

Segmenting visitors encountered at sacred sites based on travelling motivations and constraints

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Although the literature contains several papers that have approached various aspects of religious tourism, the scientific interest is oriented to a lesser extent towards the market itself and its particularities. Therefore, considering the existing gaps in the scientific knowledge, the aim of this article is to identify the segments of visitors encountered at sacred sites, with evidence from Romanian Orthodox monasteries. The segmentation variables taken into account are motivations for and constraints on religious travel. Respondents were grouped into seven segments of visitors with distinct characteristics using the K-mean cluster method. The results indicate that religious motivations of an emotional nature are more intense and present in most segments of visitors. With regard to the constraints, the most frequent and important ones are those of a structural nature. On the one hand, the findings lead to a better understanding of the motivations behind and constraints on visits to sacred sites. From a practical standpoint, the study establishes that those administering sacred sites like monasteries must manage visitors with different religious motivations, those which overall exceed in intensity the factors that inhibit the decision to travel. These findings make significant contributions to the literature because the identification of the categories of travellers encountered at sacred sites representative of the Orthodox religion, characterized simultaneously by the intensity of motivational and restrictive factors, represents a novelty.

Keywords: Cluster analysis, motivations and constraints, religious travel, visitor segmentation.

TRAVEL driven by religious motivations has great importance in many places around the globe, for both pilgrims and the destinations which they travel. Various studies have shown the importance of identifying the types of visitors encountered at sacred sites and have focused on such variables as the relationships among and intensity of religious and non-religious motivations; the activities in which the visitors take part, which range from those of a religious nature to exclusively recreational ones; or the experiences at sacred sites. Compared with other journeys, the characteristics of travel with a religious motivation are significantly different depending on several factors, including religion. Research related to travel experience within religious establishments for the Orthodox population (the third most popular Christian religion in terms of the number of adherents worldwide) is rare, except for a few studies¹⁻⁴. According to Mohammad and Som⁵, travellers can be pushed by intangible and intrinsic desires (internal forces) or pulled by the tangible features

of the destination (external factors). Although theoretically both types of factors can be considered when discussing the motivations behind visiting, say, a monastery, empirical evidence shows that pilgrims and non-pilgrims who visit sacred places are rather driven by internal motivations⁶.

In addition to the benefits, there are some constraints associated with religiously motivated travel, which are key factors influencing the decision whether to make the journey or not. However, the role of the constraints in this process has rarely been studied in the literature⁷.

The present article does aim to define and differentiate the concepts of pilgrimage, religious tourism, spiritual tourism or faith tourism, an extremely vast and difficult endeavour that has been attempted by numerous authors, nor to frame the travellers gathered at religious sites according to the typologies already found in the religious tourism literature. Rather, the aim is to propose a typology of visitors encountered at religious sites represented by Orthodox monasteries, considering religious travel motivations and constraints. The need for a novel approach is mainly due to the peculiarities of Orthodox pilgrimage sites compared with other sacred sites and to specifics of the perceptions, motivations and constraints experienced by travellers due to the influence of their

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culture and religion⁸ (studies in the field of religious travel are rare in the case of the Orthodox religion). For this purpose, we used a framework in the sphere of marketing to identify segments that are highly operational. The study results have important utility for people responsible for administering religious sites and for other operators and tourism organizations, which often fail to manage the religious tourism market effectively⁹, because they view the market as a homogenous mass of consumers, without considering their multiple reasons for travelling¹⁰. However, segmentation of the population is essential, as in most markets.

Regarding the religious tourism market in Romania, the tendency is similar to the global trend, with the number of pilgrims rising, although mainly to monasteries. In Romania, where over 80% of the population is Orthodox, there are over 600 monasteries. Drule *et al.*¹⁰ have identified that in view of those responsible for management, the monastic establishments distinguish and position themselves and gain reputation through one or a combination of the following elements: locations in places of exceptional beauty, possession of relics of saints, miracle-working icons or objects, and spiritual fathers with special skills¹¹. Each monastery is run by an abbot/abbess, who is responsible for administering the religious site; the abbot/abbess has autonomy regarding administration and development of the religious site, of course, taking into account the rules of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The promotional and/or presentational activities of monasteries are conducted both at an individual level by each monastic establishment and collectively. These actions are usually performed by the Mitropolies or Patriarchy, which manage their own pilgrimage offices, radio stations, television stations, publishers, publications, web portals, social networking pages, blogs, etc.

