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Islamic tourism: Exploring the motivational factors and satisfaction of Muslim tourists visiting at Bishwa Ijtema in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Every year, millions of Muslims from all over the world flock to Bangladesh for Islamic pilgrimage events like the Bishwa Ijtema. Despite its significance, research on this event is limited, particularly regarding the motivations and satisfaction of attendees. This study contributes to the literature on Islamic tourism by examining the factors that drive pilgrims to attend the Bishwa Ijtema and their satisfaction layers. The study arranges totaling 40 in-depth interviews of Muslim tourists attending Bishwa Ijtema. Data collection spanned January to May 2024. Later, the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti.24 was used to analyze the data. Through qualitative analysis, key motivational factors were identified, including religious devotion, community building, spiritual renewal, intercultural exchange, and economic opportunities. The findings reveal that pilgrims are drawn not only by the desire for spiritual growth but also by the opportunity to connect with fellow Muslims and share Islamic values in a global context. However, infrastructure limitations, such as inadequate transportation, sanitation, and accommodation, impact the overall satisfaction of attendees. Enhancing infrastructure and improving event management are crucial for fostering a safe and fulfilling experience. The study suggests that increased marketing efforts, international collaborations, and tailored services for foreign pilgrims, such as language support and cultural orientation, could boost the global appeal of Bishwa Ijtema and strengthen Bangladesh's Islamic tourism sector. Despite the limited literature on this event, this research highlights the potential of the Bishwa Ijtema to serve as a beacon of unity and cultural exchange for Muslim pilgrims worldwide, offering insights for policymakers to improve the event's structure and appeal.

Keywords: Islamic tourism, pilgrimage motivation, Bishwa Ijtema, Muslim tourist satisfaction, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

The field of Islamic tourism is rapidly gaining scholarly attention worldwide, driven by its rising popularity among Muslim and non-Muslim nations alike (Almuhrzi & Alsawafi, 2017; Basendwah *et al.*, 2024; Hassan *et al.*, 2022) [3, 13, 26]. Islamic tourism adheres to Islamic teachings and moral principles, influencing conduct, attire, behavior, and dietary practices (Liana *et al.*, 2024; Saffinee *et al.*, 2024) [41, 60]. It encompasses religious obligations, such as Hajj and Umrah, and extends to leisure travel that respects and promotes Islamic customs, facilities, and values, primarily catering to Muslim travelers (Alshaibi, 2024; Arham *et al.*, 2024) [4, 5]. Within this context, Bishwa Ijtema (BI), an annual world congregation in Bangladesh, is a prominent Islamic tourism event, especially for Muslim communities. Academic research in Islamic tourism, however, has been heavily focused on Hajj and Umrah (Carvache-Franco *et al.*, 2024; Faraby & Hammam, 2024; Jradi, 2017; Osra & Yasein, 2024; Shah, 2024; Uyuni *et al.*, 2024) [19, 23, 35, 52, 63, 72], leading to a notable knowledge gap regarding BI. Given the unique characteristics and preferences of Islamic tourists, this gap warrants new research focused on BI.

This study aims to identify the factors motivating Muslim tourists from Bangladesh and other countries to attend BI, assess their satisfaction levels, and examine the word-of-mouth (WoM) they generate about BI. World Travel Market (2007) [74] highlighted the impact of religious values, traditions, and beliefs on Muslim tourists' decisions to visit Islamic or pilgrimage sites. This form of tourism often addresses sociocultural, religious, and economic objectives (Chantarungsri *et al.*, 2024; Kusumawardhani, 2024; Mirhoseini *et al.*, 2024;

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Lecturer, Department of Business Administration Marketing, Faculty of Business Studies, Bangladesh University of Professionals, Mirpur Cantonment, Dhaka, Bangladesh Samarathunga *et al.*, 2024) ^[20, 40, 46, 62]. The Muslim travel market has considerably boosted the global economy, with the Global Muslim Travel Index (2019) ^[24] predicting that by 2026, over 230 million Muslim tourists will travel domestically and internationally, contributing an estimated \$300 billion. Aljazeera (2018) ^[2] reported that BI, which began in 1967 in Bangladesh, is the second-largest Muslim gathering after Hajj, drawing over two million participants from more than 130 countries. Recently, The Business Standard (2024) ^[67] noted that BI attendees, now from over 150 nations, engage in spiritual practices, including divine recitations and sermons, establishing BI as a key player in Islamic tourism.

This study assumes that push and pull factors influence tourist behavior, which impacts satisfaction and WoM. By exploring these factors, the study may reveal how PULF and PUSF contribute to visitor satisfaction and WoM, examining the link between Islamic practices, satisfaction, and WoM. Insights from this research will help policymakers and marketers in developing strategies to attract Islamic tourists to Bangladesh. This study's originality lies in being the first to examine BI's role in motivating Islamic tourists and satisfaction offering a valuable perspective from a developing economy.

