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Exploring the "Symbiotic Mutualism" between the Religious Tourism and World Buddhist Archeological Sites of Pakistan



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Abstract: Symbiosis involves two organisms living together, while mutualism denotes a mutually beneficial relationship. This study delves into the fusion of Religious Tourism and Buddhist World Archeological Sites, aiming to uncover symbiotic mutualism between these seemingly disparate industries. Beginning with understanding this phenomenon and identifying relevant parameters, literature and case studies were analyzed, focusing eventually on Pakistan. The context of Buddhist World Heritage Sites and religious tourism in Pakistan was examined, exploring their mutual relationship. The study investigated the necessary parameters for symbiotic mutualism and assessed its existence and effectiveness through public surveys and interviews. Findings suggest significant potential for mutualism, yet comprehensive frameworks and strategic planning are lacking for its full realization. Public interest and basic guidelines exist, but a cohesive approach is needed to excel in this dimension. This research underscores the untapped potential of merging Buddhist archaeological sites with religious tourism, calling for concerted efforts to capitalize on this opportunity.

Key Words: Religious Tourism, Buddhist World Heritage Sites, Symbiosis, Mutualism, Buddhist Archeological Site

JEL Classification:

Introduction

Religious Tourism at Archeological Sites

Nearly every religious tradition urges its followers to travel on pilgrimages to sites significant to that religion (Raj & Morpeth, 2007). Holy sites like temples, churches, and other religious locations are increasingly sought after as tourist destinations, often embodying millennia-old historical relics. The

World Tourism Organization notes that around 300 million pilgrims engage in religious tourism annually, contributing to 600 million national and international religious visits to sacred places globally. The Asia-Pacific region is particularly rich in religious sites and pilgrimage hubs. Buddhism, originating in the Indian subcontinent, has transcended borders, with archaeological sites forming the majority of Buddhist temples (Berkwitz, 2006). The

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Borobudur Temple in Indonesia built between 760 and 830 A.D., stands as the largest Buddhist temple globally, now transformed into a historical and cultural tourist attraction. Additionally, events like the Arba'een Walk in Iraq, witnessing a record-breaking gathering of 21 million Shias in 2019, underscore the enduring global significance of religious pilgrimage (Gorji, Gorji, & Hosseini, 2022).

Pakistan celebrated for its towering mountains, diverse national parks, and rich cultural traditions, is a bastion of natural beauty. Despite its relative youth, dating back to the third millennium BC with the Indus Valley civilization, the country boasts a varied history and distinct religious heritage, particularly in embracing Buddhism. Notably, UNESCO recognizes Pakistan's sacred sites like Taxila and Takhti-Bahi. Despite this, religious tourism in Pakistan remains underexplored internationally, missing out on the economic benefits this sector offers to countries with suitable resources (Siddiqui, 2018).

Globally, religious tourism intertwines with archaeological wonders, drawing thousands yearly to sacred sites like Mount Fuji in Japan, Amish settlements in rural Pennsylvania, the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the pyramids of Giza in Egypt, Chartres in France, and the ruins of Machu Picchu in the Peruvian Andes (Balan, 2022). Abandoned yet architecturally stunning ancient religious sites also attract tourists. Indonesia's restored Borobudur Temple is now open to visitors, contributing to the \$100 million global market value of Buddhist tourism (Scolaro, 2016). Notably, international travel planners emphasize the unique allure of Pakistan's Gandhara region, encompassing Mardan, Taxila, and Swat.

A 2016 Gallup study identified 58 million "interested visitors" in a selected group of nations, with 5% (2.9 million) expressing a likelihood to visit Pakistan (Durrani & Akbar, 2023). This highlights the potential for Pakistan's Buddhist archaeological heritage to attract religious tourists to some extent.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is:

- To explore the relevance of the Religious Tourism industry and World Buddhist heritage sites and how can evolve symbiotic mutualism.
- In addition to the primary objective following objectives will be achieved through this research
- To find the stakeholders involved to ensure the sustainability of this collaboration
- To investigate the potential of collaboration between the Religious Tourism industry and World Buddhist Heritage sites in the context of Pakistan.
- To explore the feasibility of the idea if applied in the context of Pakistan

Research Methodology

To achieve the objectives, research is designed and conducted in three different phases:

Phase 1: Qualitative research is done on collaboration between the religious tourism industry and World Buddhist Heritage sites to understand the phenomenon and its sustainability.

