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Reni Polus

The Business School, Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh, UK, r.polus@napier.ac.uk

Ismail Shaheer

Department of Marketing, University of Otago, New Zealand, ismail.shaheer@otago.ac.nz

Naresh P. Nayak

Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, The Business School, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Saigon South Campus, Vietnam, naresh.nayak@rmit.edu.vn

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Pilgrimage in the COVID-19 Era: Uncovering Supply Side Challenges and Opportunities in Media Representations

Reni Polus

Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh, UK
r.polus@napier.ac.uk

Ismail Shaheer*

University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
ismail.shaheer@otago.ac.nz

Naresh P Nayak

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Saigon South Campus, Vietnam
naresh.nayak@rmit.edu.vn

Pilgrimage travel, a common practice across major religions, has historically exhibited remarkable resilience to global crises, owing to the unwavering conviction of its followers. However, the COVID-19 pandemic marked a significant departure from this trend, disrupting pilgrimage tourism, unlike any event since World War II. Despite extensive research on the pandemic's impact on tourism, limited attention has been directed towards understanding its specific effects on pilgrimage travel. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the challenges and opportunities faced by pilgrimage tourism suppliers in the aftermath of COVID-19. To obtain a comprehensive global perspective, we collected and analysed one hundred and fifty media articles from thirty countries. The thematic analysis of these articles revealed eight challenges and four opportunities encountered by pilgrimage tourism suppliers during the pandemic. These findings not only highlight the distinctive struggles within the pilgrimage sector but also provide broader insights into the implications for the tourism industry at large. By exploring the intricacies of COVID-19's impact on pilgrimage tourism, this research contributes valuable knowledge to guide strategies for resilience and recovery in this durable yet vulnerable sector.

Key Words: pilgrimage, COVID-19, media representation, challenges, opportunities, pilgrimage suppliers

Introduction

Pilgrimage is travelling for religious and / or spiritual purposes and is a common practice across major religions (Raj & Griffin, 2020). Pre-COVID-19, pilgrimage sites welcomed about 300 to 330 million international visitors annually (generating US\$ 18,000 million globally), significantly contributing to pilgrimage destination economies (OMT, 2014). Arguably pilgrimage tourism has shown strong resilience to most of the crises in the past. Indeed, since WWII, pilgrimage tourism has had no profound impact due to global crises until the COVID-19 pandemic (Mróz, 2021). Although tourism, including pilgrimage tourism, has experienced a range of substantial effects due to earlier crises, the impact of COVID-19 is estimated to be more extensive (Ramelli & Wagner, 2020).

As a result of the global impact of COVID-19, researchers from various disciplines have undertaken studies about the pandemic, including its impact on tourism (Ramelli & Wagner, 2020; Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022). Yet, there is a dearth of research undertaken to understand the implications of COVID-19 on pilgrimage tourism (Séraphin & Jarraud, 2022; Shaheer *et al.*, 2022), particularly looking at the impact on pilgrimage tourism suppliers, which includes pilgrimage destinations and service providers. Furthermore, most of the current research about COVID-19's impact on pilgrimage tourism utilises data related to one religion (such as Islam by Ebrahim *et al.*, 2021) or a single pilgrimage event (such as Kumbh Mela by Shukla *et al.*, 2021). This limitation suggests that an evaluation of diverse cases of religions and pilgrimage events is required for a holistic understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on pilgrimage tourism.

Therefore, the primary aim of this research is to examine the challenges and opportunities faced by pilgrimage tourism suppliers due to the impact of COVID-19. Understanding the consequences of the pandemic on suppliers is crucial for developing strategies to minimise its impact and capitalise on lessons learned from this experience. Moreover, the findings will contribute to enriching the existing literature on the impact of crises, particularly COVID-19, on the tourism sector.

This research addresses a gap in the limited attention given to COVID-19's impact on the supply side. It achieves this by focusing on three exclusive pilgrimage destinations / events related to three different religions: Hajj (Islam), Khumb Mela (Hinduism), and Camino de Santiago (Christianity). This approach is expected to provide more nuanced and diverse perspectives on the challenges and opportunities faced by pilgrimage tourism suppliers. Additionally, the research utilises online news as data, operating on the premise that news representation is an effective method for comprehensively understanding the global implications of COVID-19 on pilgrimage tourism (Shaheer *et al.*, 2022; Ng *et al.*, 2021).

Literature Review

Pilgrimage Tourism

A pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by a pilgrim to holy or sacred places to engage in specific religious or spiritual practices (Raj & Griffin, 2020). Pilgrimage is acknowledged as the oldest known form of tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2016). Traditional religious pilgrimage is obligatory for some faiths, such as Islam (within the context of capability). For others, like Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists, pilgrimage is highly recommended (Collins-Kreiner, 2016). Today, Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia are considered to be Islam's two holiest pilgrimage sites. Likewise, Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela are major Christian pilgrimage destinations (Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006).

Hajj is an annual pilgrimage event that occurs during the 8th-12th Dhulhijja, the last month of the Islamic calendar (Yamin, 2015). Performing Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, constituting a once-in-a-lifetime obligation for all physically and financially capable Muslims, with 203

million pilgrims attending annually before COVID-19. In contrast, Kumbh Mela, a Hindu pilgrimage festival, is organised once every three years. Its venue rotates among four different cities in India, namely, Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nasik (Yamin, 2015). It is estimated that over 200 million pilgrims attended Kumbh Mela in 2019. Santiago has been a destination for Christian pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, or Way of St James, since the early Middle Ages (Gusmán Correia *et al.*, 2017). The most popular contemporary walking route is the Camino Francés, or French Way (Slavin, 2003; Gusmán Correia *et al.*, 2017). It is estimated that over 400,000 pilgrims travelled on the various routes to Santiago in 2023.

For some countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia), pilgrimage tourism is not only a primary economic activity but also makes significant contributions to the country's geopolitical and cultural identity (Gautam, 2020). Collectively, pilgrimage tourism represents the most significant mass movement of people globally. For instance, Hajj and Umrah to Mecca in Saudi Arabia attracts more than 20 million pilgrims each year, generating £12 billion or 7 percent of the total GDP of the country (Yezli *et al.*, 2021; Memish *et al.*, 2020). Transportation, accommodation, catering, and religious ceremonies are all integral parts of pilgrimage tourism operations. These activities generate substantial revenue and employment opportunities, supporting local economies and livelihoods.

However, despite its historical and economic importance, pilgrimage tourism is vulnerable to various challenges and risks. Throughout history, crises such as wars, political conflicts, natural disasters, and epidemics have had significant impacts on pilgrimage tourism (Kala, 2014; Mosier, 2020). For example, political conflicts in regions such as the Middle East have disrupted pilgrimage to sites like Jerusalem and Mecca (Olsen, 2018), and the devastating Gorkha earthquake in Nepal in 2015 affected pilgrimage routes to holy sites in the region, including Mount Kailash in Tibet (Ghimire, 2019; Min *et al.*, 2020). Prior to the emergence of COVID-19, various epidemics and infectious diseases such as the Spanish Flu, SARS, MERS, and Ebola, had caused disruptions to pilgrimage tourism. The outbreak of SARS in 2003, for example, forced the closure of major pilgrimage sites in Asia (Wilder-Smith, 2006).

