

# Exploring the Dimensions of Pilgrims' Experiences

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Experiences are private events that occur in response to some stimulation. They often result from direct observation or participation in events – whether they are real, dreamlike, or virtual. This study aims to understand and explore the dimensions of pilgrims' experiences at Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) located in Tirumala near Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. Furthermore, the study aimed to develop an instrument that would measure the pilgrims' experiences.

**Approach:** The current trend in the marketing practices is to create engaging and lasting experiences for the customers. To understand the experiences in the services context, the study was conducted with the pilgrims who visited the holy Tirumala temple. A self administered questionnaire which included both structured and open-ended questions was used.

**Findings:** A close look out for the various dimensions of pilgrims' experiences management was developed and an instrument to measure pilgrims' experiences in the context of the holy temple was evolved.

**Research Limitations:** The research scope registered only exceptional experiences of the respondents and experiences observed at the time of the study. The grade of criticality of the experiences was not examined further.

**Practical Implications:** The study provides a new understanding of pilgrims' experiences and would help the temple management to design a framework that enhances the *darshan* experience and ensures that the pilgrims have a memorable stay at the Tirumala temple.

**Originality/Value:** This paper is the first of its kind, exploring the various dimensions of pilgrims' experiences and addressing the dimensions that create the various aspects of a wonderful *darshan* leading to the pilgrims being satisfied with their visit.

**Keywords:** pilgrim, pilgrims' experiences, pilgrim satisfaction, Lord Venkateswara, TTD

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Experiences are private events that occur in response to some stimulation (Schmitt, 1999). Experiences involve the entire living being. They often result from direct observation and /or participation in events - whether they are real, dreamlike, or virtual; experiences are usually not self-generated, but induced. Today, many firms and institutions practice customer experience management (CEM) as a business strategy, supported by an integrated platform to enable the organizations to capture, evaluate, analyze, and understand their customers' experiences when they interact with them.

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD henceforth) is the largest pilgrimage center in the world, situated in the hill town of Tirumala, near Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, and attracts a large number of pilgrims from across the world. Developed by the Pallava Kings, the rulers of the subcontinent during the 9th century, the Tirupati temple got due recognition during the 15th century due to the rulers of the Vijayanagara dynasty. The Tirumala Tirupati Temple, an uphill place, is managed by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam Board, constituted by the State Government of Andhra Pradesh, and the temple attracts nearly 1,00,000 plus pilgrims on an average per day. TTD has developed robust systems to manage the requirements of the pilgrims, and today, with the Internet, it manages the system effectively by managing and engaging the huge crowd, their waiting experiences, their stay, and provides a peaceful and divine experience of the Lord. The number of the pilgrims who visit the Tirumala Tirupati Temple has been increasing steadily over a period of time and the number of pilgrims visiting the Tirumala Tirupati

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Temple has reached more than 200 million in a year. The first and the primary objective of a pilgrim visiting the Tirumala temple is to have the *darshan* of the Lord followed by tonsuring (shaving of the hair as offering), donations, collecting *prasad*, staying, and then shopping. In this context, the present research work addresses the complexity and dynamism of the pilgrims' experiences of visiting the Tirumala Tirupati Temple.

## Review of Literature

Experience is an often-used term, which has been increasingly discussed since the beginning of 2000 (Caru & Cova, 2007), but it is rarely defined. Customer experience is defined as the customer's direct and indirect experience of the service process, the organization, the facilities, and how the customer interacts with the service firm's representatives and other customers (Sundbo & Hagedorn-Rasmussens, 2008). The customer is actively involved in some way and takes the memory aspects into account. The authors opined that customer experience is "a mental journey that leaves the customer with memories of having performed something special, having learned something, or just having fun". It should be added that the result of the mental journey could be both favourable and unfavourable. These in turn create the customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses and leave the customer with memories about the experience.

The focus of research about customer experience has been customer's cognitive based perception of pre-determined attribute dimensions that measure the outcome of service processes. Details about customers' individual emotional processes of service experiences, described as "an interactive relativistic preference experience" (Holbrook, 2006) including customers' own interactions with employees and the physical environment were not considered. In addition, the methods and measurements used only described customer experiences by general measures without distinguishing the importance of variables. In the context of the TTD visit, we identified and conceptualized the variables involved and proposed a measure for understanding the customers' experiences.

