

Spiritual Tourism between India and Pakistan: A Framework for Business Opportunities and Threats

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Humans and societies have always been interested in spirituality since the dawn of civilization. Only recently various businesses started adapting various dimensions of spirituality. The travel and tourism industry has also appreciated this change and has identified a new product known as spiritual tourism. In today's world, spiritual tourism offers business opportunities for all countries with different cultures and religions. This conceptual paper highlights business related opportunities and threats of spiritual tourism between two countries with unfriendly relations, India and Pakistan. The research in this paper is based on a theoretical analysis of publications on tourism potential and business growth of spiritual tourism that could be adopted by these two countries. The conclusion presents a framework indicating business opportunities and threats for spiritual tourism that is a unique contribution to theory of tourism marketing and management. An empirical study could be conducted to analyse the significance and implications of opportunities and threats identified in this paper by inquiring from spiritual tourists and operators in related countries.

Field of Research: Marketing, New Product Development, Services Marketing

Keywords: Spiritual tourism, India, Pakistan, business, opportunities and threats.

1. Introduction

Business activities are growing despite the global unrest and financial, economic and political instability around the world. In the meantime, today humanity is living in a post secularist era where the importance of religion and need for spirituality is growing. A major reason for this change is the interest of people towards spiritual teachings, practices and peace rather than the religious dogma. This shift in human behaviour inclined towards different aspects of spirituality has motivated various business groups and service providers from all major industries to include some dimensions of spirituality. The tourism industry has also recognised this change and presented spiritual tourism as its niche product related to spirituality.

India and Pakistan recognise the importance of tourism, but they fail to identify potential benefits from mutual tourism. Spiritual tourism is considered in many countries as a new tourism product, but for Indians and Pakistanis it has been the primary motive for traveling. Indian and Pakistani spiritual tourists stay busy throughout the year with various spiritual festivities related to the solar and lunar calendars. The emerging product of spiritual tourism can spell several opportunities for both countries.

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Indians and Pakistanis living in different parts of the world, regularly travel to fulfil their religious and spiritual desires in various ways to connect with the Supreme Being, or the Higher Spirit. All of these pilgrims or religious tourists can be categorised as 'spiritual tourists'. The discussion on the rise in demand for spiritual tourism indicates various opportunities as well as threats for both nations. This paper suggests the important role that could be played by all key supply side stake holders of spiritual tourism and highlights the business related opportunities and threats that could be considered for implementing any spiritual tourism programs or packages across India and Pakistan.

An obvious shift in people's attitudes towards spirituality has been observed (Ferrari & Cristofori, 2010). Authors studying in different areas of social and business sciences have also appreciated the growing interest in the study of various dimensions of spirituality (Stan & Turcescu, 2011). This revolution in trends of business and research applications has instigated a change in business philosophies among many worldwide industries (Cohen, 2012; Ferrari & Cristofori, 2010). The tourism industry is one of the most influenced by the latest business perceptions and future economic expectations by the business (Tilson, 2005; Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

Tourism is academically divided into many types where special interest tourism entertains tourists with special interests, who are keen to fulfil their special and uncommon travel needs and spend money. Recently, spiritual tourism in the tourism and travel publications is identified and marketed as a substantial subset of special interest tourism, which encompasses pilgrimage and religious tourism (Haq & Jackson, 2009; Finney, Orwig & Spake, 2009).

WTO (2013) reported that international tourist arrivals grew from 25 million in 1950, to 278 million in 1980, 528 million in 1995, to a four figure growth of 1,035 million in 2012. In 2012 it contributed 9% to GDP, and generated 1.3 trillion in export dollars constituting 6% of world's export. UNWTO has forecasted that worldwide tourist arrivals will reasonably increase, and could reach to 1.6 billion by the year 2020, spending a total of \$2 trillion per year, or \$5 billion a day WTO (2009). Moreover, international travel demand increased and created more than 4 million new jobs and the travel and tourism sector outperformed manufacturing, financial and retail (WTO, 2013). Recently, tourism market shares of emerging economies of Asia and Pacific have increased from 30% in 1980 to 47% in 2012 and is expected in long term future to increase to 57% by 2030 (WTO, 2013). Therefore, this paper underlines the magnitude of spiritual tourism with respect to the business opportunities and threats for the business growth and social development of India and Pakistan.

