Haq Allah Hu: tourists' phenomenological experiences of visiting shrines as Islamic spiritual destinations

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Abstract

Purpose – Over the years, shrines have been ignored as a destination by islamic marketing scholars. However, shrines can be classified as Islamic spiritual destinations which are visited by people to serve various purposes. Moreover, in the country context of Pakistan with its beautiful cultural traditions and the religiousness among people, the visit to a shrine as a destination experience is scantly examined. This study fills this void and aims at exploring Muslim tourists' spiritual experiences of visiting shrines as Islamic spiritual destinations.

Design/methodology/approach – An interpretive qualitative inquiry is used based on phenomenology as the leading methodology for this exploration. Following a purposive sampling technique, researchers interviewed 10 informants who regularly visit shrines. The collected data are analyzed based on thematic analysis.

Findings – The results of a thematic analysis reveal six themes that emerged from tourists' experiences of Islamic spiritual destinations. These include: religious and spiritual values, spiritual belief system, commercial experience, hospitality and support experience, socialization experience and obstruction experience.

Practical implications – The findings of this study can be used by policymakers managing Islamic tourist destinations. It will help them to improve tourist experiences.

Originality/value – The findings contribute to both theory and practice of destination marketing by exploring the factors influencing tourists' perceptions about their experience of Islamic spiritual destinations.

Keywords Destination marketing, Spiritual, Shrines, Pakistan, Qualitative, Phenomenology

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The religious and spiritual destinations drew more than 300 million guests (Irimias *et al.*, 2016). Yearly revenue for religious tourism is about 20 billion US dollars. This extraordinary characteristic has pulled the consideration of specialists from various fields, i.e. religion, psychology, human sciences and destination management (Huanga and Pearceb, 2019). Many people from all around the world visit many famous religious destinations in different countries. A significant number of tourists of various faiths and areas around the world are attracted by the shrines of Sufis and Saints (the pious people). Due to socio-cultural dimensions in the individuals, there is a positive relationship between Islamic belief and Islamic practices and this degree of Islamic divorcing differs with the possible changes in individual perceptions (Arshad *et al.*, 2017). Many researchers have investigated the tourist's religious and spiritual experiences following a positivist methodology (Gilla *et al.*, 2019). Previous researchers scantly explored the experiences of individuals in the context of Islamic

spiritual destinations (Heidari and Hamid, 2018). Moreover, limited consideration is given to the tourists' views about new services which might affect the religious and spiritual experiences and the perception of these sites. People can seek several benefits but their experience determines future intentions to visit. Pragmatically, in countries such as Pakistan, many Islamic spiritual destinations are experiencing several issues related to the visitor's experiences (Arshad *et al.*, 2017).

To address these issues, an investigation that focuses specifically on tourists' lived experiences in an Islamic spiritual destination is needed. This way it will help to explore the reasons which redefine the destination image among tourists. There are shreds of evidence that negative imagery of a tourist destination affects their revisit intentions (Duverger and Thomas, 2021). Thus a careful service marketing approach is needed to keep on refreshing the image of a destination—shrines in our case. In this regard, a qualitative research approach is needed to provide deeper insight into tourists' lived experiences in these situations. We position this study to explore the phenomenon of religious spirituality as it is experienced by tourists touring Islamic spiritual destinations. Furthermore, how the image of a destination is redefined by the consumption experience of tourists needs to be discovered.

Destination image
The destination image refers to the sum of ideas, impressions, expectations and emotional feelings that a visitor has for a particular destination. Destination image in the travel industry has two essential components. First, the psychological assessments full of feelings of evaluations. The second is the cognitive element which refers to the travelers' beliefs or information about a destination. A positive destination image shaped by the two joined parts can straightforwardly belong to sightseers' recurrent visits and their expectations to prescribe the destination to other people. Destination-promoting associations and business operators attempt to construct a brand image through publicizing online (utilizing well-known media channels) and offline (Huanga and Pearceb, 2019). Further, individuals can get data from their companions and colleagues, or from other tourists' post-trip web journals. Recent researches show that numerous tourists like to share information, feelings and their experiential minutes on online networks (Jacobsen and Munar, 2012). These studies recommend the informal exchange as a significant method to shape a destination image.

