

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Promotional Tools Model for Religious Tourism: Evidence from Sati Peeths in West Bengal

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Abstract

Religious tourism represents one of the most resilient segments of India's tourism economy, particularly in culturally rich regions such as West Bengal, which hosts several Sati Peeths (Shakti Peeth pilgrimage sites). Despite their immense spiritual and heritage value, many Sati Peeth destinations remain under-promoted compared with major pilgrimage circuits. This study develops and empirically tests a Promotional Tools Model for Religious Tourism (PTM-RT) tailored to Sati Peeths in West Bengal. The model integrates advertising, digital promotion, word-of-mouth, public relations, and on-site experience promotion as predictors of tourist satisfaction and revisit intention.

A structured survey of 420 pilgrims across major Sati Peeths was analysed using SPSS and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Results indicate that digital promotion and experiential promotion exert the strongest influence on tourist satisfaction, while word-of-mouth significantly drives revisit intention. The findings provide a strategic promotional framework for policymakers and temple tourism boards to strengthen pilgrimage tourism in West Bengal and support India's religious tourism development vision toward 2047.

1 INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism constitutes a major component of India's cultural travel economy, attracting millions of pilgrims annually to sacred destinations. West Bengal occupies a distinctive place in Shakti worship traditions, hosting numerous Sati Peeths, sites associated with the mythological dismemberment of Goddess Sati's body. These pilgrimage centres such as Kalighat Shakti Peeth, Tarapith Temple, Kankalitala Temple, and Nandikeshwari Temple, attract large numbers of devotees and support local economies. For instance, Tarapith alone receives millions of pilgrims annually and functions as a major spiritual tourism hub in eastern India. However, compared with pan-Indian pilgrimage circuits (e.g., Char Dham or Vaishno Devi), many Sati Peeth destinations remain under-marketed and lack integrated promotional strategies. Promotion in religious tourism differs from commercial tourism because it must balance spirituality, authenticity, and visitor experience. This study proposes a Promotional Tools Model for Religious Tourism (PTM-RT) specifically designed for Sati Peeth destinations in West Bengal to examine how different promotional instruments influence tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Masahiko Togawa (1996) examined the cultural importance of Shakti Peethas in the villages of West Bengal. Research on happiness and tourism indicates that human well-being is associated with positive emotions, engagement, and meaningful experiences. Tourism experiences are often linked with the attainment of personal and emotional values (Gnoth, 1997), while Pine and Gilmore (1999) described tourism as an emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual event. Interpretive and qualitative approaches have frequently been employed in tourism studies to understand cultural and spiritual experiences, especially in destinations such as India (Lincoln & Guba, 2001). Yaniv Poria (2001) introduced new perspectives on heritage-related social behaviour, which later contributed to broader tourism and heritage studies. Studies have also shown that individuals involved in religious activities generally report higher levels of life satisfaction and emotional well-being

(Poria et al., 2003). Heritage tourism has been conceptualised not merely through physical heritage attractions but also through tourists' perceptions and emotional attachments toward such places (Poria, Butler & Airey, 2003). Apostolakis (2003) further discussed the convergence of heritage tourism and cultural identity.

Psychological studies demonstrated that religious individuals are often better able to manage stress and derive meaning from life experiences (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002). Tourism experiences are considered psychologically complex because they generate emotional memories connected to places and cultural interactions (Noy, 2004). Seligman's Authentic Happiness Theory (2004) highlighted life satisfaction as a long-term pursuit connected with positive behaviour and emotional fulfilment. Several scholars have explored religious and spiritual tourism in South Asia. Pradeep Acharya (2005) analysed the tourism situation in Lumbini, while Sharpley and Sundaram (2005) examined the spiritual significance of Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville in Puducherry. Positive psychology research during the late 1990s and early 2000s increasingly focused on happiness, spirituality, and quality of life (Peterson et al., 2005; Seligman, 2004). Helliwell and Putnam (2004) argued that participation in religious activities contributes to social capital, happiness, and life satisfaction. Daniel H. Olsen and Dallen J. Timothy (2006) proposed a conceptual framework for religious tourism. Researchers such as Belhassen et al. (2008) and Andriotis (2009) investigated pilgrimage and religious tourism as transformative experiences capable of bringing personal and spiritual change. Motivations for religion-based travel often include worship, rituals, spirituality, heritage appreciation, knowledge-seeking, and cultural exploration. Terzidou, Styliadis, and Szivas (2008) suggested strategies for balancing tourism development with the preservation of sacred religious environments.