Pilgrimage Tourism and COVID-19

COVID-19 has adversely affected both the demand and supply of the pilgrimage tourism sector. The pandemic shocked the world by cancelling international flights, closing borders and airspaces, and causing irreparable losses and damages to tourism sectors (Raj & Griffin, 2020; Gautam, 2020). However, COVID-19 has impacted on a much deeper level in pilgrimage tourism. For the first time in history, the major pilgrimage destinations worldwide were forced to close, and prominent pilgrimage events were restricted, postponed or cancelled (Memish *et al.*, 2020). For instance, Saudi Arabia restricted international pilgrims to the 2020 annual Hajj while Umrah (year-round pilgrimage) was suspended that year (Ebrahim & Memish, 2020). Religious events such as Kumbh Mela, a Hindu religious gathering held every 12 years in Uttar Pradesh, India, were postponed to April (normally held in January). The festival's duration was shortened to 30 days (normally lasts for 100 days) due to its potential as a super-spreader event (Quadri & Padala, 2021). This unprecedented global event disrupted centuries-old traditions and practices associated with pilgrimage, leading to disappointment and a loss of spiritual experiences for millions of pilgrims (Raj & Griffin, 2020; Gautam, 2020).

The unique characteristics of pilgrimage tourism make it particularly susceptible to disruptions during pandemics. Pilgrimage sites often witness large gatherings of people in confined spaces, creating an environment conducive to the spread of infectious diseases (Al-Tawfiq *et al.*, 2014; Ebrahim & Memish, 2020). The close proximity and physical contact among pilgrims can amplify the risk of disease transmission. Moreover, pilgrims typically come from diverse geographic regions, potentially carrying infections from their home countries and transit points, thus, increasing the chances of introducing and spreading diseases across borders (Al-Tawfiq *et al.*, 2014; Ebrahim & Memish, 2020). Given the above vulnerabilities, it is essential to understand the mechanisms and operations of pilgrimage tourism to address the specific challenges it faces during crises.

Stakeholders on the supply-side adapted to the 'new normal' by introducing new protocols for business operation (e.g., hand-sanitising, use of face coverings,

social distancing, and restricting the number of participants for mass gatherings). Service providers also invested heavily in technology (e.g., GPS tracking systems, employing drones to monitor pilgrim movement, use of infographics and videos to deliver information) as containment strategies and scaling up healthcare infrastructures to prepare for a potential series of new variants of the COVID-19 pandemic (Quadri & Padala, 2021; Ebrahim & Memish, 2020). These measures not only added operational complexities but have changed the overall pilgrimage experience, creating a sense of unease and altering the spiritual ambience (Raj & Griffin, 2020; Ebrahim & Memish, 2020).

Furthermore, the impact of COVID-19 on pilgrimage tourism goes beyond religious and spiritual aspects, having significant socio-economic implications for local communities and businesses that rely on pilgrimage tourism. The closure of pilgrimage sites, cancellation of events, and travel restrictions resulted in substantial financial losses for pilgrimage destinations and service providers (Raj & Griffin, 2020). The recovery process for pilgrimage tourism has been gradual and prolonged, as it involves rebuilding trust among pilgrims, attracting visitors, and restoring the infrastructure and services necessary for a successful pilgrimage experience.

Additionally, the pandemic led to a shift in pilgrim behaviour and preferences. Many individuals are now more cautious and concerned about their health and safety while undertaking pilgrimages (Parveen, 2020; Shaheer *et al.*, 2022). This shift in behaviour may lead to changes in pilgrimage patterns, with pilgrims seeking destinations that provide a sense of security and which follow stringent health protocols (Gautam, 2020).

In many cases, due to limitations and constraints imposed during the pandemic, age-old traditions and practices have been impacted and altered, giving rise to altered forms of worship and spiritual practices (Raj & Griffin, 2020; Kapoor *et al.*, 2022). For example, Hajj and Umrah rituals were greatly altered during the pandemic, affecting the psychological well-being of potential pilgrims, often denying people an opportunity to engage in a ritual that they consider essential to the completion of religious duties (Muneeza & Mustapha, 2021; Shaheer *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, the pandemic accelerated the

adoption of technology in pilgrimage tourism, with virtual pilgrimages and online religious services becoming more popular alternatives for those unable or hesitant to travel (Mróz, 2021; Srivastava, 2019).

Media Representation

In this unprecedented time, news media played an essential role as the primary source of information. Online news was imperative in making people aware of the situation worldwide without risking any possible virus transmission through print media (Anwar *et al.*, 2020). Diseases like SARS and Ebola have attracted widespread media coverage, which induced positive and negative impacts on health and social risk among the public (Kuang *et al.*, 2021). Hence, media representation is a valuable source for understanding the effects of COVID-19 on pilgrimage tourism. Media representation refers to the ways media outlets portray communities, countries, experiences, or topics from a particular ideology, concept, or image (Gabore, 2020; Gong & Firdaus, 2022). Within this context, this research aims to explore the challenges and opportunities which pilgrimage suppliers faced due to COVID-19, utilising online news media as a data source.

Studies indicate that the media has a significant influence on public perceptions and attitudes. Specifically, researchers have extensively investigated how media coverage influences individuals' comprehension and reaction to health crises, disasters, and various societal matters (Anwar *et al.*, 2020; Kuang *et al.*, 2021). These studies provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between media, public opinion, influence, and social responses. In the context of COVID-19, researchers have explored various types of data to assess its impact, including decline in pilgrim numbers, the cancellation of pilgrimage events, and loss of revenue (Parveen, 2020; Yasin *et al.*, 2020). However, there is a noticeable research gap when it comes to studying the impacts on pilgrimage tourism of COVID-19, specifically using online news media as a data source. Arguably, a holistic method to explore the impact of COVID-19 on pilgrimage tourism is by reviewing news media.

News media is not only one of the most convenient and accessible sources to understand the effects of COVID-19,