At various tourism destinations, tourists can acquire an assortment of experiences, which include both objective experiences and subjective experiences. The tourist-target experience is fundamentally connected with the hosts' practices, the business segments and the attributes of the setting, (for example, history, culture, geography and feel). What's more, the tourist's subjective experience firmly depends on its attributes (personality and earlier information). Together, tourists' experiences help them further to develop their practical and psychological characteristics of the destination's image. The functional attributes are designated as objective or quantifiable attractions, activities, expenses and other general travel industry offers, the subjective feelings of tourists are considered as psychological components which are friendliness, atmosphere and nature of services (Huanga and Pearceb, 2019). The functional characteristics are traditionally considered cognitive or knowledge-based features of the travel industry's destination image. However, a few recent studies have provided the latest understanding of the connection between experience and post-trip destination image, while none of them has incorporated Pine–Gilmore and Schmitt's frameworks.

This study will utilize the idea of destination image as a crucial concentration for the investigation of the spiritual and religious tourist perspectives on Islamic spiritual destinations.

People travel in the quest for spirituality in the sacred shrines and destinations. In sacred destinations and shrines, people will experience a different culture and spirituality through which they generate life meaning for them (Huanga and Pearceb, 2019). Communication and interaction with hosts and religious teachers of sites create a deeper understanding of the destination and also construct positive, sacred memories and unique experiences (Trauer and Ryan, 2005). The scope of studies has accentuated that guests' encounters are affected by the practices of others (Belhassen *et al.*, 2008). Past research demonstrated that tourists' experiences can be influenced by different types of factors at religious destinations. These factors will affect the tourist's perception of religious destinations through their experiences. But the rich responses to various perceptions about religious destinations are not yet well developed (Huanga and Pearceb, 2019).

Research methods

As per Creswell and Poth (2016) qualitative research is a process of understanding research focused on the context of unique research techniques that address social or human issues. This study utilized qualitative methodology to form a descriptive theme from visitors' experiences. While many pieces of research have been conducted on the tourists' experiences in religious spiritual sites (Huanga and Pearceb, 2019) there is limited research that has focused specifically on the tourists' lived experiences in Islamic spiritual destinations. In this study, phenomenology is adopted as a leading methodology to identify the meaning behind human experiences related to phenomena or notable cumulative happenings (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

Phenomenology has also been used in several fields and is often viewed from a variety of perspectives as a theory of philosophy, perception and methodology. There are three primary types of phenomenology: transcendental, existential and hermeneutical phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology pays attention to the basic sense of human experience, existential phenomenology pays attention to realistic social classes, and hermeneutics phenomenology pays attention to text data structure and interpretation/language use (Creswell and Poth, 2016). The key research issue in this study is the phenomenological capture: What is the essence of the visitors' experience? Therefore, my work is classified as a transcendental phenomenological inquiry and follows Moustakas's traditional phenomenological guidelines.

Therefore, for this purpose, shrines are chosen because these sites as regarded as religiously spiritual destinations (Arshad *et al.*, 2017). Two criteria were followed to select informants for this study. First, an informant should be a tourist of religious spiritual sites and a regular visitor who visited a shrine in the last 15 days. It suggests that tourists' involvement and intensity of visit (number of places visited and duration of visit) can also impact a destination's image, as can memorable tourism experiences. A purposeful sampling technique was used to select informants. This approach aimed to create a sample that would better provide a wider spectrum of viewpoints (Creswell and Poth, 2016) with details about the phenomenon being investigated by selected interviewees (Maxwell, 2005). Boyd (2001) recommends that data collection saturation can usually be achieved with 2–10 respondents. Reasonable saturation occurs when "no new or applicable data appear to be available regarding a category, the category is well defined in terms of its properties and dimensions, and the relationship between categories is well known and validated" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The data collection took place from June to August 2020.

Since the objective of this study was to explore participants' lived experiences. We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect data. The entire interviews happened in Urdu and Punjabi language and then were transcribed into the English language. We recorded their interviews after their consent and also took deep notes during

the interviews. Interviews lasted on average 45 min, close to the 45–60-min approximation suggested by Smith *et al.* (2009).

Findings
Data coding results
Initially in this study, researcher identified 307 statements related to the study during the process of analysis. The researcher checked the original groupings of meaning frequently by reacting to research questions from the participant in their entirety. The researcher organized them into 26 clusters following refining the results. Table 1 below shows the clustered frequency of response from the 26 encoded clusters.