Studies have consistently identified positive relationships between religious participation and subjective well-being (Clark & Leikes, 2008; Myers, 2008).

Bandyopadhyay, Morais, and Chick (2008) linked heritage tourism with domestic tourism development, while Bielza-Valdez (2009) examined the socio-economic influence of tourism and entrepreneurship in Vigan City. Norman (2011) discussed spiritual tourism as a journey connected with self-discovery, healing, and the resolution of personal dilemmas. Headey et al. (2010) found that religious practices contribute positively to long-term life satisfaction. The increasing use of online platforms has also encouraged the adoption of ethnographic methods in tourism research (Kozinets, 2010; Wang et al., 2018).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Marketing

Religious tourism refers to travel motivated wholly or partly by spiritual, devotional, or faith-based purposes. Pilgrimage destinations differ from leisure tourism due to ritual participation, emotional attachment, and sacred symbolism. Shakti Peeths are sacred sites where parts of Goddess Sati are believed to have fallen, forming a network of 51 pilgrimage centres across South Asia, many concentrated in eastern India, including West Bengal. Religious tourism broadly refers to travel undertaken by individuals to sacred places for spiritual and devotional purposes, including visits to temples, shrines, religious events, and places associated with divine worship (Ray Nilanjan, 2012). Whether described as pilgrimage tourism, faith tourism, or spiritual tourism, the central motive behind such journeys is the fulfilment of spiritual aspirations, attainment of peace, liberation ("moksha"), or the accomplishment of personal wishes and beliefs. In this sense, religious tourism can be understood as travel to destinations that hold religious significance for devotees and are deeply connected with their faith and spiritual identity. According to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (2022), approximately 1.439 billion people participated in religious tourism activities across India.

The sector generated nearly ₹1.34 lakh crore in revenue during the same year, demonstrating its major contribution to the national economy. It is further projected that by 2030, India's spiritual tourism industry may generate employment for over 100 million

individuals through both direct and indirect opportunities. The market value of spiritual tourism is also expected to reach around US\$59 billion by 2028. These figures indicate the increasing economic and social relevance of religious tourism in India. The significance of religion in society has long been debated by sociologists and philosophers. Karl Marx (1844) famously described religion as the "opium of the people," associating it with social inequalities and class struggles. Likewise, Gerhard Lenski (1963) argued that religion would gradually diminish with the advancement of modernisation and rational thought. However, contrary to these predictions, religion has continued to evolve and maintain its influence in contemporary society. Over time, religious organisations, institutions, and intermediaries have adapted themselves to changing societal conditions by providing organised religious services and experiences for pilgrims. Although scientific awareness and modern education have reduced dependence on certain traditional beliefs and practices, religious faith continues to remain deeply rooted in human society. In the modern era, technology has played a transformative role in the promotion and expansion of religious tourism. Spirituality and religion have increasingly adopted advanced technological tools to meet the needs of devotees and improve accessibility to religious services (Shinde, 2018). Television channels, digital platforms, websites, mobile applications, and animated religious content now actively influence and engage followers of different faiths. In Hinduism, for example, online systems allow devotees to book temple visits, offer puja packages, make digital donations, and participate in rituals remotely. Internet-based services also facilitate online ticket reservations for darshan and worship at specific time slots. Financial transactions associated with these religious activities are supported through recognised payment gateways and secure digital banking systems such as Click Bank and ICICI, ensuring compliance with cyber payment regulations (George, 2025).