Literature review

Tourist market segmentation has always been a challenge for tourism scholars because the process itself is useful for a better understanding of the needs and desires of various groups of travellers to meet their expectations¹². Over time, a transition from general models of segmentation of the overall tourist market to those used for various forms of tourism may be observed. The first attempts to segment the religious tourism market were made from a general perspective, focusing on the differences between pilgrims and tourists^{13,14}. In this respect, the best-known typology is that proposed by Smith¹⁵, which identifies tourism and pilgrimage at the two ends of the same axis and generally defines the central point between sacred and profane combinations as 'religious tourism'. However, the present study subscribes to Risnchede's¹⁶ definition, including in the sphere of religious tourism every journey that has an exclusively or partially religious motivation.

An increase has been observed in studies addressing religious tourism market segmentation from the perspective of motivations for religious travel for various religions and types of sacred places. This intensification of scientific interest may be due to several factors, including the increasing dynamics and complexity of the religious tourism market¹⁷, the fact that tourism operators typically view this market as homogenous, and the hypothesis that religious site managers, and religious tourism promoters and operators must know the religious motivations and expectations of different categories of visitors to sacred sites in order to satisfy them¹⁸⁻²¹. Despite all the progress from the scientific point of view, religious tourism market segmentation remains problematic in terms of its definition and operational consistency. Therefore, we find promising the opportunity for a study of religious motivations in a less-studied religion (Orthodoxy), with monasteries as tourist destinations (with several exceptions²²⁻²⁴, monasteries represent religious attractions that are rarely approached) and a conceptual framework that includes not only motivations but also travel constraints.

Regarding the religious motivations, there are several factors that specialists in the domain consider to be representative of religious travel^{25,26} and which correspond to the features of religiously motivated travel in the Orthodox religion: redeeming the soul, finding God, strengthening faith in God, becoming closer to God, praying for various needs, participating in religious services, confessing sins, repenting, giving thanks for benefaction, finding a different world, obtaining guidance, finding inner peace and maintaining tradition (religious benefits)^{27,28}.

According to the literature, the main restrictive factors that influence travel are time, health, lack of interest, fear, distance, companionship, aspects of a social, physical or financial nature, and family life cycle²⁹. Crawford *et al.*³⁰ grouped leisure constraints into the following three categories: structural constraints (e.g. financial resources, family life cycle, work schedule), intrapersonal constraints (e.g. depression, anxiety, stress) and interpersonal constraints (e.g. influence of and interaction with others). Given the specifics of religious travel, the present study uses an adaptation of this list, considering the results of the study by Tirca and Stănculescu³¹. Thus, following an investigation among people responsible for Romanian monasteries, the two authors have identified that among the main reasons inhibiting visits to monasteries are convenience, fear of not finding what one seeks, weak faith and worries/stress (intrapersonal constraints), lack of money, personal problems and lack of time (structural constraints), and the influence of others and fear of being scolded (interpersonal constraints)³¹.

In order to identify segments that are highly operational, the overall approach of the present study involves the adoption of a marketing framework. Consequently, the factors considered in this study are grouped according to Andreasen and Kotler's³² framework, which divided

the behavioural drivers into the following four categories: benefits of adopting a behaviour (motivational factors), costs (constraints), influence of reference groups and self-assurance. It may be noteworthy that in the marketing literature, the influential factors most frequently addressed are the costs and benefits; these two represent key element in the consumer exchange process³². However, consumer behaviour is not only influenced by those two factors. Situations can arise in which the benefits are greater than the costs and the individual's consumption behaviour does not appear as if it can be influenced by persons from the individual's peer group, especially if the product or service is consumed publicly and presents a high social risk. Moreover, if the benefits exceed the costs and the peer group has a favourable attitude toward the consumption behaviour but the individual does not consider himself/herself to be able to adopt the behaviour, then he/she will not act.

