Exploring Consumer Segments and Typologies of Relevance to Spiritual Tourism

Farooq Haq, John Jackson, Central Queensland University

Abstract

This paper is part of a doctoral research study being conducted to develop strategies for effective marketing of spiritual tourism. This paper is a theoretical piece that explores various tourism typologies of relevance to the emerging field of spiritual tourism. After analysing various typologies from the theory of tourism, a new composite and integrated Venn-diagram model of spiritual tourist typologies is suggested. This model will be further tested on related tourism operators to identify the types of marketing strategies that could be adopted to effectively target the spiritual tourist groups.

Introduction

The term "spiritual tourism" is largely unheard of in both the academic literature and the tourism trade press, yet more people visit Mecca, the Vatican and Bethlehem/Jerusalem per year than attend the World Cup, for example. To develop strategies for the effective marketing of spiritual tourism, these spiritual tourists need to be further identified to analyse their behaviour and attitudes, and hence there is a need to build a typology of spiritual tourists. The designing of a typology is critical since the professional marketing of an idea or product where there is no established academic literature or common trade tradition and practice, is difficult without a valid typology of the customer (Schiffman et al., 2001). Incidentally, the concept of grouping people into 'types' is not usually appealing to those people who see themselves as individuals, and this can be especially strong for those who see themselves as on a 'spiritual journey'. But for tourism marketers these groupings are very useful managerially as they are often similar people or customers who buy and use any products and services for similar reasons. Anecdotal evidence is that consumer typologies and segmentation apply to spiritual tourists as much as any other group.

Literature Review

It has also been observed by various authors that spirituality in general has recently become an important subject of research in social and business areas (Cimino & Lattin, 1999; Hill, 2002; Konz & Ryan, 1999; Pesut, 2003). The interest in spirituality has affected a number of industries around the world (Mitroff & Denton, 1999), including the tourism industry. Spiritual tourism seems to be a new concept but it is not a new phenomenon. Based on the literature review and interviews conducted with various stakeholders in various countries, this study defines a spiritual tourist as 'someone who visits a place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual growth, without overt religious compulsion, which could be religious, non-religious, sacred or

experiential in nature, but within the Divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling'.

A predominant theory of marketing argues that every market consists of groups or 'segments' of customers with different needs and demands (Bowen & Clarke, 2002; Bowen, 1998; Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2003; Ladkin, 2000). It should be noted here that segments are unlikely to be mutually exclusive, and this would also apply to spiritual tourism. To further identify the spiritual tourist and analyse his/her purchasing behaviour, there is a need to build a typology of the spiritual tourist. Typology comes from the Greek work 'typus' and describes various types of person based on his/her behaviour and attitudes (McKercher & Cros, 2003). This typology would help to understand the characteristics and motives of different typology of a spiritual tourist.

Models for a Spiritual Tourism Typology:

The most relevant and effective models on typology of tourism that will be analysed to design a comprehensive model for typologies of spiritual tourists are discussed below:

Mckercher's cultural tourism typology model:

This research probes this model for a possible spiritual tourism version of his typology based on five types of tourist ranging from the ones who had strong purposeful (spiritual) motives for tourism to the ones with no planned (spiritual) motives for tourism (McKercher, 2002). The five types based on their depth of spiritual experience and intention indicate the extent of spirituality as a significant factor in their destination decision making process(McKercher & Cros, 2003).
Hence, these are discussed in the following:

- **Purposeful spiritual tourist:** Personal spiritual growth is the main reason for visiting and this 'purposeful' tourist has a deep intention.
- **Sightseeing spiritual tourist:** Personal spiritual growth is the main reason for visiting but this 'sightseeing' tourist has a lesser spiritual experience.
- **Casual spiritual tourist:** Personal spiritual growth is a casual motivation for the visit and this 'casual' tourist also has a lower spiritual experience.
- **Incidental spiritual tourist:** Personal spiritual growth had no element of influence on tourism decision of this 'incidental' tourist and by the journey he had a chance/occasional spiritual experience.
- **Serendipitous spiritual tourist:** Personal spiritual growth had no element of influence on the tourism decision of this 'serendipitous' tourist, but by luck he/she ended up having a deep spiritual experience after the journey.