Phase 2: In this phase the understanding of context is evaluated in the past decade how people visited the world Buddhist heritage sites of Pakistan for spiritual/religious and leisure/pleasure reasons, what were their experiences and do they want to promote Pakistan for international Buddhist religious tourism. Moreover, the feasibility of the idea as per the audience will be extracted from a research questionnaire.

Phase 3: The result obtained from prior phases will be critically analyzed as per stakeholders and context and will be concluded.

Literature Review

Understanding the Phenomena

The collaboration between the religious tourism and heritage domains adds an artistic dimension, as both involve the preservation and appreciation of past art and culture. Religious activities at Buddhist archaeological

sites, carrying historical significance, offer a unique impact during pilgrimages. This literature review aims to explore the essentials and factors influencing collaboration, assessing its effectiveness and potential impacts. By establishing a baseline from existing knowledge, the study seeks to understand and apply these dynamics within the context of Pakistan, providing insights for comparison, testing, and application in the realm of religious and heritage tourism.

How the Religious Tourism Industry and Buddhist Archeological Sites are Relevant

Nearly every religious tradition urges its followers to travel on pilgrimages to sites significant to or connected to that religion (Raj & Morpeth, 2007). Religious sites like temples, stupas, and churches are gaining popularity as tourist destinations. Buddhist places such as Bodhgaya, Lumbini, and Boudhanath are now accessible to all travellers. Pilgrimage sites have become a valuable asset for nations, contributing significantly to global tourism. The renowned Borobudur Temple, once considered a Wonder of the World, stands as a major Buddhist landmark. Lumbini, with a predominantly Muslim population, offers a unique opportunity to witness diverse Buddhist practices from countries like Thailand, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Burma through international monasteries, providing tourists with a rich and exotic cultural experience (Shinde, 2021).

Factors Involved in the Relevancy of the Buddhist Archeological Sites

When two distinct domains collaborate, various factors come into play to shape their relationship. This synergy commences with understanding the individual objectives of each domain. For instance, what considerations guide the religious tourism industry in selecting sites for religious activities, and what do heritage/archaeological sites convey for a specific religion? Once these objectives are clear, the focus shifts to exploring how a joint venture or sustainable collaboration can be achieved.

A tourist destination's allure is influenced by several factors that attract potential visitors, such as (a) available information about different sites, (b) facilities at the location, (c) alignment with specific religious beliefs, (d) cost-effectiveness and incentives, (e) destination image, (f) visit intention, (g) foreign tourist exchange, and (h) sense of place.

On the flip side, factors considered when allowing archaeological sites for religious activities include (a) the prestige of a site, (b) ensuring no harm during tourist activities, (c) managing the site for conventional use during film production, and (d) assessing physical and environmental capacity (Mihai, 2023).

Possible Impacts of Collaboration of Religious Tourism Industry and Buddhist Archeological Sites

Evaluating impacts is crucial for ensuring sustainability in collaborations, especially between the religious tourism industry and archaeological sites. The choice of archaeological sites as religious tourist destinations is meticulously assessed under specific criteria to align with Buddhist beliefs. These heritage sites, encompassing archaeological, architectural, cultural, and social elements, are preserved pieces of the past, making them more susceptible to impact. Potential impacts on heritage sites due to increased religious pilgrimage include permanent or recoverable damage, increased wear and tear, overcrowding, support for preservation, and global reach. The impacts on the tourism industry involve commercialization, fostering social bonds among countries, and enhancing a country's soft image as a tourist destination. Globally, tourism significantly contributes to the economic development of destination nations, with tourists spending on souvenirs during visits to various holy sites. Additionally, religious travel can have a substantial societal influence on a nation. This style of cross-border pilgrimage tourism fosters social ties between the nations involved. Religious tourism possesses an influence on social values, social facets, beliefs, practices, and

