

# Conceptualizing the Antecedents and Consequences of Religious Travellers Experience and Wellbeing

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## Abstract

Religious based spiritual tourism has become widespread and popularized in recent times as travelling become easier and more affordable. However, the study about this market and its travellers are scarce due to the complex relationship between tourism and religion. Religious travellers especially pilgrim travellers, travel for ritual and spiritual renewal and not for the search of pleasure or leisure. In tourism related activities, destination knowledge can be seen as a key element in order to have a pleasant and safe journey and also their their wellbeing after journey. Thus, the well-being of travellers during and after the journey will depend on the amount of preparations that they make based on the quality of the destination product knowledge acquired and traveller's characteristics. The aim of this paper is to offer an integrated concept of the relationships that exist between the antecedents of travellers pre-trip planning that may affect the overall experience of the journey and finally its consequences toward the quality of life that can be measured with six wellness dimensions. The model develop will provide valuable insight to policy makers, tour operators and relevant parties in their key strategic managerial decision areas such as communications planning, market segmentation and customer relationship management.

**Keywords:** destination knowledge, information acquisition, religious travellers, quality of life, religious tourism, wellness dimension

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is considered one of the world's largest growth industries. Tourism is the actions of an individual travelling and staying in certain places which are outside of their residents for a certain purpose (Rowe et al., 2002). It seems like travelling and tourism are important activities for some individuals to indulge themselves in. They have the passion to explore new places to find excitement and new experiences. There are several types of motives for an individual or groups to travel around the world (Ambrož & Ovsenik, 2011). The reasons for tourists to travel are for leisure, enjoyment and to encounter spiritual values.

In the recent decades, spiritually motivated travelling has boomed and became famous as travelling has become easier and more affordable (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). The segment used to be a small niche segment, but in the last five years, it has grown into a full-fledged industry. The market for religious travel has grown into a billion dollar industry worldwide (Hashim et al., 2007) and the majority being Muslims, Christians and Hindus (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). A continuous growth in this market segment also appears to be a conceivable trend in the years to come. Although this type of tourism is booming, research in this area is still limited, especially concerning traveller's behaviour and the implications of such a journey on their well-being. Relatively, little attention has been paid to the religious tourism subject in the tourism literature due to the complex relationship between tourism and religion (Stewart & Leggat, 1998; Vukonić, 1998). This is particularly so when compared to other aspects of the tourism system and their associated markets.

Religious travel is not a new phenomenon and can be considered an ancient type of non-economic travel for centuries (Jackowski & Smith, 1992). It is unique from other tourism segments because it is motivated by a responsibility and obligation rather than a pursuit for pleasure and leisure (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Religious motivated travel, including pilgrimage, has grown tremendously during the past five decades. The increase in religious and spiritually driven travelling have coincided with the development of tourism in the modern era (Lloyd, 1998). Each year, millions of people were attracted to travel around the world to visit major

religious destinations (Jansen & Kühl, 2008). According to the World Religious Travel Association (WRTA), there are over 300 million people who travel to sacred places, and the industry size was projected at \$18 billion (Wright, 2007). The industry is clearly witnessed a huge growth in the past twenty years and religious sites significantly attracted millions of travellers every year (Jansen & Kühl, 2008).

### 1.1 Religious Tourism

Religious travelling is an ancient type of tourism and is motivated by religious or spiritual commitment (Sharples, 2009). However, the concept of religious tourism is complex and can be interpreted in a variety of different ways by the religions. Thus, there is no single confirmed definition or definite definition for religious tourism (Mu et al., 2007). Many feels that it is injustice to use the word “tourism” due the link of “pleasure” and “leisure” associated with the word “tourism” when the purpose of religious travelling is far from pleasure and leisure. Mu et al. (2007), argued that, the concepts of religious tourism in the West and in the East are different, although religious tourism is a kind of tourism of world events. Religiousness is defined as a principle of trust in a godly or incredible individual’s strength and procedure of reverence (Beit-Hallahmi, 1975). Religious attendance strengthens and ensures a person’s religious certainty and the particular explanation of an individual’s experience. Religious loyalty or religiosity has been studied because it is firmly connected with the person’s thinking, attitude, emotional and physiological wellness (Chamberlain & Zika, 1992; McDaniel & Burnett, 1990; Pollner, 1989; Witter et al., 1985). Religious travel can be regarded as an important time in people’s lives because of its potential for a healing experience.