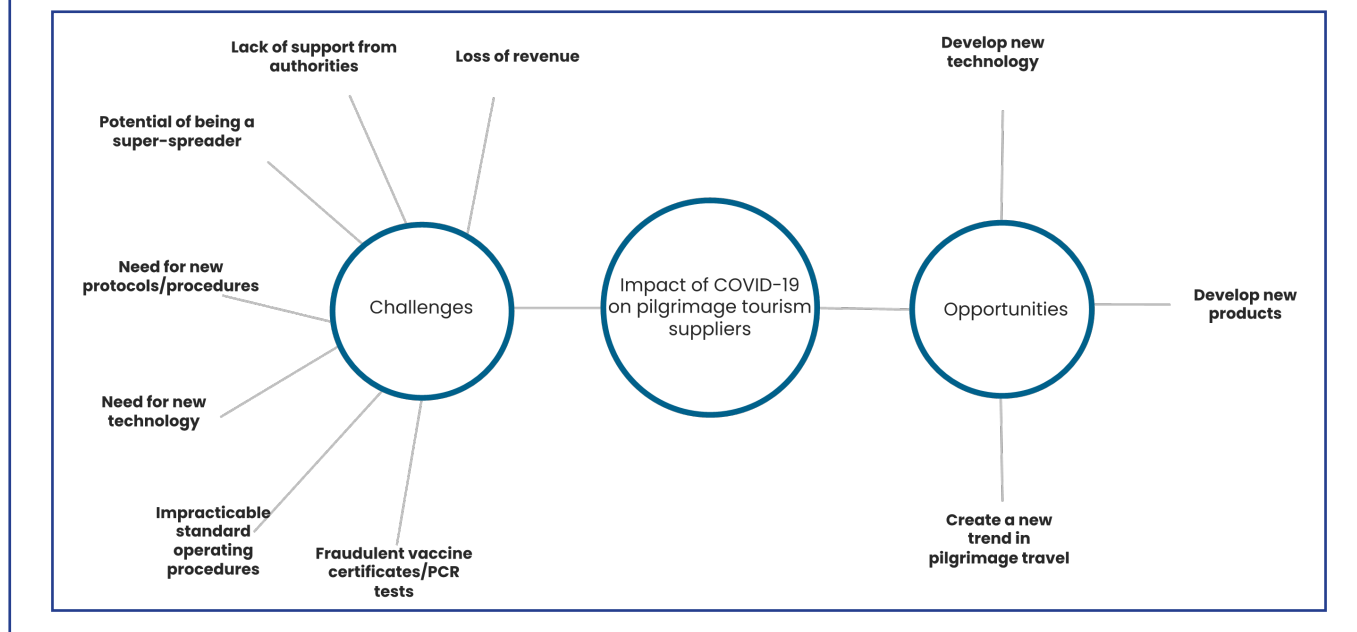
but it also offers real-time updates, global coverage and a combination of quantitative and qualitative data (Ng *et al.*, 2021; Kuang *et al.*, 2021; Gong & Firdaus, 2022). Recent studies have noted the crucial role of online news in providing timely and accurate information to the public regarding COVID-19 after workplaces were shut down and many millions were forced to stay at home for extended lengths of time (Ng *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, news media offers a platform for different voices and perspectives (Kuang *et al.*, 2021; Gong & Firdaus, 2022). Journalists interviewed pilgrims, religious leaders, tourism officials, and other stakeholders, providing diverse insights into the experiences and opinions of those directly affected by the pandemic. These first-hand accounts and expert opinions contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the impact on pilgrimage tourism. As such, by leveraging online news media as a rich data source, this study seeks to explore the specific impacts of COVID-19 on pilgrimage tourism, identifying the unique challenges faced by pilgrimage destinations and service providers, and exploring the opportunities that have emerged in response to the pandemic.

Methodology

The Hajj in Saudi Arabia, the Kumbh Mela in India, and the Camino de Santiago in Northern Spain were chosen as cases for this study. These pilgrimage destinations / events were selected for this study not only because they attract large numbers of pilgrims, but also because they were highly affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 (Raj & Griffin, 2020).

The data employed for this study was online news articles, which are often used to understand a collective global voice (Ng *et al.*, 2021). The data were collected utilising Google News as a search engine. In Google News, headlines were compiled from more than 4,500 English-language news sources worldwide using an algorithm. The results were sorted based on relevancy and popularity (Leporini, 2011; Lin & Rosenkrantz, 2017). This approach helps to ensure that the collected articles are from established and recognised news outlets, thereby enhancing the credibility of the data.

The search was conducted between 10 November 2021 and 14 January 2022, following news media reporting a

Figure 1: Challenges and Opportunities for Pilgrimage Tourism Suppliers

significant impact on the pilgrimage sector, such as major pilgrimage destinations / events being forced to either be closed, postponed, or cancelled. The search yielded an extensive collection of online news articles from diverse sources and countries, spanning from June 2020 to January 2022. By analysing news articles from diverse sources and different countries, valuable insights can be gained regarding the profound effects of the pandemic on the pilgrimage tourism sector.

The sample was drawn using the search terms

'COVID-19 + pilgrimage name' (e.g., *COVID-19 and Hajj*, *COVID-19 and Kumbh Mela*, *COVID-19 and Camino de Santiago*).

and

'Coronavirus + pilgrimage name'

This approach aimed to retrieve relevant and context-specific information related to the research objectives. The top 50 search results were recorded for analysis, and this included news from 30 countries. The judgment criteria for selecting articles was based on relevance to the research topic and the inclusion of substantial information related to the challenges and opportunities faced by pilgrimage suppliers during COVID-19.

Articles that provided in-depth analysis, insights from industry experts, and first-hand accounts from pilgrimage

stakeholders were prioritised, as they were more likely to contribute valuable and reliable information to the study. When articles were inaccessible (e.g., a link to a news source requiring a subscription), the following article in the queue was selected as a replacement. In this way, a clear and systematic protocol was established to select an appropriate replacement article from the search results, ensuring that the overall sample remained representative and unbiased. Data saturation was achieved after 44, 42, and 36 articles for the Hajj, the Kumbh Mela, and the Camino de Santiago, respectively (See Appendix A at end of paper). Hence, no further news articles were collected.

The news articles were analysed using thematic analysis through an inductive approach following Walters (2016). Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring patterns, themes, or concepts within a dataset, enabling the researcher to derive meaningful insights from the data. Our analysis involved an iterative process. Firstly, we familiarised ourselves with the data. Then, we generated initial codes, searched for themes, reviewed and refined them. Lastly, we defined and named the themes that emerged. The inductive approach allowed for the emergence of themes directly from the data, minimising researcher bias and ensuring that the analysis was grounded in the collected information. The thematic

analysis was a collaborative effort involving all three authors, enhancing the credibility and reliability of the analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The study examines challenges and opportunities for pilgrimage tourism suppliers due to COVID-19. The online news articles revealed significant challenges and opportunities for pilgrimage tourism suppliers due to COVID-19 (Figure 1).

Challenges for Pilgrimage Tourism Suppliers

Loss of revenue

The challenges and opportunities identified in this research echo some of the earlier COVID-19 impacts on tourism studies (see Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022; Foo *et al.*, 2020). One of the most immediate challenges reported by suppliers was the loss of revenue (UNCTAD, 2020). Initial contention measures of COVID-19 focused on reducing mass gatherings, and although such efforts helped contain the virus, they led to a drop in the economy (Nicola *et al.*, 2020; OECD, 2021). While the impacts were most felt by pilgrimage destinations almost immediately, some destinations had a more profound impact, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

The Covid-19 pandemic hugely disrupted both pilgrimages [Hajj and Umrah], usually [the] key revenue earners for the kingdom [Saudi Arabia], raking in a combined \$12bn annually' (Al Jazeera, 17 October 2021).

For the first time since 1932, international pilgrims, who make up the majority of worshippers, were not allowed to visit the holy sites, causing a loss of as much as \$4.6 billion (Bader *et al.*, 2012). Due to COVID-19, the Saudi Arabian government decided to suspend the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, a significant religious event that draws millions of pilgrims annually. This suspension was imposed in February 2020, and although it was lifted in October 2020, only a limited number of pilgrims were allowed to participate, with strict safety measures in place (Sigala, 2020; Jokhdar, 2021). The Hajj pilgrimage holds immense importance in Islam, with its impact reaching far beyond the local economy to influence the worldwide Muslim community. Travel agencies and other service

providers that rely heavily on pilgrim influx during this period were adversely affected by suspension of this event. Moreover, the Muslim community worldwide experienced a psychological impact, as many devout believers were left disheartened by their inability to attend this significant religious event (Jokhdar, 2021; Shaheer *et al.*, 2022). Nevertheless, the loss of revenue due to COVID-19 was not only specific to the pilgrimage tourism sector (Sigala, 2020). According to WTO (2021), a crash in international tourism due to COVID-19 led to an estimated US\$ 1.3 trillion loss.