It is worth noting that the intra-regional tourism is expanding within Asia's major sub-regions due to the cultural and historical similarities (Medhekar & Haq, 2012). Apparently, Asian outbound tourism is predominantly limited to cross-border trips and Asia's sub-regions are preferred, such as mainland Chinese traveling to other Chinese locations, Thais to Laos and Vietnam, Arabs to other Middle Eastern destinations and South Asians that include Indians and Pakistanis within the same region (Duarah & Bhaskar, 2013; Cohen, 2012). The numerical significance of Asian intra-regional tourism and perhaps pre-modern oriented traveling practices such as pilgrimage has attracted little attention in tourism studies (Cohen, 2012; Medhekar & Haq, 2012). However, this crucial development in the growth of Asian tourism in recent decades has seen a spectacular rise in domestic and spiritual tourism, which needs to be capitalised by Indian and Pakistani public and private tourism operators.

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The above mentioned discussion implied towards the research problem for this study. The research problem that emerged was to identify the business opportunities and threats that could be considered for the success of spiritual tourism between India and Pakistan. The research problem was acknowledged as the need for working on cross border spiritual tourism as well as growing business and diplomatic vacuum between both countries. In India and Pakistan, spiritual tourism has always been a traditional occurrence and practice embedded in the vigorous socio-cultural, historical and spiritual roots in context of pilgrimage. Spiritual tourism accounts for major travel within India and Pakistan that can strategically reshape the socio-economic development of both countries.

This paper highlights the fact that India and Pakistan need to recognise the business opportunities and threats related to spiritual tourism for their socio-economic development. They have a rich diversity of ethnic groups with distinctive lifestyles and religious beliefs. Due to spiritual motivation, spiritual tourists are inclined to travel to satisfy their specific needs even when the economic, financial and political situation is not favourable. Many politicians and media people talk about tourism opportunities between both countries but there is no workable platform. Therefore this study was aimed to have a clear framework highlighting business opportunities and threats for spiritual tourism. The framework presented in this paper is unique from other related studies and provides a distinctive contribution to the body of knowledge on tourism in general and spiritual tourism specifically.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Part two explores the literature review related to spiritual tourism in India and Pakistan. Part three discusses the research problem and methodology. Part four discusses the possible business opportunities for spiritual tourism between India and Pakistan and cooperation for economic, social, political, media leading to peace initiatives between the two countries. Part five examines the threat for the development of spiritual tourism in context of loss of local tourism, information overflow, terrorism and government foreign relationships between the two countries and proposes a framework for opportunities and threats for the development of spiritual tourism in both countries. Final section provides conclusion and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Spiritual Tourism

Travelling for pilgrimage has been one of the oldest reasons for people to travel and journey far and near (Medhekar & Haq, 2012; Jauhari, 2010). A review of current literature on spiritual tourism deliberates that as a practice it has been disguised as pilgrimage or religious tourism when the differences are evident (Haq & Jackson, 2009; Finney, Orwig & Spake, 2009; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Spiritual tourist participants have described themselves in a number of different ways; as 'travellers', 'seekers', 'pilgrims', 'devotees', 'conference/events/festival attendants' and 'adventurers', etc. 'Interestingly, many spiritual tourists have been classified by academic researchers as practising pilgrimage, religious, special interest, cultural or experiential tourists' (Haq & Jackson, 2009, p. 142).

The recent research in this area implies that pilgrimage and religious tourism are practically the subsets of spiritual tourism (Haq & Medhekar, 2013; Phukan, Rahman & Devdutt, 2012; Jauhari, 2010; Finney et al., 2009). A spiritual tourist has been defined as "someone who visits a specific place out of the usual environment, with the intention of spiritual meaning and/or growth, without any overt religious compulsion, which could be religious or non-

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religious in nature, but within the Divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling” (Haq & Jackson, 2009, p.143).

Historically, South Asia or the Indo-Pak subcontinent has been recognized as the home of global spiritual activities attracting religious and spiritual tourists associated with all religious affiliations to satisfy their spiritual obligations and aspirations (Haq & Medhekar, 2013; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; James, 2000; Gupta, 1999). Spiritual tourism could be called as the last link in tourism connection between India and Pakistan, given its common socio-cultural heritage, besides Bollywood and cricket. History has witnessed several oral and written records of people traveling for spiritual experiences and accomplishments to different areas of this special region (Ramesh & Joseph, 2012; Jauhari, 2010; Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Richter, 1999).

