

## **Profiling Monastery Tourists based on Memorable Experiences, Place Identity, Satisfaction, Intention to Revisit and Intention to Recommend**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The research presented in this paper profiles monastery tourists based on memorable tourism experiences, place identity, satisfaction, intention to revisit, and intention to recommend. Subjects of the research were two monasteries (Monastery of Panagia Soumela in Trapezounta Pontos, today Trabzon Turkey, and the new Panagia Soumela, Imathia, Greece) and two monastery complexes (Agio Oros or Holly Mountain and the Meteora). A quantitative research took place via a questionnaire employing a non-probability sampling method and a mixed method data collection technique. The final sample consisted of 780 participants. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, factor, reliability, cluster analysis, and chi-square tests. Three tourist segments that were profiled were extracted namely “the highly MTE achievers and favourable monastery tourists”, “the sufficient MTE attainers and semi-satisfied monastery tourists”, “the no meaning found, negatively positioned monastery tourists”. Marketing communication implications are discussed, aiming at promoting monastery tourism.

**Keywords:** Memorable tourism experiences; Monastery tourism; Marketing communication; Segmentation.

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

As discussed by Drule *et al.* (2012a, b), a growing number of individuals choose to travel to holy places nowadays and therefore also take part in religious events, such as festivals, which are organized in the sacred places. Faith-related or religious tourism has become a key type of tourism, aimed at special-interest or alternative travelers. As many researchers indicate, this trend began during the 1990s and its popularity has steadily increased to the point where it now plays a significant role in the tourism industry (Şen Küpeli *et al.*, 2018; Santos, 2003). Drawing on data from the Tourism Association (WRTA), it is evident that close to 300 million people per year visit sacred sites. In addition, the number of religious destinations is steadily increasing (Giuşcă, 2020). Those individuals whose motivation to

travel is based in full, or in part, on religious motives, can be defined as religious tourists (Rinschede, 1992). It appears that motivation marks the distinction between secular tourists and those who can be regarded as pilgrims. The visiting of monasteries for purposes related to faith or tourism can be defined as monastery tourism. According to van Tongeren (2014, p.53), certain individuals appear to visit monasteries solely for spiritual or religious reasons, whereas there are others whose motivation is based on two factors: a beneficial and pleasant experience which does not, however, carry within it any primarily religious aspirations.

The concept of a memorable tourism experience (MTE) has been the focus of extensive research and discussion in recent years and it has received significant interest as a notion. Tourism firms that will create an MTE will attract and retain customers (Stavrianea and Kamenidou, 2021; Leung *et al.*, 2013), and thus, it is evident that this notion is considered the key issue when it comes to determining the competitive advantage that one company could potentially have over other similar businesses (Chen and Rahman, 2018; Yu *et al.*, 2019). As has been argued by Bluck (2003), memories not only affect ones' actions and opinions on an everyday basis, but they also literally determine and shape them. Barnes *et al.* (2016) contend that the recollection of ones' memories will without doubt influence the ways in which one makes future choices and decisions. It has become clear that businesses focus their energy and resources on providing memorable experiences to travelers (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). As a result, the research related to this sector has highlighted the observable characteristics - the growth, the measurement and the essence of previous experiences that could be defined as being an MTE (Kim and Ritchie, 2014).

Another element that has a significant impact on tourist satisfaction is place identity (Tlili and Amara, 2016), which entails a deeper connection with a place in which an individual's personal identity is linked with this space (Proshanky, 1978). Budruk *et al.* (2008) state "Place identity not only includes the physical setting or environment, but also includes the social element. Beyond the role of place in an individual's self-identity formation, place also contributes to group or social identity". Proshansky *et al.* (1983, p.61), refer to the theoretical conception of place-identity "as an individual's strong emotional attachment to particular places or settings", that "is a complex cognitive structure which is characterized by a host of attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meanings and behavior tendencies that go well beyond just emotional attachments and belonging to particular places" (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983, p.62).

Given that modern monasteries are "open" to the public and depend heavily on monetary contributions and proceeds from monastic products, an MTE is particularly significant to the religious tourism industry more widely, and especially, to monastic

tourism.

Furthermore, it is essential that monasteries have access to detailed information as well as a clear grasp of the kind of perceived impressions and experiences which diverse groups of religious travelers take away with them following their visits. As discussed by researchers, access to this type of knowledge and data could assist them in developing strategies for potentially persuading tourists to revisit the religious venue and, generally, for attracting prospective future travelers (Priporas *et al.*, 2012; Kamenidou *et al.*, 2009). Enschede (1992) explains that the rural location of most monasteries offers visitors the opportunity to escape from their sense of daily routine and enjoy a religious experience away from the noise and pollution of cities. One researcher remarks on a recent trend in religious tourism, the possibility of staying for a holiday in a monastery (Mróz, 2019). It is clear, however, that tourists who feel the need to relax and remove themselves from their everyday life and routine are most likely to be attracted to this mode of traveling. Spending time in a western European monastery requires the visitor to follow certain rules and conventions, such as silent prayer and culinary restrictions, the author explains. Additionally, the daily routine of the monks must be observed, such as waking up early, eating a restricted diet and being involved in prayer several times a day. The number of monasteries which provide such holiday opportunities has been increasing every year, Poland being one of these countries (Mróz, 2019). Certain monasteries in Romania offer beds to religious visitors, and there are some which have a large number of seats and can potentially serve meals to over 300 people, a good example of that being the Rohita Monastery of Maramures County. The majority of monasteries which fit into this category, do not charge anything for offering their services and allow the pilgrims to donate on an individual and on a voluntary basis (Țirca *et al.*, 2010).