Employees' quality of service has been acknowledged as an essential source for satisfying customers' experiences (Hartline, Maxham III, & McKee, 2000). Although the impact of employees on customers' experiences is certainly important, we can say that there are additional constructs that influence the customers' experiences leading to emotional responses. TTD is not an exception in this case, as employees become an integral part of providing services - right from providing information to the pilgrims to overseeing their return from the temple.

Researches have highlighted the importance of customers' experience of the atmosphere in service settings (Heide & Grønhaug, 2006; McGoldrick & Pieros, 1998; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). Heide and Grønhaug (2006) argued that there is need for more research on how atmospheric constructs influence customers' experiences in service settings. McGoldrick and Pieros (1998) pointed out the lack of knowledge of the emotional effects of atmosphere in tourist attractions. Wakefield and Blodgett (1999) observed that aspects of the design and decor of the physical facilities as well as ambient factors influence customer perceptions and feelings, but have not been incorporated in service-quality research. Cronin Jr. (2003) positioned emotion as a core attribute in satisfaction and suggested that models of satisfaction should include a separate emotional component. Wirtz and Bateson (1999) also contended that a separation of the cognitive and emotional components is both necessary and valuable for modeling behavior in service settings. Gupta and Vajic (1999) wrote that an experience occurs when a customer has a sensation or knowledge acquisition, or both, as a result of interaction with different elements of a context created by a service provider.

Sound is the most commonly studied facet of ambience. For example, focusing on sounds of music as an atmospheric facet, Milliman (1986) found that the employment of different tempos of background music are linked to traffic flow and gross receipts in service settings. In the temple premises, pilgrims chant the Vedic word of the Lord "*Govinda - Govinda*" and keep moving in the crowds in the queue system, and the background music of the Vedic mantra "*Om*" is one of the divine connecting sounds that pilgrims can imbibe in them before the *darshan* of the Lord.

Lighting is another important atmospheric factor. Intensity, color, type, and placement of lighting, among other qualities, are important for developing a desirable atmosphere. Proper lighting can add texture, charm, and beauty to a building or a landscape. Effective lighting attracts attention and creates an impression of the atmosphere inside. Research reveals that bright light will promote an atmosphere of liveliness and sociability, while dim light increases the sense of relaxation (Heide & Grønhaug, 2006). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) cited studies that demonstrated people's tendency to be drawn to light sources. The right atmosphere relaxes guests and creates an atmosphere in the service setting that contributes to a positive experience. The intensity and style of light are, therefore, closely linked to customers' experiences. TTD Management has provided clear, sufficient, colourful, and a good number of lights in the walk path to the pilgrims coming up to the temple premises.

The concept of the physical environment as an important part of the service experience was introduced as early as the 1970s (Kotler, 1973). Kotler's research suggested there may be more to the customer's experience than the product or service, citing atmosphere or physical environment as possible influences in the purchase decision. In support of this, Brady and Cronin (2001) found using meta-analysis that service quality has many different constructs, with the tangible physical environment emerging as an important and often neglected construct. This environment is composed of ambient conditions, design, physical, and social factors, all of which are important predictors of service quality. Jha and Singh (2013) emphasized that the aspects of atmospheric stimuli show the way to bring about a change in behaviours while staying in an environment of that nature. Another important factor about the Tirumala temple is its location -it is surrounded by seven panoramic hills, which are home to perennial waterfalls, lush valleys, and verdant forests. The temple was constructed more than 1000 years back (earliest records date back to 300 BC), and the interiors of the temple comprise of ancient sculptures and art work, and the main deity of the Lord's monument top (*Gopuram* – the temple tower) is covered with real gold.