The term religious tourism is complex and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Despite the different perspectives and points of view in the sphere of religious tourism, it is clear that in a single space that it can be defined as sacred, different types of tourism that have differences and also common elements. Quantifying and defining them is a complex task, since the difference between one type and another is based on the motivation, a factor that is clearly subjective and difficult to ascertain. Some terms related to religion and tourism are cultural tourism, spiritual tourism, religious tourism and pilgrimage, which are different contexts within the same setting of the sacred site in question.

In the current literature, the definitions of religious tourism based simply on a combination of ‘religion’ and ‘tourism’ are of little help in understanding the phenomenon of pilgrimage. According to Wiederkehr (2001, p. 11) “a pilgrimage is a ritual journey with a hallowed purpose. Every step along the way has meaning. The pilgrim knows that the journey will be difficult and that life-giving challenges will emerge. A pilgrimage is not a vacation: it is a transformational journey during which significant change takes place. New insights are given. Deeper understanding is attained. New and old places in the heart are visited. Blessings are received. Healing takes place. On return from the pilgrimage, life is seen with different eyes. Nothing will ever be quite the same again”.

Religious travel is about the purchase of an experience that could be emotionally, intellectually, spiritually or physically involving. It can be determined from the importance of pilgrimages, grand tours or healing visits, which have a major impact on the experience in the life of individuals from ancient times until today (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2002). Religious attendance strengthens and ensures a person’s religious certainty and the particular explanation of an individual’s experience. According to Vukonić (1996, p. 80), traditionally, “pilgrimage has been defined as a physical journey in search of truth, in search of what is sacred or holy”. This global resurgence of religious pilgrimage has occurred for many reasons, including the rise of fundamentalism (Friedland, 1999; Riesebrödt, 2000; Stump, 2000) the retreat of some religious faiths into traditional forms of medieval spirituality and religious ritual (Post et al., 1998).

On the other hand, there are also numerous individuals who travel to holy places not only for religious or spiritual purposes in the traditional sense, but because the places are well known and promoted as heritage or cultural attractions (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). They may be interested to visit the sacred sites to enhance their knowledge and understand more about the history of the place or to learn a certain religious faith and its culture and beliefs, instead of being driven purely by pleasure-seeking or spiritual growth. While not necessarily motivated by their own religious beliefs, tourists who belong to a particular religious tradition may visit a site associated with their faith out of a sense of obligation to do so while in the area, for nostalgic reasons, or to educate their family members about their religious beliefs. Tourists also about visiting to sacred sites also seek unique experiences, whether through watching religious leaders and pilgrims perform rituals or by experiencing the “sense of place” or the holiness of the atmosphere (Shackley, 2001).

In Islam, for example, religious and spiritual journeys can be divided into three forms of activities (Haq & Wong, 2010; Olsen & Timothy, 2006). The first activity is performing *Hajj* including *Umrah* which is the fifth pillar of

Islam that is the fundamental of Muslim practices and institutions known as the five pillars of Islam. The visit is a compulsory duty for all Muslims to Mecca at a specific time frame from the 8th to the 12th of Dhu al-Hijjah. The second spiritual journey is *Rihla*, the journey in search of knowledge, commerce health or research. The third activity is called *Ziyara*. *Ziyara* is known as travel to visit sacred sites such as shrines, mosques, or monasteries for spiritual growth and devoutness towards the well-known spiritual people (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). The travel undertaken by Muslim visitors, whether it is *Rihla* or *Ziyara*, with the purpose of spiritual growth and connection with the Creator is considered as spiritual tourism (Haq & Wong, 2010).

## 2. Antecedents and Consequences of Religious Journey

Religion has been one of the factors why people are travelling since ancient times (Wall & Mathieson, 2006) but according to Vukonic (1998), religious tourism is one of the most understudied area in tourism research. There is little information available about religious pilgrims (Egresi et al., 2012). Attention was focused on the extent to which modern tourism practices can be compared with, or the distinct from traditional pilgrimage in terms of social form and meaning (Smith, 1992). Although researches on travellers' satisfaction are extensive, few studies have connected the level of participation in activities while on a journey that is related to religious tourism.