Based on the above, the following research questions emerged:

RQ1: Do monasteries as a tourist destination offer MTEs?

RQ2: What are the tourists' perceptions regarding the monastery's place identity (PLI)?

RQ3: What is the tourist's satisfaction (S) level from their visit to the monastery or monastery complex?

RQ4: Are tourists that have visited the monasteries willing to revisit (R) it in the future?

RQ5: Are tourists that have visited the monasteries willing to recommend (IR) the monastery to other potential tourists?

RQ6: Can the monastery tourists be grouped based on similar behavior?

RQ7: What is the tourist profile of each group?

RQ8: What marketing communication techniques can be adopted by the monasteries to promote their place as a tourism destination?

Based on the above-mentioned research questions, this study, which is exploratory in

nature seeks to research the MTEs of visitors to religious sites. It draws data from Greece, and thus, explores the MTEs pertaining to tourists who visit Greek monasteries or monastery complexes (answering to RQ1). Additionally, it has as objectives to explore:

1. The tourists' perceptions regarding the monastery's place identity (answering RQ2)
2. The tourist's satisfaction level from their visit to the monastery or monastery complex (answering RQ3)
3. The tourists' willingness to revisit in the future the monasteries (answering RQ4)
4. The tourists' willingness to recommend the monastery to other potential tourists (answering RQ5)
5. The tourist segments based on MTEs, place identity (PII), satisfaction (S), revisit intention (R), and intention to recommend (IR), answering to RQ6
6. The tourist profile of each segment (answering RQ7)
7. The marketing communication techniques that may be adopted by the monasteries to promote their place as a tourism destination (answering RQ8)

This paper fills the following gaps in literature:

1. It deals with MTEs in the context of religious- monastery tourism, which is an extremely understudied topic. Specifically, to the best of our knowledge, one research has tested the MTEs via the seven dimensions in religious or monastery tourism (Kamenidou *et al.*, 2021).
2. It segments monastery tourists based on MTEs, PLI, S, R, and IR, which to the best of our knowledge again only one paper was retrieved.

This research is considered as incredibly significant for the Greek monasteries since it provides information about the MTEs that tourists receive when visiting a monastery as a destination for religious tourism.

This paper is structured as follows. At first the monastery and monastery complexes are presented followed by the literature review. Additionally, the methodology and results are shown. Lastly, discussion and conclusions with the limitations of the research concludes the study.

## **2. MONASTERIES WHICH ARE PART OF THIS STUDY**

The Greek Orthodox faith represents 91% of the population of the country. The Greek National Tourist Organization reports that there are 80 Bishoprics as well as 441 Greek Orthodox monasteries throughout the country. To support Greek religious tourism, numerous informative leaflets which offer details of 100 religious monuments have been published by this organization (Real Society, 2012).

In Greek, the word “monastery” denotes the “house of a single person”. This

meaning stems from the fact that originally there would have been an individual monk living by himself and focused solely on prayer (Aulet *et al.*, 2017). There is a significant number of Orthodox monasteries and churches in Greece, many established in the Byzantine era, in most of them the visitor will find frescoes as well as other relics of religious faith. As described by Redžić (2019), important cultural elements can also be found in numerous monasteries and churches. These monasteries are often included in the World Heritage List and are under the protection of UNESCO. The same researcher notes about Greece that the numbers of religious tourists visiting monasteries has steadily increased. As evidenced by Poulaki *et al.* (2015), over 30,000 Greek pilgrims travel to holy sites annually. Furthermore, according to the same researcher, 85% of international tourists who visit the country, also visit a sacred site during their stay in Greece (Poulaki *et al.*, 2015). Finally, the most frequent visitors to Greek monasteries, apart from domestic tourists, come from the Balkans countries and the wider Eastern European regions such as Bulgaria and Romania (Skoultzos and Vagionis, 2015).

### **2.1 Agio Oros or Holy Mount Athos or Holy Mountain**

Situated in northern Greece, Agio Oros, or Holy Mountain, belongs to the prefecture of Central Macedonia, and is specifically located within the easternmost peninsula of Chalkidiki. Its highest peak is at 2,033m above sea level. The term Agio Oros or Holy Mountain relates to the whole mountainous area along with the monasteries that are enclosed within it. Apparently, “Mount Athos is the largest, and, by, far the most important community of Eastern Orthodox monks in the world that symbolizes Byzantium monasticism” as stated by Andriotis (2009:64). Founded in 1927 under the Greek Constitution, it is an independent and self-governing area of Greece - an autonomous territory. Legally, it forms part of the European Union (European Union Law, Document 11979H/AFI/DCL/04; Kousoulou, 2013; Alexopoulos, 2013, Sidiropoulos 2010). The Agio Oros is governed by the so-called “Holy Community”. This is a council composed of representatives from the 20 monasteries as well as a representative of the Greek State who resides in the capital city of Karyes ([mountathosinfo.gr](http://mountathosinfo.gr)). The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople is responsible for the spiritual matters which arise on the Holy Mountain (<http://mountathosinfos.gr/administration/>). Also, women, girls as well as female animals are forbidden around the Agio Oros, with the exception of female cats (Chrysopoulos, 2019; Andriotis, 2009). Kapilevich and Karvounis (2015) explain that this particular rule is called the “AVATON” and has been in force since the very first monastery was established. Overall, Mount Athos boasts 20 monasteries, 17 of which are