Music was defined by Brunner (1990) as “a complex chemistry of controllable elements rather than a generic sonic mass.” The ability of both background and foreground music to affect moods has been demonstrated throughout history by poets, playwrights, and composers (Brunner II, 1990) and is reflected extensively in servicescape studies (Areni & Kim, 1994 ; Baker, Levy, Grewal, 1992 ; Dube, Chebat, & Morin, 1995 ; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001 ; Milliman, 1986; North, Hargreaves, McKendrick, 1999 ; Yalch & Spangenberg, 1990). Srivastava (2013) revealed that music can have a deep impact on consumer behaviour and influence the repeat visits of consumers. TTD continuously airs the *Suprabatham* (a prayer to wake up the Lord), *bhajans*, *keerthans*, and chantings of Lord Venkateswara. Thus, the whole environment becomes so pleasant that one can dive into the nectar of divinity.

Aroma can be defined as a distinctive smell (especially one that is pleasant). Morrin and Ratneshwar (2003) asserted that “environmental fragrance” is now becoming a common practice in retailing, restaurants, and other service-oriented businesses because “pleasant scents encourage customers to spend more time in the servicescape” (p. 21). The supreme specialty of TTD is the Laddu (a *prasadam* for all). The Laddu is a confectionery made out of pure ghee, nuts, and toor dhal powder. The aroma in the premises is surrounded by the fragrance of the ghee recipe, and the pilgrims wait to receive the mouth -watering Laddu as the *prasadam* (Hallet & Silver, 1994).

The importance of cleanliness within the service environment has been highlighted extensively in the literature (Berta, 2005 ; Fitzsimmons, 2003). More specifically, Wakefield and Blodgett (1996) asserted that “cleanliness is an important part of the servicescape”. The importance of cleanliness has been manifested in a great number of studies, which directly link cleanliness to customers' evaluation of the servicescape and hence their future behaviour (Stern & Stern, 2000). TTD ensures that cleanliness is maintained round the clock and sanitation is given the top most priority to maintain the sanctity of the temple.

The concept of value is central to successful marketing because value is believed to be central to consumer decision-making, albeit a thorough understanding of value and its role in consumer decision-making has remained elusive. The strategic role of value was revealed in Woodruff's (1997) contention that value and satisfaction are inextricably linked and both impact a customer's desire to continue a relationship. Similarly, Jones and Sasser Jr. (1995) asserted that providing customers with outstanding value may be the only reliable way to achieve sustained customer satisfaction and loyalty. TTD has got great values, which have been associated with the temple due to its

ancient history, and the temple is considered to be the most traditional temple of the Hindu culture. The idol of Lord Sri Venkateswara is called the *Mulaberam*, and it is believed to be self-manifested. There is no known sculptor possessing the capability to sculpt idols of God so proportionately. Furthermore, no human being is known to have installed it in the shrine (Tirumala Venkateswara Temple, Wikipedia). Hence, the Tirumala Temple is extremely sacred and is an embodiment of values that form a core of TTD, and the values and sacredness of the temple carry a lot of importance for the pilgrims.

## Objectives of the Study

This study will contribute to closing this knowledge gap by :

- (1) Exploring the dimensions of pilgrims' experiences from the point of view of visitors and;
- (2) Studying the drivers of customer service experiences, which are regarded as the mechanisms that evoke customer experiences in a divine environment.

## Methodology

Through the depth interview technique, people who are associated with TTD in various functional areas were interviewed. Also, to generate views of the pilgrims, unstructured interviews were carried out. These processes created a long list of 100 items related to various facets of TTD. To identify the underlying structures/ dimensions in the pilgrims' experiences, exploratory factor analysis was deployed, and the results are summarized in the following section.

## Data and Profile

➡ **Sample and Data Collection** : An empirical study was conducted during February and March 2012 by

**Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.769
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	509.109
	<i>Df</i>	28
	Sig.	.000

**Table 2. Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component		
	1	2	3
Website navigation	.905		
Website is easy to use	.902		
Website is attractive & meaningful	.632		
Ticket Prices - <i>Darshan</i>		.863	
Ticket Prices - <i>Prasadam</i>		.815	
Ticket Prices - Transportation		.728	
Website is trustworthy			.821
Ticket purchase			.816

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

<sup>a</sup>. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

interviewing visitors who were visiting TTD by using a structured interview schedule. The targeted population consisted of pilgrims who came for the Lord's *darshan* and stayed at TTD. From this population, a sample for the study was selected on the basis of convenience sampling. Data were collected at the walk path to the temple, at the guest houses, at the temple premises once the pilgrims finished the *darshan*, and at the bus depots where pilgrims boarded buses to return to their respective destinations. A total of 179 respondents were contacted, out of which 155 respondents agreed to participate in the study and filled up the questionnaire. Questionnaires with missing data were removed, which left us with 149 usable questionnaires. The sample profile of these 149 respondents is provided below.

