

Between Spirituality and Exploration: Visitors' Motivation and Behavioural Intention in McLeod Ganj, India

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Abstract—McLeod Ganj, Himachal Pradesh, India is more than a one-site visitor experience; it is a destination with a variety of layers of sacredness around the Dalai Lama Temple Complex. In this context, the authors tested the relationship between spiritual motivation (SM) and cultural and exploratory motivation (CEM) and visitor satisfaction (VS) and Behavioural intention. A total of 195 responses were collected from visitors through a structured questionnaire at the exit gate of Dalai Lama Temple Complex. The SPSS was used to perform descriptive analysis and the hypothesised relationships were checked in PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4. The findings reveal that visitor satisfaction is significant positively impacted by both the motivational dimensions. In turn, both SM and CEM positively impacts behavioural intention. However, neither SM nor CEM had significant direct effect on behavioural intention. The above-mentioned findings suggest that future responses emerge mainly from a satisfying visit experience. The descriptive findings indicate that McLeod Ganj as a visitor destination perceived as a short-stay, self-planned and religiously centred destination, with comparatively selective participation in its broader cultural attractions.

Keywords: religious tourism; spiritual tourism; visitor satisfaction; behavioural intention; travel behaviour.

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious and spiritual tourism has gained popularity in tourism research due to a large number of people travel to sacred spaces in search of worship, peace, reflection, learning and personal meaning [27], [5]. Recent work points out that pilgrims do not necessarily go to sacred sites due to their faith. Such visit can be related to culture, heritage, curiosity and place experience [16], [5]. Accordingly, researchers are increasingly interested in understanding visitors' motives for travelling to sacred places and how their experiences influence behavioural intention. As a result, motivation, satisfaction and behavioural intention have

gained considerable importance in contemporary religious and spiritual tourism research.

In the wider context, sacred destinations are now recognised as complex spaces where religious significance and tourism experience come together. This broader understanding is more important in Buddhist tourism and pilgrimage, where sacred destinations attract both spiritually motivated visitors and those interested in culture, history, architecture and the overall place-based experience. This makes the Buddhist sacred destinations a meaningful context for understanding how diverse visitor motivations influence satisfaction and post-visit behavioural intentions.

In India, this field has particular relevance because the country has a long tradition of spiritual travel and a wide range of sacred destinations and pilgrimage circuits [1]. At the same time, recent work has pointed out that growing visitor pressure at spiritual destinations in India can lead to crowding, infrastructure strain, environmental pressure, and lower visitor satisfaction [1]. Buddhist destinations form an important part of this wider setting. Earlier research at Bodhgaya shows that different motivational dimensions can influence visitors' behavioural intention in different ways, suggesting that sacred destinations should not be treated as motivation-simple spaces [21]. In this respect, India emerges as an appropriate setting for understanding how spiritual and non-spiritual motives jointly shape visitor experience and post-visit behavioural outcomes at sacred destinations.

Within India, Himachal Pradesh offers a meaningful regional setting, given its long-standing association with hill tourism, cultural significance and place-based experience [3]. This setting is particularly relevant to the study of sacred destinations, where mountains often bring together landscape, symbolism and travel

experience within a journey [16], [27]. In this context, spirituality is not only experienced by the faith but also by the destination environment, local culture and exploratory travel behaviour.

McLeod Ganj sharpens this context further. Academic writing on Dharamsala presents it as a place strongly shaped by Tibetan exile culture and by the symbolic experience of encountering Tibet outside Tibet itself [28]. The presence of the Dalai Lama has also given Dharamsala and McLeod Ganj a strong association with Tibetan Buddhism and has made the area visible to visitors interested in Buddhism, spirituality, and related cultural practices [28]. In this setting, visitors may come for prayer, peace, Buddhist teaching, religious meaning, Tibetan culture, heritage, or exploration [16]. McLeod Ganj can therefore be understood as a sacred destination characterised by a combined visit experience, in which the Dalai Lama Temple Complex acts as the principal spiritual anchor while the wider destination also provides strong cultural and exploratory appeal. This makes the setting especially suitable for examining whether different motivational dimensions shape visitor experience in distinct ways.

More importantly, sacred-place motivation is understood in broad terms, although visitors to such destinations may be guided by different motives. In places like McLeod Ganj, where spirituality, Tibetan culture, and exploratory travel are closely interlinked, it is important to differentiate between the spiritual motivation and cultural and exploratory motivation. This difference is theoretically essential as it provides diversified understanding of sacred-destination experience.

Despite the increased number of studies on the topic of religious tourism, model-based research into motivation, satisfaction, and behavioural intention are more evident in Buddhist sites like Bodhgaya compared to McLeod Ganj [21], [28]. In places like McLeod Ganj, where spirituality, Tibetan culture, and exploratory travel are closely interlinked, it is important to differentiate between the spiritual motivation and cultural and exploratory motivation. This difference is theoretically essential as it provides diversified understanding of sacred-destination experience. Instead of treating visitor motivation as a single religious response, this allows the experience of sacred destinations to be understood as layered and multidimensional, where different motives may influence satisfaction and behavioural intention differently.

