

EMERGENCE OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN INDIA

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Abstract:

Spirituality, in general, has recently become an important subject of research in social and business areas. This has added a new dimension to the tourism industry, called 'spiritual tourism'. Consequently, there has been an increase in the awareness and research interest in the thematic field of spiritual tourism. Tourism is an age old activity associated with civilized nations. Thus, tourism literature too has a long history. However, there are few areas in tourism which have come to the domain of scientific investigation only recently. Spiritual tourism is one such area in which only a few researchers have started their work in a systematic way. This paper emphasizes on the emergence of spiritual tourism oriented research activities and explores the potentials for future work in tourism research. A model depicting a general Classification of tourism literature in the context of increasing research interests in the spiritual tourism has been presented in the form of a model. Research publications on spiritual / pilgrimage tourism appeared in five different journals and a few major conference proceedings since the year 1992 have been analysed. This paper presents an analysis of the available and relevant literatures in the field of spiritual tourism with special emphasis on the Uttarakhand state of India.

Keywords: spiritual tourism, tourism research, classification of tourism literature, tourism marketing, tourism research.

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Introduction:

Tourism is considered vital for many countries, due to the revenue generated by the consumption of goods and services by tourists, the taxes levied on businesses in the tourism industry, and the opportunity for employment in the service industries associated with tourism. Tourism has its own direct and indirect effect on society which is regarded as an effective instrument of country's economic development. Tourism, as viewed by Smith (1992), is an activity dependant on three operative elements – discretionary income, leisure time and social sanctions permissive of travels. Tourism industry fosters a country's economy, stimulates development process, restores cultural heritage, and helps in maintaining international peace and understanding.

It has been observed that spirituality, in general, has recently become an important subject of research in social and business areas. This has added a new dimension to the tourism industry, called spiritual tourism. Spiritual tourism, also termed as religious heritage tourism, includes all the religions, religious places associated with, emotional attachment to these centers and infrastructure facilities for the tourists. This can also be referred to as pilgrimage tourism, as clients are not looking for luxury but arduous journeys to meet the divine goal or simple life. Spiritual tourism, as observed by Haq et al. (2008), 'seems to be a newer academic concept, but it is certainly not a new phenomenon'. The term spiritual tourism, of late, has attracted many researchers globally. This increasing interest is not because of its spiritual perspective, but for the potential it carries to become the largest segment within the industry. The present paper examines the emergence of spiritual tourism as a fertile research area in the context of available literatures. A brief review of literatures in the field has been presented.

Review of Academic Literature:

Tourism research is considered as a matured area of research which has received adorable attention from the researchers. Several authors have reported works on different aspects of tourism research including many geo-specific, sector-specific case-based studies and theoretical models. In this section, a review of research carried out in various areas in tourism, and published in some of the leading journals and conference proceedings has been presented.

Developments in Tourism Research:

The concept and scope of tourism have been progressively changing. Hunziker and Krapf, in 1941, defined tourism as "the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity" (Leiper, 1979). In 1976, Tourism Society of England defined it as "Tourism is the temporary, short-term movement of people to destination outside the places where they normally live and work and their activities during the stay at each destination. It includes movements for all purposes." Cohen (1979), however, argued against the tendency to over generalize, to propose universal models and to conceive the dynamics of tourism as a unilinear process. Instead, the author favoured a multiplicity of types, different typologies and a multilinear approach to the dynamics of tourism. In 1981, International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism defined Tourism in terms of particular activities selected by choice and undertaken outside the home environment (Wheeler, 1995). Hamilton-Smith (1987), in an earlier work, proposed a conceptual framework relating tourism to humane leisure. Today, tourism has attained the status of the highest revenue earner industry for many countries. This service sector industry has become a real threat for the core manufacturing sector industries in the recent times. Consequently, research interest in the area has also been increasing considerably.

There has been a considerable number of published literature on concepts and scopes of different aspects of tourism. An early seminal contribution to the basic economic analysis and theoretical and applied approach as applicable to the tourism sector is highlighted by Mukhopadhyay (2007). Crouch and Ritchie (1999) studied the link between societal prosperity and tourism using a competitiveness framework. The authors also proposed a conceptual model to demonstrate the links. In an earlier work, Leiper (1979) went one step further and proposed a framework for the general study of tourism that could be applicable for several sectors like academic research, education, business and government arenas of tourism by using economic, technical and holistic approaches. Likewise, Oh et al. (2007) proposed a measurement model based on four realms developed by Pine and Gilmore (1999) which is applicable to lodging. The authors demonstrated how the measurement scale can be further refined for adoption by destination marketers. Performance measurement is applied to some extent in tourism research.