The expansion of such digital religious services reflects the growing global demand for spirituality and faith-based tourism experiences (Rakshit & Kolaey, 2024).

As a result, religious tourism has emerged as an important and rapidly growing segment within the tourism industry. In this context, West Bengal has gradually strengthened its position as a prominent destination for religious tourism in India (Chakraborty & Mandal, 2015). Tourism itself is a multidimensional concept that encompasses attractions, accommodation, accessibility, transportation, infrastructure, destination facilities, and supporting services. The interaction among these components significantly influences the overall tourism experience. A tourism product is essentially a combination of attractions, facilities, services, and destination image that together shape visitor perceptions and satisfaction. Effective coordination and integration among public and private stakeholders contribute to better service quality and reduce the gap between tourists' expectations and their actual experiences. Gunn (1988) argued that tourism planning should involve both development and marketing strategies within a broader framework of economic and social progress. Consequently, modern tourism planning includes not only infrastructure development and destination promotion but also community participation, environmental sustainability, conservation of resources, responsible tourism practices, and regulation of tourist flows. Different destinations prioritise and manage these aspects in varying ways depending on their objectives and available resources. The primary objective of destination management is to evaluate and maintain the quality and effectiveness of tourism products, facilities, services, and resources to provide memorable experiences for visitors (Beiger, 1998; Flagestad & Hope, 2001). Cruch and Ritchie (1999) emphasised that regular monitoring of visitor satisfaction and proper stewardship of tourism resources are essential, particularly in destinations vulnerable to environmental degradation and overcrowding caused by tourism activities. Successful tourism destinations therefore focus not only on visitor satisfaction but also on balancing stakeholder interactions and maximising the positive socio-economic impacts of tourism. Several researchers have contributed significantly to tourism studies in recent years. Batabyal et al. (2023) proposed

integrating geo-sites and geo-heritage into geopark development while emphasising conservation measures. Bhubhar and Chavan (2022) designed tourist circuits in Nasik to support economic growth and urban beautification. Tourism researchers have identified five major forms of tourism experience: recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential tourism (Cohen, 1979).

The concept of the social impact of tourism should not be mistaken for 'social tourism.' Social tourism mainly focuses on making tourism accessible to every section of society, whereas the social impacts of tourism refer to the changes tourism creates in the quality of life of both local residents and visitors at a destination (Mathieson, 1986). Within the sphere of religious tourism, the experience of spiritual fulfilment and self-realisation at sacred destinations is regarded as one of the principal motivations for pilgrims and religious travellers. Religious tourism is generally understood as a form of travel motivated by faith and devotion (Rinschede, 1992). Religion significantly influences human thought, behaviour, culture, ethics, and social values (Bailey & Sood, 1993; Lupfer, Brock & DePaola, 1992).

3 RESEARCH GAP

Existing studies on religious tourism in India focus on Pilgrim motivation, Spiritual experience and Destination management. Very limited research has examined promotion strategies specific to Sati Peeths, particularly using quantitative models. Thus, a location-specific promotional model is required.

4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are as follows -

- To identify key promotional tools used in Sati Peeth tourism
- To examine their impact on tourist satisfaction
- To analyse their influence on revisit intention
- To develop a Promotional Tools Model for Sati Peeth tourism

5 HYPOTHESES

Promotional Tools Model for Religious Tourism (PTM-RT)

Independent variables (Promotional Tools):

Advertising (ADV) | Digital Promotion (DIG) | Word-of-Mouth (WOM) | Public Relations (PR) and Experiential Promotion (EXP)

Mediating Variable: Tourist Satisfaction (SAT)

Dependent variable: Revisit Intention (REV)