In this background, the present study contributes to religious and spiritual tourism research in three ways. First, the study conceptualises McLeod Ganj as a layered sacred destination rather than a pilgrimage stop or a cultural destination. It highlights how spiritual meaning, Tibetan cultural exposure, and exploratory travel are experienced together within a single visit. Second, it differentiates spiritual motivation from cultural and exploratory motivation, while treating both as the combined aspects of the visitor experience. Third, it shows that future behavioural intention in such settings is shaped less by motive strength alone. Rather, it depends more on how positively visitors evaluate the combined visit experience, where satisfaction is the key mechanism connecting motivation and behavioural intention. In addition, by examining attractions visited, facilities used, and travel behaviour, the study situates

these latent relationships within the broader lived experience of McLeod Ganj as a sacred destination.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

A. Religious/spiritual and Buddhist tourism

Religious and spiritual tourism is now widely understood as a field in which sacred-place visits are shaped by more than faith alone. Current research shows that such visits may combine devotion, cultural learning, heritage interest, reflection, and general travel experience [16], [5]. This is especially relevant in Buddhist tourism, where visitors may seek spiritual fulfilment while also engaging with history, culture, architecture, and place atmosphere [21]. In such settings, motivation is better understood as multidimensional rather than as a single religious motive. McLeod Ganj reflects this well, as the Dalai Lama Temple acts as a Buddhist spiritual hub and the destination provides cultural and exploratory appeal.

B. Spiritual motivation

Spiritual motivation is the internal motivations that attract tourists to a holy place. It encompasses motives such as prayer, inner peace, devotion, spiritual development, and attachment to a sacred place [16]. This motivation is particularly significant in Buddhist destinations since tourists are usually interested in contemplation, religious meaning, and fulfilment associated with beliefs. Previous research at Bodhgaya also indicates that religious belief is an influential factor in visiting a Buddhist sacred site [21]. Spiritual motivation is the inner drive in the current study and it attracts tourists to the Dalai Lama Temple and the broader sacred environment of McLeod Ganj.

C. Cultural and exploratory motivation

Cultural and exploratory motivation represents outward-oriented motivations to visit a destination, including learning, observing, discovering, and interacting with local heritage. In sacred tourism, destinations are appreciated not only for devotional purposes, but also for architecture, traditions, atmosphere, and local ways of life [5]. [16] also demonstrates that pilgrimage centres can appeal visitors based on the cultural heritage, recreation, and social experience beyond the religious meaning. This motivation is particularly applicable in McLeod Ganj, where Tibetan culture, Buddhist heritage, and the distinct character of the place. For this reason, it is considered separately from spiritual motivation.

D. Visitor satisfaction

Visitor satisfaction is the general assessment of the destination experience which a visitor makes after visiting the destination. In tourism studies it denotes the extent to which actual experience is met or surpassed on expectations and has a favourable emotional impact [2]. Satisfaction is important in sacred tourism as visitors do not only judge the physical environment, but also the meaning, atmosphere, and the quality of experience that they get [19]. Visitor satisfaction in the current research is a total assessment of the integrated visit experience of McLeod Ganj and Dalai Lama Temple Complex.

E. Behavioural intention

Behavioural intention is a predetermined future reaction of a visitor to the destination, particularly, the desire to visit it once again, recommend it to others and discuss it in a positive manner. The importance of this construct is that it indicates whether a destination experience is good enough to create enabling post-visit behaviour [2]. In religious tourism, these responses are often treated as practical expressions of loyalty and endorsement [20], [5]. The behavioural intention in this study is a positive future attitude towards McLeod Ganj as a sacred place.

F. Spiritual motivation and visitor satisfaction

Spiritual motivation is expected to strengthen visitor satisfaction because spiritually oriented visitors tend to evaluate

sacred destinations in terms of meaning, peace, and fulfilment. When a destination responds well to these inner expectations, visitors are more likely to judge the experience positively. [5] found that belief experience was the strongest predictor of satisfaction in pilgrimage-focused religious tourism. [19] also demonstrated that experiential motives had a positive impact on satisfaction-related outcomes in religious destinations. Visitors who come to McLeod Ganj with spiritual motives are thus supposed to record more satisfaction as the Dalai Lama Temple is the primary spiritual foundation there.

H1: Spiritual motivation has a significant positive influence on visitor satisfaction.