In contrast with other types of tourism, the business groups and researchers have been unsuccessful to deliver any reliable statistics presenting the realistic picture of spiritual tourism between India and Pakistan (Haq & Medhekar, 2013; Phukan et al., 2012; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). Thus international and national tourism organisations should try to collect international visitor data, particularly related to spiritual tourism between countries and across the border. Public and private tourism operators highlight records of Indian and Pakistani persons and groups living in these two countries, and the diaspora living in other developed countries that travel frequently to fulfil their religious and spiritual needs in order to connect with God or the Supreme Being. All of these pilgrims or religious tourists are suggested to be collected under the umbrella of integrated label of ‘spiritual tourists’.

2.2 Indian Spiritual Tourism

At least half of all international tourists travelling to South Asia visit India (Cooper, 2009; Bhattacharya & Narayan, 2005; Aggarwal, 2000). Spiritual tourism as a ritual and religious practice or a sacred journey in India is massive and still growing for centuries, despite the uncertainty regarding the economic, social and political future (Phukan et al., 2012; Singh, 2010; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; James, 2000). Spiritual tourism is also an immortal business practice due to its acceptance by the masses and that its negative externalities are perceived to be quite minimal (Gupta, 1999). The Kumbh Mela in Allahabad and the pilgrimage in Banaras to the Ganges River, and many Indian temples in South India are recognised as the most celebrated spiritual destinations for Hindus in India (Phukan et al., 2012; Gangwar & Joshi, 2008; Rinschede, 1992).

Many spiritual tourists even from the more profane known West are also turning to spirituality and visiting various ashrams that accommodate thousands of local and foreign spiritual tourists on a spiritual and religious retreat (Ramesh & Joseph, 2012; Singh, 2010; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Aggarwal, 2000). From ancient time’s people in the Indian subcontinent have travelled to religious places for pilgrimage from Kashmir in the north to Kanyakumari in the south, to Bodhgaya, Golden Sikh temple at Amritsar, to Salim Chisti’s Darga in Ajmer, Varanasi and Ganges in the East to Ajmer and Amritsar to Lahore in the West (Medhekar & Haq, 2012). The government of India has also developed many religion based spiritual tourism circuits for Buddhism, Sufism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism Sikhism and Sarva Dharma (Medhekar & Haq, 2012; Singh, 2010). Singh (2010) has focussed his research towards Buddhism related spiritual tourism in India and gives the credit to the exile of Tibetan Buddhism to India as the key factor. Many religious and non-religious spiritual tourists are visiting Buddhist sites in India, especially Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh, which is based on a process that has rejuvenated people’s interest in

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Buddhism and its religious attraction (Singh, 2010). It also includes the famous spiritual tourism circuit promotion by the Indian Railways called 'In the Footsteps of Buddha Temple Tour' which attracts many Buddhist tourists from all over the world (Medhekar & Haq, 2012).

Spirituality and India have been connected for many millennia and people have been traveling for this purpose following different religions. Recently, researchers from various disciplines have studied and contributed to the knowledge base of spiritual tourism in India. Cooper (2009) discussed the religious significance of Indian rivers that are considered as gods and goddesses and worshipped by many Hindus. Most famous temples and Hindu festivals including Maha Kumbh Mela are organised on the river banks (Cooper, 2009). Phukan et al. (2012) studied the development of Indian spiritual tourism and analysed its emergence from an academic perspective. A rampant growth in spiritual tourism is observed. A detailed literature review indicates that effective segmentation and an adoption of market development strategy is the key for business success of Indian spiritual tourism (Phukan et al., 2012). Segmentation for Indian spiritual tourism is also emphasised by Aggarwal (2000) as she observes the rise of female spiritual tourists and their domination of the future market. Compared to above mentioned studies on Indian spiritual tourism, this paper compares its range and scope with Pakistani spiritual tourism and addresses various cross-border business opportunities and threats.

2.3 Pakistani Spiritual Tourism

The tourism business opportunities in Pakistan have always been lost due to bad management and mishandling of the marketing of its several tourism assets (Haq & Wong, 2013; Richter, 1999; Curtiss, 1996). The socialist governments applied a secularist agenda and developed Western style bars and casinos, which had decent success to attract non-religious foreign tourists for some cost effective and fun oriented tourism in Pakistan. The religious regimes shifted the government policies and nation's mentality towards rightist Islam. The ultra-religious approach created the extreme spiritual tourism product of Madrassas or religious schools to promote spiritual and religious education for global Muslim travellers. These religious schools were funded by some Middle Eastern and American Governments to promote the spirit and power of war against infidel communist Russian forces invading Afghanistan (Rahman & Bukhari, 2006). The success of these Madrassas was not sustainable as they crashed when the Russian forces left Afghanistan.