Greek. The remaining three are Bulgarian, Russian and Serbian.<sup>1</sup> All of the monasteries were constructed from 963 AD to the 14th century.<sup>2</sup> The cultural geographer Della Dora (2012) notes that "In 963 Saint Athanasius established the first coenobitic foundation on the peninsula (the still-extant monastery of Great Lavra) on one of its most inaccessible spots". On Agio Oros, the visitor will find 12 hermitages (known as "sketes") and approximate 700 houses and cells, all of which fall under the direct authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople (Kousoulou, 2013). In 1988, the Holy Mountain was named as a World Heritage Site (Kousoulou, 2013; Alexopoulos, 2013) and draws visitors from around the globe. Alexopoulos (2013) asserts that "Alongside the pure pilgrimage-faith aspect related to the Agio Oros and its monasteries, there are collections every aspect of the art and heritage of the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine periods in Greece and the Balkans." Thus, the Agio Oros can offer different experiences to both the pilgrim and the secular tourist who might be seeking a cultural and educational aspect to their visit combined with an element based around an authentic experience in terms of cultural heritage (Andriotis, 2011).

## 2.2 Meteora Kalampaka

A renowned destination in Greece, Meteora is under the protection of UNESCO and is part of the World Heritage List (Rassios *et al.*, 2020). Daniilia (2008) notes that, after Mount Athos, it is the second most significant complex of monasteries in Greece. As Della Dora (2012), informs us that around 1,000 tourists pay a visit to Meteora annually. Twenty-four monasteries were founded and built during the Byzantine era, though at present, only six monasteries continue to be used by approximately sixty monks and nuns. These are: Great Meteoron, Varlaam, St Stephen, Holy Trinity, St Nicholas Anapafsas, and Rousanou (Daniilia, 2008). Steps were built into the rocks in 1897, but before that time a rope tied to a net was the only means of gaining access to the monasteries. Women were not permitted to enter monasteries until after the Second World War, in order to prevent temptations to the monks. Later on, two monasteries were eventually occupied by nuns in the 1970s (Della Dora, 2012). While the complex of Meteora is ruled by the Greek State, the monasteries are part of the Greek Orthodox Church. Poullos (2014) reports that the daily lives and routines of the monks of Meteora are disrupted on a permanent basis due to the large number of annual visitors to the area. However, the benefits to the monasteries' economics in terms of added income are vital in terms of protecting the site long term (Poullos, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://mountathosinfos.gr/administration/>

<sup>2</sup> [inathos.gr/athos/en/AboutMonasterys.html](http://inathos.gr/athos/en/AboutMonasterys.html)

### 2.3 Panagia Soumela Trapezounta Pontos

Panagia Soumela of Pontos, otherwise known as the monastery of the Holy Virgin of Soumela, is located in Trapezounta (in northern Turkey today known as Trabzon), 1100 meters above sea level, in the Pontos area which borders the Black Sea (Liddle, 2012; Bryer, 1976; Amanatidis, 2018). It is the Greek Orthodox monastery of the Soumela Virgin Mary (Liddle, 2012; Bryer, 1976), built on the cliff of Mount Mela, today called Karadağ (Liddle, 2012). The monastery constitutes an important emblem of the Greek Pontic identity who lived in this region until 1922 (Topalidis, 2018; 2019 a,b). The icon of the Virgin Mary, an icon connected with miracles, is said to have been portrayed by Luke the Evangelist and the monastery's history is inextricably linked to this icon. Following the authorization received by the Turkish State, the monastery began to function again after 88 years. This event happened on August 15, 2010 when the Ecumenical Patriarchate held a liturgical service for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the monastery (Antoniadou, 2010).

### 2.4 The New Panagia Soumela, in Kastania, Imathia

The new monastery of Panagia Soumela was established in 1951 in the region of Imathia, Greece, specifically in Veria, near the village of Kastania. The Pontus refugees who founded the monastery, wished to revive the original monastery from Trapezounta Pontos.<sup>3</sup>

The valuable and sacred icon depicting the Virgin Mary, which was originally kept at Soumela monastery in Trapezounta Pontos was moved to this monastery which was named after the icon. The icon is seen as an incentive for certain individuals to visit the monastery and many do visit it. Each year, on the 15th of August, when the monastery celebrates, often thousands of pilgrims go to worship the sacred icon of the Virgin Mary.<sup>4</sup>

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic researchers have been increasingly interested in studies based on the experience of the consumer, as indicated by a number of studies (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Kim and Ritchie, 2014; Yu *et al.*, 2019). Research carried out in the field of tourism and consumer experience provides with a significant body of work, which contributed to the development of a number of new evolving concepts, including the concept of Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE), as stated by academics in this field (Zhang *et al.*, 2019; Kim, 2010). As Kim *et al.* (2012) argue, MTEs relate to “the positively remembered tourism