Lack of support from authorities

While large gatherings worldwide were either cancelled or postponed because of COVID-19, some pilgrimage events still continued (OECD, 2020). For instance, amidst the deadly COVID-19 surge in India, the government urged people worldwide to come and perform the holy dip in the Ganga River during the Kumbh Mela festival (Barel *et al.*, 2021). The media reported that more than 1,350,000 devotees turned up as the majority believed that 'the faith of God would overcome the fear of the virus'. Media also reported that despite the increase in infections linked to the festival and new variants ripping through the state, the local authorities refused to cancel events (Freckelton, 2020; Brig, 2020). The festival was only cancelled 17 days later as there was a surge in COVID-19 infections linked with the festivals, and the country's daily death toll passed 1000. The lack of collective efforts from the local authorities caused major confusion and anger among locals. Some commented, 'our stubbornness and superstitious belief has bought us a catastrophe' as reported in the media. The notion of pilgrimage events becoming super-spreader events of COVID-19 is observed in the excerpt below.

This year's event takes place amid fears that a massive gathering like this could turn out to be a COVID-19 super-spreader event ... However, even before the Kumbh began, the city and neighbouring areas had already emerged as COVID-19 hot spots. As the festival began, seven living Hindu saints in the city of Haridwar tested positive, and 300 pilgrims were found positive during the first few days of the festival (Tulasi Srinivas, The Conversation, 9 April 2021).

The example of the Kumbh Mela festival serves as a stark reminder of the potential consequences of ignoring the rules of avoiding mass gatherings. The festival turning into a COVID-19 hotspot highlights the urgency of implementing measures to control the spread of the virus during such festivals. It also highlights the necessity for the pilgrimage tourism sector to adapt to the new realities presented by the pandemic.

Need for new protocols / procedures

Although some pilgrimage destinations remained open or re-opened during the pandemic, a series of protocols and preventive measures were imposed. Apart from limiting access, social distancing and mandatory mask-wearing, the standard operating procedures of businesses were changed, such as having to present a vaccine pass upon entering establishments as proof of entry, which was increasingly mandated, not only for pilgrims but also for the general public (Taylor & Asmundson, 2021). For example, as the comment below shows, in Saudi Arabia, sanitising the mosque's floor in Mecca became part of the routine to ensure pilgrimage could be performed safely.

We are sanitising the floor and using disinfection liquids while cleaning it two or three times during (each) shift said Olis Gul, a cleaner who said he has been working in Mecca for 20 years (Samir Salama, Gulf News, 19 October 2021).

This excerpt highlights the efforts made by Saudi Arabia to prioritise the well-being of pilgrims amid the pandemic. The quote from a cleaner who has worked in Mecca for more than 20 years emphasises the continuity and importance of these measures. This information is relevant to the broader discussion on the impact of COVID-19 on pilgrimage tourism, as it illustrates the various steps that were taken by pilgrimage destinations to ensure the safety of pilgrims.

The media also reported that special training on COVID-19 protocols was added as part of the pilgrimage package for Hajj pilgrims, which was considered a challenge, especially for senior pilgrims (Kunwar, 2021; Ali & Cobonaglu, 2020). The comment from The Religious Affairs Ministry (Indonesia) highlights the point:

The one-door Umrah pilgrimage departure scheme was initiated to facilitate control and supervision as well as ensure the health, security, and safety of pilgrims amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia (Suharto, Antara, 4 November 2021).

The comment from The Religious Affairs Ministry of Indonesia highlights the proactive measures taken to ensure the health, security, and safety of pilgrims during COVID-19, indicating that pilgrimage tourism suppliers were taking active steps to adapt to the changing circumstances. In this case, the initiation of the 'one-door Umrah pilgrimage departure scheme' is an example of a measure taken to facilitate control and supervision over the pilgrimage process. This reflects one of the challenges faced by pilgrimage tourism suppliers due to COVID-19, which was the need to implement new protocols and procedures to ensure the safety of pilgrims. However, it is worth noting that these measures may also impact the overall pilgrimage experience in the future, as special training on COVID-19 protocols may be required as part of a pilgrimage package, potentially posing a challenge, especially for elderly pilgrims.

Need for new technology

The Saudi Arabian authorities invested heavily in preventive measures, such as training the staff required to operate health facilities and technology (Al-Hanawi *et al.*, 2019). Given the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, it was observed globally that special training was implemented for not only by pilgrimage tourism suppliers (Jokhdar *et al.*, 2021) but generally for most of service providers such as airports, hotels, restaurants, airlines, and schools (Agarwal, 2021; Pulella & Sica, 2021). The excerpt below addresses how special training was employed during COVID-19 to continue Hajj in Saudi Arabia.

The Minister [Union Minister for Minority Affairs] said that arrangements for special training for Hajj 2022 regarding Covid protocols and health and hygiene are being made in India and Saudi Arabia for the Hajj pilgrims (The Times of India, 22 October 2021).

The excerpt emphasises the partnership between India and Saudi Arabia in order to make the Hajj experience as

smooth and secure as possible. In this respect, it is evident that both countries shared responsibility for ensuring the safety and well-being of pilgrims and maintaining the religious significance of the pilgrimage.

Impracticable standard operating procedures

However, in the context of the pilgrimage events that involved mass gatherings, new protocols to ensure a safer environment to perform the pilgrimage posed a significant challenge. The media reported that due to the huge crowd during the Kumbh Mela festival, it was impracticable to strictly follow the standard operating procedures, particularly having to observe the proof of vaccine to allow entry to the festival sites. Instead of mandatory checking the test report and / or vaccine pass of every pilgrim entering the sites, random checking was done, as the below excerpt indicates.

While negative RT-PCR test reports were a mandatory requirement for people entering Haridwar, authorities resorted to random checking, admitting that everyone could not be checked as the queue of waiting vehicles stretched into kilometres (Sourav Roy Barman, Indian Express, 12 March 2021).

This excerpt brings attention to the challenges of enforcing rigorous health measures amidst a large gathering of pilgrims. It specifically highlights the overwhelming size of the crowd, as evidenced by the queue of vehicles waiting to enter the premises extended for several kilometres. This presents a significant challenge for pilgrimage tourism suppliers, as it becomes challenging to effectively control the crowd and implement health protocols. The excerpt references the Kumbh Mela festival, known for attracting millions of pilgrims, and emphasises the impracticality of conducting thorough checks of test reports and vaccine passes for each individual entering the festival grounds. Consequently, the festival swiftly turned into a concerning ‘corona atom bomb’ event, where 130,000 positive COVID-19 cases were recorded in the state of Uttarakhand soon after. This is not surprising, as earlier research has noted that crowded events with poor organisation may become an epicentre of super-spreader events of diseases (e.g., Majra *et al.*, 2021; Kumar *et al.*, 2020).

Fraudulent vaccine certificates/PCR tests

Alarming, there were reported cases of pilgrims using fake vaccine passes during the Kumbh Mela festival, as indicated in the following media excerpt.

Following a reveal by the Uttarakhand health department that around 400,000 COVID-19 test results issued during the Kumbh Mela at Haridwar in April this year were fake ... investigation found that a private laboratory conducted about 100,000 rapid antigen tests. ‘Of that ... 100,000 tests, at least 50,000 are fake ... It most likely did this to siphon off money from the government ...’ a state health official said (The Wire, 15 June 2021).

The point raises concerns about the effectiveness of measures put in place to control the spread of COVID-19 during pilgrimage events. The use of fake test results and vaccine passes undermines the efforts of pilgrimage tourism suppliers to control the spread of the virus and puts the health and safety of pilgrims at risk. Importantly, it illustrates the unique challenges pilgrimage destinations face when it comes to maintaining the safety and well-being of pilgrims, given the communal nature of many pilgrimages.