The Pakistani government was always ineffective in marketing its tourism and failed to create brand awareness of Pakistani tourism; for example, very few tourists around the world are aware of the fact that trekking and skiing in the Himalayas would mean tourism in Pakistan. Recently, spiritual tourism and its subsets of pilgrimage and religious tourism have been acknowledged by the Pakistani Government as a potential progressive area of tourism (Haq & Wong, 2013; Cooper, 2009). The market for spiritual tourism in Pakistan consists of tourists who visit Buddhist monuments, mosques, temples, tombs and spiritual leaders for their spiritual development. Pakistan Tourism Development Cooperation (PTDC) statistics show a significant decline in foreign tourists visiting Pakistan after 9-11 or the events of 11th September, 2001, yet the guests coming for spiritual motives have been regular (Haq & Medhekar, 2013).

Currently the Pakistani tourism market is in decline because of political instability and security crisis. The government of Pakistan is seeking special interest tourism products and services to bring back the tourist dollars in the country. The ideas and motivation are right, but not being followed by the right strategies. Pakistan needs to be recognised as a spiritual

tourism hub for Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists. The suggestion of Cohen (2012) about intra-regional tourism should be appreciated and applied to attract more Indian tourists, especially the ones who visit Pakistan across border for other social or trade reasons. The growth of spiritual tourism in Pakistan can be multiplied if it is complemented with Indian tourism and hence this paper presents a framework on the business opportunities and threats for more clear business directions in the future. The literature review indicates that earlier studies have not dealt with the business opportunities and threats related to spiritual tourism between India and Pakistan nor have they identified and suggested any business model or framework for the same. This paper focussed on it and proposed a framework of opportunities and threats for the development of spiritual tourism.

3. Research Problem and Methodology

The underlined research problem for this study was: 'what are the business opportunities and threats that could be considered for the success of spiritual tourism between India and Pakistan'? The research problem was recognised due to the significant gap in tourism and business literature which is void of any research on business opportunities and threats related to spiritual tourism in general, and between India and Pakistan in particular. There is growing research interest in spiritual tourism, but the business dimensions still seem to be neglected, which triggered this research paper. Moreover, the business opportunities and threats need to be presented as a framework for tourism study and management purposes. The research problem was addressed by conceptually studying academic and government publications on tourism potential and business growth of spiritual tourism that could be applied for these two countries.

The two authors of this paper applied an exploratory approach to study, observe and identify business opportunities and threats related to spiritual tourism between India and Pakistan from each country's perspective. The two authors of this paper used their Indian and Pakistani origins, current socio-economic and political relationships between the two countries and experiences of spiritual tourism in their respective countries to specify the business opportunities and threats for India and Pakistan respectively. The business opportunities and threats for spiritual tourism for each country were then combined and presented as a functional framework by both authors to present a comprehensive understanding of research issues in this exploratory paper.

4. Business Opportunities of Spiritual Tourism

An understanding of the concept and need for spiritual tourism leads this discussion towards the related business opportunities. A study of various tourism networks and business successes around the world indicate towards opportunities that could be identified for spiritual tourism in this paper as discussed in the following section.

4.1 Economic Development

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industry and business that is independent of any specific geographical or demographical group. It can be said that if any economy indicators show growth, then tourism is always the first to prosper and flourish. Even when global economies are slowing down and various goods and services are reaching saturation, tourism picks up again and again from the maturity or decline stages of a product life cycle.

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Fort and Schipani (2007) also stressed on economic development as the first opportunity in tourism business management.

At the beginning of this century, in 2001, three quarters of market share in terms of receipts was captured by United States and Europe and only 1% US \$ 4.7 billion of the total world receipts of US\$ 462.2 billion by South Asian Region (WTO, 2009). However, within few years the trend shifted, and the Asian tourism started blooming due to its strong domestic demand and more effective recognition of the business opportunities associated with it. The number of international tourist arrivals is projected to reach 1.6 billion by 2020, spending a total of \$2 trillion per year, and by 2030 the arrivals will increase to 1.8 billion, supporting 337,819,000 jobs with a significant socio-economic impact (Duarah & Bhaskar, 2013; WTO, 2013; WTO, 2009).