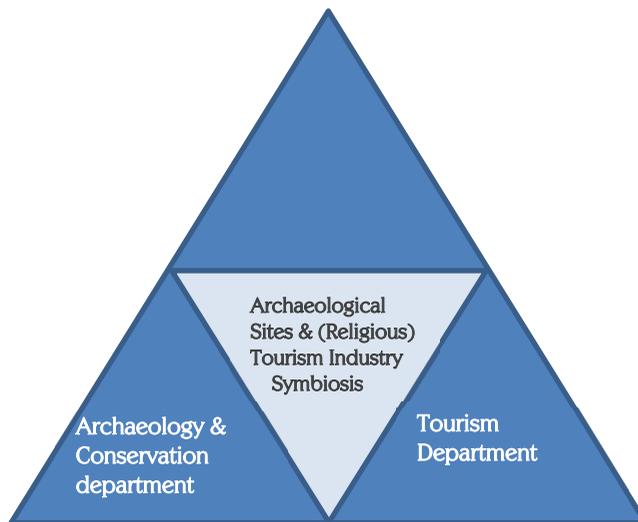
traditions. It serves as a tool for both economic and social growth (Tawney, 1926)

Identification of the Shareholders Involved in the Process of "Symbiotic Mutualism" between the Religious Tourism Industry and Buddhist Archeological Sites

Ensuring the sustainability of the collaboration between the religious tourism industry and Buddhist archaeological sites demands a comprehensive approach. Initiating and maintaining this collaboration requires a multidisciplinary effort and thoughtful consideration of outcomes. To attract tourism companies, incentives, facilities, and policies are essential, necessitating government

involvement. The alignment of Buddhist beliefs with sites is pivotal for desired results. Rules and regulations for religious tourism, safeguarding the prestige and authenticity of archaeological sites, involve collaboration with archaeology and conservation departments. The tourism department plays a crucial role in strategizing how to utilize Buddhist archaeological sites for pilgrims and tourists. Effective marketing, focusing on both the religious and the site's appeal, is vital in attracting visitors. Preserving religious sites, adopting marketing strategies, and involving various stakeholders create a pyramid chart reflecting the integral relationship shaping the symbiosis of the religious tourism industry and Buddhist archaeological sites.

Figure 1
Shareholders



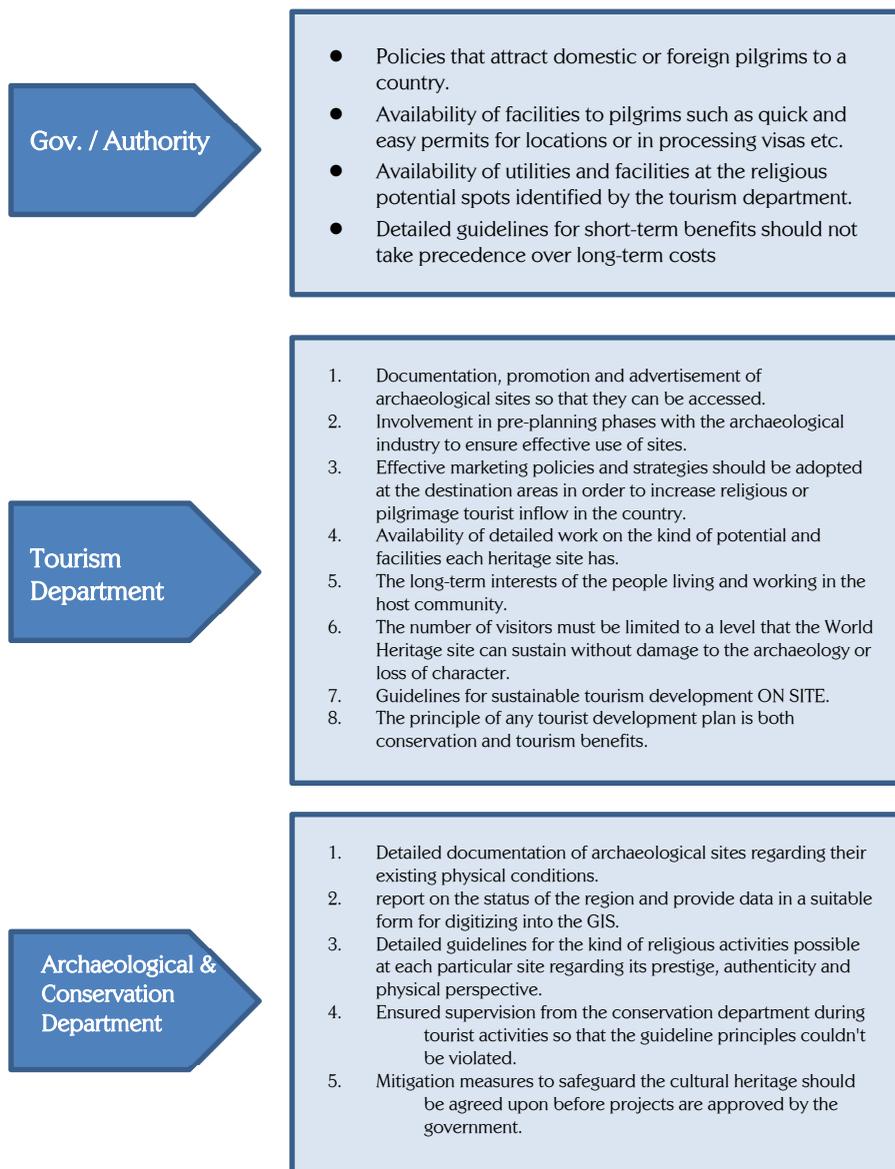
Parameters for Sustainable Cooperation of Religious Tourism Industry and Buddhist Archeological Sites