1.1 Problem statement

Despite the growth of Islamic tourism, there remains a significant gap in understanding the motivations, satisfaction, and word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviors of Muslim tourists in non-pilgrimage events, such as Bishwa Iitema (BI), beyond the commonly studied Haii and Umrah. Most research focuses on Islamic tourism within Saudi Arabia and select Middle Eastern nations, overlooking destinations like Bangladesh that have rich Islamic heritage (Carvache-Franco et al., 2024; Faraby & Hammam, 2024; Jradi, 2017; Osra & Yasein, 2024; Uyuni et al., 2024) [19, 23, ^{35, 52, 72]}. This limited focus creates a literature gap, leaving travel motivations, satisfaction factors, and WOM behaviors of Muslim tourists attending BI underexplored. BI, held annually in Bangladesh, draws millions of Muslims globally and combines religious observance with cultural exchange. As Björkman (2010) [16] and Siddiqi (2016) [64] suggested, investigating these aspects is crucial to enhancing tourism services, fostering positive WOM, and positioning Bangladesh as a prominent Islamic tourism destination.

1.2 Aim, objectives, and research questions

This study aims to investigate the travel motivations and satisfaction levels of Muslim tourists attending Bishwa Ijtema in Bangladesh. It seeks to broaden the understanding of Islamic tourism beyond traditional pilgrimage by focusing on a significant non-mandatory religious gathering. This research also aims to identify the factors that contribute to positive travel experiences and explore how these factors align with Muslim tourists' expectations and cultural values. Precisely, this study sheds light on two objectives as follows:

- 1. To identify the factors that motivate Muslim tourists attending Bishwa Ijtema,
- To analyze the satisfaction of Muslim tourists at the event.

The fulfillment of the research aim and objectives is guided by the research questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2007; Lim, 2024) [34, 43]. Open-ended and exploratory, qualitative research questions seek to comprehend a phenomenon's "how, what, or why" rather than merely measuring it (McCaslin & Scott, 2015) [45]. Furthermore, research questions are formulated in accordance with study objectives, according to Johnson & Christensen (2007) [34]. As a result, this study's research questions are constructed as follows:

- 1. What are the factors that motivate Muslim tourists attending Bishwa Ijtema in Bangladesh?
- 2. What are the satisfaction levels of Muslim tourists at Bishwa Ijtema?

The remainder of this research is described as follows after this introduction. The literature and "PULL, PUSH" motivational theory are covered in the second section. The methodology is then described in the third section. The motivational factors, satisfaction, and word of mouth of Muslim tourists surrounding BI are then presented in the fourth segment. After that, the findings are discussed with previous results from other studies. Finally, the sixth part identifies some limits and suggests several further research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Islamic Tourism

Islamic tourism, from a Qur'anic perspective, is aligned with Islamic principles, encouraging travel as a way for Muslims to appreciate and reflect upon Allah's creation. The Our'an encourages travel in Surah Al-Ankabut (29:20): "Travel through the earth and see how He (Almighty Allah) originated creation," suggesting that travel can deepen one's understanding and appreciation of Allah's wonders. This study defines Islamic tourism as travel by Muslims who follow Islamic law and access religious amenities at their destinations. Bishwa Ijtema (BI), for instance, is an event where Muslim tourists engage in religious activities, such as reciting the divine names of Allah, attending sermons, making supplications, and fostering a spiritual connection with Allah. Islamic tourism also includes halal entertainment, food, prayer rooms, and Shari'a-compliant facilities that ensure Muslim tourists can uphold their religious beliefs throughout their journey (Perlis & Lumpur, 2024) [54]

Islamic tourism serves socioeconomic and cultural purposes while fostering religious aspirations (Uyuni *et al.*, 2024) ^[72]. It contributes to the revival of Islamic culture, enhances Muslim self-esteem, and spreads Islamic values. In addition, Islamic tourism strengthens Islamic identity and community beliefs. The Organization of Islamic Conference (2008) highlights the economic benefits of Islamic tourism, which generates employment, business opportunities, and improved infrastructure, such as hotels, restaurants, and travel services. Wohab (2024) ^[75] supports that Islamic religion significantly influences Muslim tourists' destination choices. However, despite these developments, research on Islamic tourism remains limited.

The growing global Muslim population and the rising demand for travel experiences that align with Islamic values have accelerated Islamic tourism's expansion (Hariani *et al.*, 2024; Hariani & Hanafiah, 2024) [27, 28]. This sector offers travel products and services tailored to meet the spiritual, cultural, and social needs of Muslim travelers (Ohlan & Ohlan, 2024; Purwandani & Yusuf, 2024) [51, 56]. Estimated

as one of the fastest-growing sectors, Muslim travelers are projected to spend nearly USD 300 billion by 2026 (Irewati & Nufus, 2024; Saddek, 2024) [31, 59]. Yet, much of the current literature focuses on pilgrimage travel, such as Hajj and Umrah, which hold immense religious significance for Muslims worldwide (Caidi, 2019; Elgammal & Alhothali, 2021; Raifu *et al.*, 2024) [18, 21, 57]. Non-obligatory religious tourism events, like BI, however, remain underexplored, leaving a gap in understanding Muslim tourists' broader motivations, satisfaction, and word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviors.