4.2 Open Media Cooperation

The importance of media in personal and business lives today does not need any prelude. Tourism between India and Pakistan has always been seen as a competition arena, but spiritual tourism as an opportunity can change that outlook. India and Pakistan can combine their media outlets to project and present spiritual tourism as a combined product appreciating all religious and spiritual traditions adopted and practised in both countries. The entertainment industry as a significant media player can be used by presenting various cross-border music, movies and shows associated with local areas famous for some spiritual people, place or events.

Sports' stars from both countries could be hired or invited to support or endorse the marketing of spiritual tourism business between both countries. For example, 'Aman ki Asha' is a popular product created by the Indian and Pakistani media in partnership with The Times of India and Jung Group of Pakistan.

4.3 Political and Diplomatic Cooperation

Fort and Schipani (2007) concluded that bilateral diplomacy between both nations was a crucial opportunity for enhancing mutual tourism business. Fort and Schipani (2007) emphasised on improving bilateral diplomacy as diplomacy should not be left alone for politicians, especially those who have failed for more than sixty years. The Spiritual tourists in both countries could be attracted by using the place or events for business growth and a diplomatic Indo-Pak cooperation. Presenting tourism in both countries as a part of the global Indian community could be an approach to capitalise on this opportunity of spiritual tourism for political and diplomatic cooperation. Ideas such as, one India, one people and one spirituality linked with message of multi-faith unity and brotherhood could be adopted to promote political and diplomatic cooperation (Haq & Medhekar, 2013).

The political and diplomatic cooperation can be further achieved if governments of both countries establish tourism sections and special attaché in their Embassies and provide exclusive services and information for tourists travelling between both countries. Moreover, social groups and educational institutions could be supported to arrange cross-border spiritual tourism journeys for the youth of both countries to educate them about the shared historical and spiritual beauty of both countries that has more similarities than differences (Haq & Medhekar, 2013).

4.4 Peace Initiatives

An earlier study on spiritual tourism by peace reflected high interest in both nations for cross-border spiritual tourism based on the concept of integration on commercial grounds; cultural, religious and social similarities; and the passion for similar aesthetics were the major emerging themes (Haq & Medhekar, 2013). The peace opportunity suggests that Indian and Pakistani spiritual tourists could be attracted by promoting self-development and spiritual growth as the benefits accrue and have a positive spill over effect. Fort and Schipani (2007) also suggested promoting a sense of community, which was based on capitalising the significance of cultural similarities.

5. Business Threats of Spiritual Tourism

The other side of the argument in this paper highlights business threats related to spiritual tourism that are identified and discussed below.

5.1 Local Tourism Loss

Taplin (2013) directly linked the influence of competition on tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. Many sceptics of Indian and Pakistani spiritual tourism would conveniently indicate the loss of local or domestic tourism as a significant threat. This paper argues that the intense competition in spiritual tourism would improve the quality of service and management of tourism and should be seen as a business opportunity contributing to economic development. Moreover, when both countries are suffering with non-friendly relations then business competition should not be considered as a pretext to avoid such an opportunity that has multiple benefits.

5.2 Information Overflow

Another threat that can be considered is the information overflow or disclosure of confidential information (Hall, 2012). The cross-border spiritual tourism between India and Pakistan could open a door towards various intelligence and security information being vulnerable as identified by Ferrari and Cristofori (2010). Further research is required on this topic as tourism sceptics have always found some ground on information confidentiality. Many ethical considerations in tourism business indicate strict regulations that could be followed to control this threat (WTO, 2013).