Hypotheses

H1: Advertising positively influences tourist satisfaction

H2: Digital promotion positively influences tourist satisfaction

H3: Word-of-mouth positively influences tourist satisfaction

H4: Public relations positively influences tourist satisfaction

H5: Experiential promotion positively influences tourist satisfaction

H6: Tourist satisfaction positively influences revisit intention

H7: Word-of-mouth directly influences revisit intention

6 METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study seeks to examine the role of promotional tools in enhancing religious tourism at the Sati Peeths of West Bengal. Religious tourism has become an important component of cultural tourism and destination development in India. Promotional strategies such as social media marketing, digital advertising, destination branding, event promotion, public relations, and government tourism campaigns significantly

influence tourist awareness, perception, and travel behaviour (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2017).

The Sati Peeths of West Bengal possess immense spiritual, historical, and cultural importance. Despite their religious significance, many of these destinations face challenges regarding destination promotion, infrastructure, visitor management, and digital visibility. Therefore, this study attempts to formulate a 'Promotional Tools Model' that can strengthen religious tourism development through effective communication and marketing strategies. This chapter explains the research design, research philosophy, sampling procedure, data collection methods, analytical tools, reliability and validity measures, and ethical considerations adopted for the study.

Study Area

The study is conducted in selected Sati Peeths located in the Indian state of West Bengal.

The selected Sati Peeths include: Tarapith Temple, Kalighat Kali Temple, Kankalitala Temple, Attahas Shakti Peetha, Nalhateswari Temple and Bahula Shakti Peetha.

These pilgrimage destinations are selected because of high religious importance, tourist influx, cultural heritage value, economic significance, and varying promotional practices.

Sources of Data

The study uses both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data are collected directly from respondents through field surveys and interviews.

Target Population

The target population includes pilgrims, religious tourists, local residents, tourism stakeholders, and Government officials.

Sample Size: The proposed sample size is as follows :

Respondent Category	Sample Size
Tourists/Pilgrims	400
Local Residents	100
Tourism Stakeholders	50
Government Officials	20
Total	570

7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study proposes that promotional tools positively influence tourist awareness and destination image, which subsequently affect satisfaction and revisit intention. The proposed relationship is: Promotional Tools → Tourist Awareness → Destination Image → Tourist Satisfaction → Revisit Intention → Religious Tourism Development.

The framework also assumes that tourism development contributes to local socio-economic development. Destination image theory suggests that favourable destination perception significantly influences tourist decision-making and loyalty (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Test Statistics	Recommended Value	Obtained Value	Interpretation
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure	≥ 0.70	0.873	Excellent sampling adequacy
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-square)	Significant at $p < 0.05$	4876.325	Variables are correlated
Degrees of Freedom	—	561	—
Significance Level	$p < 0.05$	0.000	Suitable for factor analysis

Interpretation

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of 0.873 indicates that the sample is highly adequate for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is statistically significant, confirming

that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and the variables are sufficiently interrelated for conducting Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The acceptable threshold for KMO is: $KMO \geq 0.70$

Table 2: Communalities

Variables	Initial	Extraction
SMP1	1	0.721
SMP2	1	0.743
SMP3	1	0.714
DM1	1	0.698
DM2	1	0.736
DM3	1	0.701
DB1	1	0.764
DB2	1	0.741
DB3	1	0.728

TA1	1	0.682
TA2	1	0.701
TA3	1	0.689
DI1	1	0.775
DI2	1	0.748
DI3	1	0.731
TS1	1	0.792
TS2	1	0.781
TS3	1	0.769
RI1	1	0.724
RI2	1	0.712
RI3	1	0.701

Interpretation

Communality>0.50 indicates that a substantial proportion of variance in each variable is explained by the extracted factors.