MacKay and Fesenmaier's change model for tourism typology

MacKay and Fesenmaier (1998) present this model to evaluate the relationships between stages of travel behaviour and past getaway behaviour. This study will analyse the model from MacKay & Fesenmaier (1998) and divide the spiritual tourists as follows:

Pre-contemplators: Never been interested in spiritual tourism and not considered to be in the spiritual tourism market at the moment (though they could be encouraged to start 'contemplating').

- **Contemplators**: They would consider buying a spiritual tourism product or service since they consider themselves as regular tourists, but have not actively searched or bought yet.
- **Ready for action**: Decided to go for spiritual tourism and looking for options available in the spiritual tourism market.
- **Active**: These tourists go for spiritual tourism but not on a regular basis.
- **Maintainers**: This group is always in the market for spiritual tourism and regularly buys spiritual tourism products and services.

Cohen's five modes of tourism experience – a good typology aid

The five modes of tourism experiences presented by Cohen (Cohen, 1996) could also be seen in conjunction with the other typologies discussed above:

- The Recreational Mode: Leisure travel with a recreational mode of experience is more entertainment oriented, and the main motivation for the tourist is to have fun.
- The Diversionary Mode: This mode of tourism experience is similar to recreational, except that it is not 'meaningful', even in the oblique sense; it is a meaningless pleasure, even when sightseeing and experiencing a 'sacred sight'.
- The Experiential Mode: This mode of tourism experience is described as the state when alienated individuals become aware of their alienation and want to have a more profound experience than the recreational and diversionary modes. They still do not have the strong intention as such, but incidentally are very willing to occasionally experience it.
- The Experimental mode: In this mode of leisure travel, the tourist plays the role of an experimental 'seeker' and is engaged in a quest for an alternative experience in many different directions. Cohen argues that tourists in the experimental mode of experience could be the ones most easily converted into the existential mode.
- The Existential Mode: This tourist mode can be described as being fully committed towards the sacred or 'spiritual' centre, and they have a deep faith in regular tourism experiences from an existential (i.e. "this is the central purpose of life") perspective.

It is conceivable that spiritual tourists could come from all five categories, yet could predominantly come from the last two modes. This research investigates these possibilities and their strategic implications and implies that people in modes four & five could be vital reference groups/opinion leaders.

Smith's five stages of religious tourism

Smith (1992, p.5) concludes from her research on tourism and pilgrimage that these two terms are opposite end-points on a continuum of travel as indicated in her diagram below:

Figure 1 – Stages of Religious Tourism

Pilgrimage	**Religious tourism**	**Tourism**
a	b	c	d	e

sacred	*faith/profane*	*secular*
	(knowledge-based)	
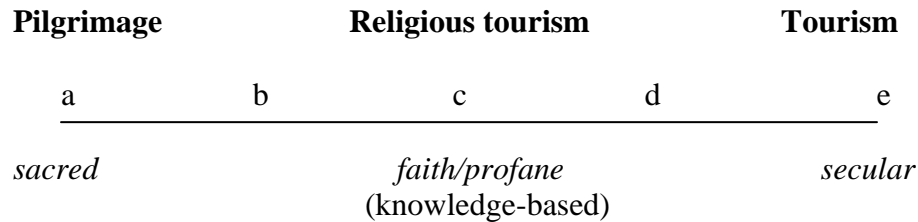
Smith claims that these positions reflect the multiple and changing motivations of the traveller, whose interests and activities may switch from tourist to pilgrim and vice versa. The central area (c) is called by Smith as 'religious tourism', where the scared and the secular combine and where the tourists enjoy a knowledge-based decision making position. In this study it is suggested all positions along the continuum (from position 'a' to 'd') are taken by different types of spiritual tourists from our core typologies.

Discussion

An integrated Venn-diagram typology model for spiritual tourism is suggested, which is a combination of the various typology models analysed earlier. The analysis of the models concludes by suggesting the more fruitful combinations within these typologies for spiritual tourism, while effective marketing strategies available to the tourism and leisure vacation operator will need to be a topic of a following paper.