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<sup>3</sup> <https://greekcitytimes.com/2018/08/02/sacred-panagia-soumela-of-mount-vermion/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.taxidologio.gr/veria-todo-sumela-monastery.html>

experiences after the occurrence of the event”. An MTE can be easily recalled, and the retrieval of that memory has the ability to influence future decisions, choices, and actions/behaviors (Zhang *et al.*, 2018)

The diverse key features of the tourist experience have been proposed by researchers in this area of study (Chen and Rahman, 2018). In 2012, in a study involving cross-cultural analysis, researchers examined and applied scale which was aimed at measuring the notion of the MTE (Kim *et al.*, 2012). In this scale, seven dimensions of experience were described: hedonism; refreshment; local culture; meaningfulness; knowledge; novelty, and involvement. The element of pleasure and enjoyment which can be evidenced when “consuming” a specific tourism experience, is known as hedonism. Kim (2012) argues that the notion of refreshment as an aspect of tourism generally goes hand in hand with the overall travel experience and carries within it the notion of renewing ourselves. Local culture, on the other hand, is closely related to the concept of making contact with tourists at the actual tourist location which often correlates with the knowledge and appreciation of the international community (Kim and Ritchie, 2014). The importance of the participation (and the involvement) on the part of the traveler in the process of creating an MTE which can be seen as an enriching experience, has been emphasized by Yu *et al.* (2019).

In addition, one of the most important factors that motivate people to travel is the notion of wanting to gain knowledge, information and understanding of a specific tourist destination as relates its historical context as well as its geographical location (Kim and Ritchie, 2014). In conclusion, “meaningfulness” as a term, refers to the principle of accomplishing an important goal. This task can be seen as a positive or useful experience that the tourist can obtain from the actual experience itself (Kim and Ritchie, 2014).

Even though the notion of MTEs is relatively new, as seen as extremely important, it enjoys a continuously increasing number of studies. These studies deal with issues such as the notion and measure of the MTEs (e.g., Chandralal and Valenzuela, 2015; Kim *et al.*, 2012; Tung and Ritchie, 2011), factors that influence MTEs (eg., Wei *et al.*, 2019; Zare, 2019; Kim., 2010), and the impact of MTEs on tourist behavior (e.g., Stavrianea and Kamenidou, 2021; Chen *et al.*, 2020; Sharma and Nayak, 2019; Kim, 2018; Chandralal and Valenzuela, 2013). Other areas of interest refer to specific tourism contexts and MTEs (e.g., Stavrianea and Kamenidou, 2021; Minaei *et al.*, 2020; Yu *et al.*, 2019; Wong *et al.*, 2019; Akkuş and Güllüce, 2016), and the MTEs and social media (e.g., Wong *et al.*, 2020; Skavronskaya *et al.*, 2020). Additional area of interest is MTEs in cross-cultural or multicultural settings (e.g., Seyfi *et al.*, 2020; Mahdzar and Shuib, 2016; Kim and Ritchie, 2014; Kim, 2013). The abovementioned areas are some of the issues tackled referring to MTEs in tourism. As to MTE and PLI, these are tested through MTEs and place



attachment (e.g., Vada *et al.*, 2019; Tlili and Amara, 2016; Tsai, 2016), since PLI is considered as an element of place attachment (Brocato (2006); Hwang *et al.*, 2005; Williams and Vaske, 2003). Lastly, it should be pointed out, that, as regards to MTEs and monastery tourism or MTEs and religious tourism, we could not identify one paper, up to our knowledge that has tackled this issue under the specific context of MTEs.

Specifically, Kamenidou *et al.* (2021), provided with a first-level segmentation regarding monastery tourists based on MTEs and revisit intentions in Greece. Segmentation analysis via K-Means cluster analysis revealed four groups, namely the "highly MTEs achievers", the "sufficient MTEs attainers," the "indifferent," and the "no meaning found."

#### 4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The dimensions and parameters of the notion of MTE, PLI, S, IR, RI were evaluated through the literature review. Specifically, the seven dimensions relating to MTEs was taken from Kim *et al.* (2012), Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2021) and Kamenidou *et al.* (2021). PLI items (N=6) were adopted from Williams and Vaske (2003), adjusted for monastery tourism. S (N=4) was adopted from Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2021), Oliver (1997) and Martín-Ruiz *et al.*, (2010). IR (N=3) and R (N=3) were adopted and adjusted for monastery tourism from Stavrianea and Kamenidou *et al.* (2021) and Zeithaml *et al.* (1996).

Specifically, the dimensions and items of MTEs are presented in following. Hedonism (H): I was thrilled about having a new experience (H1); I indulged in the activities (H2); I really enjoyed this tourism experience (H3); It was exciting (H4). Novelty (N): It was once-in-a-lifetime experience (N1); It was unique (N2); It was different from previous experiences (N3); I experienced something new (N4). Local Culture (LC): I had good impressions of the local people (LC1); I closely experienced the local culture (LC2); Local people in a destination were friendly (LC3). Refreshment (R): It was liberating (R1), I enjoyed a sense of freedom (R2); It was refreshing (R3); I was revitalized (R4). Meaningfulness (MEAN): I did something meaningful (MEAN1); I did something important (MEAN2), I learned about myself (MEAN3). Involvement (INV): I visited a place where I really wanted to go (INV1); I enjoyed activities, which I really wanted to do (INV2); I was interested in the main activities of this tourism experience (INV3). Knowledge (K): The experience was exploratory (K1); I learned knowledge from the experience (K2); I experienced new culture (K3). Regarding the PLI items, they were: The monastery "X" is very special to me (PLI1); The monastery "X" means a lot to me (PLI2); I am very attached to the monastery "X" (PLI3); I identify strongly with monastery "X" (PLI4); Visiting monastery "X" says a lot about who I am (PLI5); and "I feel that the monastery "X" is a part of me" (PLI6). As regards the S items, one item was adopted and modified from Martín-Ruiz *et al.*, (2010): "The monastery destination