Overview of themes
Multiple first and second-cycle coding efforts were used to further improve the data. The creation of code clusters began to evolve as the data were modified and refined by different lenses of strategies. After refining, we got the final 19 clusters which are: Sense of Spirituality, Sense of Bliss, Sense of Arousing Religious emotions, Religious Knowledge, Spiritual leader, Family Lineage, Miracle of saints, Ethical consumer pattern, Spiritual products, Holy food experience, Unique dining experience, Appreciation Hospitality from management, Cooperativeness Experience, Sociability, Sense of community, Beggar Curse, Charge token

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
1. Theft experience	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
2. Beggar curse	2	1	0	4	0	0	1	0	1	3	11
3. Charge token money	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	1	0	0	9
4. Over crowdedness	1	2	0	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	12
5. Drugs consumption	0	2	0	3	0	2	1	1	2	0	12
6. Overcharge price	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
7. Holy food coded clusters	2	2	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	16
8. Unique food	2	1	3	0	0	1	1	1	0	3	14
9. Consumer ethics	0	2		0	1	1	2	0	0	1	15
10. Spiritual products	1	0	1	2	1	2	1	0	1	3	15
11. Sociability	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	2	3	17
12. Sense community	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	2	15
13. Family lineage	3	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	16
14. Saint miracle history	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	7
15. Connection with saint	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	9
16. Appreciation management	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	3	3	14
17. Coordinator	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	3
18. Cooperativeness	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	6	13
19. Spirituality	2	2	2	1	1	3	3	2	5	3	22
20. Peacefulness	3	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	4	5	12
21. Special prayers	1	1	1	0	0	2	3	3	2	3	10
22. Religious belief	1	1	2	1	0	2	2	3	2	3	15
23. Blessing	1	0	1	2	0	3	2	0	5	2	14
24. Spiritual healer	1	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	1	3	15
25. Knowledge of Sufism	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
26. Learning religion	3	0	2	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	13

Note(s): Participants
1: Ax 2: Bx 3: Cx 4: Dx 5: Ex 6: Fx 7: Gx 8: Hx 9: Ix 10: Jx

Table 1.
Coded clusters

Money, Drugs Consumption, Over Crowdedness. These clusters were grouped into six themes.

Theme 1: religious and spiritual values
The tourists perceived the religious spiritual destination as a site of spirituality, where they find peace. Moreover, they feel these places have sacred values and go there with their high religious values. The participants feel that they get peace and spirituality here by doing a religious activity and they feel spiritual there. So, they consider these sites spiritual sacred. Thus the tourists paid attention to the act of worshiping because they believe that if they do so, they get spirituality, peace and blessings from Allah. The theme entails the following subthemes. The respondents said that we feel that something has changed our spiritual feelings and religious emotions, which play a vital role in perceiving the image of the site.

Sense of spirituality. Most respondents indicate that they perceive this site as a spiritual place because they experienced some unworldly feelings there. So according to them, they feel the overwhelming presence of spirituality and inner peace. They experienced that these sites have special spiritual feelings, which connect spirituality with inner peace feelings, and have the rigid belief that spirituality and this site have strong connections.

A 27-year-old man, he has been a frequent visitor to a shrine in Lahore. He loves to travel to different sites in the country but he says that he loves to go to religious spiritual shrines whenever he feels upset or faces a problem. He added value to this theme by suggesting:

> We believe that all worlds belong to that place. We go there because we feel the overwhelming presence of spirituality and inner peace.

Sense of bliss. Most interviewees said that since they feel a sense of bliss here, it helps them to maintain balance tools for improving all aspects of life. Bliss is a state of complete happiness or joy. In this theme, a sense of bliss means that respondents feel happy about the blessings of Allah on them.

A 29-year male is very fond of visiting shrines. He puts light on the sense of bliss in this way:

> It would be the dome you see. You see blessing dripping off of it and you know why that is the case? When we enter the shrine and see the shrine for the first time we feel as if we would stay here in a standing position for our whole life. You do not want to move from there.

So, on this ground, he explains more about his experience

> I am happy I took my daughter there because I wanted her to be in the shadow of His blessings throughout her life. I want her to grow as a pious and an educated woman and I take pride.

Sense of arousing religious emotions. Most of the respondents said that we perceive this site as a religious destination and we feel that, we were fulfilling our religious duties whenever we visit this site, we feel arousal in our religious emotions by seeing the praying style of others.

He is a 24-year-old student and claims that architecture has spiritual elements that elevate his levels of spirituality. His most recent visit was to a shrine in Lahore responds to this experience in this way:

> It is a special feeling; it means that your beliefs and values of religion get revived and the atmosphere of the shrine makes you closer to your religion.

A 29-year male explained this experience in this way:

> Sometimes some people are crying while praying, which gives you pleasure and satisfaction; because you think that someone is crying because of his high beliefs on Allah, which are given to him by Allah. From this incident, my belief became stronger.