In the Venn-Diagram we present three circles combining the extensive forms of tourists' buying behaviour as the purposefulness, existentialism and regular maintenance. The 'sacred centre' is the overlap between the circles and is identified as number 1. This area also includes the positions a, b or c as given by Smith (though not necessarily in terms of purchasing receptive power or size of market segments). The areas, number 2, indicate the people who are interested in spiritual tourism and are looking for the best destinations. From Smith's diagram they are given (a) since they are the hard core pilgrims who have been regularly visiting their religious sites and they could be convinced to visit other similar sites with a spiritual motive.

The area with number 3 belongs to people who are looking for new motives in their travels; they are regular tourists and can be convinced to try the new type of 'spiritual' tourism. They are given the position (bc) according to Smith since they have more sacred than secular intentions in their journeys. On the inner-periphery of the large outer circle we have tourists who have done very little contemplation of a spiritual tourism experience or who might have had one by chance, or coincidentally, while undertaking a fun-based recreational leisure experience. They are given number 4 and are also identified as (d) according to Smith since they seem to be more tourists than pilgrims.

Outside our model are those tourists who do not qualify: those who never contemplate such a purchase or experience, those who have no chance of a serendipitous spiritual tourism experience due to circumstances or attitude, and those who are only interested in purely hedonistic tourism and are the secular tourists (e) according to Smith. It is also

important to appreciate that the people grouped together in each of these three sectors of the model are not necessarily similar in the specifics of their spiritual tourism.

Figure 2 - Typology Model for Spiritual Tourism
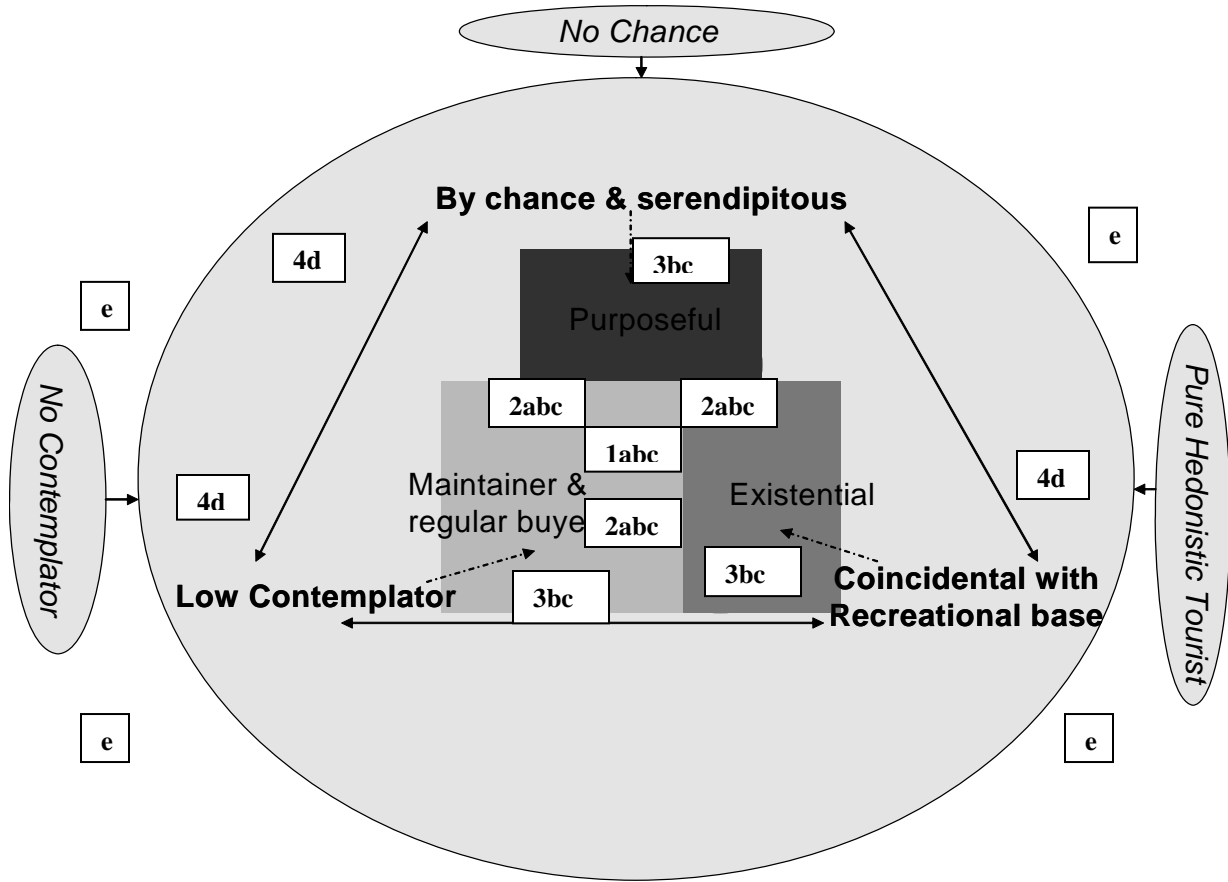
Sources: Based on various theories in the literature, and adapted specifically for this paper.

