developing transnational tourists' attraction and promotion of these sites.

Literature Review

Religious tourists' locations, precisely Buddhist sites in Pakistan are thriving, however, some important parts are still uncovered which need conservation, restoration, and revival to be explored by national and transnational tourists. There are number of landmarks representing religious ethnicity hidden from the world. Previous research has explored that the most prominent and largely expanded religious sites in Pakistan are of Buddhist cultural heritage such as Taxila, Lahore and Peshawar Museum, and Takht-e-Bahi, and similarly Hindu place Katas Raj Temple is also much famous in the world. Most of the people around the world come to Pakistan to visit these places by seeing beautiful pictures on social media. Currently, we are living in is a global village and we can connect to anyone at any time through social media and these media platforms are also used as way to promote different things all around the world (Khan et al., 2019). This digital media and Buddhist Culture are never apart because there is a lot of historical and philosophical history of this religion which is mainly being explored by the people with the help of digital and print media. These media technologies are one of the ways to connect and help us in investigating these appealing places (Grieve, & Veidlinger, 2014). For instance, the festival at the Gandhara which is one of the amazing Buddhist sites in Pakistan, always remain focus of attention to promote and give people awareness about historical Gandhara civilization, what it is and what it offers such as its culture of kite flying, its history, cuisines, and sports etc. (Zhang, 2018). As for Singh, & Gauri (2014), these Buddhist sites are also a way to publicize the country and was also used to resolve conflicts in The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) regions by diverting their attention towards these beautiful places though social media. As there is a large community of people who have

Buddhism as their religion and culture, however, by ignoring these sites indicates the disregard and negligence of millions of people and their sentiments. So, in nutshell it can be said that the promotion of these kind of places will not only enhance the beauty and ratio of tourists to Pakistan but will also bring prosperity and peace in society. It is the right of Buddhist people to get to know about their heritages which can be easily promoted through social media in this digital media age (Singh & Gauri, 2014). According to census report of 2012 Pakistan was ranked as the 115 around the world in international tourism. However, from 2013 to 2018 the number of tourists in Pakistan have been increased in millions and the main reason behind this is the influence that made by bloggers through social media. In short, we can say that social media have impacted a lot and played its part by creating a beautiful image and by building awareness among people regarding these beautiful and historical places and religious sites.

Previous studies describe that religion is an important demographic factor that influences visitor's choices and love for a destination. Thus, by focusing on religious tourism, the country's largest supporting industry can be developed through direct and indirect investment as well as revenue earnings (Wiltshier & Griffiths, 2016). Pakistan is a top tourism destination in the world, with a diverse range of adventurous, beautiful scenery, and cultural heritage attractions. However, due to poor governance and a lack of effective marketing techniques, tourism fails to attain its full potential, resulting in the degradation of several revenue streams from it (Khan et al., 2019). According to Irfan and Ali (2020), Pakistan owes its ruminants to a variety of historical religious places, in which sites associated to a prominent religion mainly found in South Asia "Sikhism" take a vital place. For this reason, each year, a considerable number of Sikh Yatris, both domestic and foreigners, visit Pakistan to complete their pilgrimages (Irfan & Ali, 2020, November). The majority of Sikhs visit Pakistan to four majors Gurdwaras: Dera Sahib, Nankana Sahib, Kartapur Sahib, and Panja Sahib. All these destinations are attractive sites, not only for the people who belong to this certain religion however, common tourists also take a great interest to visit these sites in a huge number around the year. To comprehend the vast knowledge of Pakistani Sikhs, however, one must have a working knowledge of history beyond what is presented in ordinary history texts. Apart from the major religious sites, Pakistan is home to hundreds of sites dedicated to the forgotten legacy of Sikhs, businessmen, intellectuals, Sufis, administrators, and warriors from western Punjab. It is worth - noting that more than 80% of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire is located in modern-day Pakistan. Whether it is the century-old murals that adorn the walls of abandoned palaces in western Punjab's mountains, or the castles, battles, palaces, and infrastructure projects, Pakistan's Sikh legacy is patiently awaiting pilgrims' discovery. They are willing to venture off the main path (Khan et al., 2019). Moreover, Nankana Sahib (Lahore) and Gurdwara Panja Sahib are the two most prominent sacred places for Sikhs in Pakistan (Hassanabdal). "Nankana Sahib" is held in high regard and reverence by Sikh Yatris. Each year, a considerable number of Sikh pilgrims travel to their spiritually sacred locations in Pakistan, including Nankana Sahib and Hasanabdal. Nankana Sahib is Guru Nanak's birthplace, and the town contains nine Gurdwaras dedicated to various events in Guru Nanak's life. As a result, Nankana Sahib is far more endearing to the Sikh community (Irfan, & Ali, 2020, November). The existing literature says that the other sacred destination for Sikh visitors is Hasanabdal, where a hand-printed rock of Guru Nanak rests in a Gurdwara built on the site of Baba Nanak's former residence (Bari & Khan, 2021).