This literature review highlights past studies, key findings, and theoretical insights, especially on the BI event in Bangladesh, an under-studied Islamic tourism destination. Despite the potential of Islamic tourism, challenges persist, including limited policy support, insufficient destination marketing, and empirical research gaps (Albarq, 2013; Hariani & Hanafiah, 2024; Hossain & Islam, 2022; Saifurrahman & Kassim, 2024) [1, 27, 30, 61]. Scholars like Björkman (2010) [16] and Siddiqi (2016) [64] advocate for examining BI tourists' motivations, satisfaction, and WOM, emphasizing the need for tailored tourism services and improved infrastructure to position Bangladesh as a prominent Islamic tourism destination.

2.2 Tourism in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, a South Asian country along the Bay of Bengal, spans 147,570 square kilometers with a population of approximately 171 million (World Bank Development Indicators 2024). In 2024, tourism contributed BDT 407.5 billion (USD 4.8 billion), or 4.2% of Bangladesh's GDP, with projections for a 5.1% annual increase, reaching BDT 742.9 billion (USD 8.7 billion) by 2028, representing 5.9% of GDP (WTTC, 2024). Tourism is increasingly vital to Bangladesh's socio-economic development, generating foreign exchange, creating jobs, and stimulating various economic sectors. It now stands as a key contributor to the economy, following major sectors like agriculture, textiles, and remittances (Bangladesh Tourism Board, 2024). At the Tourism Expo Japan (2024), the Bangladesh Tourism Board highlighted the rapid growth of the tourism sector, emphasizing Bishwa Ijtema (BI), an Islamic congregation attracting millions of Muslims globally, which is a focal point for this study.

Bangladesh offers diverse tourism forms, including ecotourism, adventure, cultural, coastal, maritime, and religious tourism. Popular destinations include the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest and a UNESCO World Heritage site, and Cox's Bazar, the world's longest natural sandy sea beach. In 2017, the country welcomed 620,000 international tourists, with an expected annual growth rate of 7.5% by 2021 (UNWTO, 2018). Government efforts to support eco-tourism and heritage preservation have fueled this growth, and the Travel & Tourism market in Bangladesh is projected to grow at a 10.27% rate from 2024 to 2029, reaching a market volume of USD 3,461 million and generating USD 2,123 million by 2029.

Despite the rich tourism offerings, research on religious tourism, particularly Islamic tourism, is limited in Bangladesh. Given that Islam is the predominant religion, practiced by approximately 91% of the population (U.S. Department of State 2023), Islamic tourism aligns well with Bangladeshi cultural values. Facilities include Halal-

certified hotels and restaurants, religious sites, and Islamic cultural festivals. With a cooperative relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim communities (Yilmaz & Sokolova-Shipoli, 2024) [78], exploring Islamic tourism's potential benefits multiple stakeholders, including the government, industry practitioners, and policymakers. This study's focus on BI underscores the untapped potential of Bangladesh as an Islamic tourism destination.

2.3 Push and Pull motivational theory

The Push-Pull Motivational Theory (PPMT) is an established framework in tourism research for examining tourists' motivations (Baniya et al., 2017; Baniya & Paudel, 2016; Battour et al., 2017; Fakharyan, 2012) [10, 11, 14, 22]. This study applies PPMT to investigate what motivates Muslim tourists to attend Bishwa Ijtema in Bangladesh, a significant Islamic gathering that attracts visitors globally. PPMT explores both internal "push" and external "pull" factors driving travel behavior (Ayoub & Mohamed, 2024; Baptista et at., 2020; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994) [7, 12, 71]. Push factors are internal socio-psychological needs that initiate travel, such as spiritual fulfillment, religious growth, family bonding, and community connection (Kumar et al., 2024; Jang et al., 2009) [39, 33]. Muslim tourists may also seek a deeper connection to faith and a sense of renewal with Allah at Bishwa Ijtema, fulfilling their socio-psychological desires (Ashton, 2018; Liro, 2021; Wen & Huang, 2019) [6, 44, 73].

Pull factors, in contrast, represent external destination attributes attracting tourists, such as the religious significance of Bishwa Ijtema, Bangladesh's Islamic heritage, and the chance to engage in a global Islamic event (Prayag & Ryan, 2011; Yoon & Uysal, 2005) [55, 79]. For Muslim tourists, these pull factors may include the gathering's historical importance, the presence of other pilgrims, and structured religious activities (Ramukumba & Setokoe, 2024) [58].

According to Battour *et al.* (2017) ^[14], push and pull factors can interact, enhancing each other- for example, the internal drive for spiritual growth (Push) can be strengthened by Bishwa Ijtema's religious environment (Pull). Overall satisfaction and positive word of mouth among Muslim tourists can further draw more attendees. Thus, PPMT offers a valuable lens for understanding Muslim tourists' motivations at Bishwa Ijtema, emphasizing the sociopsychological and cultural dimensions that shape religious tourism experiences.