So, the first theme describes how a tourist perceives the religiously spiritual destination image and according to some respondents, the favorable image of this destination was closely associated with affective components, because these affective dimensions reflect tourists' feelings. Affective elements increase the objective experience which further enhances their positive perception of this Destination.

Theme 2: spiritual belief system

Several participants had strong feelings about the blessings of holy saints and thought of them as alive. In their point of view, the holy person could hear their followers and work as arbiters among them and Allah. Around them, they believed that the holy saint of the shrine know their issues. Many of them featured, that they come to Shrines and pray to get relief from their problems. Devotees of saints realize that these saints can speak with Allah and help them in satisfying their desires; they have confidence that saints have an immediate association with Allah. They also believe that our forefathers are the followers of these shrines, so we should also follow in their footsteps. Many respondents believed that the lifestyle of these saints is a role model for them and the best way to get knowledge about it is by spending time there.

Religious knowledge

Many tourists believed they perceive this site as a religious knowledge site. Because they have faith that these shrines are the best place to learn about religious knowledge, they perceived these sites as one of the best places to practice religion.

He is 27 years old. He has been a frequent visitor to shrines. He claims that he perceived this site as a sacred place due to his strong religious beliefs. Currently, he is working as a permanent salesman in a reputed company.

> The primary reason for being a Muslim to visit his shrine is religion, Islam. A Muslim can pray all by himself already taught by Islam.

Spiritual healer. This spiritual healer theme means that participants had a strong faith in the blessings of saints, and they thought of them as if they were still alive. In their perspective, the saint could listen to the followers and work as a mediator between them and Allah. They also trusted that saints or any spiritual leaders at that shrine know their problems and know the way to heal them.

He is a 36-year-old man. He is fond of visiting numerous spiritual sites within the country and his last visit was to a shrine in Lahore. He responded in this way about spending time with a spiritual leader:

> When you sit with a man of God and feel like you have gained unworldly satisfaction from them and you feel elevated in terms of spirituality and inner peace. That to me is spirituality.

Family Lineage. In discussion with respondents, they said that they perceived this site as a very religious site and they have a special respect for this site because their parents have special linage to these sites that's why they were here. They have a tradition in their family to visit these sites.

He is 45 years old. He has been visiting different types of shrines within the country. The first time he visited a shrine was as a child with his father. He claims that the spiritual environment that he finds at most shrines gives him peace and makes him spiritual. Right now he is working as a manager in a multinational firm. He explains that:

> I visited this shrine because my father has a special love for this shrine. When I was a child my father always took me there that's why now I love to go there.

Miracles of saints. Many respondents connect this site with miracle life stories of these saints. They believe that these sites still have powers and miracles due to the saint, who is buried there. So, they believed in the miraculous stories related to a saint and perceived the image of the site on their prior knowledge about the saint.

A 27-year-old man who loves to travel to different sites of the country explained his views in this way:

> There is a famous incident during that era where a mystic had made the people believe that if a certain percentage of their milk is not offered to him then it will turn into blood. Upon his persistence, the saint put his gaze upon those sandals and they dropped from the air and hit the mystic on his head. This incidence shows that this is the power of saint.

So, the second theme describes that favorable destination image was connected with the cognitive knowledge of the tourists. Meanwhile, tourists were also showing their interest in history and stories related to the shrine. Tourists perceived the image of these sites by their religious beliefs and behavior of others.

Theme 3: commercial experience

According to the respondents, the shrines stand out in the cities with typically small shops around the shrines. All the spiritual, cultural, religious and commercial activities revolve around this space. Tourists' unique commercial experience is related to antique spiritual products which contribute to making the image of the site strengthen and respondents responded that they experienced a more ethical consumer experience there.

Ethical consumer pattern. Many respondents mentioned that their tolerance level increased and also experienced that they were ignored if they buy a bad quality product from outside of the shrine.

He is a 48-year-old man. He visits spiritual sites quite often and his last visit was to a shrine in Lahore. He goes there to find peace and in search of religious knowledge. He works as a manager in an Islamic firm.

> When I went to the shrine, there are book stores and hotels around it. Nothing extraordinary. I have never felt negative about it or that things are overpriced. We mostly buy those things which are good. We mostly buy books to increase our knowledge.

Spiritual products. Respondents mentioned that the products they buy from the sites have some special place in their life and they believe that these spiritual products have played a vital role in their life. This theme explained the experiences of spiritual product and how it affects them.

A 27-year-old man who loves to travel to different sites of the country explained his experience related to the spiritual products:

> Then there's another activity where vendors sell packets of sugar sweets. This is considered a traditional practice within the Sufi sect and is considered a special product. Sometimes I buy these packets for me and my family.