Unlike many Hindus and Sikhs who migrated to India all through the period of department, most Christians lived in newly shaped Pakistan, in keeping with the 1998 Census, Christians make up approximately 1.59 percent of the total population of Pakistan.

The precise quantity is unknown; however, estimates range from much less than 2 million to 3 million. According to the object, there are Christian communities inside the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which incorporates about 70,000 in Peshawar, but the general public of Pakistani Christians stay in Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, and many smaller communities inside the Punjab. Speaking of the first-rate Christian websites in Pakistan, the records of Pakistani congregations is a part of the Christian history of the Indian subcontinent. Their origins can be traced again to the paintings of numerous Christian machines from the sixteenth century onward. Pakistan came into existence whilst the British Empire came to an end on a small continent in 1947. Research says that in line with lifestyle, St Thomas the Apostle traveled through the Taxila vicinity of Pakistan on his pastoral adventure throughout a small continent in the 2nd half of the first century. An historical stone cross discovered in the present-day province of Punjab is taken into consideration to be the symbol of the primary-century Christian presence in the location (Irfan & Ali, 2020, November). In extraordinary components of the United States of America, several important churches and cathedrals can be observed very essential in religious tourism in Pakistan, amongst them, Lahore's Cathedral of the Resurrection is taken into consideration by means of many architects to be the fine, built by means of the British, the cathedral become consecrated in 1887 and acquired by the Anglican community of the city after the founding of Pakistan, 60 years later. A growing body of literature describes that a church constructed within the form of a move, a purple-brick-and-sandstone rise above Mall Road, the city's principal thoroughfare. It's cool, dark indoors, included with long ceilings, provides a sanctuary from the sizzling heat of Punjab. St Patrick's Roman Catholic cathedral in Karachi has additionally taken over a healthful church, manufactured from nearby stone, and erected in 1881 on the website of a church built with the aid of Irish Catholic soldiers conquering the province of Sindh, St Patrick's is all spiced with lancet home windows. Consequently, there are few Christian locations in the global which might be visited by using human beings from all over the world who're surprised at their high-quality architectures and layouts (Bari & Khan, 2021).

Faisal place of worship once the look of Turkish creator Vedat Dalokay was chosen for the male monarch Mosque, several raised eyebrows. The looks differed from the standard design of the mosque because it featured up to date and chic lines and, most importantly, lacked a dome. Construction work began in 1976 and was finally completed 10 years later. By then, most critics had folded at the imposing and crowd-pleasing building that currently towers over Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, from its lofty position at the foot of the Margalla foothills. The mosque is called once Faisal bin Abdul-Aziz, the Saudi King who suggested the concept of a Pakistani national place of worship and for the most part funded its construction. The 5,000 sq ft prayer hall is an eight-sided concrete structure, sculpturesque once ancient Beduin tents, with a capability of 100,000 worshippers. It is enclosed by four minarets eighty-eight meters high in good relation one to one with the base. They were designed because the sides of notional cube, in honor of the sacred three-dimensional Kaaba found at the middle of Mecca' most significant mosque. Wazir Khan Mosque heritage of historic places of Pakistan image credit, Kanwar Taimoor on Unsplash Lahore is one of the most culturally diverse and historically stratified cities in Pakistan. The ancient parts of Lahore are full of diversity and culture. Apart from the streets steeped in history, Lahore's famous Wazir Khan Mosque also has a historical effect on the city. Best known for its picturesque and aesthetic architecture, the most famous is among locals and tourists alike (Khan et al., 2019). Moreover, one of Lahore's most treasured historical monuments is the Mughal-era Badshahi Mosque, which translates to the Mosque of Royalty. It has magnificent architecture and design, which perfectly shows the splendor of Mughal building art. It is easily accessible by having a taxi driver who takes you to the walled city of Lahore (Bari & Khan, 2021). Moreover, there are many Hindus religious sites