Nearly 97% of the pilgrims visited the Tirumala Temple as a group. The party/group size ranged from 2-18 members with a mean of 4.35 members ( $\sigma = 3.198$  members). Most of the pilgrims visited Tirumala on the basis of the opinion given to them by their parents (39.6%) and elderly members in the family (16%). The major purpose as to why the pilgrims visited the Tirumala Temple was to get a *darshan* of Lord Venkateswara (56.4%) and nearly 50% of the respondents visited the '*Kalyana Katta*' for their hair tonsuring. Only 10% of the pilgrims spent less than a day at Tirumala, and those who spent more than a day stayed over for a time period from 2-7 days, with a mean of 1.95 days ( $\sigma = 1.058$  days).

## Results and Discussion

➔ **Factors Related to Ticketing :** Using the 11 items related to ticketing, an exploratory factor analysis was performed. The KMO test results (presented in the Table 1) for the overall measure of sampling adequacy is relatively superior (0.769), and the correlation matrix of the variables included in the analysis contain sufficient amount of significant correlations. Three factors were loaded, which are summarized in the Table 2.

Factor -1 loadings consist of items related to website features and navigation and attractiveness, hence named as 'Website- Physical Component,' Factor -2 loadings consist of items related to ticket for *darshan*, *prasadam*, and

**Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.725
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	275.117
	Df	36
	Sig.	.000

**Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix<sup>b</sup>**

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Guide services	.804			
Friendly staff	.720			
Additional information from the staff	.684			
Information about the ticketing procedure	.508			
Adequate information about the <i>darshan</i>		.860		
Clear Signage		.853		
Variety of media (video, etc) providing information			.905	
Entitled to free food, accommodation, and medical treatment			.740	
Hall of Antiquities				.858

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

<sup>b</sup> Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

**Table 5. KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.787
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2044.903
	Df	351
	Sig.	.000

**Table 6. Rotated Component Matrix <sup>c</sup>**

	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Reaching Tirumala is very easy	.965						
Online services	.956						
Tirumala is an inspiring and devotional experience	.950						
Standing in the long queues for the Darshan	.815						
Audio and Video material at TTD	.673						
Amazing view of the plains		.811					
The lightings and scenery		.717					
Vibrant cultural and philanthropic institutions		.705					
Climbing the hill path		.627					
Sentimental attachment to the temple		.579					
Tasting of Prasadam ( <i>Laddu</i> )			.861				
Tasting of Prasadam ( <i>Vada</i> )			.764				
Fragrance at the temple premises			.681				
Hearing of divine chants			.610				
Availability of cottages for a pleasant stay at Tirumala				.728			
The Hundi on display				.586			
Beautiful gardens in Tirumala and Tirupati				.494			
Pleasant background music				.472			
Booking of different sevas					.677		
Space to move around					.631		
Absolute silence					.534		
Lighting					.516		
Well-maintained and picturesque mountain road						.773	
Path to drive down						.757	
The divinity in the temple							.720
Waiting in long queues							.660
Hearing the chants of " <i>Govinda, Govinda</i> "							.525

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

<sup>c</sup>. Rotation converged in 12 iterations.

transportation and it is named as 'Ticket Value Component'. Factor-3 loadings include secure online payment gateway (website trustworthiness) for booking of tickets and so forth, and it is named as 'Website Functional Component'.