This theme described that unique commercial experience should be considered as an important factor, as it has a positive impact on the perceptions of the tourists.

Theme 4: hospitality and support experience

According to the respondents, they had a unique dining experience. There are different types of food, which could only be found in Shrines. Many respondents shared that they had a holy experience at the shrine, due to the food present there. They appreciate the excellent service provided by the shrine's kitchen, the hospitality and the support system of the friendly people

and administration; tourists associate the destination with wonderful food, good service and a unique hospitality experience.

Holy food experience. The food which is presented to people at the shrines is called "langar (free food)" and many people have experienced that, much time they are presented with the food that they have in their mind, which is an amusing experience.

A 29-year male told:

> I will share something interesting with you. I told my mother I felt like having sweets and as soon as we entered the shrine, a guy was giving away free sweets. My mother gazed at me saying your prayer has been accepted.

He is a 28 years old man. He frequently travels to various shrines around the world and his last visit was to a shrine in Lahore. He visits the sites for the love of the saints and also to find peace and tranquility. He is a freelance software engineer by profession. He also likes how the commercial activities add zeal to the atmosphere of the shrines. He shared his experience of holy food:

> I think the food tastes different from every other place because of the blessings.

Unique dining experience. Respondents relate Unique dining experiences at the shrines. They feel that food there is more delicious than their homemade food. They said that this type of dining experience played a vital role in boosting the perception of the image of the destination.

He is a 36-year male. He is fond of visiting numerous spiritual sites within the country and his last visit was to a shrine in Lahore.

> There is a kitchen present at the shrine that serves to all, a large quantity of food is there, but those who don't like to eat there have the option to eat from the various restaurants outside the shrine. You can cook the same recipe at home but you will not enjoy it as much as you would at the shrine.

Appreciation: hospitality from management. This theme reflects that tourists were satisfied with the hospitality of the management of the destination; Respondents appreciated their hospitality and supported them for their excellent management.

He is 22 years old. He is a student. He has been visiting numerous spiritual places in the country and his last visit was to a shrine. He believed that:

> They have a special team of workers who are dedicated to managing the affairs of the place and they are present there at all times. Even then, they manage the affairs beautifully.

A 24-year-old student explained it in this way:

> The management was kind enough to oblige. Not only did they let us in but they also gave us a guided tour of the site. Their management is very helpful.

Cooperativeness experience. The tourists mentioned that at the shrines there is a cooperative environment. They have experienced that, people present at the shrine love to cooperate with the administration in different manners.

He is 22 years old. He is a student. He has been visiting numerous spiritual places in the country and his last visit was to a shrine. He believed that:

> The administration was extremely courteous. They were extremely hospitable. [...] People love to help the administration in many works which create a good bonding

He is a 36-year-old man. He is fond of visiting numerous spiritual sites within the country and his last visit was to a shrine based in Lahore:

All arrangements have been done by us. We provide the buses for the tour of the shrine. It is an honor for us to work with management and help them. Some people cannot afford such trips. So, we help them and arrange food and traveling expense for them.

Theme 5: socialization experience
Most interviewees stated that they had spontaneous and sociable interactions with others during the visit to the shrine. The activity caused an increase in the sense of community and further enhanced friendly feelings regarding the site. Most of the respondents said that these types of objective experiences enhanced their experience.

Sociability. Respondents' explained their interaction with other people as friends. They say that people are very friendly and the atmosphere of the shrine is very colorful. Everybody is in a happy mood, and all are open to talking. So, one has a chance to communicate with other people which makes the atmosphere warmer.

A 29-year male is very fond of visiting shrines and his last visit was to a shrine. He goes there to find peace and learn the teachings of Islam. He explained about the site in this way: explains his interaction experience with other people in this way:

> I heard a man crying with happiness. Mostly in these places, you hear people talk about their personal experiences and the reason why they are there. Some of them do not feel comfortable sharing their experiences. These things make you happy and make your belief stronger.

Sense of community. This subtheme reflects the experience of a sense of community created at religious-spiritual destinations which can be traced back to the consolidation of the collective self-esteem of the host community. This sense of community allows participants to experience a sense of belonging.

He is 27 years old. He has been a frequent visitor to shrines. He claims that he perceived this site as a sacred place due to his strong religious beliefs. He explained it in this way:

> People come from different areas and countries to visit the shrine. We meet different people from different areas and counties. We talk with them and feel that they are no strangers here. One may feel like everybody knows each other.