2.4 Push and Pull motivational theory and its impact on tourist motives and satisfaction

In the context of Islamic tourism at Bishwa Iitema in Bangladesh, push and pull factors significantly impact travel satisfaction. and word-of-mouth motivations. recommendations among Muslim tourists. Push factors encompass internal motivations like the desire for spiritual fulfillment, religious enrichment, and belonging within a Muslim community, reflecting the socio-psychological needs that lead tourists to seek faith-aligned experiences (Battour et al., 2017; Hamdy et al., 2024;) [14, 25]. Pull factors, in contrast, are the external attractions of Bishwa Ijtema, including its religious significance, communal worship opportunities, and supportive environment for Islamic values. These factors also encompass the cultural heritage and organized services that enhance accessibility and fulfillment for attendees (Chi & Qu, 2008; Lai & Wong,

2024; Zabkar *et al.*, 2010) ^[80, 42, 81]. Satisfaction derived from these motivations strengthens the tourism experience, often prompting positive word-of-mouth and repeat visits, as tourists' spiritual, social, and cultural expectations are met (Iniesta-Bonillo *et al.*, 2016; Prebensen & Xie, 2017) ^[82, 83]. This dynamic fosters growth in Islamic tourism at events like Bishwa Ijtema.

3. Methodology

3.1 Approach

Oualitative research has gained prominence across various fields, including psychology, sociology, business, and anthropology (Bentalha & Alla, 2024; Budi, 2024; Mwita, 2022; Thomson, 2011) [15, 17, 49, 68]. This study adopts a qualitative approach, using thematic analysis to explore interviews, experiences, and observations from selected respondents (Lim, 2024) [43]. Given the study's focus on understanding Islamic tourism at Bishwa Ijtema, qualitative methods, specifically observation and semi-structured interviews, are chosen as primary data collection tools. This approach allows for in-depth insights into tourists' motivations, experiences, and perceptions, which are essential for capturing the unique aspects of religious tourism (Muhtadi, 2023; Yuli, 2024) [47, 17]. Known as a word-based approach, qualitative research articulating new theoretical insights within Islamic tourism and addresses research gaps by examining travel behaviors and satisfaction factors specific to Muslim pilgrims (Eisenhardt *et al.*, 2016) [84]. By employing observation and interviews, this study seeks to reveal the underlying reasons that shape visitors' motivations and satisfaction at Bishwa Ijtema, thereby contributing valuable insights to both theory and practice in Islamic tourism research.

3.2 Observation

Observation serves as a key qualitative tool to capture rich, contextual data, including verbal and non-verbal cues, interactions, and environmental factors influencing tourists' experiences. Researchers conducted passive observation at Bishwa Ijtema, noting interactions, body language, and behaviors of local and foreign pilgrims. This approach focused on engagement with religious activities, visitor interactions, and the organizers' facilitation of religious experiences. Observing discreetly minimized researcher influence, ensuring an authentic capture of natural behaviors and experiences.

3.3 Interview

In-depth qualitative interviews offer valuable insights into respondents' unique motivations and experiences (Edwards & Holland, 2020) ^[85], prompting this study to employ semistructured interviews with Muslim tourists at Bishwa Ijtema. A consistent interview protocol was applied to ensure rigor, with participants informed of their right to withdraw or skip questions at any time. Questions progressed from general to detailed, exploring travel motivations and satisfaction levels. Each 15–20 minute interview involved participants selected for their willingness to contribute meaningful responses to the study.

3.4 Sampling technique

For the study on "Islamic Tourism: Exploring Exploring the Motivational Factors and Satisfaction of Muslim Tourists Visiting at Bishwa Ijtema in Bangladesh," a combination of

stratified, convenience, and snowball sampling techniques was chosen to capture insights from both local and foreign pilgrims. Stratified sampling divides the sample into local and foreign pilgrim strata, ensuring balanced representation from both groups, which is essential for a comparative analysis of travel motivations and satisfaction across diverse demographics. This approach enhances representativeness for each subgroup, supporting an of varied cultural and understanding geographic perspectives. Given the large gathering at Bishwa Ijtema, convenience sampling is practical for reaching pilgrims onsite, allowing for data collection from readily available participants despite time and logistical constraints. Snowball sampling complements this by helping to locate foreign participants through referrals from initial respondents, enabling the researcher to expand the sample among international visitors, who might otherwise be challenging to access in the crowd. Together, these methods ensure a well-rounded view of the event's attendees.

3.5 Sample size

Qualitative research has gained recognition across various academic fields, including anthropology, business, economics, psychology, sociology, and medicine (Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024) [86]. Selecting an appropriate sample size is crucial to ensure depth, validity, and transparency in qualitative studies (Lim, 2024) [43]. Recommends 10-12 indepth interviews for qualitative studies; however, this research includes 40 in-depth interviews to meet sample size requirements. Additionally, a data saturation approach was applied, where data collection continued until themes began to recur, typically achieved with a sample of 12-14 participants (Marshall *et al.*, 2013) [87]. Thus, the sample size for this study meets qualitative research standards.

3.6 Data collection

Data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews to investigate participants' motivations, satisfaction, and intentions to promote Bishwa Ijtema via word-of-mouth. These interviews, lasting 15-20 minutes each, were conducted in-person at the event site, allowing flexibility for participants to share detailed experiences while covering essential themes. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed for analysis. Data collection spanned January to May 2024, given the challenge of reaching both local and foreign pilgrims within the Ijtema period. Foreign tourists were prioritized due to their shorter stay at the event.