➡ **Factors Related to TTD Information :** Using the 16 items related to information, an exploratory factor analysis was performed. Factor analysis with varimax rotation and the four factor loadings accounted for nearly 70% of the

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**Table 7. KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.810
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1933.067
	<i>Df</i>	496
	Sig.	.000

**Table 8. Rotated Component Matrix<sup>d</sup>**

	Component									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The pedestrian path	.775									
Separate <i>darshan</i> registration	.738									
Security guards	.735									
Covered walk path	.644									
Free luggage carry counter	.465									
APSRTC buses	.415									
Bio metric coupons	.405									
Accessible toilets		.866								
Drinking water		.803								
Public toilets		.764								
Toilets in the walk path		.760								
Clean and tidy toilets		.650								
Free food			.798							
Hot and tasty food			.776							
Free food to all			.762							
Shops			.425							
Free milk, coffee, and tea				.792						
Free food in the queue complex				.780						
Toilets in the queue complex				.575						
Free bus					.777					
Free hair tonsure					.543					
free <i>darshan</i> to the trekkers					.415					
Medical help and 108 services						.793				
Mobile auto clinics						.599				
<i>Prasadam</i> tickets						.415				
Good value for money items							.749			
Smoking in restaurants							.664			
Items for sale							.619			
Walk path with lights								.755		
Free cloak and shoe rooms								.600		
Variety of food in hotels									.766	
Serving premises										.836

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

<sup>d</sup>. Rotation converged in 13 iterations.

total variance in the data. The KMO test results (listed in the Table 3) for the overall measure of sampling adequacy is relatively superior (0.725), and the correlation matrix of the variables included in the analysis contains a sufficient amount of significant correlations. Four factors were loaded under TTD information, which are summarized in the Table 4.

Factor -1 loadings consist of items related to information features and staff friendliness and additional information, hence named as 'Information - Empathy Component'. Factor -2 loadings consist of items related to information regarding procedures for *darshan*, ticket purchases, and locations in the temple premises, and it is named as 'Information Value Component'. Factor-3 loadings include other information sources of the temple information and information pertaining to the provisions made to the pilgrims and it is named as 'Right to Information Component'. Factor-4 loadings include information of the existence of the museum at the temple premises and it is named as 'Antique Hall'.

➡ **Factors Relating to the Pilgrims' Experiences :** Using the 28 items related to pilgrims' experiences, an exploratory factor analysis was performed. The factor analysis with varimax rotation and the seven factor loadings accounted for nearly 69% of the total variance in the data. The KMO test results (Table 5) for the overall measure of sampling adequacy is relatively superior (0.787), and the correlation matrix of the variables included in the analysis contains sufficient amount of significant correlations. Seven factors were loaded under pilgrims' experiences, which are summarized in the Table 6.

Factor -1 loadings consist of items related to logistics, visiting, and standing in the long queues, hence named as 'Connectivity Component,' Factor -2 loadings consist of items related to amazing views, lighting, scenery, and

**Table 9. Summary of Reliability Analysis**

Factor	S. No.	Dimensions	Mean (SD )	Alpha
Ticketing	1	Website Physical Component	3.3490 (0.7859)	0.868
	2	Ticket Value Component	3.8098 (0.6988)	0.751
	3	Website Functional Component	3.3054 (0.7835)	0.671
Information	1	Information Empathy Component	3.2216 (1.0252)	0.618
	2	Information Value Component	3.7378 (0.8261)	0.732
	3	Right to Information Component	3.5643 (0.8852)	0.665
Experience	1	Connectivity Component	3.8559 (1.9085)	0.918
	2	Atmospherics	3.9433 (0.7269)	0.585
	3	Senses Component	4.0370 (0.5934)	0.783
	4	Stay Facilities	3.5752 (0.9519)	0.562
	5	Temple Premises	3.5959(0.7169)	0.550
	6	Directions	4.1821 (0.5504)	0.724
	7	Divine Experience	4.1533 (0.5439)	0.727
Facilities	1	Facilities - Walk Path Component	3.8432 (0.6249)	0.497
	2	Sanitation	3.4956 (0.8599)	0.855
	3	<i>Annadanam</i> Facility	3.8358 (0.9053)	0.360
	4	Free Food Supply - Queue Complex	3.6787 (0.6934)	0.682
	5	Special Provisions for Walkers	3.8491 (1.0081)	0.688
	6	Facilities - Road Path	3.6489 (1.4059)	0.250
	7	Items for sale	2.9220 (1.1132)	0.696
	8	Additional facilities for Walk Trekkers	3.8504 (0.5602)	0.368
	9	Food Variety	-	NC
	10	Cleanliness	-	NC



excitement among the pilgrims, and hence, it is named as 'Atmospherics'. Factor-3 loadings include tasting, smell of the *Prasadam*, and it is named as 'Senses Component'. Factor-4 loadings include information regarding the stay, cottages, gardens, and pleasant music and it is named as 'Stay Facilities'. Factor-5 loadings include information relating to advance booking systems, space to move around, silence in the temple premises, and lighting, and it is named as 'Temple Premises'. Factor-6 loadings include information about the picturesque and the clear path directions and it is named as 'Directions'. Factor-7 loadings include information pertaining to the divine atmosphere, the *darshan* experience, and divine chants, and it is named as 'Divine Experience'.