Opportunities for Pilgrimage Tourism Suppliers

The analysis also identified several significant opportunities that are essential for future planning when adapting to the new normal due to COVID-19 (OECD, 2020; UNCTAD, 2020). For instance, lessons learned from COVID-19 and new technology such as location tracking Apps that were implemented to combat COVID-19 can be adapted for any potential future pandemic. Previous crises, such as the 9/11 terror attack in the United States of America, also provided opportunities for businesses and destinations to learn and be proactive (e.g., ensure more safety protocols at airports) (Raj & Bozonelos, 2020; Chappell, 2020).

Develop new technology

In the context of pilgrimage tourism, the media reported that technology made pilgrimage events such as Hajj 2021 possible, as the authorities were taking futuristic measures to keep the pilgrims safe (Bremmer, 2009;

Ghaliya, 2020). For instance, the Ministry of Hajj in Saudi Arabia utilised innovative technology to manage pilgrimage events during COVID-19, which is noted in the excerpt below.

Saudi Arabia is also testing a smart bracelet this year in collaboration with the government's artificial intelligence authority. The touchscreen bracelet resembles the Apple Watch and includes information on the Hajj, the pilgrim's oxygen levels and vaccine data and has an emergency feature to call for help (Amr Nabil and Aya Batrawy, AP News, 18 July 2021).

The utilisation of technological advancements, like this smart bracelet, holds significant potential in elevating safety, crowd control, and communication within the context of pilgrimage tourism. By embracing technological advancements, pilgrimage suppliers can adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic and provide a more secure and efficient experience for pilgrims. An issue that could potentially arise is the level of acceptance and approval from the pilgrims towards the new technology. Some pilgrims, particularly elderly ones, may find it challenging to use a smart bracelet, especially if they are not accustomed to technology or have limited access to it in their daily lives. This may result in resistance or hesitancy to use the bracelet, potentially impeding its effectiveness in ensuring safety and providing necessary information.

Develop new products

Several service providers have offered opportunities for pilgrims to pursue spiritual practices through virtual pilgrimages (Mróz, 2021; Srivastava, 2019). For instance, participation in virtual walks and viewing of religious rituals online (e.g., the shrines in Santiago de Compostela and Lourdes). Increasingly, products related to virtual reality received much attention during COVID-19, such as online learning and virtual travel (Chiu, 2022; Zhang *et al.*, 2022). The excerpt below regarding the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage points to the developing opportunity of virtual pilgrimage.

We came up with the idea of a virtual Camino – a way to walk with us wherever you live ... Our pilgrimage is for any person of any faith – or indeed, none at all – open to a meditative walk through natural surroundings, so as to join in a

common endeavour around the world to restore body, mind and spirit in these anxiety-ridden times (Fr Tate / Loretta Lohberger, ABC News, 14 January 2022).

The excerpt implies that virtual pilgrimage became increasingly popular for those who could not travel due to the pandemic or for other reasons. Virtual pilgrimage offers a unique chance for people to take a reflective journey through peaceful natural surroundings, regardless of physical constraints preventing them from visiting the actual pilgrimage location. This also highlights that the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage offers a profound meditative journey for people of all backgrounds, regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs. In essence, the Camino de Santiago offers a chance to enhance physical, mental, and spiritual health. Father Tate in the above excerpt, emphasises the importance of a common endeavour during the pandemic that allowed people to feel connected to others across the globe.

Create a new trend in pilgrimage travel

Media also reported that 'pilgrimages could be the next post-COVID travel trend', which opened opportunities for pilgrimage suppliers and the tourism industry in general (Manhas & Balakrishnan, 2020; Coles *et al.*, 2022). For instance, the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela's Pilgrims Reception Office noted that 347,578 travellers walked the pilgrimage trail to Santiago de Compostela in Spain in 2019. They expect a further surge in bookings in the post-COVID era (European Institute of Cultural Routes, 2020; Seryczynska *et al.*, 2022). The following excerpt highlights the potential opportunity that COVID-19 has created for pilgrimage tourism.

'More travelers than ever are embarking on pilgrimages, a trend that may boom in a post-COVID world, as people move away from short-haul city breaks toward fewer flights and longer trips with a sense of purpose ... Lockdown has shown us that community is important; people want space but miss human connection. Pilgrimages tick many of these boxes' says Tim Williamson, from UK travel company Responsible Travel (Kerry Walker, National Geographic, 13 July 2021).

This observation suggests that COVID-19 has created a potential opportunity for pilgrimage tourism. Due to the

pandemic, people are moving away from short-haul city breaks and opting for fewer flights and longer trips with a sense of purpose. Media suggests that more travellers are undertaking pilgrimages, a trend that may grow in popularity in the post-COVID era. As Tim Williamson notes, the lockdown has demonstrated that community is important and that people want space but miss the human connection that pilgrimages provide.

In a media article titled 'Pilgrims return to Spain's 'El Camino' path to heal lockdown wounds' (*ABC News*, 2021), the idea of people finding comfort and recovery through their pilgrimage experience is further illustrated. Consequently, this indicates that pilgrimage tourism may be on the rise as a result of COVID-19 and people's changing travel preferences.

Changes in Spiritual Practices

Based on the identified challenges and opportunities faced by pilgrimage tourism suppliers, it is evident that COVID-19 not only affecting pilgrimage tourism from a logistical standpoint but also from a spiritual standpoint. One of the most crucial aspects to consider is transformation in the nature of pilgrimage travel itself. Given the impact of restrictions on group gatherings and increased focus on maintaining good health, it is possible that a growing number of pilgrims will opt to travel solo or in small groups as opposed to in larger groups. Consequently, spiritual experiences may shift from communal to more personalised and solitary. For example, the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage in Spain has traditionally been a communal event, with many pilgrims walking the route together and staying in 'albergues' (pilgrim hostels) along the way. Due to the pandemic, however, the media reported that a number of 'albergues' were closed or operated with reduced capacity, and the Spanish government limited the gathering of groups (*Aleteia*, 2020). Consequently, some pilgrims may have chosen to walk the Camino alone or in smaller groups separated by social distance, resulting in a more introspective and individualistic pilgrimage experience. Travel to other pilgrimage destinations where group gatherings were restricted, such as Mecca during the Hajj, also exhibited this trend towards more individualised travel (*Memish et al.*, 2020; *Mróz*, 2021).

Another potential change in pilgrimage travel is a shift towards less popular destinations that are not as commonly visited. Some of these reasons may be due to the desire for more isolated and secluded spiritual experiences as well as a desire to avoid crowded destinations that may pose a greater risk of COVID-19 transmission. An example of this scenario could be seen in Hindu pilgrimage where the popularity of smaller and less commercialised pilgrimage sites in India, such as the temples of Kumbakonam or the ancient ruins of Hampi, became increasingly popular during the pandemic (*Gautam*, 2021; *Kapoor et al.*, 2022). These destinations may appeal to pilgrims seeking a more authentic and isolated experience in light of COVID-19 restrictions. Importantly, as smaller sites are typically less crowded and more focused on the spiritual experience rather than commercialism, they may offer a deeper and more personal connection to the spiritual tradition.