in Pakistan, however, the biggest Hindu Temple is in Karachi namely Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, the only of its kind which is very famous for its dimensions and front view which is over 32,306 square yards. There are also some other sites which are Raharki Sahib at Raharki which is five Kilometers away from Daharki, Shadani Darbar, Hanuman Mandir at Mirpur Mathelo, Shri Krishna Mandir Aanand Dham at Devri road, Ghotki, Jagannath Mandir in Sialkot, Hinglaj Mata Mandir in Baluchistan, Katas Raj Temple, Chakwal district in Punjab province, Kalka Devi Cave Arore in Sindh, Shri Varun Dev Mandir in Manora, Gor Khattree and Gorakhnath Temple Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Panchmukhi Hanuman Mandir in Karachi and Mansehra Shiv Temple in Chitti Gatti fifteen kilometers from Mansehra in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which is counted as one of the oldest temples in Pakistan. According to the existing research, among all of them, there are 13 operational Hindu temples in Pakistan till the time of writing this paper (Khan et al., 2019).

Social Media and Religious Tourism in Pakistan

The latest research says that the concept of audience is replaced by the term "Prosumer" (Shirky, 2021), which is the combination of producer and consumers, describes that there is no more passive audience to stay at the front of analog TV, but, they produce and distribute their own content by using digital media platforms. This trend has opened the ways for content creators and bloggers to explore new places, people, culture, traditions, and share them with the world through social and digital media platforms. Social media can be an effective platform to handle everything in a controlled manner and can easily help to communicate with others. Previous research says that this platform has spread tourism all over the world. The young generation seems highly interested in social media which make them able to create content, give feedback to others and develop a para-social relationship with other users, products, and celebrities. A growing body of literature mentioned that, for the last few years, social media plays a vital part in influencing the national and international tourists to visit and explore more about their religious sites and antiquities. In this context, there are many creative professionals and content creators who attract the people to tourist destinations through their vlogging, a phenomena that can be associated to advance form of media induced tourism through digital media platforms (Divinagracia et al., 2012). There are many vlogs covering different temples such as Katas Raj in Chakwal, Punjab and so many other Hindu sites. Bloggers have depicted these religious tourist sites with rich audiovisual content by covering their traditions, history, worship, architecture, and spirituality (Bari & Khan, 2021).

The travel industry business is overwhelmed by strict the travel industry. It is otherwise called specific the travel industry. Strict the travel industry is essentially connected with followers of specific confidence who travel to sacrosanct locales (Navruz-Zoda & Navruz-Zoda, 2016). Strict spots are visited by non-strict guests just as pioneers since they have social, authentic, and strict qualities. Most of the vacationer areas are promptly impacted by financial uncertainty, yet strict the travel industry is impressively less impacted because the inspiration for visiting is amazing and assumes a critical part in individuals' lives (Griffin & Raj, 2018). In our regular routines, web-based media has become progressively significant, which helped the travel industry in turning them into the quickest developing industry on earth. The travel industry likewise gives a critical wellspring of yearly income, social trade, financial development, occupations for the nearby populace, infrastructural improvement, work prospects, and merchandise trade. Mountains, tops, lakes, snow, streams, seashores, glorious valleys, ice sheets, deserts, food, inns, lodgings, authentic locales, climbing trails, culture, fields, northern regions, occasional assortments, particular craftsmanship, and handiworks are ordinarily drawn in by travelers. Be that as it may, here we talk about the strict site, there are numerous strict