3.7 Data analysis

This study utilized concept, content, co-occurrence, and thematic analysis to explore Muslim tourists' motivations and satisfaction at Bishwa Ijtema. Data was systematically coded to identify recurring themes, which were synthesized into networks showing interrelationships. Using ATLAS.ti 2024, a qualitative analysis software, enabled effective organization and visualization of emerging themes and patterns.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The demographic profile of Muslim tourists visiting Bishwa Ijtema in Bangladesh reveals diverse backgrounds among both local and foreign attendees, considering age, education,

profession, and origin. Local tourists are predominantly in the 31-40 (8 individuals) and 41-50 (7 individuals) age groups, with a range of educational levels from illiterate (1 individual) to postgraduate (6 individuals), the majority being undergraduates (6 individuals). In terms of profession, private job holders (8 individuals) are the largest group among locals, followed by government service holders (4) and students (3).

Table 1: Description of the respondents

Age	Local Tourists	Foreign Tourists
20-30	4	8
31-40	8	6
41-50	7	4
51-60	1	2
	Education	
Illiterate	1	-
SSC	2	1
HSC	5	6
Undergraduate	6	7
Postgraduate	6	6
	Profession	
Student	3	2
Govt. service holder	4	3
Private job holder	8	6
Businessman	3	5
Miscellaneous	2	4
	Locations	
Dhaka	8	
Rajshahi	5	
Barishal	3	
Chattogram	2	
Rangpur	2	
Malaysia		5
Pakistan		4
India		5
Afghanistan		2
Morocco		1
Indonesia		3

Source: Authors' Survey (2024)

Foreign tourists are mostly in the 20-30 (8 individuals) and 31-40 (6 individuals) age brackets, with most holding undergraduate (7) or postgraduate (6) qualifications. They work in varied professions, with businessmen (5) and private job holders (6) making up the largest groups, alongside students and miscellaneous occupations. Local tourists come from various regions in Bangladesh, including Dhaka (8), Rajshahi (5), Barishal (3), Chattogram (2), and Rangpur (2), while foreign tourists hail from countries such as Malaysia (5), Pakistan (4), India (5), Afghanistan (2), Morocco (1), and Indonesia (3). This diversity highlights the broad appeal and significance of Bishwa Ijtema, attracting attendees from different cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds.

4.2 Concept analysis

Figure 1 unveils that the Islamic annual festival, Bishwa Ijtema is the central focus of both domestic and foreign visitors. In this case, BI is surrounded by Islamic values and principles that make people spiritually upright and keep them away from non-Islamic practices.

The word cloud reveals that the primary motivators for visiting Bishwa Ijtema are religious experience, social interaction, and personal growth. Pilgrims seek spiritual connection, community building, and knowledge acquisition. However, the event also presents challenges like overcrowding and infrastructure limitations. Despite these challenges, some pilgrims express satisfaction with their

overall experience, highlighting the positive impact of the event on their faith and well-being. To enhance the pilgrim experience, addressing these challenges and further exploring the potential for religious, social, and personal growth are crucial.

4.3 Content analysis

Figure 2 quantifies the textual data collected through the interviews. The treemap visualizes the frequency of words in the text data related to the Bishwa Ijtema. The size of each box represents the frequency of the word, and the color indicates different themes. It shows that BI takes the leading position in the case of the visitors' purposes. Most of the coding is attached to the BI totaling 97 instances. However, the event is followed by different statuses of experiences and a wide array of challenges.

It highlights the importance of religious experience and social interaction as primary motivators for attending the event. Words like "Allah," "prayer," "Islam," and "Hajj" emphasize the spiritual significance, while terms like "people," "friend," and "community" highlight the social aspect. However, the map also reveals challenges such as overcrowding and infrastructure limitations, represented by words like "problem," "traffic," and "congestion." Despite these issues, the tree map suggests that pilgrims generally have a positive experience, with words like "satisfaction," "opportunity," and "growth" indicating a sense of fulfillment and personal development.

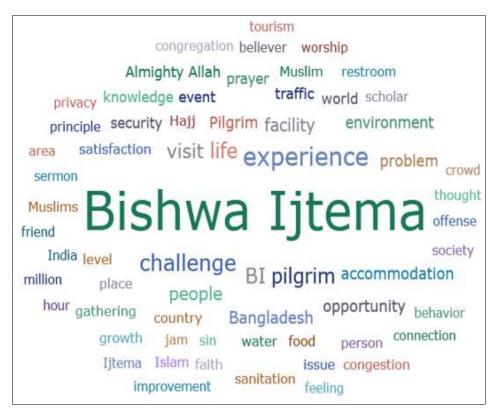


Fig 1: Word Cloud (Source: Author's creation)

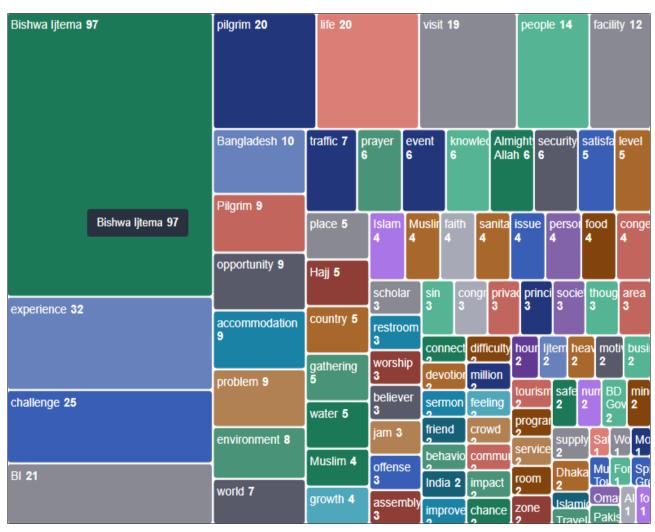


Fig 2: Treemap (Source: Author's creation)