In a classical work on ethical aspects of tourism, Wheeler (1995) observed that ethical marketing of tourism products advocates promotion of destination to attract larger number of tourists. The concept of 'authentic-seeking', considered within the context of tourism and focusing on the opportunity for Scotland was well discussed by Yeoman et al. (2007). While working on a different approach, Tribe (2008) explored new ways of mounting virtual exhibition in tourism art. This new innovative method is called "virtual curating" which is applied to interrogate written texts.

The tourism industry has been analysed in a holistic manner through distribution channel perspectives by various authors (Laws, 1997; Halloway, 1998; Middleton and Clark, 2001; Mill and Morrison, 2002). Yilmaz and Bititci (2006), in their recently published work, claims 'there is no attempt in the tourism management literature proposing frameworks or models, which can assist the tourism companies, evaluate and control the overall tourism value chain'. They have proposed a value chain model for performance measurement in tourism that would allow various players to communicate and coordinate their processes and activities in a more mature manner. Jurowski and Olsen (1995) used content analysis approach to identify patterns of activity that exist in the context of general environment of the tourism industry and possible trends emanating from this environment which would influence the tourism industry in the near future. The significant trends identified by the authors include- (i) more precise targeting and aggressive marketing, and (ii) greater use of technology in marketing and servicing tourists.

Tourism marketing and promotion is considered essential for successful tourism development. The tourism traffic, both domestic and international, for various purposes like pleasure, environmental change, and religious /spiritual purpose has increased significantly during recent times. Accordingly, there has been a phenomenal rise in the academic research activities on the marketing aspects of tourism also. Many authors have invariably analysed the psychographic and demographic profiles of tourists and their perception about the performance of various tourism services. It is seen that in tourism research, a considerable emphasis has been focused on marketing of tourism (Haywood, 1990; Middleton, 2001). However, Wheeler (1995) observes that only little attention has been paid towards ethical marketing of the tourism products. According to the author 'the trend has been to look at definitional aspects of tourism marketing which has been followed by prescription towards the management processes'. Williams (2006) admits that

marketing and promotion is clearly essential for successful tourism and hospitality development, however, 'it is often overlooked'.

Calantone and Mazanec (1991), while addressing different marketing management issues, have presented a detailed analysis of role of marketing management in tourism. They have highlighted the need of management and information analysis tasks of the service providers in tourism like various business and government organizations. Hu (1996) have analysed at length the diverse developments that are taking place in travel and tourism marketing and categorized these developments into different themes and sub themes. Major themes and trends evolving in the tourism industry have also been reviewed and discussed by Eccels (1995). The author observes tourism development as a way of improving country's economy and social well being and underlines the need to be proactive so as to stop potential tourists migrating to competing destinations. In an increasingly complex global market system, it is observed, tourism needs to adopt societal marketing strategies that facilitate regional development (Buhalis, 2000). Issues in national marketing strategies in tourism have also been addressed (McCleary 1987; Riege and Perry 2000).

Papadopoulos (1989a), while presenting a conceptual model on tourism marketing planning, observes that for a national tourist organization to achieve its objectives and meet conditions in a rapidly changing environment, a well coordinated tourism marketing planning process is vital in order to survive and prosper in the tourist industry. Papadopoulos (1989b) further emphasizes for a holistic view of the many variables affecting tourism marketing, and believes a heuristic approach is necessary to assess the implications, importance and effectiveness of potential tourism marketing strategies and tactics in dynamic situations. Various aspects of tourism marketing and promotion have also been investigated (Morgan and Pritchard, 1998; Buhalis, 2000; Echtner and Prasad, 2003; Hannam, 2004). Many researchers (Chaudhary, 2000; Enright and Newton, 2004; Swain, 2006; Das et al., 2007) have reported the importance tourism destination marketing with the help of domain specific data and relevant analysis. Haywood (1990) examined the marketing concept and suggested revisions underlying philosophy to tourism marketing, organizational strategy and structure. Use of tools and techniques for planning a country's tourism marketing was proposed by McCleary (1987). A general framework for national tourism marketing has been presented by the author. Calantone and Mazanec (1991) presented Macro-level analysis of management