fulfilled my expectations” (S1). The other three items were adopted and modified from Oliver (1997): “Overall, I am satisfied with the monastery X as a tourism destination,” (S2); “As a whole, I am happy with the monastery X as a tourism destination” (S3), and “I believe I did the right thing in visiting the monastery X as a tourism destination” (S4). As to IR the three items were: “I would recommend this place to my friends” (IR1); “I would say positive things about this place” (IR2); “I would encourage friends and relatives to visit this place” (IR3). Lastly, the R items were: “I plan to visit this destination again in the future” (RI1), “I would like to visit this place again in the future” (RI2), and “I believe I will return to this destination in the near future” (RI3). All answers were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1= Completely/totally disagree; 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Somewhat agree, 6 = Agree, and 7 = Completely/totally agree).

The field research was undertaken from January to September 2020, also in part during Greek lockdown. The questionnaire was sent out in two ways, both in the form of online and personal interviews using a non-probability mixed sampling method (criterial, convenience and snowball sampling). In order to qualify for participation in the study, individuals had to have visited at least one of the abovementioned monasteries the past two years: Agio Oros, Meteora, Panagia Soumela of Pontos, and Panagia Soumela in Greece. Personal invitations were extended to the researchers’ acquaintances via Facebook or email, so that they would participate in the study. They were, in turn, asked to forward the link to their own acquaintances who might potentially have met the requirements of the research. Overall, 780 valid responses to the questionnaire were sent within the timeframe during which the link was able to receive completed responses for data analysis purposes. The analysis included descriptive statistics, factor, and cluster analysis. Validity (content, face) and reliability of instrument was established.

## **5. RESULTS**

### **5.1 Reliability and validity measures**

Reliability of scale and validity was examined in order to assure that the scale was reliable and valid. Reliability of scale was determined with Cronbach  $\alpha$  as in total and as per factor. Factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed with all variables (N=22) to ensure the dimensions of MTE for this specific research and to proceed to further analysis. Factor analysis was achieved with Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and varimax rotation (KMO=0.964; BTS=21964.360; df=276; P=0.000) producing the seven factors accounting for 86.2% of the total variance (TV). Two items were dropped due to multiple loadings. These items were: “Local people in a destination were friendly (LC3)” and “I visited a place where I really wanted to go (INV1)”. Reliability of scale for the MTE in total and per construct are presented in Table 1, as well as the total variance explained (TVE), and the minimum and maximum of the loadings per factor. Additionally, factor

analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to the variables of PLI, S, R, and IR, to ensure uni-dimensionality.

Table 1. *Cronbach's alpha* of dimensions used in analysis

Parameter	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )	TVE (%)	Loading range on factor (min-max)
MTEs: H (N=4)	0.949	17.5	0.802-0.843
MTEs: N (N=4)	0.931	15.3	0.637-0.736
MTEs: L(N=2)	0.851	14.7	0.654-0.702
MTEs: R (N=4)	0.942	11.9	0.590-0.790
MTEs: MEAN (N=3)	0.915	9.6	0.608-0.737
MTEs: INV (N=2)	0.894	8.9	0.695-0.743
MTEs: K (N=3)	0.918	8.3	0.505-0.645
MTEs: Total scale	0.975	86.2	0.505-0.843
PLI	0.945	78.7	0.743-0.941
S	0.963	90.0	0.928-0.962
RI	0.919	86.3	0.910-0.954
IR	0.961	92.9	0.960-0.967

Source: The authors

Reliability analysis indicated that all construct measurements had Cronbach's alpha higher than 0.80 (Table 1) indicating adequate internal consistency reliability (Nunnally, 1978). As to validity, content and face validity were determined. For content validity, the researchers considered that the practice of the constructs by previous academics determines the content validity of the questions. Additionally, through a small-scale pilot test (N=96, excluded from the sample), whereas participants were requested to determine any problems regarding the questions and the questionnaire, face validity was ensured (Kent, 1993; Kamenidou *et al.*, 2020) Lastly, participants were also timed in order to make sure that the questionnaire was not tiresome. All comments were taken into account and minor wording changes were done.