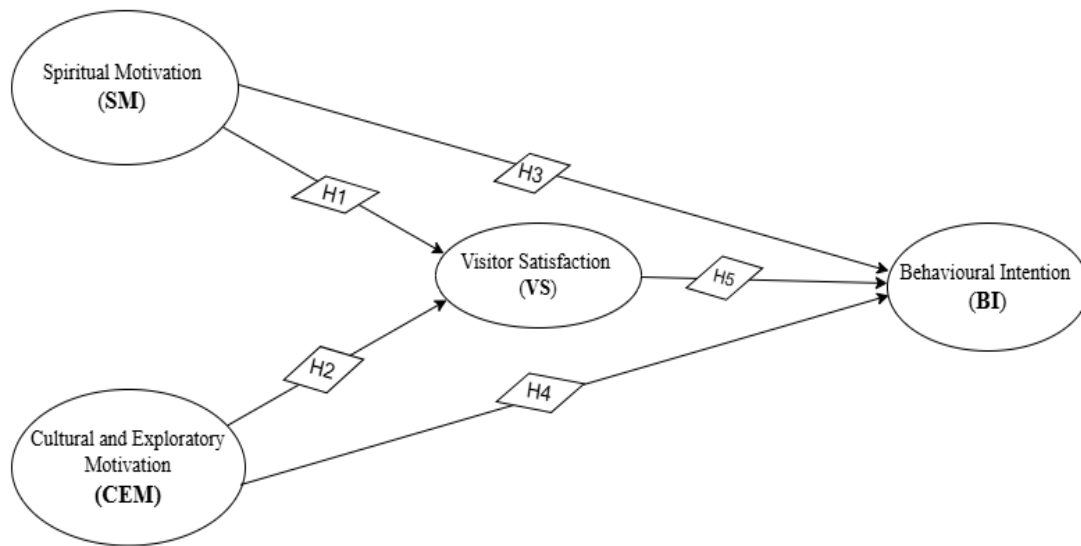


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model prepared by authors on the basis of literature review

G. Cultural and exploratory motivation and visitor satisfaction

Visitor satisfaction is also likely to be enhanced by cultural and exploratory motivation as a number of sacred destinations are encountered by heritage, atmosphere, learning and discovery in addition to devotion. Cultural and adventure tourists will probably be satisfied with the destination when it provides a strong local experience and overall experience. [16] demonstrates that pilgrimage centres are usually more about religious and cultural motives, whereas [5] indicate that sacred tourism may be more about artistic, historical, and cultural involvement. Such motivation in McLeod Ganj, where the destination core is the Tibetan culture and Buddhist heritage, must positively impact visitor satisfaction.

H2: Cultural and exploratory motivation has a significant positive influence on visitor satisfaction.

H. Spiritual motivation and behavioural intention

Spiritual motivation may also influence behavioural intention because visitors who experience strong spiritual

meaning at a destination may be more willing to revisit it, recommend it, and maintain a favourable attachment to it. Evidence from Bodhgaya shows that religious belief significantly influenced behavioural intention at a Buddhist sacred site [21]. [5] similarly found that belief experience was the strongest predictor of loyalty-related outcomes in religious tourism. If McLeod Ganj is experienced as spiritually meaningful, spiritually motivated visitors are therefore expected to show stronger behavioural intention.

H3: Spiritual motivation has a significant positive influence on behavioural intention.

I. Cultural and exploratory motivation and behavioural intention

Cultural and exploratory motivation may influence behavioural intention when visitors perceive the destination as distinctive, enriching, and worth revisiting or recommending. Sacred destinations often generate future supportive responses not only through faith, but also through memorable cultural and exploratory experiences. [16] shows that visitor motives at

pilgrimage centres are often multi-faceted, [5] likewise show that sacred tourism includes more than belief alone. At the same time, [21] suggest that culture and heritage do not always exert a strong direct effect on behavioural intention in every Buddhist destination. The expected effect is therefore positive, but context-dependent. Given McLeod Ganj's strong Tibetan cultural setting and exploratory appeal, a positive relationship is proposed.

H4: Cultural and exploratory motivation has a significant positive influence on behavioural intention.

J. Visitor satisfaction and behavioural intention

Satisfaction among the visitors will have a positive impact on behavioural intention since when visitors are satisfied, they tend to be more inclined to revisit a destination and also suggest it to others. As demonstrated by author [2], the satisfaction has a strong relationship with behavioural intentions, and Prayag and Ryan (2012) found that satisfaction is a significant factor in tourist loyalty. The logic applies equally in sacred tourism where positive visit experiences will tend to promote positive behavioural intention. Based on this, the hypothesis is as follows:

H5: Visitor satisfaction has a significant positive influence on behavioural intention.

K. Attractions visited, facilities used, and travel behaviour at spiritual destinations

Though the primary analytical concern of this research is on motivation, satisfaction, and behavioural intention, the broader visitor experience in a spiritual destination encompasses travel behaviour, attractions seen and facilities consumed. [16] demonstrates that the behaviour of visitors in pilgrimage centres is varied and associated with various types of motivation, such as religious, cultural, recreational, and social. The same study also notes that pilgrimage centres increasingly provide cultural, service, and tourist facilities, and visitors expect an acceptable level of comfort and support during their stay. Studies on Bodhgaya also suggest that Buddhist attractions receive diverse groups of visitors with different travel intentions and expectations [21]. This is why attractions visited, facilities used, and travel behaviour are also significant descriptive dimensions of the current research, although they are not elaborated as hypothesis-testing relationships.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following the hypothesis development, this section presents the research methodology adopted for the study, covering the survey instrument, sampling and data collection procedures, descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS, and hypothesis testing through PLS-SEM.

A. Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used in this study. It measured visitors' motivation, satisfaction, behavioural intention, travel behaviour, and use of attractions and facilities in McLeod Ganj. The initial part consisted of four reflective constructs: Spiritual Motivation (SM), Cultural and Exploratory Motivation (CEM), Visitor Satisfaction (VS), and Behavioural Intention (BI). A total of 16 items were used, with four items for each construct, measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from

1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The SM and CEM items were adapted from existing research on religious tourism, visitation of a Buddhist temple, and sacred-place motivation [7], [25], [8]. VS items were adapted from destination satisfaction research [4], [24], whereas BI items were based on behavioural intention and destination loyalty research [6], [20]. Everything was adjusted to the sacred-destination context of McLeod Ganj and the integrated visit experience in the focus of the Dalai Lama Temple Complex. There were also five questions in the questionnaire on the travel behaviour that included accommodation type, travel companion, time spent in McLeod Ganj, time spent in the Dalai Lama Temple Complex and how the trip was organised. Besides this, another section captured questions related to attractions and the facilities used by the visitors during the visit. These questions on travel behaviour and visitation were adapted from the pilgrimage and religious tourism behaviour research [17].

B. Sampling & Data Collection

Data were collected from visitors to McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala, through convenience sampling. The approach was deemed appropriate since it was able to gain access to the respondents available on the survey site in a practical and fast manner when randomisation was not possible [9]. The respondents were contacted at the point of exit of Dalai Lama Temple Complex. Even though respondents were sampled at this focal point, the research was planned to sample their general integrated experience of visitation of McLeod Ganj as a sacred site. A total of 215 questionnaires were collected from April 2025 to May 2025. The response was voluntary and anonymous. Following the screening of data, 20 questionnaires were eliminated because of incomplete answers, and the final sample was 195 respondents. Since the model is relatively simple, and only a small number of predictors were included in each endogenous construct, this sample was sufficient to estimate PLS-SEM [11].

C. Data analysis

The data were analysed using SPSS and SmartPLS 4. SPSS was used to generate frequency and percentage distributions for the respondents' profile and travel behaviour, while SmartPLS 4 was used to test the hypothesised relationships. PLS-SEM was considered appropriate because the study is prediction-oriented and examines relationships among latent constructs [11], [26]. All constructs were modelled as reflective first-order constructs, and the analysis followed the standard two-step procedure of assessing the measurement model before the structural model [13]. The measurement model was evaluated using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio [10], [14]. Common method bias (CMB) was assessed using full collinearity VIF values (Kock, 2015), and structural-model collinearity was examined using inner VIF values. The structural model was then assessed through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples using a two-tailed test at the 0.05 significance level. Path coefficients, t-values, p-values, R^2 , f^2 , and bootstrapped indirect effects were used to evaluate the structural relationships and mediation effects [12].

IV. RESULTS

A. Respondent profile and travel behaviour

A total of 195 respondents participated in the study. The sample was dominated by males (58.5%), while females accounted for 41.5%. Most respondents were young adults, with 45.6% aged 21-30 years and 30.8% aged 31-40 years. The majority were Hindus (77.9%), followed by Sikhs (6.7%) and Buddhists (5.6%). In terms of marital status, 53.3% were married and 45.1% were single. Educationally, most respondents were graduates (54.9%), followed by those with postgraduate and above qualifications (29.2%). Regarding occupation, the largest group was employed in the private sector (34.4%), followed by students (24.6%) and self-employed/business respondents (15.9%). A majority of the respondents were from India outside Himachal Pradesh (67.2%), while 12.8% were from Himachal Pradesh excluding locals, 11.3% were from abroad, and 8.7% were local residents. Most respondents belonged to urban/city (49.2%) and metropolitan areas (37.9%). In terms of income, the largest share of respondents fell in the INR 80,001 and above category (35.4%), followed by those earning INR 20,000 or below (25.6%).

Socio-Demographic profile

TABLE I. RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	114	58.5
	Female	81	41.5
	Others	0	00.0
Age (in years)	Below 20 years	13	6.7
	21-30 years	89	45.6
	31-40 years	60	30.8
	41-50 years	22	11.3
	51-60 years	6	3.1
	61 & above	5	2.6
Religion	Buddhism	11	5.6
	Hindu	152	77.9
	Islam	8	4.1
	Christian	5	2.6
	Sikh	13	6.7
	Jain	6	3.1
Marital status	Single	88	45.1
	Married	104	53.3
	Divorced	1	0.5
	Others	2	1.0
Educational Qualification	Under matriculation	5	2.6
	Matriculation (10th)	6	3.1
	Intermediate (+2)	20	10.3
	Graduate (+3)	107	54.9
	P.G & above	57	29.2
Occupation	Student	48	24.6
	Government Service	26	13.3
	Job in private sector	67	34.4
	NGO/Non-profit org.	3	1.5
	Self-employed/Business	31	15.9
	Unemployed	20	10.3