Research emphasizes the tourism industry's benefits for Buddhist archaeological sites,

underscoring the importance of conservation. A parameter checklist is vital for sustainable collaboration, ensuring mutualism and effectiveness.

Figure 2

Parameters for sustainable cooperation of Religious tourism industry and Buddhist Archeological site



Case Studies of Archeological Sites Involving Religious Tourism which Achieved Symbiotic Mutualism

Machu Picchu

Nestled 50 miles from the Andes in Peru, the

The revered Inca citadel of Machu Picchu faces growing challenges due to escalating tourist numbers. Receiving 2500 visitors daily, the remote location confronts pressure from developers and government officials seeking to boost regional tourism. Despite a twofold

increase in foreign tourists and spending in Peru from 2000 to 2010, Machu Picchu's development is restrained by its isolated position. While the Inca Trail offers an alternative, most visitors arrive via a four-hour train. UNESCO and the state are collaborating on a Master Plan, considering diverse stakeholders. With over 2000 daily tourists, conservation efforts, such as a satellite tracking system, aim to preserve the delicate balance between tourism's rise and sustainable growth for this UNESCO World Heritage Site (Larson, [2012](#))

Borobudur Temple

Borobudur, the world's largest Buddhist temple in Central Java, Indonesia, built between 760 and 830 A.D., has become a historical and cultural tourist destination managed by the Indonesian government. In 2011, it attracted 7 million foreign and 6 million local tourists, with one-third of local tourists visiting Borobudur. Despite being in a predominantly Muslim community, the temple is used by Buddhists for Vesak celebrations. Borobudur Leisure Park, covering 87.1 hectares, caters to both international and domestic tourists. However, the overuse of tourism poses a threat to its spiritual significance. Analyzing the symbiosis between the religious tourism industry and Pakistan's Buddhist archaeological sites requires understanding the current status of these sites nationally and internationally, as well as assessing the tourism industry's incorporation of Pakistani sites as Buddhist pilgrimage destinations (Hermawan, [2016](#))

Understanding the Phenomena

Buddhist Archaeological Assets of Pakistan and its Potential for Buddhist Religious Tourism

Buddhism has left an indelible mark on Pakistan, with ancient civilizations evident from Kashmir to Swat, and Taxila to Sindh. Despite natural decay and human-induced destruction, surviving Buddhist art and architecture stand majestic in museums or on their original sites. Gandhara, a prominent Buddhist centre in present-day Peshawar Valley, housed capitals like Kapisa,