4.4 Local pilgrims' motivational factors at Bishwa Ijtema: The motivations of local pilgrims attending the Bishwa Ijtema are multifaceted. Primarily, they are driven by religious aspirations, seeking to deepen their spiritual connection and purify their souls. The event provides a

platform for collective prayer, reflection, and seeking forgiveness. Additionally, the social and cultural significance of the Ijtema cannot be overlooked. It offers an opportunity for community building, cultural exchange, and strengthening bonds with fellow Muslims.

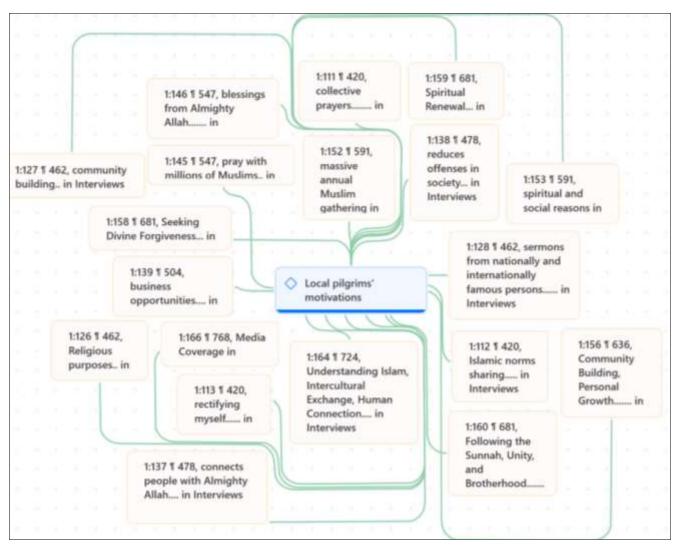


Fig 3: Local pilgrims' motivations (Source: Author's creation)

Beyond spiritual and social benefits, the Bishwa Ijtema also contributes to personal development and economic growth. Pilgrims are inspired to strive for self-improvement, adopt virtuous behaviors, and live a righteous life. The event generates economic activity, creating employment opportunities and boosting the local economy.

4.5 Foreign pilgrims' motivational factors at Bishwa Ijtema

The motivations of foreign pilgrims attending the Bishwa Ijtema are multifaceted and deeply rooted in their spiritual aspirations and cultural connections. Primarily, they are drawn to the event for its spiritual significance. Pilgrims seek to deepen their faith, seek forgiveness for their sins, and strengthen their connection with Allah through collective prayers and religious discourse. The opportunity to listen to renowned Islamic scholars and engage in religious discussions is also a major draw.

Beyond spiritual enrichment, foreign pilgrims are attracted to the cultural and social aspects of the Bishwa Ijtema. They are fascinated by the unique Islamic traditions and customs observed at the event. The chance to meet people from different cultures and backgrounds, share experiences, and build lasting friendships is another important motivation. Additionally, some pilgrims view the Bishwa Ijtema as a spiritual pilgrimage, similar to Hajj, and seek blessings and spiritual rewards.

Finally, practical considerations such as affordability and accessibility play a role in attracting foreign pilgrims. The Bishwa Ijtema offers a relatively cost-effective and convenient opportunity to experience a large-scale Islamic gathering. By understanding these diverse motivations, we can gain deeper insights into the global appeal of the Bishwa Ijtema and its impact on pilgrims from around the world.

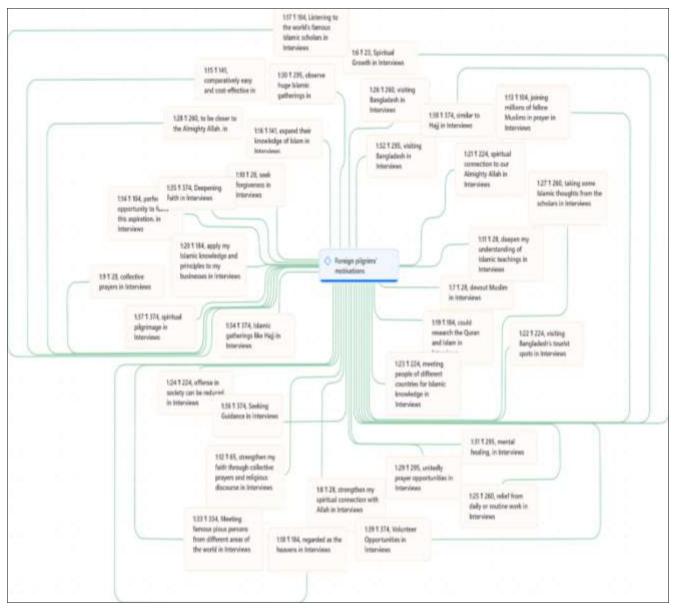


Fig 4: Foreign pilgrims' motivations (Source: Author's creation)

4.6 Local pilgrims' satisfaction status at Bishwa Ijtema

The satisfaction levels of local pilgrims attending the Bishwa Ijtema are generally positive, with many expressing satisfaction layers with the spiritual experience and the overall atmosphere of the event. However, there are also

concerns regarding environmental factors, including cleanliness, sanitation, and overcrowding. Some pilgrims suggest that the government could play a role in improving these conditions by providing additional facilities and infrastructure.