5.3 Extremism and Terrorism Threats

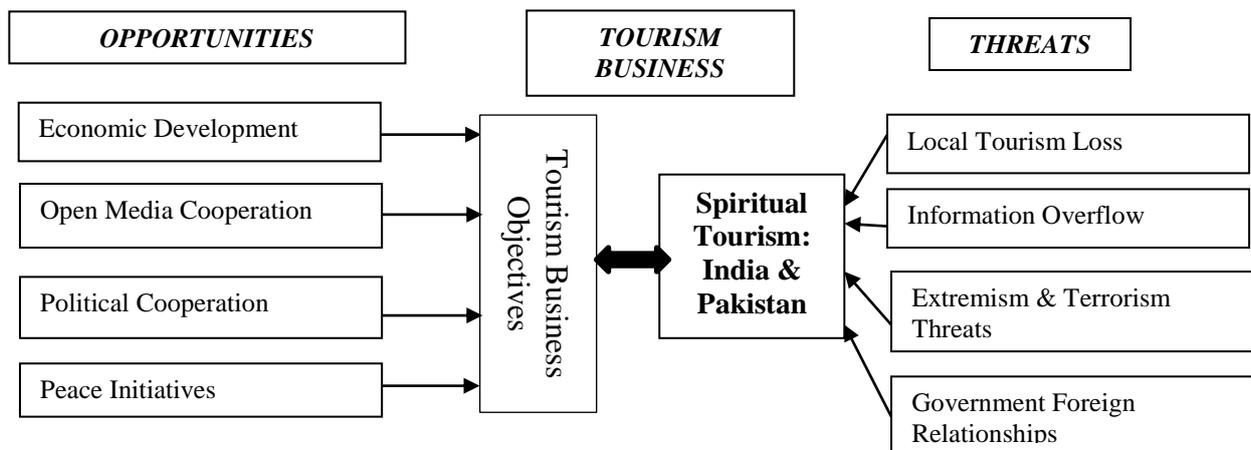
This is a serious threat around the world nowadays and no tourism business can afford to ignore it (Korstanje & Clayton, 2012). There have been incidents where tourists with different motives in both the countries have been victims of terrorism. The dark history of both the countries that has witnessed three wars and many confrontations since the 1947 independence has created various terror groups with extreme views as in many other countries (Butler & Suntikul, 2013; Raza & Jawaid, 2013). This paper acknowledges the threat of terrorism for spiritual tourism from extremist groups in both countries. A comprehensive peace and security agreement between both countries could only be a solution to the terrorism threat. A future study could be conducted to analyse the details of the terrorism threat for tourism in both countries.

5.4 Government Foreign Relationships

As mentioned in the previous section, the political and diplomatic cooperation between both countries is an outstanding opportunity that faces many hurdles. The major hurdle for any type of cooperation between India and Pakistan is their own foreign government and diplomatic relationships (Butler & Suntikul, 2013; Haq & Medhekar, 2013). Since their partition in 1947, no sincere efforts have been made for any reconciliation and both India and Pakistan found themselves in two rival blocks: Americans and Russians. Since then they have faced many confrontations due to internal and external or global issues. Moreover, as both countries had to show loyalty to their respective blocks, the opportunity for any political and diplomatic cooperation was little or unrealistic.

India and Pakistan need to compromise with their international loyalties at least in the area of tourism business and trade. They also need a political will and commitment for the benefit of the future generation on first building trust and peace in the South Asian region. Further playing a leading role in having an economic and monetary union, this will lead towards economic prosperity. Such economic freedom will enable both countries to come forward for political, economic, and diplomatic cooperation and open several business and trade routes and markets including spiritual tourism.

Figure 1: Framework of Opportunities and Threats for Spiritual Tourism Business Development



Source: Designed for this paper

6. Summary and Conclusions

India and Pakistan enjoy a rich culture, heritage and history for potential growth of tourism. This paper has highlighted various business opportunities available to the Governments of India and Pakistan, which include economic development, media collaboration, diplomatic cooperation and peace initiatives leading to South-Asian Union. South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SARRC) in spite of its good objectives, the leaders have not played a significant role in uniting South Asia. Rather there is growing mistrust, which has not culminated into mutually beneficial partnerships for economic development and growth. Meanwhile, various business threats have also been identified in this paper, such as local tourism loss, information overflow, terrorism and foreign relationships. This paper suggests

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that since both countries are historically sharing significant cultural and spiritual richness that governments on both sides should realise business opportunities and manage threats for successful development of bilateral trade in spiritual tourism related services. A framework illustrating the business opportunities and threats for spiritual tourism between India and Pakistan is the final and unique contribution of this paper.

The study in this paper is exploratory in nature that in itself is the primary limitation. Lack of background knowledge and data on the topic is another limitation. The political deadlock between both countries also creates hindrance of any cross border research or data collection. An empirical study on implications of opportunities and threats identified in this paper is a palpable future study. A qualitative study of spiritual tourism operators and their perspectives, followed by a quantitative study of spiritual tourists and their perceptions and preferences will be the natural extension of this paper.

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