Pushkalavati, Takshashila, and Purusapura. The Gandhara art, dubbed "the child of an Athenian sculptor and a Buddhist mother," gained recognition in the 19th century after British archaeologists unearthed it. The region, now hosting the world's largest concentration of Mahayana Buddhism followers, beckons tourists and pilgrims from Korea, Japan, China, Vietnam, Tibet, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. With a global market size projected at \$100 million, Buddhist tourism serves as a pivotal aspect of soft power and public diplomacy. Pakistan's commitment to promoting its ancient Buddhist heritage aligns with emerging opportunities in the global rise of faith tourism. (Rehman, [2023](#))

The travel and tourism sector in Pakistan, contributing 2.8% to the GDP, falls short compared to the regional average of 3.5%. Foreign income from tourism constitutes less than 1% of Pakistan, unlike India (69%), Sri Lanka (10%), and the Maldives (7%). A 2016 Gallup survey identified nearly 58 million interested Buddhist visitors, with 2.9 million likely to visit Pakistan. Capturing just 1% of this potential market could yield 29,000 annual visitors and \$63 million in revenue initially. Pakistan, with its historical and cultural heritage, has untapped potential in the global religious tourism business. The nation's ability to leverage soft power is crucial, and efforts to promote heritage tourism can improve its image internationally. Encouraging religious tourism, especially for Buddhists, and highlighting cultural ties with countries like South Korea can lead to economic growth and a positive global perception of Pakistan. Pakistan's rich history, diverse cultures, and ancient civilizations make it a promising destination for travellers, showcasing its soft power on the global stage (Amstutz, [2019](#))

Exposure of Buddhist Archeological Sites Nationally and Internationally

Pakistan boasts numerous archaeological sites, particularly UNESCO World Heritage sites, and those on the tentative list. For the Gandhara civilization, Taxila holds prominence, housing over 50 archaeological sites within a 30-kilometer radius, including the significant

Takh-e-Bahi. This Buddhist monastic complex, added to the World Heritage List in 1980, is known as the "throne of origins." Takht-i-Bahi attracts interest for its exceptional quality and importance, making it a potential pilgrimage site for the 50 million Mahayana Buddhists in Korea, China, and Japan. A Gallup survey suggests that 2.9 million out of 58 million "interested visitors" are "likely to visit," indicating a significant market potential for religious tourism, with an estimated short-term income of US\$ 62.9 million (PKR 6.6 billion) if 1% of this potential is realized (Durrani, [2023](#))

Analyzing the Context (Pakistan) as Per Phenomenon

Assessing the feasibility of Pakistan's claim to utilize Buddhist archaeological sites for religious tourism involves understanding the existing ties between the tourism industry and these sites.

Buddhist Archaeological Heritage and International Market

The investigation into Pakistan's potential in the international Buddhist market for religious tourism reveals minimal official international visits to archaeological sites. Notably, the Chief Monk of Thailand, Arayawang, spent three months in Taxila in 2022, emphasizing the site's importance. In May 2023, he returned to participate in International Vesak Day festivities, addressing students and leading prayers with a delegation. Despite this, a World Bank survey indicates that 59% of Buddhist respondents from South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan show no interest in visiting Pakistan. Security concerns, lack of facilities, and visa issues contribute to this reluctance, emphasizing the need for better marketing and awareness of Pakistan's rich Buddhist heritage. (Timothy, [2009](#))

Understanding the Context as Per Viewer Response

The study delves into the dynamics between the religious tourism industry and Buddhist archaeological sites in our socio-cultural

context. To gauge the current situation, a survey was conducted to record people's responses as tourists and their interaction with archaeological sites, assessing the perceived interrelation between the two. Survey results highlight that school and college trips are the primary reasons for visiting archaeological sites, yet awareness about Buddhist heritage is limited. Only 56% of respondents never purchased souvenirs.

Analyzing the Context (Pakistan) as Per Shareholders and Identified Parameters

Assessing the potential for symbiotic mutualism between Buddhist archaeological sites and the religious tourism industry necessitates collaboration across various sectors, including tourism, government, conservation, and archaeology. The evaluation aims to gauge the readiness of these stakeholders and assess the existing infrastructure's capability to support this collaborative venture.