➔ **Factors Relating to Facilities at TTD :** Using the 36 items related to facilities, an exploratory factor analysis was performed. The factor analysis with varimax rotation and the seven factor loadings accounted for nearly 71% of the total variance in the data. The KMO test results (presented in the Table 7) for the overall measure of sampling adequacy is relatively superior (0.810) and the correlation matrix of the variables included in the analysis contains sufficient amount of significant correlations. Ten factors were loaded under facilities at TTD, which are summarized in the Table 8.

Factor -1 loadings consist of items related to information about wild animals, bio-metrics for walk trekkers, security guards along the walk path, shelter, luggage systems, and bus facilities, hence named as 'Facilities - Walk Path Component'. Factor -2 loadings consists of items related to toilets, clean and tidy aspects, drinking water, and it is named as 'Sanitation'. Factor-3 loadings include free food, good quality food that is hot and tasty, and it is named as '*Annadanam* Facility'. Factor-4 loadings include free food and snacks offered to pilgrims waiting in the queue complex and it is named as 'Free Food Supply - Queue Complex'. Factor-5 loadings include free transportation (bus), hair tonsure, and free *darshan* for walk trekkers and it is named as 'Special Provisions for Walkers'. Factor-6 loadings include medical facilities, ambulances, and auto clinics and it is named as 'Facilities - Road Path'. Factor-7 loadings include items sold at the temple and smoking at the restaurants, and it is named as 'Items for Sale'. Factor-8 loadings include facilities provided for the walkers at the night time, lighting, free cloak room, and it is named as 'Additional Facilities for Walk Trekkers'. Factor-9 loadings include information pertaining to the variety of food available and it is named as 'Food Variety'. Factor-10 loadings include information pertaining to serving premises and it is named as 'Cleanliness'.

The items were tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha values and the results are summarized in the Table 9. From the Table 9, it can be seen that many of the reliability coefficients were in the range of 0.7 to 0.9. However, some of the coefficients related to few factors were below the acceptable levels of Nunnally (1978). The results suggest that this model/framework satisfactorily explains customer experience and suggests that the Management needs to focus on the various dimensions that really enhance the experience of the pilgrims, like Directions ( $\mu = 4.1821$  and  $\sigma = 0.5504$ ), Divine Experience ( $\mu = 4.1533$  and  $\sigma = 0.5439$ ), Senses Component ( $\mu = 4.0370$  and  $\sigma = 0.5934$ ), Atmospherics ( $\mu = 3.9433$  and  $\sigma = 0.7269$ ), Connectivity Component ( $\mu = 3.8559$  and  $\sigma = 1.9085$ ), Special Provision for Walkers ( $\mu = 3.8491$  and  $\sigma = 1.0081$ ), *Annadanam* Facility ( $\mu = 3.8358$  and  $\sigma = 0.9053$ ), Facilities - Walk Path Component ( $\mu = 3.8432$  and  $\sigma = 0.6249$ ), Ticket Value Component ( $\mu = 3.8098$  and  $\sigma = 0.6988$ ) and so forth, which are being managed quite well by the TTD Management. However, TTD needs to put in extra efforts to catapult itself in the realm of excellence so that its systems and processes become a role model for handling large numbers of pilgrims at religious sites all around the world.

## Conclusion

We have shown and analyzed the complexity and dynamism of experience in a temple visit context, with social interactions, the core product (*Darshan* of the Lord Venkateswara), and the physical environment as the frequent drivers of the pilgrims' favourable and unfavourable experiences. The customer interacts in a dynamic process with the drivers and vice versa as an active co-creator. For the service providers, the results indicate the value of investing great efforts in understanding the complexity of interactions, especially between the customer and the frequent drivers, in order to find ways of how to direct the interactions together with their customers.