Methodology and results

The Romanian Orthodox population was investigated, from all over the country, aged over 15 years. The aim was to obtain results that are statistically significant nationally for the Orthodox population. One filter variable was considered, namely religion. As the sampling method, we combined quota sampling and probabilistic sampling. Information collected on the 2011 census by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics was used as the sampling frame. The following three characteristics were considered for the sampling frame: residence environment (rural or urban), sex (male or female) and age (under 34 years – young, 35–54 years – adults, over 55 years – seniors). To geographically cover the entire country when collecting the data, the distribution of the population by developing regions was also considered; to a large extent, these areas correspond to the Mitropolies in the Romanian Orthodox Church (a Mitropolie is an administrative structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church that rules over several eparchies). Crossing the three above-mentioned criteria yielded a total of 12 layers. Due to the unequal weights of the layers in the sample to organizational and time constraints respectively, 15 questionnaires were distributed to 115 interviewers; the interviewers were Faculty of Economics and Business Administration students who had passed the Marketing Research examination. A total of 1725 questionnaires were collected; however, only 1611 were validated (Table 1).

The SPSS program and the non-hierarchical K-mean cluster method were used to group the visitors into segments based on the variables noted in the literature review. The data were standardized before cluster analysis.

Cluster 1 is composed of 124 persons and represents 7.70% of the sample (Table 1). For this segment, the religious benefits are less important because the values

obtained are well below the average values of the sample. The most important benefits are tradition and finding inner peace, while those related to religious ritual and relationship with God are the least important.

The most significant barriers to visiting a monastery are daily concerns, money and lack of convenience. The fact that the average values of these costs are higher than those obtained with the benefits is likely to prevent pilgrimages. However, two of the costs, namely fear of not finding what one seeks and lack of time have lower values compared with the entire sample. The influence of others is unlikely to hinder pilgrimages for this segment. However, weak faith can influence pilgrimages to some extent.

Cluster 2 includes 156 individuals and represents 9.68% of the sample (Table 1). Religious benefits are somewhat important for these people; however, the average values of the cluster are lower by almost one point than the average scores of the entire sample. The most significant benefits are finding peace, tradition and closeness to God, while the less important benefits are repentance, salvation of the soul and confession of sins. The most important barriers to visiting a monastery are daily concerns, lack of convenience, money and personal issues. It should be noted that the average value of the lack of convenience is the highest among the clusters. All the costs considered have higher average values than the global sample, which indicates a superior sensitivity. The reference groups exercise an average influence that is much higher than in most of the clusters. Moreover, weak faith of the respondents can prevent them from visiting monasteries; the average score of this variable is higher than in most of the clusters.

Cluster 3 consists of 352 respondents and represents 21.85% of the sample (Table 1). In the case of these pilgrims, most religious benefits have higher values than the average values of the global sample, except the variables related to confession, repentance, seeking another world and tradition. The most important benefits are closeness to God, finding inner peace, strengthening faith in God and prayer. The most significant barriers are daily concerns, lack of money and personal problems, for which the mean values are higher than in most of the clusters. The reference groups and weak faith have minor influences on the decision to visit a monastery, with average values close to the sample score.

Cluster 4 is composed of 259 individuals and represents 16.08% of the sample (Table 2). For these visitors, the average values of the benefits considered are lower than those of the global sample. The most significant benefits are finding inner peace, becoming closer to God, praying and giving thanks for benefaction. Although the most important barriers are lack of money, daily concerns and personal problems, the lower average values of these barriers indicate a reduced sensitivity to costs. Because the average values for the influence of reference groups and weak faith are below those recorded in the sample,

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Table 1. Mean scores for the entire sample (M_S), cluster 1 (M_C1), cluster 2 (M_C2) and cluster 3 (M_C3)