literature philosophies and micro-level analysis for tourism research through application of different analysis tools. Major variables for segmentation in the Indian tourism market were identified more than a decade ago by Dutta (1991) which affords a framework for product mix planning. Postcolonial theory was used as a critical, contextual perspective to interpret the patterns of different marketing images occurring across the destinations (Echtner and Prasad, 2003). The authors outlined the analysis of brochures representing different Third World countries. Likewise, Williams (2006) provides a framework as to how organisations might effectively implement an experiential marketing strategy. “Electronic Word-of-Mouth (WOM)” has been coined to describe a potentially cost effective mean for marketing hospitality and tourism by Litvin et al. (2008). The authors pointed out its pragmatic importance and proposed a conceptual model of WOM. The strategy making concept as applied to planning event tourism has been outlined by Poria and Ashworth (2009).

Tourism destination marketing has been considered vital in the changing competitive marketing environment. Chaudhary (2000) has reported its importance with the help of domain specific data and relevant analysis. Theoretical analysis involving different issues in formulating strategies for destination marketing (Buhalis, 2000) is outlined. Synthesis of different marketing models and relationship between marketing and planning of destinations and their conflicting and symbiotic relationship was focused. Gallarza et al. (2002) focused on concept and measurement of destination image. The study also proposed a conceptual model of tourist destination image within an intradisciplinary marketing perspective. Beerli and Martin (2004) go hand in hand to develop a model that explains the post visit image of a destination. Enright and Newton (2004) proposed a model on ‘Tourism Destination Competitiveness’ based on studies performed in the city of Hong Kong. Cracolici and Nijkamp (2008) attempted to assess the relative attractiveness of competing tourist destinations on the basis of individual visitor’s perception regarding a holiday destination. The authors also highlighted the need to use micro and macro data to analyse tourist attractiveness. Dey and Sharma (2007) adopted a factor-cluster segmentation approach for segmentation of tourists while Franch et al. (2008) have presented new approaches for established destinations to offer in an innovative and sustainable way. Dwyer et al. (2009), on the other hand identified five global drivers of tourism change and studied their influences on changes in the tourist values and attitudes. The relationship between involvement and place attachment was examined by Gross and Brown (2008) based on a survey conducted in

five South Australian tourism regions. The study also developed and tested a structural model that measures predictive relationships between the constructs of involvement and place attachment. Mohsin (2005) attempted to correlate tourists' attitude and destination marketing. The study was conducted based on responses of tourists regarding Australia's Northern Territory and Malaysia. An investigation on the significance of transport infrastructure as a factor in destination development, showing it to be part of the classical demand for international tourism functions was carried out by Khadaroo and Seetanah (2007). The authors have also cited the infrastructure base of a country as a potential determinant of the attractiveness of a destination. A neural network based approach for content analysis was used to measure destination image from a phenomenographic post-positivist perspective in an online survey (Govers et al. 2007). Hsu et al. (2009) have presented a case based study which identifies the factors that influences the tourist's choice of destination. Authors proposed a 4-level Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) model and used fuzzy set theory for evaluating and ranking the destinations.

Classification of Tourism Literature:

Most of the literatures in the area of tourism studies are geo-specific (case study based). Many aspects of the area are yet to be explored well. Many authors have presented detailed reviews of tourism literatures and classified them from different perspectives. Few typical classifications as reported by various authors are presented.

A review of different literature appearing in the 'Journal of Tourism Management' (during the period 1989 – 1994) focusing on five prime themes has been presented by Eccles (1995). The author has attempted to identify the trends evolving in the tourism industry and hence classified the tourism research into five major themes, namely – destination planning, marketing and promotion, new products, sustainable tourism and transport.

Hu (1996), on the other hand, has identified five main themes in the research of tourism. These five basic themes– economic psychology, market segmentation and travel patterns, strategic marketing, technological advances and travel and tourism communications have been categorized based on a detailed review of literatures on developments in travel and tourism

marketing appearing in the 'Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing' over a period of four years (1992 – 1995).

In an analysis of 174 research articles published in the issues of 'Travel and Tourism Analyst' published during the period from 1989–1994, Costa (1995) has identified four main themes based on their importance and recurrence during the period of analysis. These themes include (a) Airline industry studies, (b) Hotel sector studies, (b) Outbound travel studies, and (d) Tourism industry studies. The author has also highlighted the issues for further research in the areas.