Enhanced knowledge in the transformation of tourism is being exposed by the latest studies focuses on the literature on association between wellness and linking the initiative of resources, society welfare, assets and maintenance (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010; Macbeth et al., 2004). Thomas (2009, p. 11), argued that wellbeing is "intangible, difficult to define and even harder to measure". The concept of well-being cannot be measured by a single concept as it is a multi-level and multi-dimensional structure (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) that include three basic factors such as subjective well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being. In wellbeing tourism, the concept of well-being is defined as "the capacity to combine physical, nutritional, mental, spiritual, social and emotional aspects of life in such a way as to ensure positive health and maintain an optimum quality of life" (Stevens & Associates, 2008, p. 5). Wellness is stated as taking personal responsibility to direct life towards optimal health and well-being. It is the state of well-being that is directed towards achieving and maximizing an individual's potential by balancing the different dimensions of life and health.

Travelling can constantly be mentally stimulated, which makes us feel like we are active. Health and wellness travel should not be limited to just the physical side but also involves emotional, social, environmental and spiritual health. To enrich the experience and satisfaction throughout the journey, the travellers need to take precautions on all aspects of health. The dimension of wellness encompasses physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, social, and intellectual. Each dimension is a critical component in the lifelong process of moving towards improving the overall quality of life.

Given the fast growth in the religious tourism market and global pandemic threat with unknown time and place, there is an urgent need to understand the well-being of travellers after the journey and their religious journey experience and how it can affect their quality of life after they reach their homeland. There is a need to understand how the preparation before the journey affects the quality of the experience and satisfaction and consequently the travellers' state of well-being during and after the journey. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to develop the conceptual understanding on the preparation of the religious travellers' that act as antecedents may affect the overall experience of the journey and, consequently, of quality of life after the journey. This can be monitored with six dimensions of wellness - physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual and financial. It is believes that the individual's characteristics such as the level of religiosity and risk taking behaviour will moderate the overall experience of the journey.

### 2.1 Preparation: Destination Product Knowledge

Information search and seeking is likely to take place whenever travellers realize that there is a need to make a decision. Information acquisition is required for the destination selection and onsite decisions such as choosing the accommodation, transportation, activities, and tour operators (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). The information search is a process of activating the knowledge from an internal source such as the information stored in the memory or acquisition of knowledge from external sources such as collecting information from peers, friends' family and marketplace (Blackwell et al., 2006). It is a need to consult various types of information before making the final purchase decision. Information searches is important in order to make a decision that produces a result for a certain purpose (Awasthy et al., 2012). The activity of information searching is an important task in order to understand the point of travelling and delivering quality knowledge for the travellers (Cho & Jang, 2008). Consumers can find information from their external or internal environments. Houston and Rothschild (1978) stated that information search and acquisition can be an active or passive process, depending on the involvement of the product. Varieties of channels in modern communication devices are designed for travellers

to obtain information or knowledge which can give input for them before travelling. It depends on how the travellers understand the context that is presented (Hjalager et al., 2012).

In tourism related activity, information search can be seen as a key element in order to have a pleasant and safe journey. Tourist information search can be divided into three major components: motives, determinants, and sources (Fodness & Murray, 1997). The primary motive of travellers in searching information is for preplanning the journey according to the need and also to improve the quality of the trip by reducing the level of related uncertainty for onsite decision making. In terms of the search factors, it is a dimension that affect information searching such as past experiences, travelling partners, the presence of friends or relative at the destination (Snepenger et al., 1990). Finally, under the sources of information, the type of information can be classified into commercial or non-commercial sources and received from personal or impersonal communication. The activity of information searching can be conceptualized as a dynamic process where travellers use different amounts and types of sources in response to internal and external possibilities to assist travel planning (Fodness & Murray, 1997; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). Thus, the knowledge acquired will help to minimize the risk during the journey and reduce the uncertainty, which will give a positive, pleasant and memorable experience before, during and after the journey. The travellers will plan their religious spiritual journey accordingly and prepare themselves physically, mentally and financially. Therefore, based on this, it is believed that the well-being of a spiritual travellers' journey may depend on how well the preparation has been done by the traveller based on the quantity and quality of internal and external information sources.