Religious benefits	M_S	M_C1	M_C2	M_C3	Costs/constraints	M_S	M_C1	M_C2	M_C3
Becoming closer to God and holy things	4.00	1.61	2.99	4.37	Daily concerns/stress	3.05	2.91	3.53	3.72
Obtaining guidance	3.61	1.79	2.72	3.68	Fear of not finding what one seeks	1.70	1.56	2.58	1.44
Repenting	3.27	1.35	2.41	3.19	Lack of convenience	2.42	2.68	3.40	2.71
Redeeming the soul	3.47	1.39	2.40	3.63	Personal problems	2.89	2.27	3.26	3.45
Confessing sins	3.21	1.42	2.34	3.09	Lack of money	3.12	2.86	3.27	3.71
Strengthening faith in God	3.90	1.52	2.90	4.23	Lack of time	1.63	1.54	2.56	1.49
Finding a different and better world	3.35	1.60	2.63	3.16	Influence of reference groups				
Finding God	3.63	1.39	2.51	3.85	Fear of being scolded	1.45	1.19	2.06	1.24
Finding inner peace	4.13	2.32	3.58	4.26	Influence of others	1.92	1.69	3.06	2.03
Participating in religious services	3.58	1.93	2.59	3.63	Self-assurance				
Praying for various needs	3.84	1.65	2.87	4.16	Weak faith	2.04	2.38	2.88	2.19
Giving thanks for benefaction	3.83	1.98	2.85	3.91					
Maintaining tradition	3.57	2.60	3.26	3.33					

Table 2. Mean scores for cluster 4 (M_C4), cluster 5 (M_C5), cluster 6 (M_C6) and cluster 7 (M_C7)

Religious benefits	M_C4	M_C5	M_C6	M_C7	Costs/constraints	M_C4	M_C5	M_C6	M_C7
Becoming closer to God and holy things	3.46	4.28	4.64	4.88	Daily concerns/stress	2.66	3.33	1.73	3.76
Obtaining guidance	2.94	4.03	4.25	4.58	Fear of not finding what one seeks	1.29	3.46	1.23	1.28
Repenting	2.42	3.67	3.95	4.65	Lack of convenience	2.01	3.36	1.44	2.39
Redeeming the soul	2.65	3.92	4.18	4.62	Personal problems	2.46	3.53	2.01	3.34
Confessing sins	2.37	3.78	3.94	4.36	Lack of money	2.75	3.63	2.07	3.74
Strengthening faith in God	3.23	4.33	4.54	4.86	Lack of time	1.19	3.25	1.20	1.27
Finding a different and better world	2.69	3.86	4.02	4.44	Influence of reference groups				
Finding God	2.73	4.20	4.34	4.78	Fear of being scolded	1.06	3.13	1.23	1.59
Finding inner peace	3.76	4.35	4.62	4.81	Influence of others	1.43	3.29	1.35	1.14
Participating in religious services	3.03	3.92	4.19	4.51	Self-assurance				
Praying for various needs	3.45	4.20	4.27	4.70	Weak faith	1.61	3.05	1.31	1.88
Giving thanks for benefaction	3.42	4.07	4.44	4.73					
Maintaining tradition	3.08	3.91	3.98	4.37					

there is a small probability of them hindering a visit to a monastery.

Cluster 5 consists of 153 people and represents 9.50% of the entire sample (Table 2). In this cluster, the benefits taken into consideration scored higher than the average value in the sample. The most important benefits are finding inner peace, those involving one's relationship with God and prayer. The average values of all the costs exceed three; however, the highest values are encountered for personal problems, fear of not finding what one seeks and fear of wasting one's time. These respondents are the most susceptible to the influence of others. Additionally, although religious benefit scores are superior compared with the entire sample, the possibility of weak faith preventing pilgrimage is the greatest.

Cluster 6 includes 317 respondents and represents 19.68% of the sample (Table 2). The most important benefits of visiting a monastery are related to the relationship with God, finding inner peace, giving thanks for benefaction, religious ritual, finding guidance and redemption of the soul. Individuals in this cluster consider the noted barriers to have a small or very small influence on their decision whether to visit monasteries. Variables like money, personal issues, daily concerns and lack of

convenience recorded the lowest average values among the clusters.