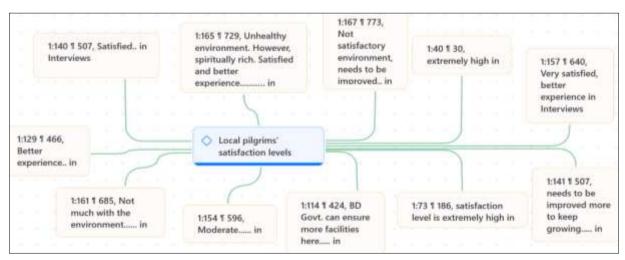


Fig 5: Local pilgrims' satisfaction (Source: Author's creation)

Despite these concerns, the majority of local pilgrims remain satisfied with their experience, highlighting the spiritual significance and social value of the Bishwa Ijtema. The event offers a unique opportunity for religious reflection, community building, and personal growth.

4.7 Foreign pilgrims' satisfaction status at Bishwa Ijtema: Figure 6 presents that the satisfaction levels of

foreign pilgrims attending the Bishwa Ijtema are generally positive, with many expressing high levels of satisfaction with the spiritual experience and the overall atmosphere of the event. The opportunity to connect with fellow Muslims from around the world, engage in religious discussions, and witness Islamic traditions firsthand is highly valued by pilgrims.

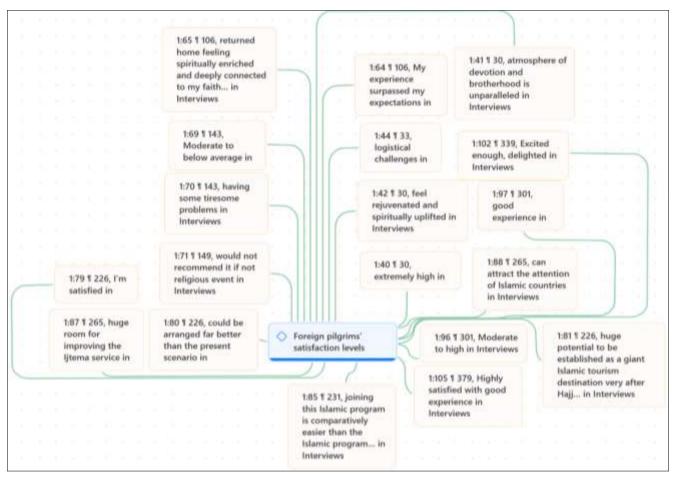


Fig 6: Foreign pilgrims' satisfaction (Source: Author's creation)

However, some pilgrims have raised concerns about certain aspects of the event, such as logistical challenges and the need for improved facilities. Additionally, while many pilgrims are satisfied with their experience, there is potential to further enhance the event by addressing these issues and improving the overall organization and infrastructure.

4.8 Thematic analysis

Figure 7 illustrates a comprehensive interplay between the motivations, challenges, and satisfaction levels of both local and foreign pilgrims attending the Bishwa Ijtema. It highlights the reciprocal relationship between these factors and the impact they have on each other.

For local pilgrims, the event offers a platform for religious and cultural enrichment, social interaction, and personal growth. However, they also face challenges such as overcrowding, infrastructure limitations, and environmental concerns. To enhance the pilgrim experience, local pilgrims

recommend improving these conditions and ensuring the sustainability of the event.

Foreign pilgrims are drawn to the Bishwa Ijtema for similar reasons, seeking spiritual fulfillment, cultural immersion, and the opportunity to connect with fellow Muslims from around the world. They also face challenges, including language barriers, logistical difficulties, and cultural differences. To improve their experience, foreign pilgrims recommend enhancing the infrastructure, providing better facilities, and improving the overall organization of the event.

The figure suggests that addressing the challenges faced by both local and foreign pilgrims can lead to increased satisfaction levels and a more positive overall experience. By implementing sustainable practices, improving infrastructure, and enhancing the organization of the event, the Bishwa Ijtema can continue to be a significant religious and cultural gathering for years to come.

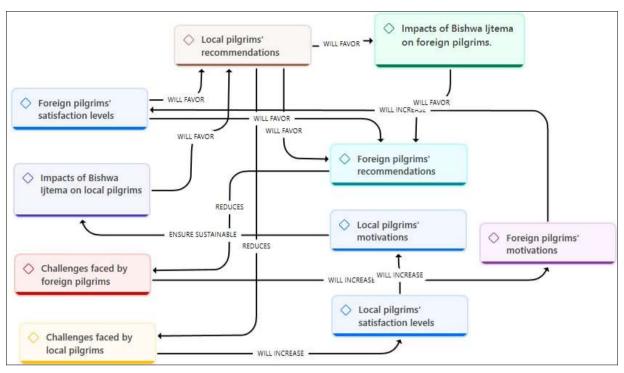


Fig 7: Thematic analysis (Source: Author's creation)

4.9 Co-occurrence analysis

Figure 8 reveals that local and foreign pilgrims attending Bishwa Ijtema experience differing levels of motivation and satisfaction. Local pilgrims generally report higher motivation and satisfaction, possibly due to cultural familiarity and easier access. Foreign pilgrims, while motivated, face more challenges, potentially affecting their satisfaction levels.