destinations like sanctuaries, mosques, and temples. Literature says that the web-based media, in this context, emphatically affects advancing strict destinations in countries like Pakistan. As for, Aftab and Khan (2019), through web-based media, Pakistan is rapidly growing its position in promoting the magnificence of the country. Due to the natural beauty, vast areas with diverse cultures and traditions of Pakistan attracted global travelers to see these wonderful destinations, which helps the travel industry by permitting it to prosper and become quicker. On the other hand, however, the facilities and infrastructures need special attention to reduce the existing barriers and improve the sector for economic and political benefits (Muzaffar, et al. 2019). Additionally, one thing that needs to be discussed is the confronted issues facing by the travel industry in Pakistan is the depiction of country in a negative light globally, also, there has been some security gives that have brought on some issues for both worldwide and homegrown voyagers. These issues should be settled with the goal that Pakistan can turn into the most secure spot for vacationers. Thus, as a general rule, online media can undoubtedly have a significant impact in advancing the travel industry in Pakistan. Guests can utilize online media stages and even the travel industry sites to get data and gauge the expense of an outing. We made a study to assemble information on how people utilize online media for movement arranging, and the outcomes uncovered that by far most individuals utilize web-based media locales to design trips and even to appraise costs (Khan et al., 2019; Muzaffar, et. al, 2020).

Despite the fact that Pakistan was established as a motherland for Indian Muslims following the partition of The Subcontinent in 1947, historians of Pakistan have struggled to produce a cohesive history for the new nation-state based on Islam (Rath, 2013). To distinguish Pakistan from India and make logical sense of Pakistan's recently formed borders, Pakistani historic museums curators co-opted and reframed Buddhist statues before the introduction of Islam (Silk, 2019). They recounted the story of primitive Gandhara, a Buddhist dynasty in northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan from the first century BCE to the fifth century CE, to provide historical history for Pakistan's establishment as a spiritual motherland in the mid-twentieth century and to forge worldwide cultural ties with Southeast Asia and Europe (Khan, 2011).

Material and Methods

Following the qualitative method, semi-structure interviews were conducted from the sample of twenty relevant experts who have good know how about religious sites, social media promotion, and archeology sector in Pakistan. To analyze the data thematic analysis has been carried out after transcribing the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed thematic analysis method is applied to this study by getting familiarity with collected data, generating the initial codes, and then extracting, reviewing, defining, and naming the themes. Finally, the report is developed with a descriptive analysis and discussion of the extracted themes. Four themes and eighteen sub-themes are extracted from the conducted interviews, which is described and discussed in data analysis section.

Results and Discussion

The following themes and sub-themes have been derived from the conducted interviews.

Table 1
Themes and Sub-themes

Sr. No	Themes	Sub-themes				
1	Social media induced tourism	Digital media platforms	Advertisement on social media	Travelogues	Religious activities	Promotion ratio
2		Tourism industry	Safety concern	Advantages of social media	Importance of Media	
3	Religious tourism and economy	Revolutionary change	Religious tourist sites	Religious hub	Religious sites	
4		Promotional steps and necessary actions	Government Attitude	Law and order	Security	
5	Individuals' role	Role as an individual	Different sects			

Pakistan is promoting religious tourism as a way of peace building and interfaith harmonies (Akhter, Jathol, & Hussain, 2019). Such efforts may create a positive environment for the long-term relations in the region and world order. Pakistan is custodian of international Buddhist heritage and has been on a mission of promoting Buddhist heritage and culture for a long time. Much like Muslims, pilgrimage is an obligation for Buddhists as ordained by Gautama Buddha himself. The aim of this pilgrimage is to develop spiritual discipline and to create a connection with the sacred historical sites. In Pakistan, Gandhara region was once the home of Buddhism as the monks of Gandhara were responsible for preservation and dissemination of Buddha's teachings (Tarar, 2020).

Social Media and Tourism

Drawing the themes from our in-depth interviews, the experts discussed much about media induced, particularly social media induced tourism and digital media platforms. Experts believe that several social media platforms may play an active role in promoting religious tourism in Pakistan. Data reveals that the documentaries and short films uploaded on YouTube attract people from various parts of the world to explore these tourist sites. Interviewing the tourists on the spots, the research found that tourists attracted by travel blogs, the scenic pictures uploaded by influencers and short films created by prosumers. Furthermore, there are different advertising companies that bring out new and exciting deals for people to visit out these religious places on social media. Advertising companies serve yet another way to connect to people and look out for ways to attract people to these religious tourist sites in Pakistan. YouTube is filled with different travelogues of different places. These travelogues contain all the information for those looking out to visit these places. YouTubers present a beautiful image of these places and attract people to visit and explore such beautiful sites. Over the past decade various vloggers have come in spotlight, making travel vlogs, and promoted tourism in Pakistan. It is witnessed from the increasing revenue, and growing number of tourists to Pakistan that social media platforms has brought revolutionary changes to the influx of tourists and tourism industry in Pakistan.