Hing and Dimmock (1997) have classified the literatures that appeared in three major tourism journals in the Asia Pacific region, namely-'Journal of Tourism Studies', 'Tourism Recreation Research' and the 'Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research' from 1989 to 1996 including both the years into five major themes. These themes are – Tourist markets, Tourist Flows, Tourist Development, Sustainable Tourism Development, and Social, economic and cultural impacts of tourism.

The tourism industry has been witnessing remarkable changes with the changes in the social system. This has been reflected in the types of researches and related publications from time to time. The industry has evolved into such a broad sector that, today, even health-care related travels, religious travels etc. are recognized as some of the most promising tourism sectors. Thus, it is indeed a difficult task to classify the researches on tourism. Considering the classical approaches, and with a view to accommodate the emerging areas of tourism, an overall classification of the literature and development in the areas can be made as presented in the Figure I.

There has been a substantial growth in the tourism industry in the last two decades (Aggarwal et al., 2008). Tourism industry got benefited by the increasing interest and number of tourists in diversified activities which were hardly known to be associated with tourism. Although, it is a century old practice that people across the globe travel for pilgrimage and/or spiritual activities, however, only during the last few decades, these activities were recognised as part of the tourism industry. In the recent years, people have started travelling vigorously for purposes like getting treatment elsewhere, getting married at a place of their choice, or to enjoy the thrills associated with adventures. Such sector-based activities are on the rise substantially.

Obviously, such activities create business opportunities in the place of happenings and have proved to be significant revenue earners. Consequently, research works and analysis of different aspects (infrastructure, marketing, economics etc.) associated with such activities have also been reported. This has resulted in few highly potential segments in tourism research. These segments include adventure tourism (Weber, 2001; Williams and Soutar, 2009), cruise tourism (Kwortnik, 2008), eco-tourism (Stoneman et al., 1995), event tourism (Getz, 2008), medical tourism (Connell, 2006; Michelle, 2009), sex tourism (Oppermann, 1999), special interest tourism (Trauer, 2006), volunteer tourism (Sin, 2009), wedding tourism (Johnston, 2006), and rural tourism to name a few. However, researches in these areas are still in infancy.

Research on Spiritual Tourism:

Spiritual tourism has extended the conventional concept 'the harder the journey, the better the reward', to a wider concept of a desire for a change, relief from the dull daily life and enthusiasm and divine nature for a common man. Accordingly, academic interests in analysing different aspects of spiritual tourism as a new segment have been gaining momentum. Spirituality has become an increasingly significant area in social, health and business research (Haq et al., 2008). Travels to spiritual places have recorded a phenomenal increase in the recent years. Believe in spirituality has caused people to travel since long even with poor travelling and communication infrastructures. However, scientific study on marketing aspects of spiritual tourism is very limited. Most of the studies are case-based or demographic. A brief review of literatures appeared in five leading international journals (Annals of Tourism Research, Applied Geography, International Journal of Tourism Research, International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, and Journal Management, Spirituality and Management) and few International Conference Proceedings since the year 1992 have been presented in the following subsection.

Emergence of spiritual tourism:

An analysis of published literatures in the broad area of spiritual / pilgrimage tourism has been presented in Figure II. It is observed that there has been a steep rise in published literatures

during the latter half of the present decade (2006–June 2009) indicating the emergence of a potential area of research. Early research thrusts were observed to be mostly concentrated on developing conceptual frameworks concerning ‘spirituality’, ‘spiritual travel’, ‘pilgrimage’, and ‘religious travel’ as seen by the higher publications during the period 1992-1995 in Figure II. In the last few years, the major research focus was shifted towards development of marketing strategy, drivers of spiritual tourism, development of typology model and analysis of tourists’ perspectives and attitudes. It has been observed that both ‘religious tourism’ and ‘pilgrimage’ are often included within the broad umbrella of ‘spiritual tourism’. Delbecq (2009) reflects on the evolution of spirituality and suggests areas of increasing understanding. The author also emphasizes on the need for future development. Haq and Jackson (2009) studied the importance of marketing strategy perspective on Hajj (once a year Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca) and examined the perceptions of Muslims going on this significant spiritual journey. The authors also contributed towards the theory on spiritual tourism and marketing of spiritual tourism, by focusing on Hajj as both an outstanding spiritual journey and a product/service. The study also identified the use of modern marketing concepts and tools which were very helpful in providing a better perspective of the enormous business aspects of Hajj.