Cluster 7 consists of 250 individuals and represents 15.52% of the sample (Table 2). This cluster registered the highest values for all the religious benefits and also the highest probability of daily worries and money preventing pilgrimages. These respondents believe that they will find what they seek when travelling to sacred sites; thus doing so is not considered a waste of time. There is a very low probability of others hindering the decision to visit a monastery. Despite the importance of religious benefits, the possibility of weak faith preventing these visits is only slightly lower than in the case of the global sample.

Conclusion

The results of the cluster analysis show the existence of seven segments of travellers to monasteries, which can be assigned or characterized as follows:

Group 1: Leisure travellers (the religious benefits are much less important) influenced in great measure by structural constraints (money and daily concerns). For them, the costs outweigh the possible benefits.

Group 2: 'Moderate' religious travellers in an emotional way (the religious benefits have medium importance, especially those of an affective nature), mostly inhibited by structural, interpersonal and intrapersonal constraints.

Group 3: Religious travellers who travel for existential and emotional reasons (the religious benefits of finding God and strengthening one's faith respectively, the emotional ones are more important, while those related to active participation in various religious actions or ceremonies are less influential), inhibited by structural and intrapersonal constraints.

Group 4: 'Moderate' religious travellers in an emotional and partially existential way (the religious benefits are less important compared with the global sample, except those associated with finding peace and closeness to God), influenced in great measure by structural constraints (lack of money, daily concerns).

Group 5: Religious travellers in an emotional and existential way (mostly preoccupied with finding inner peace and having close relationships with God, but less willing to become involved in such religious rituals and activities as religious services and confession of sins), mostly inhibited by structural, interpersonal and intrapersonal constraints.

Group 6: Religious travellers in an existential, participatory and emotional way (the religious benefits have high values except those related to repentance), not influenced by any types of constraints or barriers when deciding to travel to sacred sites.

Group 7: 'Devoted' religious travellers in an existential, participatory and emotional way (all medium values over four) but who are concerned with or inhibited to some extent by structural constraints (financial costs, daily concerns).

Given the results, the study has implications for both academics and people responsible for managing visits who want to better understand the behaviour of visitors with religious motivations. Overall, religious motivations of an emotional nature are more intense and present in most segments of visitors; regarding the constraints, the most frequent and important are those of a structural nature. The knowledge that the religious tourism market is not a homogeneous mass of consumers clearly has potential implications not only for those responsible for administering sacred sites, but also for tourism operators and other organizations. As seen earlier in the text, each cluster identified has its own distinct motivations and, relatedly, most likely different behaviours and distinct degrees of satisfaction with experiences with the religious sites. Consequently, people responsible for managing visits to sacred sites must acknowledge these differences and adapt their actions to meet the optimum level of satisfaction for all the parties involved. Moreover, those administering monasteries can more efficiently manage the groups of visitors who simultaneously visit a site.

Another practical implication for tourism operators and other organizations involved in organizing visits is that based on the results of this study, they might provide personalized offers for each segment of visitors, considering such aspects as religious and additional leisure activities, price level and journey length.

Meanwhile, a deeper understanding of the religious motivations of the visitors may help those responsible for monasteries and organizing visits attract more people using the findings in their promotional activities. The results of the research also reveal the constraints related to religious travel decisions; thus, people responsible for organizing visits and administering monasteries may develop intervention programmes to diminish them.

Regarding the academic importance and implications, the approach of this study is novel. The research not only confirms the existence of several motivations for and constraints on religious travel, but also identifies the existence of segments of visitors encountered at sacred sites, aspects that provide insights for the religious tourism literature. Moreover, the actual study is one of few that consider monasteries as sacred sites. The methodology developed by the authors allows certain measurement standardization; thus, future studies may concern (a) comparisons among populations with different religions, (b) comparisons among various religious sites of the same religion (Orthodox), and/or (c) international comparisons of the same type of religious sites of a religion.

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