Experts believe that for developing countries with low and middle income like Pakistan, tourism can be the vital tool for economic development. The data shows that for last few years the influx of Buddhist community to Pakistan is remarkable, and the reason

is the positive promotion of these religious sites through digital media platforms. Social media induced tourism led the publicity which help the Buddhist communities worldwide in developing their interest to visit Pakistan and explore all these historical and religious places (Khan et al., 2019). Interviewees have emphasized on the ratio of covering the events by users/creators on social media. On individual basis everyone is doing whatever they want to, on their own and only big events get noticed but there are so many events happenings in Punjab, southern Punjab and in Sindh that are not being covered yet and a lot of people need to know the story behind all the religious activities which they conduct during those events. All the tourism, which is currently active in Pakistan, 70 to 80 percent is promoted by common people (prosumers) on social media platforms. Another, serious concerns which is more emphasized by experts is security concerns. Digital media platforms, however, have changed the tendency and foreign tourists frequently get help and actual information through online media, vlogs, and blogs. As, what we have witnessed in the recent past, the traditional local and international media outlets always portray the negative image of Pakistan, especially highlighting the security concerns, extremism, interfaith dissonance, sectarian violence, etc. On the other hand, however, the social media platforms have been utilized in positive and useful ways to depict the peaceful and prospers image of the country. Tourists those were interviewed for this study, were mainly belong to China, Japan, and Korea. Majority of them admitted their friendly experience with getting information through reviews of other visitors on online and digital media platforms. Social media platforms are not only the sources of information; however, this tool have positive impact on tourism business, especially when the content shared is appealing both emotionally and visually. Playing a role of citizen journalism, social media share speedy information which is one of the good features of this tool, on the other hand, however, it might create troubles by its post filter nature and an easy source for spreading misinformation and disinformation.

Religious Tourism and Economy

Tourism could be the major source of income and socialization agent for the underdeveloped countries like Pakistan. Including other religious sites in Pakistan, Buddhist site are notable. The most popular Buddhist sites in Pakistan are in Taxila, Swat, Mohenjo-Daro, and Gilgit-Baltistan. Buddhist devotees do not merely visit their sites in Pakistan for sightseeing but also for pilgrimage. Previous studies show that Buddhist delegations along with their monks have frequently visited their spiritual sites in Pakistan, precisely from South Korea and Sri Lanka. Either for pilgrimage or for tourism, whichever purpose for people visit these sites has a great impact on the economy. Statistics shows that tourism sectors have contributed a great amount of revenue to the country economy (Hwang & Lee, 2018). In our conducted interviews, the experts also predicted that in Pakistan religious tourism will flourish and the improvement have been noticed in GDP that can be further improved with providing favorable environment and standard facilities to tourists. With the advent and ubiquitous nature of social media platforms, things have revolutionized which played a fast role in transforming other industries including tourism.

Promotional Steps and Necessary Actions

In order to flourish tourism in Pakistan, it demands the government to have a positive and serious attitude towards the sector of tourism. In the opinion of the experts and the transnational tourists, Pakistan should have a warm and welcoming attitude towards tourism. It should bring out better policies that help tourists feel safe and easy within the country, while visiting far sites located in different areas of the country. Moreover, law and order is one of the main concerns for bringing up religious tourism in

Pakistan. Pakistan needs to focus on law and order, to bring about new and improved policies that would facilitate the tourists in different regions of the country. One of the most important requirements promoting peaceful tourism in Pakistan is improving law and order situation, and planning for the proper marketing strategies. Interfaith dissonances and denominationalism are also one of the major issues, which need an exceptional attention of the government and other influencers. Poor security situation is also one of the concerns, discussed by experts during interviews. No one will put their life in risk for visiting such a place about which rumours are roaming regarding vulnerability and poor security.

This issue cannot be resolved only with the promotion of positive image of country through media, but the authorities must need to revisit their foreign policies and policies regarding war against terror. Although, it has been witnessed that religious tourism in Pakistan has shown an uphill trend in the last three years due to the improvement in Law and order and government's special attention to the sector, however, more, and rapid actions are needed in this regard, according to the interviewees.