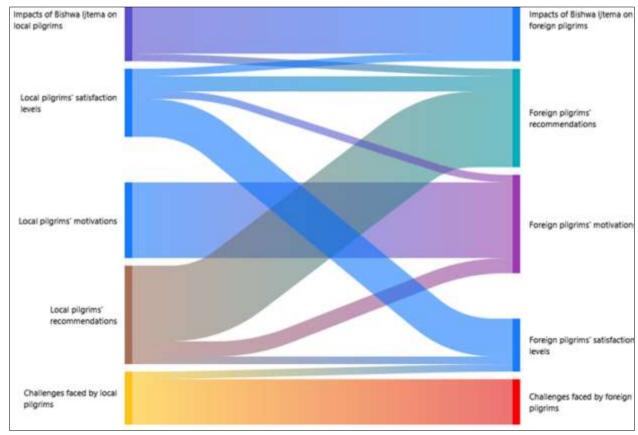


Fig 8: Sankey diagram

Both groups have unique motivations for attending, yet foreign pilgrims' recommendations reflect a greater focus on logistical improvements. This contrast highlights how cultural context and logistical factors impact the overall experience for each group at Bishwa Ijtema.

5. Results and Discussion

The Bishwa Ijtema, a massive Islamic gathering held annually at the banks of the Turag River in Tongi, Bangladesh, offers a unique opportunity to study the motivations, experiences, and challenges of Muslim pilgrims. Analyzing the data presented in the provided figures and incorporating insights from previous Islamic tourism studies supplies a deeper understanding of this significant religious event. The entire analysis showcases that local and foreign pilgrims visit BI primarily with the intention of spiritual connection to Almighty Allah. enhancing religious knowledge, collective prayers, meeting internationally renowned Islamic scholars, and seeking divine forgiveness. The findings are supported by previous studies (Henderson, 2009; Jafari & Scott, 2014; Kalender & Tari Kasnakoglu, 2022; Nassar et al., 2015; Ohlan & Ohlan, 2024; Purwandani & Yusuf, 2024) [29, 32, 37, 50, 51, 56]. Moreover, pilgrims at BI are motivated by opportunities like Islamic community building, sharing Islamic norms, and understanding righteous Islamic values and principles. Alshaibi (2024) [4] and Arham et al. (2024) [5] have found similar results in their studies. The study also highlights that the number of pilgrims at BI is increasing every year due to its cost-effectiveness compared to Hajj. That means the cost structure has an impact on visiting pilgrimage sites which is unexplored in previous studies. However, most pilgrims report that they are not entirely satisfied with the BI environment due to several problems and challenges. This dissatisfaction is making them create negative advocacy regarding the BI. In Contrast, some pilgrims are spiritually upright and for this reason, they are not bothered with the environment. However, they also believe that satisfaction triggers the motivation of pilgrims towards Islamic destinations. Iniesta-Bonillo et al. (2016) [82] and Prebensen & Xie (2017) [83] extracted the same findings. Interestingly, the study traces that Islamic congregation like BI reduces offense in society because the visitors learn and receive divine teachings from the event. In addition to that, people can rectify themselves by injecting Islamic values from the mega Islamic event. Besides, making an Islamic event prominent requires the development of infrastructure and logistics. Scholars (Kadir & Alaaraj, 2023; Karia & Asaari, 2016; Paché, 2023) [36, 38, 53]; supported this statement before in their research.

6. Conclusion

The Bishwa Ijtema stands as a profound symbol of Islamic pilgrimage, drawing Muslims from across the globe. Understanding the motivations, challenges, and aspirations of pilgrims can enhance the event's appeal and provide a more fulfilling experience. Addressing infrastructure and organizational issues, such as transportation, accommodation, sanitation, crowd control, and security, is essential to improve pilgrims' experiences. Furthermore, better waste management and crowd control are crucial for comfort and safety.

Promoting cultural exchange can foster unity among diverse attendees, transforming the Ijtema into a truly global gathering. Enhancing international visibility through digital marketing and collaboration with tour operators can attract more foreign pilgrims, boosting Islamic tourism in Bangladesh. Tailoring services like language support, cultural orientation, and accessible facilities can meet the needs of international visitors, making the event more

inclusive.

However, this study faces limitations due to the scarcity of literature on Bishwa Ijtema. The author found only a few previous studies, cases, and news related to BI where they did not analyze the motivating factors and satisfaction of Muslim tourists attending BI. Additionally, limited data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs hampers comprehensive analysis. Further research and more accessible data are needed to fully understand and support the growth of Bishwa Ijtema as a global Islamic tourism event.

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