Based on the discussion, the following proposition is proposed:

*P1: The degree of a traveller's destination knowledge will affect the level of experience during and after the journey.*

## *2.2 The Process: Satisfaction and Experience of Religious Journey*

People choose religious journeys as their motivation for travelling (Pourtaheri et al., 2012). Religious journeys has contributed to the profit of every country just like other types of journeys (Karar, 2010). Religious tourism is different from other types of leisure and tourism activities, and is viewed to a great extent as an experiential consumption. However, this experiential consumption is beyond the service quality received from the service provider. Service experience can be understood as the subjective personal reactions or feelings that are experienced by travellers when using the service (Chen & Chen, 2010). Hence, the perceived quality is much more related with their experiences throughout the process of ritual and journey of the pilgrimage than services per se given by the service the provider, such as the hotel or restaurant they visited. This experience will differ from a consumer to a consumer. In religious tourisms, the quality of service received will be a secondary or additional benefit to a pleasant visit and journey. Unlike service quality, there is still little research shedding light on the experiential quality of specific tourism participation such as religious tourisms.

Experience and satisfaction are interrelated and important attributes for a pleasant and enjoyable journey. In the tourism context, satisfaction is mainly specified as a function of pre-travel's expectations and post-travel's experiences. Ojha (1982) pointed out, satisfaction is not just from a good outlook but also from the way consumers encounter and receives the information acquired and the efficiency with which the needs are served. When experiences are contrasted with expectations, the outcome is feelings of contentment and the traveller is regarded as satisfied. Dissatisfaction happens when the travellers felt displeasure (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). The concept of experience itself becomes a key concept within the study field of the cultural heritage marketing (Rojas & Camarero, 2006) or even in religious and spiritual tourisms. As a result, a consumer's satisfaction is determined, most times, by the total experiences obtained after making the visit.

Traveller's satisfaction can be defined as the outcome of the interaction between a tourist's experience and the expectations at the destination area. Consumer's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one of the attributes leads to dissatisfaction or satisfaction with the overall destination experience. According to Chon and Olsen (1991), there is a significant relationship between tourists' expectations on their destination experience and tourists' satisfaction. If the expectation is above the experience of the travel service and product, the travellers will be unsatisfied with their travel experience.

Based on the discussion, the following propositions are proposed:

*P2: The higher the quality levels of total experience of travellers, the more positive quality of life they will experience.*

## *2.3 Outcome: Quality of Life*

The wellbeing of travellers can be related to the quality of life which can be defined in many ways, as is the

relationship between quality of life and life satisfaction. The meaning of quality of life can be described as the interconnection of quality of life and life fulfilment, while some of the researchers define quality of life in the context of life fulfilment (Dolnicar et al., 2012). Subjective well-being concerns a person's evaluation of the quality of their lives, as additional indicators for informing or evaluating public policy (Loewenstein & Ubel, 2008). The study of subjective well-being has been the issue of extensive research resulting in the emergence of fields such as hedonic psychology (Kahneman et al., 1999), positive psychology (Seligman, 2002), and happiness economics (Frey & Stutzer, 2002). Wellness is a multidimensional concept established on balance and spirituality that combines physical and mental health with social and environmental elements (JE et al., 2005). Wellness is stated as taking personal responsibility to direct life towards optimal health and well-being. It is the state of well-being that is directed towards achieving and maximizing an individual's potential by balancing the different dimensions of life and health.