## 5.2 Sample profile

Regarding the sample profile, male subjects were overrepresented, accounting for 71.3% of the sample, while females accounted for the 28.7%. Additionally, age was categorized in five groups: 18-25 (27.7%); 26-35 (20.6%); 36-45 (22.6%); 46-55 (15.4%); and 56+ (11.7%). Moreover, the married and single subjects equally distributed (45.8% and 45.0% respectively), while 7.0% were either divorced or widowed. Two education groups stood out: the secondary education group (29.1%) and the highly educated one, with at least a

bachelor's degree (35.6%). Additionally, 16.4% had post-secondary education, 13.2% were students, and 6.0% had primary education. As to profession the vast majority were salaried participants (employees, on a pension, or unemployment benefit for at least six months) representing 55.3%, dependent on others (student, housekeeper, unemployed) represented the 22.8%, while 18.5% referred to businesspeople and 3.5% to labourers. Moreover, 56.8% resided in urban areas, 13.2% in semirural, and 30.4% in rural. Lastly, those with a net family monthly income of 1000.01-2000.00€ accounted for 47.8%, those with less than 1000.00€ accounted for 33.3% and 18.8% of the sample had net monthly family income above 2000.00€

### **5.3 Monastery Tourism- Memorable Tourism Experiences- Place identity**

As regards the monastery tourism, and specifically tourism to the four abovementioned monasteries or monastery complexes, Mount Athos monastery complex was the most visited one (40.3%); thus, justifying the overrepresentation of the male subjects. The Panagia Soumela monastery in Ponto Trapezounta was the second most visited (30.5%), followed by the Meteora Complex (15.9%). Lastly, the Panagia Soumela in Veroia Greece was the least visited by participants (13.3%).

MTEs of monastery tourism (aim of research/RQ1) which were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, whereas regarding their mean scores (MS), it is observed that no item has been assessed  $>6.00$  nor  $<5.00$ , meaning that participants did not find an item towards that they agree or completely agree nor that they in the best-case scenario tend to somewhat agree. Thus, in all cases, participants at least somewhat agree up to tend to agree with the statements provided of MTEs regarding monastery tourism. Furthermore, the item that was higher rated was from the involvement construct and specifically, INV1: "I visited a place where I really wanted to go" (MS=5.94), and second in line a statement from the novelty construct and specifically, N2: "It (the monastery) was unique" (MS=5.87). On the other hand, the two statements that were rated as lowest are also from the involvement construct and specifically the statement N3: "I was interested in the main activities of this tourism experience" (MS=5.42), and N2: "I enjoyed activities, which I really wanted to do" (MS=5.44).

As regards the monastery tourists' perceptions regarding PLI (RQ2/ objective No.1), Table 2 provides with insight via percentages and mean scores (MT). in the 1<sup>st</sup> row, numbers 1-7 represent the points of the 7-point Likert scale and their relative percentage per PLI item.

From Table 2, it is evident that the highest MS (MS=5.92) refers to the statement "The monastery "X" is very special to me", and the lowest to the statement (PLI6): "I feel that the monastery "X" is a part of me" (MS=4.93). it is also evident that all items are

included in the range  $4.51 < MS < 6.00$ , underlying that monastery tourists tend to agree with the statement PL1 and PL2 ( $> 5.50$ ), while with the other statements they somewhat agree.

Table 2: Perceptions of the monastery's place identity (%)

PLI items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	MS
PLI1	1.4	2.4	2.6	5.7	15.4	26.8	45.7	5.92
PLI2	1.7	3.5	4.1	10.8	18.8	26.2	34.9	5.52
PLI3	2.4	3.2	5.3	15.4	24.3	22.2	27.3	5.23
PLI4	2.3	5.3	6.1	17.2	23.2	23.0	22.9	5.00
PLI5	3.3	5.8	6.3	17.9	20.0	24.7	22.1	4.96
PLI6	4.4	5.0	7.4	16.8	20.3	23.5	22.6	4.93

Source: The authors

#### 5.4 Satisfaction, Revisit Intention, and Intention to Recommend

Exploring to the monastery tourists' S (RQ3/ objective No.2), R (RQ4/ objective No. 3) and IR (RQ5/ objective No. 4), Table 3 provides with insight via percentages and mean scores (MS). Again, in the 1<sup>st</sup> row, numbers 1-7 represent the points of the 7-point Likert scale and their relative percentage per S, R, and IR item. From Table 3, it is evident that the highest MS refers to the IR statements (MS= 5.96-6.02), while the R statements enjoy the lowest scores.

Table 3: Satisfaction, Revisit Intention, and Intention to Recommend (%)

S, R, IR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	MS
S1	1.7	2.5	4.8	8.3	17.1	28.0	37.7	5.84
S2	1.9	1.5	2.5	7.7	14.8	27.4	44.2	5.94
S3	1.5	2.4	3.1	7.3	12.2	28.3	45.1	5.97
S4	2.3	1.7	3.0	8.3	15.8	30.2	38.8	5.81
R1	6.1	3.7	3.9	10.1	14.6	21.1	40.4	5.63
R2	3.2	3.0	3.2	9.0	14.3	22.2	45.1	5.84
R3	10.3	5.1	6.1	14.0	16.5	18.6	29.4	5.29
IR1	2.1	2.4	2.5	6.1	12.5	27.1	47.4	5.96
IR2	1.7	1.9	2.2	5.9	12.5	28.4	47.4	6.02
IR3	1.2	2.4	2.2	5.7	12.4	29.5	46.6	6.02

Source: The authors

#### 5.5 Cluster Analysis

The above seven constructs via their mean factor score (MFS) were used for further

analysis, i.e., segmentation of the participants in homogenous groups with similar behaviour ((RQ6/ objective No. 5). Furthermore, additional variables were added using their MFS too: PLI, S, RI, IR. K Means cluster analysis was applied after utilizing at first hierarchical cluster analysis to obtain an understanding of the number of clusters that would arise. Furthermore, various clusters were tested (2-5) in order to identify the one with the best physical and logical interpretation. Ultimately, the three-cluster solution was accepted as most appropriate, and the clusters were differentiated from each other in all variables included in the K-means analysis, as Table 4 presents (ANOVA statistics). Table 3 presents the results of the final cluster centres (FCC) for each variable and cluster (CL), the number of participants per cluster (N), and with ANOVA statistics (F and Sign.).