Individuals' Role

In their conversations, the experts emphasized on the individual's tasks by playing a positive role in developing and promoting the religious tourism sector. They suggested the authorities and other influencers to play role in the awareness and education of individuals about not to litter, keep their surroundings clean and attract others to such useful activities. The role of relevant institutions is important in this regard; however, the individual's role cannot be ignored to uphill the sector of religious tourism. There are different sects in Pakistan and sectarianism is at its peak. Suppose if anyone is Hanfi, Shia, Dewbandi or Shaafi, they would promote their side of the story. It is important to educate the common individuals in this regard and harmonized their behaviour to maintain a common, prosper, peaceful and liberal environment.

Conclusion

Following a growing body of the literature, and thematic analysis, this paper has highlighted religious tourism and role of digital media platforms in promoting religiose tourism in Pakistan.

To summarize the results of our survey, a manifold explanation could be provided the concluding remarks. Pakistan is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, however, due to low promotion and lack of standard facilities, tourists do not visit Pakistan as compared to other countries in the region. Mountain, snow, desert, beach, river, forest, cliff, wonderful historical sites, cultural diversity, usually the main attractions of international travelers. All attractions above are in Pakistan. So far, Pakistan has met with two main disabled to become a tourist destination in the world. Including special attention of the government to the tourism sector, digital media platforms are the most effective tools which could be utilized for exploring and presenting the tourist sites and providing necessary information to the anticipated tourists. According to the available data, some social media platforms are full of photos and anecdotes of people who explain their travel and experience in detail. Second, government agencies create many social networking profiles to promote these locations contributing remarkable development to the sector. Publicity through digital media networks, has dramatically gained a landscape that gives people access to scenes in many areas of the world, have encouraged the travel for last decade (Chen & Chiou-Wei, 2009). According to the available information on national

digital database, people from around the world have used more and more search engines such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube to determine where they should go. Data shows that geographical hashtags and Instagram trends helped users find exactly what they are looking for. Utilizing these tools effectively, one can easily encourage people to find their business quickly and easily. Moreover, Pakistan is home to astonishing cultural history which gives it an unfair advantage to step into the global religious tourism industry, if the relevant institutions of government become able to carefully plan out and execute enter into this industry, it can earn a dignified place in the assembly of peace-loving countries in the region and world order (Tarar, 2020). Pakistan has already embarked on successfully promoting Sikh and Hindu religious tourism and it is only a matter of time before Buddhism is finally added into this list strengthening ties with Buddhists of the modern world as well.

In this study, we made thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews, generally covering the domain of nation branding through religious tourism by utilizing digital media platforms. For future research project, however, we tend to precisely cover the challenges and remedies to the sector of religious tourism in Pakistan.

References

- Aftab, S., & Khan, M. M. (2019). Role of social media in promoting tourism in Pakistan. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 58(1), 101-113.
- Akhtar, M. S., Jathol, I., & Hussain, Q. A. (2019). Peace Building through Religious Tourism in Pakistan: A Case Study of Kartarpur Corridor. *Pakistan Social Science Review*, 3(2), 204-212.
- Bari, M. W., & Khan, Q. (2021). Pakistan as a Destination of Religious Tourism. In *Global Development of Religious Tourism*, 3(5), 1-10.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Chen, C., & Chiou-Wei, S. (2009). Tourism expansion, tourism uncertainty and economic growth: *New evidence from Taiwan and Korea*. *Tourism Management*, 30(6), 812-818.
- Collins-Kreiner, N. (2018). Pilgrimage-tourism: common themes in different religions. *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, 6(1), 8-17.
- De Alwis, A., Andric, & Berislav. (2016). social media in destination marketing. *International Journal of Management and Applied Science*, 2. 121-125.
- Divinagracia, L. A., Divinagracia, M. R. G., & Divinagracia, D. G. (2012). Digital Media-Induced Tourism: The Case of Nature-based Tourism (NBT) at East Java, Indonesia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 57, 85-94.
- Grieve, G. P., & Veidlinger, D. (Eds.). (2014). *Buddhism, the internet, and digital media: The pixel in the lotus*. Routledge.
- Griffin, K., & Raj, R. (2018). The importance of religious tourism and pilgrimage: Reflecting on definitions, motives and data. *The international journal of religious tourism and pilgrimage*, 5(3), 2-9.
- Hwang, J., & Lee, J. (2018). Relationships among senior tourists' perceptions of tour guides' professional competencies, rapport, satisfaction with the guide service, tour satisfaction, and word of mouth. *Journal of Travel Research*, 58(8), 1331-1346.
- Irfan, E., & Ali, Y. (2020, November). Religious tourism in Pakistan: Scope, obstacles & strategies. In *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*, 2 (22), 134-154.
- Khan, A. U., Zaman, G., & Baloch, Q. B. (2019). Promoting Religious Tourism in Pakistan: Empirical Evidence from Sikh Pilgrims Visiting Pakistan. *City University Research Journal*, 9(4), 805-818.
- Khan, M., & Pembecioglu, N. (2019). International Audience's Perception about the Turkish TV Serial "The Magnificent Century" In the Context of Portrayal of History and Women. *Global Media Journal TR Edition*, 10(19), 216-246.
- Khan, M., Won, Y.-J., & Pembecioglu, N. (2021). Cultural Exportation, Digital Distribution, and Penetration of K-Dramas in Turkey. *Transnational Marketing Journal*, 9(2), 367-387.