Place of residence	INDIA except H.P.	131	67.2
	Abroad	22	11.3
	Local resident	17	8.7
	Himachal Pradesh (except locals)	25	12.8
Nature of residence	Metropolitan	74	37.9
	Urban/City	96	49.2
	Semi urban	20	10.3
	Rural / Village Area	5	2.6
Income	INR 20,000 or below	50	25.6
	20,001 to 40,000	28	14.4
	40,001 to 60,000	30	15.4
	60,001 to 80,000	18	9.2
	80,001 or onwards	69	35.4

Source: Author's compilation based on primary survey data.

TABLE II. GENERAL TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR OF VISITORS

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Travel companion	Alone	19	9.7
	With Spouse and Children	37	19.0
	With Entire Family	53	27.2
	With Friends	83	42.6
	Others	3	1.5
Duration of Stay at McLeod Ganj	Less than 1 day	43	22.1
	2-3 days	127	65.1
	4-6 days	15	7.7
	1 week and more	10	5.1
Duration of Stay at Dalai Lama temple Complex	Less than 1 hour	136	69.7
	1-2 hours	39	20.0
	2-4 hours	16	8.2
	4-6 hours	4	2.1
Journey organized by	Self	163	83.6
	Government tourist office	1	0.5
	Travel agent/ Tour operator	28	14.4
	Others	3	1.5

Source: Author's compilation based on primary survey data.

The travel behaviour results show that most visitors travelled with friends (42.6%), followed by the entire family (27.2%) and spouse and children (19.0%). Only a small share travelled alone (9.7%). Most respondents stayed in McLeod Ganj for 2-3 days (65.1%), while 22.1% stayed for less than one day. This means that the destination is primarily a short-stay destination. The amount of time spent at the Dalai Lama Temple Complex was also minimal with 69.7 percent of the respondents spending less than an hour. The visit was mostly self-arranged (83.6%), with a low rate of travel agents (14.4%), or government tourist offices (0.5%). In general, the results indicate that visitors tend to visit in social groups, have short visits, spend very little time in the temple complex, and visit on their own.

TABLE III. ATTRACTIONS VISITED BY VISITORS

Attractions	Frequency	Percent
Religious Attraction		
Tsuglag khang temple	164	84.1
Namgyal monastery	8	4.1
Dalai lama residence	11	5.6
Dalai lama temple complex	12	6.2
Cultural Buildings		
TIPA	22	11.3
Tibetan museum	56	28.7
Tibetan library	5	2.6
TIPA & Tibetan Library	5	2.6
TIPA & Museum	24	12.3
Museum & Library	14	7.2
TIPA, Tibetan Library & Tibetan Museum	7	3.6
No visit	62	31.8

Source: Author's compilation based on primary survey data.

The attraction uses pattern reveals that the primary focus of the visit is the religious attractions. The most frequented destination (84.1%), was the Tsuglagkhang Temple, which validated its focal location in the destination experience. Conversely, the percentage of those who visited the Dalai Lama Temple Complex as a whole was only 6.2%. This indicates that visitors recognized their experience more with individual sites, in particular, the temple, rather than the complex in a larger context. The Dalai Lama house (5.6%), and Namgyal Monastery (4.1%) had fewer visits, which could be due to the restriction to access or reduction in the movement of visitors to these locations. The most visited cultural buildings were Tibetan Museum (28.7%). Nevertheless, only 31.8% of the respondents went to a cultural building. This signifies that the visit was

influenced primarily by the religious essence of the destination, and the broader cultural amenities were secondary.

B. Analysis of the inter-relationships among SM, CEM, VS and BI

The analysis followed the standard two-step PLS-SEM procedure, i.e. (i) assessment of the measurement model, followed by (ii) assessment of the structural model using bootstrapping to test the significance of the relationships (Hair et al., 2019).

C. Measurement Model Assessment:

Bootstrapping was performed with 5,000 subsamples, using a two-tailed test at the 0.05 significance level and percentile bootstrap confidence intervals [12]. The reflective measurement model was assessed through indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator reliability was supported, as all outer loadings exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.70, ranging from 0.737 to 0.886 [13]. As shown in Table 4, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.836 to 0.882, and composite reliability values ranged from 0.891 to 0.918, both exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 and remaining below 0.95 [13]. Convergent validity was established, as the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.672 to 0.737, exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.50 [10]. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio. The Fornell–Larcker criterion was satisfied, and all HTMT values were below the threshold of 0.90 [14]. Common method bias was assessed using Kock's full collinearity VIF approach, and the full collinearity VIF values were below 3.3, suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to be a serious concern [15]. Collinearity in the structural model was also assessed using inner VIF values, which ranged from 1.032 to 1.334, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern [13].