Table 4: Segmentation analysis based on MTEs dimensions, PLI, S, IR, and RI

Variables	N=516	N=265	N=60	F	Sig.
MTEs: H	6.40	5.05	3.37	383.546	.000
MTEs: N	6.48	5.15	3.20	585.344	.000
MTEs: L	6.23	4.88	3.30	408.316	.000
MTEs: R	6.37	4.89	3.01	693.978	.000
MTEs: M	6.36	4.87	2.83	785.634	.000
MTEs: INV	6.16	4.70	2.74	511.342	.000
MTEs: K	6.41	5.04	2.68	986.733	.000
PLI	5.93	4.56	2.55	459.687	.000
IR	6.63	5.44	3.04	554.769	.000
R	6.22	4.99	2.80	294.772	.000
S	6.54	5.27	3.10	588.134	.000

Source: The authors

## 5.6 Cluster Profiles

In following, chi-square tests were performed regarding clusters and the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of participants. The analysis revealed that in almost all cases statistical differences exist; exception being area of residence. Specifically, no statistical differences were found between clusters and area of residence ( $\chi^2=5.307$ ;  $p=0.258$ ). on the other hand, for monastery tourists' gender ( $\chi^2=15.292$ ;  $p=0.000$ ), age ( $\chi^2=76.170$ ;  $p=0.000$ ); marital status ( $\chi^2=56.763$ ;  $p=0.000$ ); education ( $\chi^2=35.785$ ;  $p=0.000$ ); profession ( $\chi^2=29.565$ ;  $p=0.000$ ), and income ( $\chi^2=23.885$ ;  $p=0.000$ ), statistical differences did exist.

Table 5 presents the cluster profiles (RQ7/ objective No.5) derived from the chi-square tests. Specifically, as regards Cluster I: This cluster is named "the highly MTEs

achievers and favourable monastery tourists". The first group comprises of 516 participants, accounting for 61.4% of the total sample. These tourists are the people who agree that they have had MTEs from the monastery they have visited. They have positive perceptions of the monasteries as regards the PLI component, are satisfied from their visit, and are willing to revisit and recommend the monastery that they visited. Their FCC in all cases is  $>5.90$  and  $<6.70$ . They are the tourists with the most favourable behaviour towards monastery tourism since they enjoyed the higher MTEs. This group consists mainly of male participants, with high percentage of young people (40.4% are 18-25 years old), single (53.6%) and with the highest percentage of university students (27.2%) compared to the other groups. Additionally, it incorporates the lowest percentage of labourers (2.6%) as compared with the other two segments, and along with the second group the highest percentage of dependents (31.7% for both groups) Moreover, it is the group with the highest percentage of rural citizens (35.5%) as compared to the other groups. Lastly, its participants are middle- income families, since 44.9% has a net family monthly income ranging from 1000.01-1500.00€, while it has the lowest percentage of participants with high income (19.6%)

Cluster II: This cluster is named "the sufficient MTEs attainers and semi-satisfied monastery tourists". This cluster consists of 265 participants, accounting for 31.5% of the sample. They are the people who somewhat agree that they have had MTEs from the monastery they have visited. They have somewhat positive perceptions of the monasteries as regards the PLI component, are somewhat satisfied from their visit, and they somewhat agree that they are willing to revisit and recommend the monastery that they visited. Their FCC in all cases is  $>4.56$  and  $<5.44$ . They are the tourists with the semi-favourable behaviour towards monastery tourism since they enjoyed moderate MTEs. This group consists almost solely of male participants (92.6%). As compared to the other groups it is the one with the highest percentage of young people with age 18-25 (46.7%) and 26-35 years old (30.0%), and with no participant in the 56+ age category. It is also the group with the highest percentage of single participants (75.0%), as well as the most highly educated one (60.0% has at least a bachelor's degree. Two categories stand out as regards profession: salaried personnel (51.7%) and dependent from others. Specifically, along with the first group it has the highest percentage of dependents (31.7% for both groups). Moreover, it is the group with the highest percentage of urban citizens (58.3%) as compared to the other groups. Lastly, its participants are either low-income families or high-income ones, since for both cases they have the highest percentages compared to the other two groups.

Cluster III. This cluster is named "the no meaning found, negatively positioned monastery tourists". The last group consists of 60 participants, accounting for 7.1% of the

sample. They disagree with having an MTE from the monastery visited, and have negative attitudes towards the variables of PL, S, R, and IR. Specifically, in all cases, FCC ranges between 2.55 and 3.37. The construct with the lowest FCC is the PL construct (FCC=2.55), followed by the and K (FCC=2.68). The highest FCC comes from the construct "Hedonism" with FCC=3.37. They somewhat disagree about being satisfied from their tourist experience, revisit intention and intention to recommend.