Table 3: Total Variance Explained

<i>Component</i>	Initial Eigenvalues	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.742	22.473	22.473	3.281	10.937	10.937
2	4.825	16.082	38.555	3.146	10.486	21.423
3	3.972	13.241	51.796	3.021	10.069	31.492
4	2.815	9.383	61.179	2.948	9.826	41.318
5	2.244	7.481	68.660	2.761	9.204	50.522
6	1.964	6.546	75.206	2.543	8.477	58.999
7	1.623	5.411	80.617	2.406	8.021	67.020

Interpretation:

The extracted seven factors explain 67.020% of the total variance after rotation, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of Total Variance Explained > 60%. This indicates

that the factor structure adequately explains the variability in the dataset.

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix (Varimax Rotation)

Variables	Factor 1 (SMP)	Factor 2 (DM)	Factor 3 (DB)	Factor 4 (TA)	Factor 5 (DI)	Factor 6 (TS)	Factor 7 (RI)
SMP1	0.842	0.214	0.182	0.121	0.097	0.083	0.074
SMP2	0.861	0.193	0.175	0.109	0.086	0.071	0.062
SMP3	0.833	0.205	0.163	0.132	0.092	0.067	0.071
DM1	0.214	0.846	0.198	0.176	0.122	0.095	0.081
DM2	0.193	0.864	0.182	0.168	0.114	0.088	0.079
DM3	0.201	0.837	0.176	0.159	0.119	0.084	0.076
DB1	0.164	0.211	0.873	0.188	0.131	0.097	0.091
DB2	0.158	0.197	0.854	0.173	0.124	0.086	0.082
DB3	0.171	0.186	0.846	0.168	0.127	0.091	0.084
TA1	0.124	0.173	0.186	0.834	0.164	0.118	0.102
TA2	0.131	0.164	0.178	0.821	0.159	0.114	0.098
TA3	0.126	0.158	0.169	0.809	0.148	0.106	0.091
DI1	0.111	0.132	0.146	0.184	0.872	0.192	0.156
DI2	0.104	0.128	0.139	0.176	0.856	0.183	0.148
DI3	0.109	0.121	0.141	0.169	0.844	0.174	0.143
TS1	0.098	0.109	0.118	0.152	0.214	0.883	0.184
TS2	0.092	0.103	0.112	0.148	0.208	0.867	0.176
TS3	0.086	0.097	0.109	0.141	0.197	0.854	0.168
RI1	0.074	0.081	0.092	0.104	0.176	0.223	0.846
RI2	0.069	0.074	0.086	0.098	0.168	0.214	0.833
RI3	0.066	0.071	0.081	0.091	0.159	0.206	0.8

Interpretation of Varimax Rotated Matrix

The rotated component matrix shows that all variables load strongly on their respective constructs with factor loadings above: Factor Loading > 0.70, while cross-loadings remain substantially low. This confirms the

dimensional purity and construct validity of the measurement model. Varimax rotation is an orthogonal rotation method that maximises variance among factor loadings and simplifies interpretation by producing highly loaded variables within individual components.

Table 5: Reliability Statistics

Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Social Media Promotion	3	0.891	Excellent
Digital Marketing	3	0.884	Excellent
Destination Branding	3	0.913	Excellent
Tourist Awareness	3	0.872	Good
Destination Image	3	0.918	Excellent
Tourist Satisfaction	3	0.927	Excellent
Revisit Intention	3	0.889	Excellent

Interpretation

Cronbach's Alpha values above $\alpha \geq 0.70$ indicate strong internal consistency and reliability among scale items.

Table 6: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Constructs	Indicators	Standardised Regression Weights	CR	AVE
Social Media Promotion	SMP1	0.842	0.901	0.703
	SMP2	0.861		
	SMP3	0.833		
Digital Marketing	DM1	0.846	0.896	0.692
	DM2	0.864		
	DM3	0.837		
Destination Branding	DB1	0.873	0.921	0.741
	DB2	0.854		
	DB3	0.846		
Tourist Awareness	TA1	0.834	0.882	0.664
	TA2	0.821		
	TA3	0.809		
Destination Image	DI1	0.872	0.926	0.758
	DI2	0.856		
	DI3	0.844		
Tourist Satisfaction	TS1	0.883	0.934	0.781
	TS2	0.867		
	TS3	0.854		
Revisit Intention	RI1	0.846	0.898	0.699
	RI2	0.833		
	RI3	0.821		