TABLE IV. REFLECTIVE MEASUREMENT MODEL RESULTS

Measurement constructs		Outer loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Spiritual Motivation (SM)			0.855	0.902	0.696
SM1	I visited McLeod Ganj to fulfil my spiritual needs.	0.836			
SM2	Visiting McLeod Ganj gave me an opportunity for prayer and inner peace.	0.829			
SM3	I visited McLeod Ganj because of its Buddhist religious importance.	0.837			
SM4	Participating in religious or spiritual activities was an important reason for my visit.	0.836			
Cultural and Exploratory Motivation (CEM)			0.882	0.918	0.737
CEM1	I visited McLeod Ganj to learn about Tibetan Buddhist culture.	0.864			
CEM2	I visited McLeod Ganj to explore a unique destination.	0.827			
CEM3	I was motivated by the cultural atmosphere of McLeod Ganj.	0.877			
CEM4	Experiencing local heritage and traditions was an important reason for my visit.	0.866			
Visitor Satisfaction (VS)			0.877	0.915	0.730
VS1	Overall, I am satisfied with my visit to McLeod Ganj.	0.886			
VS2	My experience in McLeod Ganj met my expectations.	0.863			
VS3	Visiting McLeod Ganj was a rewarding experience for me.	0.835			
VS4	I am pleased with my decision to visit McLeod Ganj.	0.833			
Behavioural Intention (BI)			0.836	0.891	0.672

BI1	I would like to revisit McLeod Ganj in the future.	0.826	
BI2	I will recommend McLeod Ganj to others.	0.875	
BI3	I will say positive things about McLeod Ganj to other people.	0.833	
BI4	McLeod Ganj would remain one of my preferred spiritual and cultural destinations.	0.737	

Author's compilation based on primary survey data.

TABLE V. DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY (HTMT)

	BI	CEM	SM	VS
BI	--	--	--	--
CEM	0.315	--	--	--
SM	0.305	0.206	--	--
VS	0.688	0.385	0.470	--

Author's compilation based on primary survey data.

D. Structural Model Assessment:

Following the assessment of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated by examining the significance and strength of the hypothesised relationships, along with the model's explanatory power and effect sizes.

TABLE VI. STRUCTURAL MODEL RESULTS (DIRECT EFFECTS)

Hypotheses	Path Coefficient (β)	Standard Error (STDEV)	t-statistics (T)	p-value	Effect size (f^2)	Results
H1: SM $\rightarrow$ VS	0.365	0.062	5.840	0.000	0.172	Supported
H2: CEM $\rightarrow$ VS	0.284	0.062	4.553	0.000	0.105	Supported
H3: SM $\rightarrow$ BI	0.010	0.068	0.145	0.884	0.000	Not Supported
H4: CEM $\rightarrow$ BI	0.078	0.064	1.226	0.220	0.008	Not Supported
H5: VS $\rightarrow$ BI	0.562	0.056	10.005	0.000	0.369	Supported

Author's compilation based on primary survey data.

Note: SM = Spiritual Motivation; CEM = Cultural and Exploratory Motivation; VS = Visitor Satisfaction; BI = Behavioural Intention; β = path coefficient; T = t-statistic; f^2 = effect size. Significance was assessed at $\alpha = 0.05$.

F. Mediation analysis

Mediation was examined using bootstrapped specific indirect effects in SmartPLS. As shown in Table 7, visitor satisfaction significantly transmits the effects of both motivation dimensions to behavioural intention. The indirect effect of

E. Assessing the direct effects and relationships:

Table 6 presents the structural model results for the direct effects, including path coefficients (β), t-statistics, p-values, and effect sizes (f^2). The direct-effects results indicate that both spiritual motivation and cultural and exploratory motivation positively influence visitor satisfaction, while visitor satisfaction positively influences behavioural intention. By contrast, the direct effects of spiritual motivation on behavioural intention and cultural and exploratory motivation on behavioural intention are not significant. This suggest that motivation positively contributes to future behavioural response mainly through evaluative experience and not through direct effects alone. The model explains 25.0% of the variance in visitor satisfaction and 35.8% of the variance in behavioural intention.

cultural and exploratory motivation on behavioural intention through visitor satisfaction is significant ($\beta = 0.160$, $t = 3.966$, $p < .001$), and the indirect effect of spiritual motivation on behavioural intention through visitor satisfaction is also significant ($\beta = 0.205$, $t = 4.990$, $p < .001$). Since both direct paths to behavioural intention are non-significant, while both indirect paths are significant, the results support full mediation in both cases. In simple terms, the findings suggest that motivation shapes future behavioural intention mainly by improving visitor satisfaction.

TABLE VII. SPECIFIC INDIRECT EFFECTS (MEDIATION RESULTS)

Hypothesis	Specific Indirect Effect (β)	Standard Error (STDEV)	t-statistics (T)	p-value	Result
H6: CEM $\rightarrow$ VS $\rightarrow$ BI	0.160	0.040	3.966	0.000	Supported
H7: SM $\rightarrow$ VS $\rightarrow$ BI	0.205	0.041	4.990	0.000	Supported

Source: Author's compilation based on primary survey data.