The six dimensions of wellness hexagon model was developed by Dr. Bill Hettler, the cofounder of the National Wellness Institute in 1975. The model demonstrates that all six types of wellness - physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and occupational must be present for a person to attain overall wellness (National Wellness Institute, 1983). Each dimension is a critical component in the lifelong process of moving towards improving the overall quality of life. Physical wellness (1) recognizes the need and fit for regular physical activity. Religious travelling involves many activities that sometimes can be challenging to a certain extent for some individuals. Preparations and a well-managed journey enable the travellers to be at their best before, during and after their journey. Emotional wellness (2) includes the degree to which one feels positive and enthusiastic about oneself and life. The religious journey could be emotionally challenging and the travellers needs to be prepared that includes the capacity to manage one's feelings and related behaviours including the realistic assessment of one's limitations, development of autonomy, and ability to cope effectively with stress. The traveller needs to acquire social skills, interpersonal relationship with others and the surrounding environment to cope with pre, during and post travelling. Intellectual wellness (3) recognizes one's creativeness and stimulating mental activities. Religious journey is believed to enhance and expand the traveller's knowledge and skills while discovering the potential to share their knowledge with others. Social wellness (4) encourages contributions to one's environment and community. It emphasizes the interdependence between others and nature. Social health promotes a chain of networks between humans, and the physical environment that contributes to the common welfare of the community. Spiritual wellness (5) recognizes the search for meaning and purpose in human existence. A religious journey is believed to strengthen spiritual health that involves seeking meaning and purpose in the human life. It includes the development of a deep appreciation for the depth and expanse of life and natural forces that exist in the universe. It also emphasizes inner peace, a positive outlook on life and caring about others and the environment. Positive thoughts and optimism will help avoid or manage depression and have been linked with longer life expectancy. Financial wellness (6) involves understanding financial situation and how an individual's manages their money. A well-managed trip will have a positive overall financial impact to the travellers especially when they are returning to their homeland. Travellers tend to fund the difference between income and expenditure "with a little credit" especially with the poor planning and preparation

Based on the discussion, the following propositions are proposed:

*P3: The degree of a traveller's overall well-being is dependent on the result of the travellers' preparation and experience during their journey.*

*P3a: The degree of quality of life will be reflected in each wellness dimension (six dimensions) after the journey.*

#### *2.4 Moderator: Individual Personal Characteristic*

The first moderator for religious tourism is religiosity. Religiosity or individual piety by virtue of being devout to their respective religion is an important trait to the success of the spiritual travellers' journey. Faith in one's religion can give a person the strength to carry on during a struggle through difficulty. Religious and spiritual involvement may provide additional ways of dealing and coping with problems (Pargament, 1997). Religious practices motivate spiritual growth, while spiritual practices are often a salient aspect of religious participation (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002). The term "coping" in this context means resolving the difficulties that travellers face while travelling. A religious person may do a number of things, one of which is praying, as an active cognitive coping strategy (Holahan & Moos, 1987). Studies show that religion seems to boost one's sense of control, and this appears to be linked with better health (Loewenthal & Cornwall, 1993).

The second moderator for this study is the risk taking. Risk taking behaviour among individuals varies. According to Aro et al., (2009) there is an urgent need to learn about traveller's risk perceptions and risk taking tendencies related to different kinds of travel (Aro et al., 2009; Koenig et al., 1998). This is important for

promoting relevant preventative behaviour, for planning health promotion, and also for avoiding societal and economic disruption related to any threats during and after travelling. Risk perceptions reflect a broader set of cognitive and affective beliefs than simply estimations of the likelihood of an event (Marwick, 1995). Furthermore, not all fundamental threats come along with leisure journey such as being murdered or kidnapped. The type of travel awareness that brings hesitation as a result (Walsh, 1986). Journey awareness comes in intangible services devoted all together with production and normally difficult to be regulate, hence travellers' apparent risk is probably high (Zeithaml, 1981). Risk is a common daily phenomenon that could be experienced by every person to some extent. There are people who avoid it as much as they can, others seem to be attracted to it (Pizam et al., 2004). Risk can be described as "the chance of injury, damage or loss," "dangerous chance," and "hazard" (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002). It is not very clear if there is a broad tendency to involve in risky behaviour, or whether individuals vary in the type of risk behaviour in which they get involved. Based on the discussion, we suggest that individual characteristics can or will moderate the experience of the spiritual journey.

Specifically, the personal level of religiosity and risk taking behaviour will strengthen or weaken travellers' relationships concerning the level of total experience. Based on the discussion, the following propositions are proposed:

*P4: The individual characteristics (religiosity and risk taking behaviour) moderate the level of travellers' overall experience.*

*P4a: The degree of religiosity of travellers will moderate the overall experience of the journey.*

*P4b: The degree of risk taking behaviour of travellers moderate the overall experience of the journey.*

Based on the relationship of each construct discussed, the conceptual framework is proposed in Figure 1.