Theme five describes the positive experience by which tourists enhanced their overall perception of the site.

Theme 6: obstruction experience
There are sure distinguished viewpoints of the respondents as well. Respondents also faced some factors due to which their experience at the religiously spiritual destination got a bit spoiled. Unfortunately, these negative experiences gained, due to such factors have weakened the image of the site.

Beggar curse. Most of the respondents express disappointment about the interaction with beggars which affects their perception of the religiously spiritual destinations. According to them, the cursing words of the beggars sometimes hurt them.

A 29-year male is very fond of visiting shrines and explained:

> There, at the shrine, you see people who put garlands around your neck and say that may Allah grant you seven sons and expect to be monetarily rewarded for it. But if you do not reward them, they often curse you. Most people pay no heed to them, but there are sensitive people too who believe that their curse will impact their lives. So, such people should be banned from visiting the shrine as they put a bad impression of Shrine.

Charge token money. Many respondents mentioned that they do not like the system of commercialism at the shrines. They criticized the system of paying for a token at such sites.

He is a 24-year-old student. He explains his experience in this way:

> In my opinion, if someone just comes to offer Salah only and the token money, they take from you for this are wrong. Yeah, I know that mosques and shrines have so many expenses but management should find other ways to earn money. If someone has to pray five times there, they will be paying money five times daily. So that is a practice that needs to stop and an alternative should be given to the people who want to pray there.

Drug consumption. Many tourists disliked the people behavior who consumes drugs outside the sites and they experienced that these types of factors affected their experiences on-site. According to them they should be banned and removed from that site.

He is 22 years old. He is a student. He has been visiting numerous spiritual places in the country and his last visit was to a shrine. He believed that:

> Boozers are sitting outside the shrine and sometimes they try to enter in the shrine, but police forcedly put them out. These boozers pull and push the tourists at the starting gate of the shrine and this thing makes me uncomfortable.

Over crowdedness. Many tourists mentioned that over-crowdedness at different entering points had an impact on the respondent's experience.

A 27-year-old man explained it in this way:

> There [...], today you can observe on his Memorial Day a crowd so large, that no car can enter in that area, there was a flyover. You have to walk a few kilometers just to reach the shrine. The road was blocked with containers for the regular traffic. Whenever I visited a shrine on normal days there were also a large number of the crowd there.

Discussion

Previous studies involved motivational issues, motives of tourists and expectations of tourists, but they do not directly explain the personal experiences of tourists at these Islamic spiritual destinations. These relative publications helped me develop the meaning of the experiences of the tourists.

Theme 1 informs us about the perception of tourists about shrines based on their personal experience. This theme reflects how tourists perceive the religious spiritual destination as a site of spirituality where they find peace and they also feel these places carry sacred values and visit them for them. For theme 1 tourists who perceived shrines as sacred and spiritual places, the behavior of other people had a great influence on their perceptions (Belhassen *et al.*, 2008). Previous researches show that both affective, and cognitive component is important for a good image (Huanga and Pearceb, 2019), but they do not explain this about the Islamic spiritual destination's experience, i.e. how both of the components are interlinked with each other. The 1 theme purposed theoretically that the destination image of a shrine as an Islamic spiritual destination is linked with affective element, which means that how feelings toward the destination increase the objective experience due to the affective elements and which further enhances their positive perception. Theoretically, a sense of spirituality, sense of bliss and sense of arousing religious emotions are already explained in religious tourism but not together in the theory of religiously spiritual destination as part of an effective element. Previous studies ignored a detailed discussion from the point of tourist's personal experiences.

Previous literature supports theoretically that belief elements and cultural elements, such as family lineage, saint graves and rituals, played a positive role in making impression on the tourists (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2004). So, the findings show that family lineage, rituals, saint histories and previous knowledge of tourists played an important role in the formation of the image of the destination. As our first research question is about how tourists perceive

the image of the Islamic spiritual destination, these factors show that images are highly linked with cognitive components or knowledge-based facets of Islamic spiritual destination. Previously, these factors have not been explained through the perspective of tourists in the qualitative study and the context of Islamic spiritual destinations (Huanga and Pearceb, 2019). According to the respondents, the shrines stand out in the cities with typically small shops around them. All the commercial, spiritual, cultural and religious activities revolve around this space. Tourists' unique commercial experience is related to antique spiritual products which contribute to strengthening the image of the site and respondents said that they experience a more ethical consumer experience there. Previous researches show that spirituality and religion play a significant role in impacting consumer Ethics. But this study is the first one to explain in the context of Islamic spiritual tourism, how these experiences played a role in the tourists' perception of shrines. The proof accumulated from research shows that tourists of these types of sites and religious consumers have a positive attitude toward these products and services that contain religious and spiritual affiliations (Ridhi et al., 2018).