This group consists mainly of male participants (66.9%) but has the highest percentage of female participants compared to the other groups (33.1%). As compared to the other groups it is the one with the highest percentage of "older" people with age 36-45 (27.7%); 46-55 (16.3%) and 56+ years old category (18.4%). It is also the group with the highest percentage of married (52.3%), divorced (6.0%) and widowed participants (7.4%). It can also be considered as the lowest educated one: 10.5% having primary education and 10.0% secondary, and 24.1% post-secondary education, being the highest compared to the other groups. Two categories stand out as regards profession with the highest percentages compared to the other two groups: salaried personnel (61.2%) and businessmen/businesswomen (19.4%). Moreover, it is the group with the highest percentage of semirural citizens (14.3%) as compared to the other groups. Lastly, its participants are middle-income families having a net family monthly income ranging from 1000.01-1500.00€ for more of the half of the members of this group compared to the other two groups.

Table 5. Cluster profiles (%)

Cluster Characteristics	CI1	CI2	CI3
Gender			
Male	67.2	92.6	66.9
Female	32.8	7.4	33.1
Age			
18-25	40.4	46.7	19.4
26-35	20.0	30.0	18.2
36-45	12.5	13.3	27.7
46-55	15.1	10.0	16.3
56+	12.1	0.0	18.4
Marital status			
Married	39.2	15.0	52.3
Single	53.6	75.0	34.3
Divorced	4.2	5.0	6.0
Widowed	3.0	5.0	7.4
Education			



Primary (up to elementary school)	5.9	4.4	10.5
Secondary (Gymnasium and Lyceum)	5.4	4.4	10.0
Postsecondary (IEK. private college)	16.3	11.1	24.1
University students	27.2	20.0	11.8
Graduate /Postgraduate	45.0	60.0	43.6
Profession			
Salaried (Employee public-private. on pension)	51.3	51.7	61.2
Businessman/Businesswoman	14.3	13.3	19.4
Labourer	2.6	3.3	3.5
Dependent on others (Student. Housekeeper. Unemployed)	31.7	31.7	15.9
Area of residence			
Urban	53.2	58.3	57.8
Semirural	11.3	11.7	14.3
Rural	35.5	30.0	27.9
Net Monthly Family Income (€)			
<1000.00	35.5	48.3	32.9
1000.01-1500.00	44.9	20.0	51.6
2000.01+	19.6	31.7	15.5

Source: The authors

## 6. DISCUSSION-CONCLUSIONS-LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study's findings revealed three tourist segments in regard to MTEs dimensions, PLI, S, R, and IR. The findings of this research may directly be compared to those of Kamenidou *et al.* (2021), who found four segments base on MTEs and revisit intention (1 item). The findings of this research are partially in line with their results. Both studies used as segmentation variable the MTEs dimensions on monastery tourism and revisit intention (N=3 items), while this one added three more constructs: PLI, S, and IR. Both found somewhat similar groups, similarity located at the following: “the highly MTE achievers” with high MTEs and intention to revisit, the “sufficient MTE attainers”, who might revisit in the future, and “the no meaning found” who are the negatively positioned monastery tourists, who will not revisit in the future.

Members belonging to the group that attained the highest MTEs score, also showed high levels of S and feel favourably towards the destination. They are more willing to recommend the monastery or visit it again in the future, a result that is in accordance with previous studies (Stavrianea and Kamenidou, 2021; Kim, 2018). Members of the second group rated higher the novelty dimension of MTEs which means that they felt they were

introduced to new images and settings. Compared to the first group, they showed much lower scores in the meaningfulness and the involvement components of MTEs and apparently, they did not manage to relate much, or find meaning in the specific travel experience. Nevertheless, they showed an adequate score of MTEs, S, RI and IR, supporting prior studies such as Kamenidou *et al.* (2021) who argued that high levels of MTEs relate to IR and RI.

The last group members attained low MTEs scores from the monastery and also, were not willing to recommend it or visit the place again in the future. It is important to notice though, that this group showed the lowest score in the knowledge dimension of MTEs. Members of this group did not manage to gain knowledge of the monastery and its history, which is an important travel incentive.

Separately from its academic impact, this research has critical implications for marketing managers of religious and more specifically monastery destinations (answering to RQ8/ objective No.7). Firstly, it is important that these religious destinations apply the proper measurement of the MTEs elements in order to understand and enhance each MTEs dimension. Monasteries can implement programs that can ameliorate the visitors' understanding and knowledge of the place and its unique elements, its history and tradition. Activities that can improve the contact between visitors and the local culture, tradition and culinary delights of the religious destination can also enhance MTEs and contribute to higher IR and RI (Mulyana, and Ayuni 2019).

As with every academic piece of work or study, this research paper inevitably contains certain limitations, which could however, be seen as potential leads towards directions for future research. First of all, a non-probability method of sampling was used for this study. To enhance any future research, and make sure that the findings are generalizable, further analysis may use a probability sampling method. Furthermore, the research has so far focused on analyzing the MTE, PLI, S, RI, IR of Greek Orthodox visitors and pilgrims to particular monasteries. One potentially interesting way of carrying out further research, would be to move the project's scope beyond its current focus and into examining different religious locations to which many tourists go, as well as look at visitors from differing cultures and religions.

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