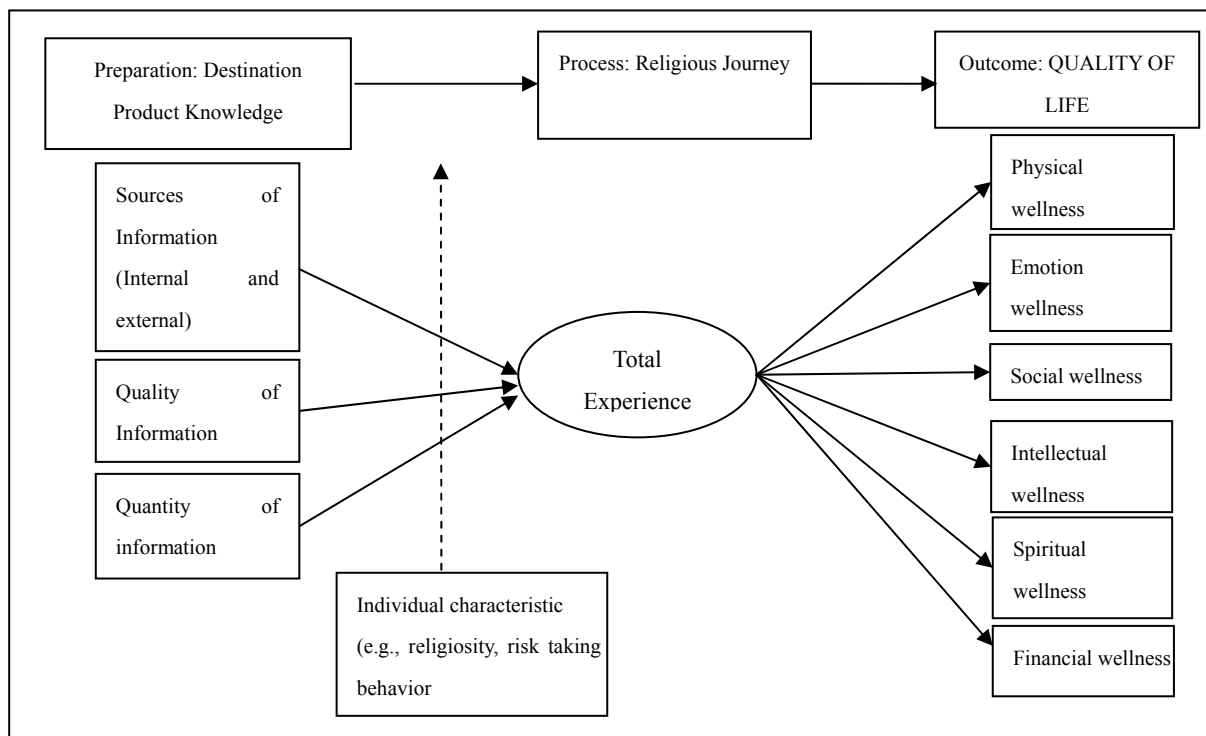


Figure 1. Proposed research framework

### 3. Conclusion

In today's dynamic global environment, understanding how travellers obtain their knowledge in religious tourism is vital for marketing management decisions. The marketers can influence the traveller's destination and service selection decisions by designing an effective communication strategy during the information acquisition. Theoretically, the propositions developed here point toward potentially interesting links with more structurally

focused approaches on how the pre-trip preparation before the spiritual journey affects the aftermath of the journey to the wellbeing of the travellers. The model is developed to help religious tourism marketers, managers, and researchers to comprehend the information acquisition in planning their religious journey of travellers. Understanding of general view on how travellers obtain their knowledge on planning their religious travelling is vital for tour operators and marketers. The proposed model will also allow service providers and travel agents to understand the different segments of tourism and the critical determinants of travellers' state of well-being before, during and after the journey that will affect the satisfaction and overall experience of the journey. Insight provided in measuring wellbeing with six dimension of wellness is an important area to uncover. It allows for improved marketing strategies to promote religious travel by targeting the respective sources of well-being within the human psyche. Application of basic market segmentation strategies based on the pattern of information source utilization and media selection will enable the company to focus on positioning strategies. It is also important to understand the main components in the information acquisition process. Based on this knowledge, the marketers can design communication and message strategies to religious travellers and targeting specifically at different stages during the information acquisition process, which will lead to an efficient use of resources and more success in attracting travellers to their specific destinations.

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