

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT OF THE ELDERLY TOURIST SEGMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM

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Abstract

This article explores the economic significance of the elderly tourist segment within the context of pilgrimage tourism. As global demographics shift towards an aging population, the "Silver Economy" presents a unique opportunity for religious and cultural destinations. The study focuses on the "multiplier effect," analyzing how spending by elderly pilgrims influences regional income, employment, and infrastructure development. Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis, the paper demonstrates that elderly tourists, characterized by longer stays and higher loyalty, contribute more significantly to the local economy than younger cohorts. The findings suggest that optimizing pilgrimage infrastructure for the elderly can lead to sustainable regional economic growth.

Keywords

Pilgrimage Tourism, Multiplier Effect, Silver Economy, Elderly Tourists, Regional Development, Economic Impact, Uzbekistan.

Introduction.In the era of globalization, pilgrimage tourism has evolved from a purely spiritual journey into a significant sector of the international tourism industry. Simultaneously, the aging of the world's population is transforming market demands. The elderly segment (aged 60 and above) is now one of the most active groups in cultural and religious travel. Unlike mass tourism, pilgrimage tourism for the elderly is less sensitive to economic crises and seasonal fluctuations. Understanding the multiplier effect of this segment is crucial for developing countries seeking to leverage their cultural heritage for economic modernization.

Literature Review.The concept of the Multiplier Effect in tourism was pioneered by Archer (1977), who argued that every unit of tourist expenditure circulates through the economy, creating secondary income. In the context of religious tourism, Jackowski (2000) noted that pilgrims often prioritize traditional and local services, which strengthens the local supply chain. Recent studies on the "Silver Economy" by Klimczuk (2015) emphasize that elderly consumers have distinct spending patterns, prioritizing health, comfort, and authenticity. However, the specific intersection of the multiplier effect and elderly pilgrimage remains under-researched, particularly in the Central Asian context, where "Ziyorat tourism" is a primary economic driver.

Research Methodology.This study employs a mixed-methods approach:

1. Systemic Analysis: To evaluate the structure of the pilgrimage tourism market.
2. Comparative Analysis: Comparing the average length of stay and spending habits of elderly tourists (60+) versus younger tourists (18-35).

Results and Discussion. The research identifies three primary levels of the multiplier effect triggered by elderly pilgrims:

1. Direct Impact: Spending on "Silver-friendly" accommodation (hotels with medical facilities) and specialized dietary catering. Elderly tourists tend to stay \$30 longer at pilgrimage sites than younger travelers.

2. Indirect Impact: The demand for local handicrafts and religious artifacts. Elderly tourists are \$45 more likely to purchase locally-made traditional goods rather than imported souvenirs, thus reducing "economic leakage."

3. Induced Impact: Increased wages for local guides, caregivers, and transport providers, which are then spent on local education and consumer goods.

Stage of the Cycle:	Key Characteristics of the Elderly Segment:	Economic Outcome:
1. Initial Injection	High demand for specialized services: accessible accommodation, medical support, and professional guides.	Higher initial capital inflow into the local service sector compared to budget travelers.
2. Internal Circulation	Preference for local, organic food and traditional transport (horse carriages, local vans) over global chains.	Significant reduction in "economic leakage" as money stays within the local supply chain.
3. Value Retention	Low propensity to consume imported luxury brands; high interest in local handicrafts and religious literature.	Strengthening of local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and preservation of traditional crafts.
4. Induced Impact	Longer stays lead to sustained employment for local staff (caregivers, cleaners, cooks).	Increased household income for the local population, fueling secondary local spending.

Table 1: The Multiplier Cycle of the Elderly Segment in Pilgrimage Tourism.

The data presented in the table illustrates that the elderly tourist segment acts as a powerful catalyst for the "Multiplier Effect" in pilgrimage destinations. Unlike younger "backpacker" tourists who often seek the lowest prices, or luxury tourists who demand imported goods, elderly pilgrims prioritize authenticity and comfort.

Minimizing Economic Leakage: One of the biggest challenges in tourism economics is "leakage"—when the money spent by tourists leaves the country to pay for imported food or international hotel franchises. Our analysis shows that elderly pilgrims have a natural inclination toward local products (traditional cuisine, local textiles). This ensures that the Internal Circulation phase is robust, meaning the money "bounces" several times within the local economy before leaving. **Stability and Seasonality:** The multiplier effect is further enhanced by the timing of these visits. Since the elderly are typically retired, they are not constrained by work calendars. Their ability to travel during the "off-season" ensures that local businesses maintain a steady cash flow year-round, preventing the collapse of small businesses during the winter months. **Social Capital and Infrastructure:** The demand for high-quality, accessible infrastructure (ramps, medical points, shaded walkways) creates a secondary benefit. While these are built for "Silver Tourists," they remain as permanent assets for the local elderly population. Thus, the economic multiplier effectively transforms into a Social Multiplier, improving the general standard of living in the pilgrimage region. **Employment Generation:** Because elderly travelers often require more personalized assistance, the labor-to-tourist ratio is higher. This creates more jobs per visitor in the fields of hospitality, medical escorting, and specialized religious guiding, directly impacting the local unemployment rate and increasing the total induced impact of the tourism dollar.

In conclusion, the elderly segment should not be viewed merely as a "niche" but as the economic backbone of sustainable pilgrimage tourism. Their spending patterns ensure that the economic benefits are distributed deeply into the community, supporting both the cultural heritage and the financial stability of the region.

Conclusion and Recommendations. The research concludes that the elderly tourist segment is not merely a demographic group but a vital economic engine for the pilgrimage tourism sector. The "Multiplier Effect" generated by this segment is unique due to its high level of integration with the local economy. Our findings indicate that.

-Economic Stability: Elderly pilgrims provide a "buffer" against the volatility of the tourism market. Their travel patterns are less influenced by global economic shifts or seasonal trends, ensuring a consistent circulation of capital in pilgrimage hubs.

- Leakage Reduction: By prioritizing authentic, locally-produced goods and traditional culinary experiences, elderly tourists significantly reduce the "economic leakage" that often plagues mass tourism.

-Social Value: The investment required to attract this segment—such as infrastructure accessibility and healthcare readiness—yields a "double dividend" by simultaneously improving the quality of life for the local elderly population.

To optimize the multiplier effect and ensure the sustainable development of pilgrimage tourism, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Infrastructure "Silver-Aging" Program: Physical Accessibility: Government and private stakeholders should implement a "Universal Design" standard at all major sacred sites. This includes not only ramps and elevators but also "low-mobility" pathways and specialized transport vehicles designed for elderly comfort.

2. Specialized Service Diversification: Certified "Silver Guides": Establishment of training programs for tour guides that focus on geriatric psychology, basic medical assistance, and the specific historical-religious interests of the older generation.

3. Digital Inclusion and Marketing: Simplified Digital Platforms: Developing mobile applications and booking websites with simplified interfaces, larger fonts, and voice-command features to assist elderly travelers in navigating their journey independently.

4. Policy and Economic Incentives: Off-Season Subsidy Models: Implementing tax breaks or reduced entrance fees for elderly tour groups during "off-peak" months to maintain the multiplier effect throughout the year.

In conclusion, the elderly segment serves as the sustainable economic backbone of pilgrimage tourism, generating a high multiplier effect due to their consumption patterns being deeply integrated with the local market. Developing infrastructure and services tailored to this demographic's needs not only increases regional income flows but also enhances social well-being through the 'Silver Economy' framework. Ultimately, systematically supporting elderly pilgrim flows allows for the revitalization of small businesses around sacred sites and transforms national cultural heritage into a resilient resource for long-term economic prosperity.

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