TTD is quite effectively managing the pilgrims who are visiting the Tirumala Temple and due to the facilities provided by the TTD Management, the pilgrims are able to have a wonderful *darshan* and stay at TTD. This pleasurable experience of the pilgrims helps them to experience the divinity of Lord Venkateswara. The TTD Management is doing a commendable job in providing and enhancing the pilgrims' experiences, and this model can be considered by other temples in India, where facilities such as proper traffic management, comfortable stay, and advance booking facilities can provide a divine and serene atmosphere to the pilgrims, thereby ensuring that the pilgrims' stay is hassle free and this strengthens their relationship with the place.

## **Managerial Implications**

We strongly believe that a study for determining the dimensions of pilgrims' experiences in a temple context of this nature is a useful one and is replicable in similar settings very well. It is imperative that the services organizations understand the quality dimensions that matter most to patronage, thus allowing the Management to put their resources to the best use. The purpose of this research was to explore the dimensions of pilgrims' experiences as these dimensions have a direct impact on the favorableness or unfavorableness of the pilgrims, which becomes extremely important in the services encounters.

Clearly, respondents in this study strongly stated that the Website Physical Component, Ticket Value Component, Information Value Component, Connectivity Component, Atmospherics, Senses Component, Stay Facilities, Temple Premises, Directions, Divine Experience, Sanitation, Items for Sale, Free Food Supply - Queue Complex, and Special Provisions for Walkers form a strong integral part of their pleasant stay at Tirumala, enhancing their happiness, and intensifying the divine experience. Moreover, another contribution for academic research as well as for decision makers is an instrument to measure experience of the pilgrims. The scale developed is reliable and valid and could be used to measure customers' experiences in other similar service establishments. Finally, from a realistic point of view, if the current service provider (TTD) chooses this instrument, it can better understand how the pilgrims' experiences can be strengthened further with the resources that the Management possesses.

## **Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research**

The sampling method is a limitation of this study, as the sample represents a limited cross-section of the visitors' population, and thus, may not represent the true and entire population of the visitors' list. The incidents collected show a great variation, even though not all of them could be assessed as being very critical for the relationship between customers and the service providers. Some of them would not be critical at all for us, but were so for the interviewees. In addition, only a temple visit context was studied, which is a high-contact service. Due to the careful description of details provided in the present study, the readers (practitioners and researchers) will be able to ascertain for themselves to which extent the results could be applied in their specific contexts.

The present study exhibited the dimensions of the pilgrims' experiences that are favourable and unfavourable. The results show that interactions occur continuously between the pilgrim and the drivers throughout the whole process of their interaction. However, further research is needed to explore and deepen the understanding of the nature of drivers and their interdependency, the role they play for the pilgrims' experiences, the start and end of the experience, which is in control of the driver in a specific situation, and a typology of the most common and most unusual situations. This additional knowledge could be an important contribution to the design of the prerequisites of favourable pilgrim experiences.

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## Glossary

TTD	- Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams
<i>Darshan</i>	- Visiting the premises and praying to the Lord in the temple.
<i>Sarvadarshan</i>	- Free <i>darshan</i> to all.
<i>Bhakti</i>	- Signifies an active involvement by the pilgrim in divine worship.
<i>Annadanam</i>	- Free food served to all with love.
<i>Kalyanakatta</i>	- A place where pilgrims get their head tonsured, an offering to submit hairs to the Lord.
<i>Galigopuram</i>	- a resting place for pilgrims who walk through the hills.
<i>Laddu (Prasadam)</i>	- Sweet made of besan flour, sugar syrup, pure ghee, cashewnuts, cardamom, raisins, and almonds.
<i>Sevas</i>	- different ways of worshipping the Lord.
<i>Gopuram</i>	- temple tower.
<i>Suprabatham</i>	- a prayer to wake up the Lord.

We humbly request that for any clarification with regards to the terms discussed in the paper, readers are requested to look up the TTD websites : [www.tirumala.org](http://www.tirumala.org) and [www.ttdsevaonline.com](http://www.ttdsevaonline.com)