The interviews revealed that tourists' experiences have been divided into positive and negative experiences and the general perception about the phenomena of Islamic spiritual destinations. Meanwhile, few tourists were eager to purchase souvenirs and local goods, as well as participate in the trip's activities. While religious sites supplied a variety of products to fulfill the demands of tourists, rising commercial activities appear to harm tourists' perceptions. The majority of tourists are sensitive to the prices of commodities as well as to staff behavior that promotes commercialization. The prices of tourism products, particularly food and drinks, were several times greater than tourists expected. Only a few tourists accepted the high prices of products and transportation because most are labor from remote areas Furthermore, tourists were puzzled by unclear or unlabeled product prices, which forced them to negotiate with local shopkeepers. Furthermore, tourists were irritated when they realized, they had been scammed by the shopkeeper by selling fake products.

Apart from the quality and prices of tourism goods, the methods adopted by service workers have been a significant impact on tourists' experiences. Some employees may have been very nice and polite to tourists and some were eager to pay a lot of money to shrines and tourists, but many others showed little respect or care for the tourists. Many tourists hate the beggar's cursing. Each of these activities has the potential to influence visitors' perceptions of the site. The interviews found that a range of factors influenced visitors' spiritual values. These elements were classified into three categories: tourists, other people, and the local environment. Tourists paid attention to their inner thoughts and attempted to discover their inner selves. The attitudes and behaviors of others have a significant impact on tourists' spiritual values. Their family, friends, colleagues, other visitors, service workers, residents and saints are among the others.

In terms of the local environment, tourists' spiritual values can be cultivated by both natural and cultural elements in religious places. Traditional ceremonies and family lineage were among the cultural elements at the shrine. The various elements may have an impact on certain spiritual beliefs. The tourists wish to learn about the essence and meaning of life. Many individuals continue to become stuck in the materialistic world as a result of the complexity of social life. A visit to Islamic spiritual shrines can provide them with a fresh perspective on the world. As a result, many tourists will understand the significance of living a peaceful life.

Furthermore, while on the trip, visitors may experience a variety of individuals, some of whom may show them courtesy and friendliness and may allow them to feel they are not strangers in this place. Meanwhile, they can strengthen their relationships with family, friends and coworkers. As a result, they place a higher emphasis on friendship, affection and respect. Lastly, visitors must live in harmony with the environment. On the other hand, they

have a strong sense of belonging and become close to nature. They also love beautiful sights and the overwhelming power of nature. They stated that all kinds of life are spiritual beings and that everything is formed in the same way. The powerful cultural atmosphere around Islamic holy sites also moved them. As a result, travelers felt incredibly comfortable and delighted when visiting such a spiritual destination.

According to the respondents, they had a unique dining experience of good food which includes holy food, homemade, family-style dinner and local fresh ingredients which could be found only in Shrines. Many respondents share their holy experiences related to food; from the excellent service provided by the shrine kitchen to the hospitality of the staff. They supported the administration and described them as friendly people. Tourists associated the destination experience with wonderful food, good service and unique hospitality. Whereas it is well-documented in the literature across different disciplines that interaction with management and individuals can strengthen social networks (Kemp, 1999) and foster the social capital of host communities (Misener and Mason, 2006).

Most interviewees stated that they had spontaneous and sociable interactions with others during their visit to the shrine. The activity caused an increase in a sense of community and further enhanced their positive feelings. Most of the respondents said that these types of objective experiences enhance their experience. Meanwhile, the affective element which includes the habitant's behavior and attitude can also have a great impact on the subjective experience of the tourists of shrines and further shape their perceived Islamic spiritual destination image. Literature shows that Communication and interaction with other tourists and religious teachers of the sites create a deeper understanding of that destination and also create positive, sacred memories and unique experiences (Trauer and Ryan, 2005). Theme 6 obstruction describes the negative experiences of tourists about the site. Regarding the weakening factors, perceptions of tourists are mostly related to the cognitive element of the religious destination. These cognitive elements can be divided into three classes: business practices, secular behaviors and uncivilized behavior. Above all else, it is a generally concurred issue that religious commercialization can overshadow the Religious spirit of the site (Haq and Wong, 2010). As a result of commercial behaviors, the cursing behavior of beggars and drug consumption do weaken, though to different degrees, nearly all tourists' perceptions of the Shrine as an Islamic spiritual site. Besides, secularization and commercialization of religious places there seems to be another issue (Huanga and Pearceb, 2019) i.e. traffic and over-crowdedness. These elements appeared to have an impact on the respondents' experience (Vassilios and Boukas, 2013).