The pandemic is also expected to impact several religious practices. Christianity, for example, modified the practice of taking communion in order to minimise transmission risk (*ABC News*, 2022). Another example could be seen in Hindu pilgrimage. During pilgrimage, devotees often take a long dip in holy rivers or visit sacred temples where large crowds perform rituals and offer prayers. As a result of the pandemic, these practices were modified in order to avoid large gatherings and to comply with social distancing guidelines. For example, during the Kumbh Mela festival in India in 2021, authorities and organisers implemented time restrictions on each group's bathing time, which led to a shorter dip in the Ganga River (*FE Online*, 2021). Muslim pilgrimages, including the Hajj, also experienced significant changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Media reported that the traditional practice of touching and kissing *al-Hajaru al-Aswad* in Kaaba was modified, with pilgrims being asked to simply point towards it instead (*The Conversation*, 2021). These changes during the pandemic reflect a shift towards prioritising health and safety in spiritual practices. Additionally, they may also encourage a transition towards more personalised spiritual practices that prioritise the well-being and safety of individuals.

Following the above, spiritual perception and practice may shift in a more introspective and reflective direction. Due to the disruption of daily life and widespread

uncertainty and anxiety resulting from the pandemic, pilgrims may become more attracted to practices that promote inner peace and calm, such as meditation or prayer (Nair, 2020). This is exemplified by the following excerpt.

Volker is a 72-year-old father and now grandfather, woodworker and veteran who mapped the Camino de Santiago onto his backyard in Vashon Island in the Pacific Northwest. Volker prays the rosary as he walks: for those who have been impacted by the pandemic, his family, his neighbors, the world (Kathryn Barush, The Conversation, 11 August 2020).

Volker's act of mapping the Camino de Santiago onto his backyard during the pandemic suggests a shift towards introspection and reflection. Unable to undertake the traditional pilgrimage physically, Volker embraces a personal journey within the confines of his own space. This act can be seen as a way to seek inner peace and spiritual connection amidst the disruption and uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

Finally, individuals who were unable to embark on a pilgrimage due to the pandemic may realise connectedness in pilgrimage is not only with fellow pilgrims but also with their surroundings. This is noted in the following excerpt.

I am missing the dirt paths, friendly villagers calling, 'Buen camino' as I go by, the other pilgrims from all over the world, the cows, chickens and bars serving cafe con leche or vino tinto (Carla Bolen, CBC News, 4 June 2020).

This excerpt beautifully highlights the deep longing for the unique experiences associated with the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, such as walking along dirt paths, being greeted by friendly villagers with 'Buen camino', encountering fellow pilgrims from diverse backgrounds and embracing the presence of animals like cows and chickens. These components are extremely important as they encourage strong bonds of friendship, cultural sharing, and a profound appreciation for nature. In essence, the pilgrimage journey has not only touched the pilgrim's personal experience but also reinforced the importance of compassion and empathy. Sharing experiences and encounters on the Camino de Santiago has broadened pilgrims' perspectives, cultivating a sense of unity and

solidarity that transcends the pilgrimage itself. This newly found understanding of interconnectedness has the potential to shape future pilgrimages, with a greater focus on acts of service and charity.

Conclusion

This research identified challenges and opportunities for pilgrimage tourism suppliers due to COVID-19, contributing valuable insights to the growing body of literature on the impact of crises on tourism. The results show that the pandemic has significantly altered pilgrimage spaces and the functioning of thousands of sacred places worldwide. Understanding these challenges and opportunities helped pilgrimage destinations and service providers be better prepared for the evolving development of the COVID-19 pandemic and will do so again in the event of future similar crises. While the pilgrimage sector is expected to fully recover, some practices and policies implemented in response to the pandemic may persist for an extended period.

The implications of this study highlight the need for destinations and service providers to develop more proactive plans to respond to crises. Although crises like COVID-19 are dynamic and uncertain, proactive measures (e.g., crisis response committees, and scenario planning) can facilitate faster responses and mitigate negative consequences. Such measures can be designed based on broader anticipated crises, such as terrorism, pandemics, and natural disasters. Thus, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of crisis management in the tourism industry (Blackman & Ritchie, 2008), particularly within the context of pilgrimage tourism (Mosier *et al.*, 2020).

By identifying the challenges and opportunities faced by pilgrimage suppliers during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study provides insights into how pilgrimage tourism suppliers can adapt their practices and policies to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic, contributing to the broader literature on resilience and adaptive capacity within the tourism industry (Hartman, 2018).

Furthermore, the opportunities that have emerged as a result of COVID-19 need to be capitalised on. This includes aggressive marketing of pilgrimage tourism

to capture post-COVID-19 interest in pilgrimage travel for spirituality and (re)connection with family and community. In marketing pilgrimage tourism, it will also be advantageous to highlight the potential for virtual pilgrimages. Virtual pilgrimages may appeal to senior and time-poor pilgrims, expanding the discussion on virtual tourism and its role in improving accessibility and inclusivity in pilgrimage tourism.

Finally, this study highlights the crucial role of collaboration and partnerships between providers of pilgrimage services and stakeholders in the industry. Engaging in collaborative efforts can help share resources, knowledge, and best practices for crisis management. Collaboration can also enable the development of joint marketing initiatives and the pooling of resources to enhance the overall competitiveness and resilience of pilgrimage destinations.

Future research can validate the results of this study by collecting empirical data from pilgrimage destinations and service providers. Research that includes more pilgrimage events and events associated with a range of religions / faiths (e.g., Buddhism) can also add to the current study. As the pilgrimage sites / events utilised in this study are different (also associated with different religions), a more detailed exploration of the unique differences regarding how their pilgrimage events were impacted would provide a more nuanced understanding. It would also be useful to investigate the challenges and opportunities which pilgrims face in the pilgrimage tourism sector due to COVID-19.

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Appendix A: Data Sources for Online News

No.	News Channel	Title	Author/Editor	Date Posted
Case 1: Hajj				
1	Al Jazeera	Social distancing at Mecca's Grand Mosque dropped	Al Jazeera And News Agencies	17 October 2021
2	The Times Of India	Haj 2022: Selection of pilgrims to be based on Covid-19 vaccination status, says Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi	Ani	22 October 2021
3	The Star	Covid-19: Those needing vaccine booster for umrah, travel can apply to Health Ministry	-	16 October 2021
4	Tempo	Jusuf Kalla Hopes Hajj Pilgrimage Will Return to Normal in 2022	Petir Garda Bhwana	7 November 2021
5	Vanguard	Road to responsible recovery of Hajj and Umrah Pilgrimages	Mohsin Tutla	29 October 2021
6	Gulf News	COVID-19: Saudi Arabia administers 44.7m vaccine doses	Samir Salama	19 October 2021
7	Caucasian Knot	Dagestan: Hajj operator announces restart of pilgrimage to Mecca	CK correspondent	3 November 2021
8	Dhaka Tribune	Saudi Arabia appoints new Hajj, health ministers	-	16 October 2021
9	International Quran News Agency	Children Under 12 Not Allowed in Masjid al-Haram	Geo News	3 November 2021
10	Vanguard	Hope as Saudi removes restrictions on Umrah, prayers in Rawdah, other holy sites	Haroon I. Balogun	23 October 2021
11	Reuters	Riyadh may block overseas hajj pilgrims again amid COVID-19 pandemic	-	5 May 2021
12	Antara News	Ministry preparing one-door Umrah pilgrimage scheme	Suharto	4 November 2021
13	Al Jazeera	Indonesia cancels Hajj again amid concerns over COVID	Al Jazeera And News Agencies	3 June 2021
14	Reuters	Saudi Arabia bars foreign travellers from Haj over COVID-19	Hadeel Al Sayegh and Marwa Rashad/Reuters	13 June 2021
15	Bk News Service	Ensure proper functioning of all washrooms at Hajj house: DC Srinagar tells officers	-	10 November 2021
16	Al Jazeera	Saudi Arabia says COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for Hajj 2021	Al Jazeera And News Agencies	3 March 2021
17	Al Jazeera	Saudi Arabia opens Umrah pilgrimage to vaccinated foreigners	Al Jazeera And News Agencies	8 August 2021
18	The Conversation	Pilgrimage in a pandemic: lessons from Mecca on containing COVID-19	-	12 May 2021
19	Al Jazeera	Saudi Arabia to allow only 'immunised' pilgrims to Mecca	Al Jazeera And News Agencies	5 April 2021
20	India Today	Online application process for Haj 2022 begins, Union minister Naqvi announces reforms	Poulomi Saha	1 November 2021