Conclusion

This typology model could be used to identify various spiritual tourists and the tourism providers could design various marketing strategies to target various groups as given in the numbers 1 to 4. Obviously the three groups out of the circle, area 'e', could be ignored by the marketers. This model will be tested by conducting in-depth interviews with tourism operators in Australia and Pakistan. A selective sampling method will be adopted to identify operators marketing spiritual tourism to local and foreign tourists in Australia and Pakistan.

Future research could be conducted in testing this model and evaluating marketing strategies to be effectively implemented for various typologies presented in this paper.

Reference List

Bowen, David, & Clarke, Jackie (2002). Reflections on tourist satisfaction research: Past, present and future. *Journal of Vacation Marketing, 8*(4), 297.

Bowen, John (1998). Market segmentation in hospitality research: no longer a sequential process. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 10*(7), 289.

Campo, Juan (1998). American pilgrimage landscapes. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 558*, 40.

Cimino, Rob., & Lattin, David. (1999). Choosing my religion. *American Demographics, 21*(4), 60.

Cohen, Erik (1972). Towards a Sociology of International Tourism. *Social Research*, vol. 39, pp.164-82.

Cohen, Erik (1979). Sociology of Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 6, 1-2, pp.18-194.

Cohen, Erik (1992). Pilgrimage Centre: Concentric and Excentric. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 18.

Cohen, Erik (1996). A phenomenology of tourist experiences. In Y. Apostolopoulos, S. Leivadi & A. Yiannakis (Eds.), *The Sociology of Tourism: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*. London: Routledge.

Haq, Farooq & Bretherton, Phil (2005). Cross cultural influences on the marketing of spiritual tourism in Pakistan, paper presented at *Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management*, 2005, Canberra, Australia.

Haq, Farooq & Jackson, John (2006). The recognition of marketing of spiritual tourism as a significant new area in leisure travel, paper presented at *Conference on Tourism - a Spiritual Dimension*, 2006, Lincoln, UK.

Hill, Brian (2002). Tourism and religion, by Boris Vukonic. *The International Journal of Tourism Research, 4*(4), 327.

Konz, Gregory & Ryan, Francis (1999). Maintaining an organizational spirituality: no easy task. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 12*(3), 200.

Kotler, Philip, Bowen, John & Makens, James (2003). *Marketing for hospitality and tourism*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Ladkin, Adele (2000). Research into consumer behaviour and value systems of ecotourists; tourist choice, behaviour, motivations, and attachments; visitors to nature based destinations; adventure tourism and channel relationships in the tourism industry. *The International Journal of Tourism Research, 2*(3), 211.

Legoherel, Patrick. (1998). Toward a market segmentation of the tourism trade. *Journal of travel & tourism marketing, 7*(3), 19-39.

MacKay, Kenneth & Fesenmaier, Daniel (1998). A process approach to segmenting the gateway travel market. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 7*(3), 1-39.

McKercher, Bob (2002). Towards a classification of cultural tourists. *The International Journal of Tourism Research, 4*(1), 29.

McKercher, Bob & Cros, Hilary (2003). Testing a cultural tourism typology. *The International Journal of Tourism Research, 5*(1), 45.

Moutinho, Luiz (1987). Consumer Behaviour in Tourism. *European Journal of Marketing, 21*(10), 5.

Plog, Stanley. (2001). Why destination areas rise and fall in popularity. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly, 42*(3), 13.

Smith, Valene (1992). Introduction: The quest in guest. *Annals of Tourism Research, 19*(1), 1-17.