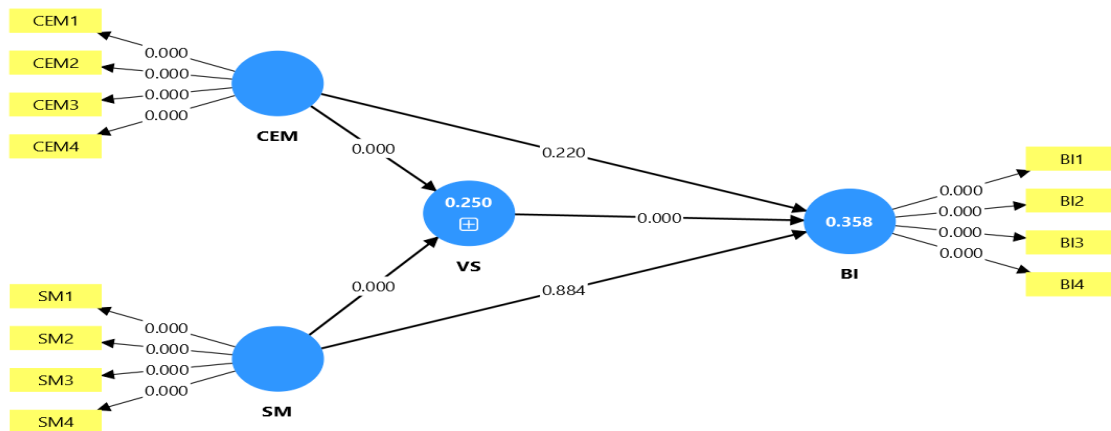


Fig. 2. Results assessment of structural model

Source: Developed by the author based on primary survey data using SmartPLS 4.

V. DISCUSSION

This study examined how SM and CEM shape VS and BI in McLeod Ganj as a sacred destination centred on the Dalai Lama Temple Complex. The results show that VS was the strongest predictor of BI. Visitors were more willing to revisit McLeod Ganj, recommend it to others, and speak positively about it when they left with a favourable overall evaluation of the visit. This finding is consistent with research [2] and [23], who identified satisfaction as a key driver of future behavioural response. It also aligns with religious tourism studies showing that supportive post-visit behaviour depends closely on positive destination experience [5], [20]. The finding suggests that in McLeod Ganj, post-visit response depends less on initial motives alone and more on how well those motives are translated into a satisfying experience.

This pattern is especially meaningful because McLeod Ganj is experienced as more than a single sacred site. It functions as a compact but layered sacred destination in which visitors encounter the Dalai Lama Temple Complex, Tibetan Buddhist culture, local atmosphere, and the broader hill setting together. The descriptive results support this reading. Most visitors were short-stay travellers, most organised the trip on their own, and most spent less than one hour at the Dalai Lama Temple Complex. These patterns suggest that many visitors consume McLeod Ganj as a combined sacred-cultural experience rather than as an extended pilgrimage stay. In such a context, behavioural intention is likely to depend on the overall quality of the visit rather than on the sacred core alone.

Both motivational dimensions significantly increased VS. The positive effect of SM shows that visitors who came for prayer, spiritual fulfilment, inner peace, or Buddhist religious meaning were more likely to evaluate the visit positively. This supports previous work showing that spiritually driven motives improve satisfaction at religious destinations [21], [19], [5]. At the same time, CEM also had a significant positive effect on VS. Visitors who came to learn, explore, and engage with Tibetan culture and heritage were likewise more satisfied with the destination experience. This finding supports the view that sacred destinations are not experienced only through devotion,

but also through culture, heritage, atmosphere, and place exploration [16], [5]. In McLeod Ganj, the religious and cultural sides of the destination appear to work together in shaping visitor evaluation.

The descriptive findings reinforce this interpretation. Although the Tsuglagkhang Temple remained the clear focal point of visitation, the Tibetan Museum also attracted a noticeable share of visitors, while a sizeable group did not engage with wider cultural buildings. This indicates that the religious core remains dominant, but the cultural layer still matters for a meaningful part of the visitor experience. Satisfaction in McLeod Ganj is therefore shaped by a destination setting in which spiritual centrality coexists with selective cultural engagement.

However, neither SM nor CEM had a significant direct effect on BI. This suggests that motive strength alone does not automatically produce revisit intention, recommendation, or positive word of mouth. Visitors may arrive with strong spiritual or cultural reasons for visiting, but those motives do not directly translate into favourable future responses unless the visit itself is positively evaluated. This interpretation is consistent with the broader view that motives often influence post-visit behaviour through experiential judgement rather than through a direct route. It also resonates with recent Buddhist tourism evidence. [18], in a study of Lumbini, reported that cultural and historical attributes had an insignificant effect on BI, suggesting that not every motivational dimension directly shapes future behavioural response in sacred Buddhist settings.