It is observed that the literatures analysed in the present work (1992 – June 2009) can further be categorised into four groups based on the theme of the publications. These categories include literatures on themes like conceptual, marketing, destination of spiritual tourists, and socio-cultural issues as shown in Figure I. There has been a significant interest in marketing aspects of spiritual tourism. However, investigations into the socio-cultural aspects of the spiritual/pilgrimage tourism indicate diverse research interests, while destination related studies are relatively less.

Future scope of research:

Tourism has been recognized as one of the major industries of many countries. Spiritual tourism is also recognized as one of the major contributors in a state’s revenue. Many countries are known for their spiritual heritages. However, organized research activities in the area are yet to be seen. Thus, although there has been an encouraging trend in the recent years, sufficient

literature on spiritual tourism is yet to be generated. There are immense scopes of research in the area.

Segmentation of inbound and outbound tourists needs to be studied well. Segmentation, as suggested by Tkaczynski et al. (2009), should be at the tourism stakeholder level rather than at the destination level. Destination marketing has been recognized worldwide as one of the important aspects in marketing of tourism. Segmentation and marketing aspects of spiritual destinations, sustainability and attractiveness of spiritual destinations are some of the aspects that require systematic investigation. Marketing strategy aspects with reference to spiritual tourism have been reported in recent literatures, however, considering the geological diversity, cultural diversity, and differences in economic infrastructures each destination of spiritual importance might demand specific approach for marketing. Accordingly, structured researches regarding quantification of strategic opportunity areas with reference to Ansoff's matrix, i.e. Market penetration, Market development, Product development and Diversification can be carried out. Scientific study of the perceptions of the spiritual tourists in the light of specific place of spirituality is another potential theme for initiating scientific research. Possible affect on number of inbound and outbound tourist to different spiritual places and its economic implications needs to be investigated. Such investigation could be case specific as different spiritual places are located at different geographic locations. Different spiritual places might attract tourists on different special occasions unlike season based tourist movements in most of the general tourist places. For example, it is quite possible and reasonable that the requirements and feelings of a Hajji (in the Gulf of Saudi Arabia) would differ significantly to those of an Amarnath Yatri (in the Indian Himalayas). Such investigation could help formulating better tourism product and contribute towards building better infrastructure. Formulation of marketing strategies to promote spiritual tourism needs to be investigated. Marketing strategies could be at different levels – national, state, and location-based. However, each of these strategies calls for analysis of data.

Conclusion:

There has been a phenomenal increase in spiritual travelers in the recent years owing to generic changes in the people's attitude towards spirituality. Ripple effect of this change has also been observed in the academic research. Literatures in the field of spiritual tourism, along with

other sector-based tourisms (adventure tourism, eco tourism, medical tourism, wedding tourism etc.), have been on rise significantly. A higher trend in reporting case-based studies (geo-specific, shrine specific etc.), rather than on general approach, have been observed. Current paper presents a brief review of literatures concerning tourism research, in general, and with a focus on spiritual tourism during the period 1992 – June 2009. Major thematic classifications in tourism research presented by different authors have been analysed. A new model depicting general classification of tourism literatures including spiritual tourism has been proposed. Literatures on spiritual/ pilgrimage tourism could be further classified into four different major categories based on the issues discussed. Growth of spiritual tourism as a promising research domain has been discussed with the available literatures. Potentials for future research in the area have been indicated. Major conclusions of the present study can be summarized as:

- Researches in the sector-based tourism are increasing significantly in the recent years.
- There has been a substantial increase in research interest in the area of spiritual/ pilgrimage tourism, especially, in the current decade. Increase in the published literature in the second half of the current decade is almost four times that of the first five years.
- Literatures on spiritual/pilgrimage tourism can be further subdivided into four thematic areas – conceptual, marketing, destination, and socio-cultural.
- Spiritual tourism as a subject of scientific research is still in its infancy. Many aspects like infrastructural development and requirement, destination analysis, segmentation of destination, demographic segmentation of tourists are yet to be explored well.