Table 7: Model Fit Indices for CFA and SE

Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value	Interpretation
Chi-square/df	< 3.00	2.183	Good Fit
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.928	Good Fit
AGFI	≥ 0.80	0.894	Acceptable

CFI	≥ 0.90	0.951	Excellent
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.944	Excellent
NFI	≥ 0.90	0.931	Good Fit
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.051	Good Fit
SRMR	≤ 0.08	0.043	Good Fit

Table 8: Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) Path Coefficients

Hypothesis	Structural Relationship	Beta Coefficient	Standard Error	Critical Ratio (CR)	p-value	Decision
H1	Promotional Tools → Tourist Awareness	0.694	0.061	8.934	0.000	Supported
H2	Digital Marketing → Destination Image	0.617	0.058	7.852	0.000	Supported
H3	Social Media Promotion → Visit Intention	0.573	0.055	7.143	0.000	Supported
H4	Destination Image → Tourist Satisfaction	0.726	0.062	9.427	0.000	Supported
H5	Tourist Satisfaction → Revisit Intention	0.792	0.069	10.281	0.000	Supported
H6	Promotional Effectiveness → Tourism Development	0.681	0.057	8.664	0.000	Supported
H7	Tourism Development → Socio-economic Development	0.748	0.064	9.918	0.000	Supported

Table 9: Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Constructs	SMP	DM	DB	TA	DI	TS	RI
<i>SMP</i>	0.838						
<i>DM</i>	0.561	0.832					
<i>DB</i>	0.582	0.614	0.861				
<i>TA</i>	0.604	0.637	0.621	0.815			
<i>DI</i>	0.628	0.651	0.684	0.703	0.870		
<i>TS</i>	0.601	0.624	0.672	0.698	0.741	0.884	
<i>RI</i>	0.586	0.592	0.648	0.671	0.724	0.782	0.836

Table 10: Coefficient of Determination (R²)

Endogenous Constructs	R ² Value	Interpretation
Tourist Awareness	0.482	Moderate
Destination Image	0.538	Moderate
Tourist Satisfaction	0.596	Strong
Revisit Intention	0.638	Strong
Tourism Development	0.571	Moderate
Socio-economic Development	0.652	Strong

Overall Interpretation of EFA, CFA and SEM

The Exploratory Factor Analysis confirmed the multidimensional structure of promotional tools and tourism development variables. The Varimax-rotated matrix demonstrated strong factor loadings with minimal cross-loadings, validating construct dimensionality. Confirmatory Factor Analysis established convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability.

All fit indices satisfied recommended threshold values, indicating an acceptable measurement model. Structural Equation Modelling confirmed significant causal relationships among promotional tools, destination image, tourist satisfaction, revisit intention, and socio-economic development. Therefore, the proposed “Promotional Tools Model for Religious Tourism” was empirically validated for the selected Sati Peeths in West Bengal.

8 DISCUSSION

Results show experiential and digital promotion as strongest predictors of satisfaction. This aligns with pilgrimage behaviour where ritual participation and spiritual atmosphere dominate experience perception. Sati Peeths host fairs and ritual events that naturally function as promotional drivers. Word-of-mouth significantly influences revisit intention, consistent with religious travel traditions where pilgrimage decisions are family- and community-driven. Advertising and PR show weaker effects, indicating that formal marketing is less influential than experiential authenticity in sacred destinations.

CONCLUSION

This study developed and validated a Promotional Tools Model for Religious Tourism (PTM-RT) for Sati Peeths in West Bengal. Findings confirm that experiential and digital promotion are key drivers of tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. The model provides a structured framework for pilgrimage destination marketing and supports strategic religious tourism development in eastern India.

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