No.	News Channel	Title	Author/Editor	Date Posted
21	Asia News	Mecca: robots, vaccines and distancing. The Hajj during Covid	-	19 June 2021
22	VOA News	Tanzanian Muslims Fear Missing Hajj Due to Vaccination Delay	Charles Kombe	28 May 2021
23	VOA News	Saudi Arabia Limits Hajj to 60,000 in Kingdom	Associated Press	13 June 2021
24	MEED	Saudi may mandate Covid-19 vaccines for Hajj 2021	Neha Bhatia	22 March 2021
25	NDTV	Saudi Smashes Fraud COVID-19 Testing, Vaccination Ring Ahead Of Hajj	-	15 July 2021
26	Reuters	Masked haj pilgrims on Mount Arafat pray for COVID-free world	Mohammed Benmansour	20 July 2021
27	The Week	Two COVID-19 vaccine doses mandatory for pilgrims going on Hajj	The Week Web Desk	16 April 2021
28	The East African	Hajj pilgrims to face restrictions over Covid-19, says leader	Mohamed Issa	10 March 2021
29	VOA News	Pilgrims Pray for End to Pandemic as Hajj Peaks	-	19 July 2021
30	The Ticker	Saudi Arabia requires COVID-19 vaccine for hajj	-	10 November 2021
31	News 18	Hajj 2021: Terms and Conditions for Hajj Pilgrims	Mirza Ghani Baig	27 May 2021
32	Reuters	Saudi king approves support for Islamic pilgrimage operators after COVID-19: SPA	Reuters Staff	9 March 2021
33	Reuters	Fewer pilgrims, less crowd risk at haj's symbolic stoning of the devil	Mohammed Benmansour	21 July 2021
34	I Gulf	What are the Covid restrictions at Hajj 2021?	Mariam Nihal	14 July 2021
35	The Hindustan Times	60,000 fully vaccinated residents can attend Hajj; foreigners barred again	-	12 June 2021
36	The Guardian	Global report: downsized hajj pilgrimage begins amid Covid-19 restrictions	Martin Farrer and agencies	29 July 2021
37	AP News	Annual Islamic hajj pilgrimage scaled back due to COVID-19 concerns	-	29 July 2021
38	Euronews	Interactive: See how COVID-19 has dramatically changed Hajj pilgrimage	Natalia Liubchenkova	16 August 2021
39	Inews	When is Hajj 2021? Start date, meaning behind the Mecca pilgrimage and how Covid-19 is restricting numbers	Georgina Littlejohn	16 July 2021
40	AP News	With pandemic in mind, pared-back hajj in Mecca for 2nd year	Amr Nabil and Aya Batrawy	19 July 2021
41	VOA News	Hajj Begins in Saudi Arabia Under Historic COVID Imposed Restrictions	-	29 July 2021
42	Vanguard	COVID-19: Board initiates refund of Hajj deposits to pilgrims in Bauchi	Vanguard News Nigeria	8 July 2021
43	VOA News	Saudi Arabia Restricts Hajj to 'Small, Limited' Number Due to COVID-19	-	23 June 2021
44	France 24	Saudi Arabia gears up for downsized Hajj rituals due to Covid-19	News Wire	28 July 2021

No.	News Channel	Title	Author/Editor	Date Posted
Case 2: Kumbh Mela				
1	NDTV	Haridwar Kumbh Mela: Court Asks Uttarakhand Government For Covid SOPs	Debjani Chatterjee	7 January 2021
2	Al Jazeera	India holds massive 'Kumbh Mela' festival amid COVID worries	News Agencies	14 January 2021
3	ABC News	Huge religious festival of Kumbh Mela goes ahead despite coronavirus pandemic	Guy Davies	15 January 2021
4	The Hindustan Times	'Covid jabs, pilgrim passes': How Uttarakhand is prepping for Kumbh	Kanishka Sarkar	7 February 2021
5	The Indian Express	Explained: How Covid protocols may reduce crowd at Kumbh Mela in Haridwar	Lalmani Verma	7 March 2021
6	Fe Online	Kumbh Mela 2021: Mandatory masks, maximum 20 minutes of bath; Here's what COVID-19 protocol states	FE Online	9 March 2021
7	Tanika Godbole	India holds Hindu festival Kumbh Mela despite COVID-19 fears	Tanika Godbole	12 March 2021
8	The Indian Express	Kumbh in the time of Covid: '3 dips per snaan'	Sourav Roy Barman	12 March 2021
9	The Hindustan Times	Not enough checks at Kumbh mela as concerns of Covid-19 spread mount	Sandeep Rawat and Kalyan Das	23 March 2021
10	NDTV	Kumbh Mela 2021: Pilgrims Must Show COVID-19 Test Report In Haridwar	Press Trust of India	25 March 2021
11	Moneycontrol News	Rishikesh and Haridwar emerge as COVID-19 hotspots ahead of Kumbh Mela 2021	-	31 March 2021
12	CNN	Mass religious festival goes ahead in India, despite Covid fears as country enters second wave	Jessie Yeung, Esha Mitra and Manveena Suri	1 April 2021
13	NDTV	Kumbh Mela 2021: Mahakumbh In Haridwar With Covid-19 Guidelines	Press Trust of India	1 April 2021
14	India Today	Follow SOP at Kumbh Mela, stop it from becoming super-spreader event: Centre to Uttarakhand	Milan Sharma	6 April 2021
15	The Conversation	India prepares for Kumbh Mela, world's largest religious gathering, amid COVID-19 fears	Tulasi Srinivas	9 April 2021
16	BBC News	Haridwar: Crowds surging at Kumbh Mela as India overtakes Brazil in Covid cases	-	12 April 2021
17	Scroll India	Covid-19: Imagine the headlines if any other religion had been responsible for Kumbh-like gathering	Rohan Venkataramakrishnan	12 April 2021
18	BBC News	Haridwar: Hundreds test positive for Covid at Kumbh Mela	-	14 April 2021
19	Al Jazeera	'Super-spreader': Over 1,000 COVID positive at India's Kumbh Mela	Al Jazeera And News Agencies	14 April 2021
20	Reuters	'Super-spreader' erupts as devout Hindus throng Indian festival	Neha Arora and Anushree Fadnavis	14 April 2021