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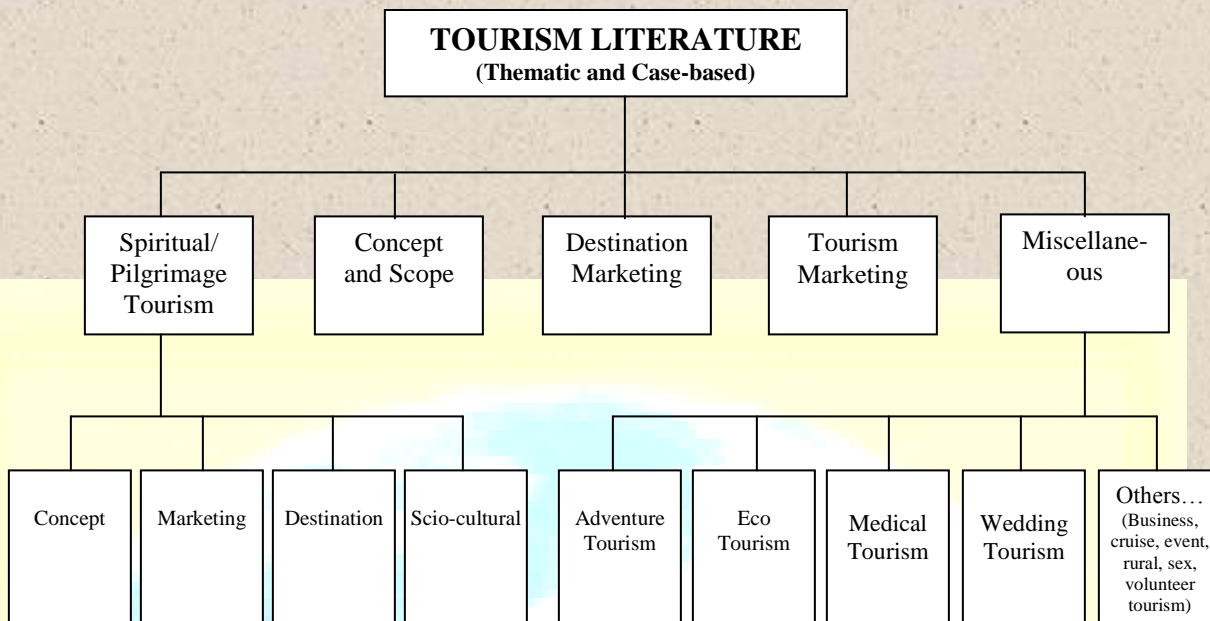


Figure I. A general classification of tourism literature.

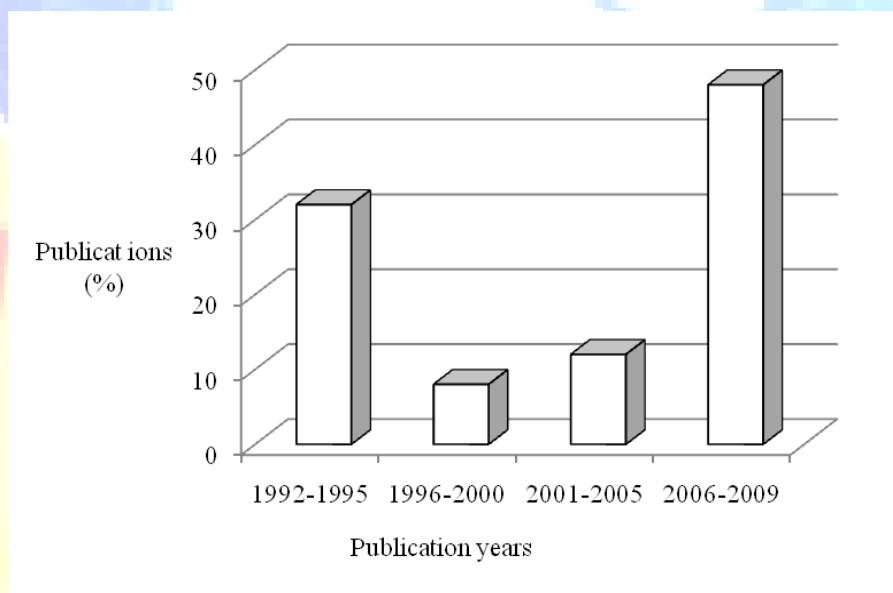


Figure II. Trends in publication of spiritual/pilgrimage tourism literature.