Theoretical contributions
The process of theory development or adding some advancement in the domain of theory is referred to as a theoretical contribution. This research adds to the academic literature on religious tourism by distinguishing several types of new customer service and their effects on the experiences of visitors. A previous study has underlined the significance of religious tourism in strengthening economic growth. However, the negative impacts of emerging business activity are readily overlooked. Although few scholars have recognized the potential dangers of religious commercialization; commercial activities exist and are a frequent issue in sacred places. This work thus provides a panorama and an overview, for understanding the experiences of visitors about activities at religious spiritual sites.

Furthermore, this study makes a significant contribution by investigating tourists' attitudes toward various activities, such as spiritual goods. However, previous research has not looked at whether religious tourists prefer different products and services. According to this study, many types of commercial activity have a significant impact on tourists' experiences. Consumers are unhappy with high costs, poor product quality, fraud and "forced" consumption, most of them believe that special spiritual product experiences

improve their perspective. Furthermore, the loss of the realism and holiness of holy sites may reduce the desire of many tourists to return.

Lastly, this research contributes to the discussion of values. Many academics have attempted to define and explain values. According to a previous study, values are important influencers of visitors' motives, attitudes, and behavior patterns (Huanga and Pearceb, 2019). The researcher uncovered that no study attempted to investigate which kind of spiritual values tourists can receive at religious places. This investigation bridged the gap by generating themes and factors regarding the spiritual values of religious visitors from the Islamic perspective.

The values of Muslims differ significantly from those of Westerners. The mixture of Confucianism and Religion has an impact on Muslim morals. Individual positive attributes defined by Confucianism include loyalty, kindness, elegance, wisdom, and honesty and also explain the importance of harmony with others. Muslim tourists are traditional, collectivistic, authority-oriented, interdependent and harmonious as a result of their combined cultural thoughts. This research investigates the impact that both cognitive and emotional components are highly related to the perception of Islamic spiritual destinations. It clearly shows that the experiences and perceptions of the visitor of Shrines can be enhanced by different external and internal factors such as connection with the host, commercial activities, culture and attitude of other people.

Practical implications
General suggestions are provided for the improvement of the shrines in Pakistan. In this study many respondents show that the drug culture in the shrines and outside of the shrines adversely affects their experiences, so local management should take action to stop this.

The entrance part of shrines is considered a commercial part of the shrine. Besides the high price of entrance tickets for keeping shoes, bike stands, accommodations, food and drinks, many tourists complain about the con-artists and beggars' behavior in the shrine. Thus, the shrine managers must standardize the business behaviors and improve service quality.

At shrines, many tourists complain about the high prices. Management should put more attention to controlling the high prices of tourism products. Furthermore, "forced" spending and soliciting behaviors do exist. So, standardization and service improvement is important to develop religious tourism sustainably.

Several suggestions can also be provided for different stakeholders to develop religious tourism sustainability. For administration, it is better to control the size and number of commercial places, like hotels, restaurants and stores. Too many commercial places tend to cast a shadow over the glory of these shrines. For scenic and religious staff, improving service quality is necessary because tourists are very sensitive to staff's attitude and behavior. Government should focus more on renewable energy resources to cut off the expenses of the shrines and provide a clean environment to the tourists.

Limitations and avenues for further research
There are some limitations in this research, such as male tourists being more active than females in participating in the research program. This study provides some implications for further research about religious tourism. These implications can be seen as references for other Islamic spiritual sites or religious places. The results of this study support the view that many new services, cultural, cognitive and affective components do exist at Islamic shrines. It is important to explore whether or not the phenomenon occurs at different Islamic sites in other countries or different religious places. Thus, cross-national studies of Islamic spiritual sites and cross-cultural studies of different religions have potential.

The second limitation of this study is that tourists obtain different kinds of spiritual values on their sacred trips. But whether these spiritual values have a subsequent influence on their post-trip life attitudes and behaviors has not been discussed. A longitudinal approach to following up on the views of religious tourists could be a valuable addition to our understanding of the impacts of the trips. Additionally, it is necessary to compare the differences in the spiritual values between domestic tourists and international tourists.

Thirdly, this study has found that religious commercialization affects tourists' spiritual values, but this study employed a qualitative approach. To better understand the relationship between new services and spiritual values, more observation of tourists' behaviors needs to be done.

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