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21	Stuff News	Covid-19: India's Kumbh Mela festival a 'super spreader' event linked to over 1000 positive cases	Stuff Puna	16 April 2021
22	Scroll India	The Covid-19 pandemic is raging like never before. Why can't India suspend the Kumbh?	Arunabh Saikia	16 April 2021
23	The Indian Express	Uttarakhand caps gatherings at 200, exempts Kumbh Mela	Lalmani Verma	16 April 2021
24	The Wire	COVID-19: How Fake Tests, Fudged Data Helped Paint a Kinder Picture for Kumbh Mela	The Wire Staff	16 April 2021
25	The Indian Express	As Covid stalks Kumbh, Niranjani Akhara withdraws from next Shahi Snan, asks its seers to leave	Express News Service	15 June 2021
26	Deccan Herald	How the Kumbh Mela lays bare BJP's double standards	DHNS	16 April 2021
27	The Indian Express	Kumbh Mela: Plea in SC seeks direction to clear mass gathering from Haridwar	PTI	17 April 2021
28	The Hindustan Times	Those returning from Kumbh will spread Covid-19 like 'prasad': Mumbai mayor	Meenakshi Ray	17 April 2021
29	NDTV	Top Seer Ends Kumbh Mela After PM's Request To Keep It "Symbolic"	Akhilesh Sharma	17 April 2021
30	Business Today	Seers demand apology from Nirajani Akhara for announcing Kumbh Mela 'end'	PTI	17 April 2021
31	The Wire	From the Kumbh to Ramzan, Contrasting Court Orders in COVID Times	Purushottam Anand and Anshuman Singh	18 April 2021
32	Scroll India	Coronavirus SOPs should have been followed at Kumbh Mela, election rallies, says Niti Aayog	Scroll Staff	19 April 2021
33	East Mojo	Assam: 16 Kumbh Mela returnees test positive for COVID-19	Rishu Kalantri	20 April 2021
34	The Hindustan Times	Nepal's former royals test Covid-19 positive after participating in Kumbh Mela	HT Correspondent	21 April 2021
35	The Hindu	Days after returning from Kumbh Mela, BJP leader succumbs to COVID-19	Peerzada Ashiq	22 April 2021
36	The Indian Express	COVID-19: SC should've intervened during poll rallies, Kumbh Mela, says Sena	PTI	24 April 2021
37	The Indian Express	Shravan Rathod, wife visited Kumbh Mela few days before testing Covid-19 positive, says son	Komal RJ Panchal	24 April 2021
38	The Indian Express	'Holy dip will wash away all infections': Kumbh returnees are driving Rajasthan Covid graph up	ANEESHA BEDI	25 April 2021
39	The Indian Express	The dip and the divide that made the fight against the coronavirus purposeless	Harshavardhan Purandare and Sandeep Pandey	26 April 2021
40	The Indian Express	'Centre played catalyst in Covid spread by allowing Kumbh mela, poll rallies': Siddaramaiah writes to Modi	Express Web Desk	29 April 2021

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41	The Hindustan Times	9.1 million thronged Mahakumbh despite Covid-19 surge: Govt data	Sandeep Rawat	30 April 2021
42	Religion News Service	As COVID-19 swamps India, decision to allow Kumbh Mela's crowds is scrutinized	Bhavya Dore	3 May 2021
Case 3: Camino De Santiago				
1	ABC News	Tasmanian Way to St James pilgrim walk attracts global audience as virtual event	Loretta Lohberger	14 January 2022
2	CBS News	Dear Diary: No longer walking to Spain, this Calgarian takes her pilgrimage to the city streets	CBS News	4 June 2020
3	Aleteia	Group of pilgrims trapped together in Spain become like family	Javier Gonzalez Garcia	14 July 2020
4	Aleteia	Spanish father and teen son with disability walk the Camino during COVID-19	Dolors Massot	18 July 2020
5	The Conversation	As coronavirus curtails travel, backyard pilgrimages become the way to a spiritual journey	Kathryn Barush	11 August 2020
6	Euro Weekly	Covid-Ridden Pilgrim Continues to Trek Across Spain's Camino de Santiago and Has Already Infected 8 More	Lura Taylor	21 August 2020
7	Religion News Service	How to make a pilgrimage into 2021	Wes Granberg-Michaelson	31 December 2020
8	El Pais	The Catalan cyclist who visited 43 countries during the Covid-19 pandemic	Bernat Coll	13 January 2021
9	Religion News Service	Intention can turn any lockdown walk into pilgrimage, urges British Pilgrimage Trust	Emily McFarlan Miller	9 March 2021
10	The Spin Off	Towards Compostela is a book that will walk with you	Chloe Blades	10 May 2021
11	DW	St. James' Way pilgrimage routes in Germany	Claudia Wurzburg	31 May 2021
12	VOA News	Pilgrims Return to Spain's 'El Camino' Paths after Pandemic	Associated Press	5 June 2021
13	New York Post	Pilgrims return to Spain's Camino de Santiago after pandemic shutdown	Conor Skelding	5 June 2021
14	Sight Magazine	Ancient walkways: Pilgrims return to Spain's 'El Camino' paths after pandemic	Joseph Wilson And Iain Sullivan	7 June 2021
15	Aleteia	The Camino de Santiago is welcoming pilgrims once more	J-P Mauro	17 June 2021
16	ABC News	Pilgrims return to Spain's 'El Camino' path to heal lockdown wounds	-	7 June 2021
17	BBC News	Frome man completes 28-day run in memory of daughter	-	18 June 2021
18	National Geographic	Pilgrimages could be the next post-COVID travel trend	Kerry Walker	13 July 2021
19	WBKO News	Bowling Green father, son on the Camino de Santiago	Laura Rogers	27 July 2021
20	U.S. Catholic	To navigate pandemic life, adopt a pilgrimage mindset	Wesley Granberg-Michaelson	12 August 2021
21	Texas Public Radio	Famous San Antonian Takes A 500-Mile Walk Almost On A Whim	Jack Morgan	15 August 2021

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22	Spectator	How I walked Camino de Santiago in Slovakia	Jana Liptakova	27 August 2021
23	The Utah Statesman	Chase-in on the Camino	Sage Souza	19 September 2021
24	The Globe and Mail	PEI's new Island Walk, inspired by the Camino de Santiago, lets visitors travel the province entirely on foot	Lola Augustine Brown	21 September 2021
25	The Courier-Herald	Enumclaw woman starting second, longer pilgrimage after nearly dying in 2015 tress crash	Alex Bruell	22 September 2021
26	Inquirer	Pilgrimage for next 500 years of Christianity in PH begins	Tonette Orejas	28 September 2021
27	Daily Mail Australia	Path of righteousness... might be WRONG: Millions of Christians could have made the 500-mile Camino de Santiago pilgrimage in vain after study suggests sacred bones at its end may NOT actually belong to Saint James the Great	Harry Howard	19 October 2021
28	The Dallas Morning News	On the Camino de Santiago, every pilgrim is walking off some burden; we were walking for mum	Rob Curran	31 October 2021
29	The Courier-Herald	Becky Rush-Peet finishes 484 mile Camino walk more than a week ahead of schedule	The Courier-Herald	3 November 2021
30	National Geographic	An epic pilgrimage trail circles Prince Edward Island	Heather Greenwood Davis	7 November 2021
31	Stuff News	Covid-19: The truth about life in Ireland during the pandemic, according to Kiwis there	Lorna Thornber	20 November 2021
32	Irish Times	Paul Flynn: Eating all around us on the Camino	Paul Flynn	28 November 2021
33	Global Sisters Report	A pilgrimage lesson offers a path to purpose	Jaesen Evangelista	15 December 2021
34	Crux Now	Spanish bishop says he still hopes pope can visit Santiago de Compostela	Junno Arocho Esteves	17 December 2021
35	The Berkshire Eagle	Take a trip through the Pyrénées with Jean-François Bizalion as he searches for the perfect cassoulet	Jean-François Bizalion	29 December 2021
36	Kilkenny People	Kilkenny Camino City Church Crib Walk to take place next Saturday	Mary Cody	1 January 2022