The mediation results clarify this mechanism. VS significantly transmitted the effects of both SM and CEM on BI. Because the direct paths from SM and CEM to BI were non-significant whereas the indirect paths through VS were significant, the findings are consistent with an indirect-only mediation pattern. In practical terms, visitors bring spiritual and cultural-exploratory motives to McLeod Ganj, but these motives produce stronger revisit and recommendation tendencies only when they are converted into a satisfying destination experience.

VS therefore operates as the main explanatory link between motivation and post-visit response.

Overall, the findings suggest that McLeod Ganj performs strongest as a sacred destination when it satisfies visitors who seek both spiritual fulfilment and cultural-exploratory experience. The results do not support a simple motivation-driven explanation of BI. Instead, they show that the destination's ability to deliver a positive combined visit experience is what turns initial motives into favourable future behaviour.

VI. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study makes three main theoretical contributions. First, it supports a layered view of sacred-destination experience. McLeod Ganj is not explained well by a single devotional logic. The results show that both SM and CEM significantly shape VS, which suggests that visitors evaluate sacred destinations through more than one motivational stream. This strengthens the argument that contemporary religious tourism should be understood as multidimensional rather than as purely faith-based travel.

Second, the study clarifies the role of VS in linking motivation to post-visit response. Although both motivational dimensions were important antecedents of VS, neither had a significant direct effect on BI. Instead, the effects of SM and CEM on BI operated through VS. This indicates that in sacred destinations like McLeod Ganj, motivation alone is not sufficient to generate favourable future behavioural response. What matters is whether spiritual and cultural-exploratory motives are converted into a satisfying combined visit experience. In this sense, the study identifies VS as the key explanatory mechanism through which plural motives are translated into behavioural intention.

Third, the study offers a more context-sensitive understanding of satisfaction in sacred tourism. In many tourism models, satisfaction is treated as a general post-visit evaluation. In the present case, however, VS reflects an assessment of a combined sacred-cultural destination centred on a major spiritual anchor. The findings therefore suggest that satisfaction in sacred destinations may capture not only service or experience quality, but also the degree to which spiritual expectations and cultural-exploratory expectations are fulfilled together. This extends religious tourism research by showing how satisfaction functions within a layered Buddhist sacred-destination setting.

VII. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest that destination managers in McLeod Ganj should treat VS as the main pathway to stronger BI. Visitors were more likely to revisit, recommend the destination, and speak positively about it when their overall evaluation of the visit was favourable. Management attention should therefore go beyond attracting visitors to the Dalai Lama Temple Complex and focus more broadly on the quality and coherence of the overall destination experience.

Because both SM and CEM significantly improved VS, planning and interpretation should support both the spiritual and

the cultural-exploratory sides of the destination. The sacred value of the site should be protected and presented in ways that preserve its religious meaning. At the same time, the Tibetan cultural atmosphere and heritage assets should be made more visible and easier to engage with. The results do not suggest that visitors come only for worship or only for exploration. Rather, they indicate that both dimensions matter in shaping a satisfying visit.

The descriptive findings provide a more specific management message. Most visitors were short-stay and self-organised, and visitation was heavily concentrated around the Tsuglagkhang Temple. Many visitors did not engage with the wider cultural buildings. This suggests that McLeod Ganj is often consumed as a compact visit centred on the religious core. Destination managers may therefore need to integrate the main temple attraction more effectively with nearby cultural points so that visitors encounter the destination as a broader sacred-cultural experience rather than as a single-site stop.

The results also point to the need for stronger coordination across the actors who shape the destination experience. Tourism authorities, local administration, cultural institutions, and site-level managers all influence how McLeod Ganj is experienced. Because BI is shaped mainly through VS, improvements should not remain limited to one focal site or one organisation. A more integrated destination approach is likely to improve the coherence of the combined visit experience and, in turn, support stronger future behavioural responses.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study has several limitations. First, data were collected from a single destination, McLeod Ganj, and from visitors approached at the exit point of the Dalai Lama Temple Complex. Although the study was designed to capture the broader combined visit experience, the findings remain context-specific. Second, the use of convenience sampling limits the generalisability of the results. Third, the research design was cross-sectional based on self-reported data, which implies that the results are the perceptions of visitors at a single time and cannot be used to make strong causal statements. Fourth, other factors that could be relevant were not studied since the structural model only incorporated SM, CEM, VS and BI.

Future studies can build upon this study by comparing McLeod Ganj with other Buddhist or spiritual destinations to determine whether the same trend can be replicated in other contexts. Other constructs that could be included include destination image, place attachment, memorable experience, perceived authenticity or perceived value. Future research can be conducted to determine how demographic and travel-related variables change the relationships in the model. Longitudinal or comparative designs would also assist in elucidating how sacred destinations translate visitor motivation into positive future behavioural response over time and across situations.

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