- Khan, R. (2011). Visual iconicity along the ancient routes Buddhist heritage of the Malam-jabba valley (Swat). *Journal of Asian Civilizations*, 34(1), 203.
- Liu, X., Mehraliyev, F., Liu, C., & Schuckert, M. (2020). The roles of social media in tourists' choices of travel components. *Tourist Studies*, 20(1), 27–48.
- Manzoor, F., Wei, L., Asif, M., Haq, M., & Rehman, H. (2019). The Contribution of Sustainable Tourism to Economic Growth and Employment in Pakistan. *International Journal Of Environmental Research And Public Health*, 16(19), 3785-3795.
- Muzaffar, M., Chohdhry, S., & Naila, A. (2019). Social Media and Political Awareness in Pakistan: A Case Study of Youth, *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3 (II), 1-13
- Muzaffar, M., Yasee, Z., & Safdar, S. (2020). Role of Social Media in Political Campaigns in Pakistan: A Case of Study of 2018 Elections, *Journal of Political Studies*, 27(2), 141-151
- Navruz-Zoda, B., & Navruz-Zoda, Z. (2016). The destination marketing development of religious tourism in Uzbekistan. *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, 4(7), 9-20.
- Rasool, H., Maqbool, S., & Tarique, M. (2021). The relationship between tourism and economic growth among BRICS countries: a panel cointegration analysis. *Future Business Journal*, 7(1), 60-71. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-020-00048-3>
- Rath, S. K. (2013). Asia's Changing History: India's Relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan. *Asian and African Studies*, 22(2), 23-32.
- Shepherd, R. J. (2018). When sacred space becomes a heritage place: Pilgrimage, worship, and tourism in contemporary China. *The international journal of religious tourism and pilgrimage*, 6(1), 34-46.
- Shirky, C. (2021). *Shirky – end of audience theory*. Media Studies
- Silk, J. A. (2019). The Buddhist Literature of Ancient Gandhāra: An Introduction with Selected Translations, by Richard Salomon. *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 62(3), 269–279.
- Singh, R. P., & Gauri, S. (2014). Developing Ancient Buddhist Sites as Tourist Circuits to Minimise Conflict in SAARC Region. In *11th UNDV International Buddhist Conference "Buddhist Perspective towards Achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals, Bai Dinh Convention Center, Ninh Binh Province, Vietnam*.
- Soni, P. (2019). Revisiting the role of relationship benefits in online retail. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 5(6), 44-51.
- Tarar, N. O. (2020). The Road Less Traveled: The Buddhist Religious Tourism of Pakistan. *Tourism Economics*, 10(4), 389-401. <https://doi.org/10.5367/0000000042430962>
- Wiltshier, P., & Griffiths, M. (2016). Management Practices for the Development of Religious Tourism Sacred Sites: Managing expectations through sacred and secular aims in site development; report, store and access. *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, 4(7), 1-8.
- Zhang, J. (2018). To brand Gandhara, the Ancient Buddhist Centre: Pakistan's potential to develop Buddhist tourism. *Religious Tourism in Asia: Tradition and Change through Case Studies and Narratives*, 4(5) 127-132.