Assessment of Parameters under the Tourism Department

PILDAT (Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency) conducted an extensive examination of Pakistan's tourism industry, revealing impediments hindering its growth. Issues include the absence of a federal Tourism Management Entity, provincial Tourism Policy Framework, and private sector investment. Security concerns and the inadequacy of enforcement standards, capacity of the Department of Tourist Services (DTS), and reliable data are also highlighted. Currently, only the KPK government has focused on a policy framework for tourism. The federal government's goal to increase tourist arrivals to 2 million by 2025 is aligned with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government's emphasis on tourism, evident in the establishment of a National Tourism Coordination Board (NTCB). The NTCB's thematic working groups, including Cultural, Heritage & Archaeology Tourism, reflect potential strategies for utilizing archaeological sites in tourism. Despite the lack of official recognition, the development of these groups

hints at an opportunity for future consideration.

Assessment of Parameters under Government or Authority

Over the years, various governments proposed and invited Buddhists, monks, scholars, and researchers to explore Gandhara sites in Pakistan. Symposiums and conferences aimed to promote Gandhara art and Buddhist religious tourism have been conducted.

Despite the cultural and historical significance of these sites, a policy to promote religious tourism has been absent for 75 years. The government now intends to encourage religious tourism by providing necessary amenities, security, and support for visitors to fulfil their religious responsibilities. While no official initiative has been comprehended, the formation of thematic working groups suggests a potential opportunity for addressing this idea in the future.

Table 1

Year	Event	Countries visitors	Buddhist archaeological sites
2023	Vesak celebration day	Ambassadors, high commissioners of Sri Lanka and Nepal	Taxila museum Dharamrajika stupa
2022	Vesak celebration day	The ambassadors/ high commissioners of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, Republic of Korea, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Nepal attended the event	
2019	Buddhist trail being developed to attract pilgrims	A 60-member delegation of Korean Buddhist pilgrim	Swabi and Swat, and culminate at Taxila,
2021	Experience Gandhara's magnificence	14-member delegation Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka	Week-long pilgrimage to holy sites
August 30, 2019		Korean monks, researchers professors from Dongguan University Korean businesspeople based in Islamabad	Taxila and Takht e bhai

Events conducted by different governments to promote Buddhist religious tourism.

Assessment of Parameters under the Archeological Department

The Buddhist archaeological sites in Pakistan are managed by provincial archaeology and conservation departments, each with its own website containing details of heritage assets. Among them, the Punjab and KPK departments provide substantial information. To assess parameters, an interview-based survey was

conducted.

The care of Buddhist archaeological sites in Pakistan falls under provincial archaeology and conservation departments, each maintaining a website with heritage asset details. Notably, the Punjab and KPK departments offer comprehensive information. An interview-based survey was conducted to evaluate relevant parameters.

Table 2

Tourism	Documentation / Advertisement	Detail potential and facilities each archaeological site has	Guiding for sustainable development on-site	Involvement in pre-planning phases
	x	x	x	x

Tourism	Documentation / Advertisement	Detail potential archaeological facilities has	and each site	Guiding for sustainable development on-site	Involvement in pre-planning phases
Government	Policies that attract domestic or foreign pilgrims to a country.	Quick and easy permits/visa.		Development of infrastructure over identifies spots.	Detailed guidelines for Short-term and long-term benefits
Conservation Archaeology	<p>✘</p> <p>Detailed documentation regarding physical condition. data in a suitable form for digitizing into the GIS</p> <p>✘</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>Guidelines for allowing religious activity</p> <p>✓</p>	<p></p> <p>for religious</p> <p></p>	<p>✘</p> <p>Mitigation measures</p> <p>✓</p>	<p>✘</p> <p>Ensured supervision</p> <p>✓</p>

Parameters and Shareholders of Symbiotic Mutualism

Conclusion

The research indicates that Pakistan has a low international profile for Buddhist religious tourism, lacking exposure to its archaeological assets. Despite unfulfilled parameters for sustainable collaboration between religious tourism and Buddhist archaeology, there is potential, as the domestic industry has utilized this asset to a limited extent. While the government aims to promote Buddhist religious tourism, no policies are in place yet. The user response suggests that religious tourism is a viable option to enhance the tourism and conservation sectors. With a developing country's economy and rich

heritage sites awaiting exposure, religious-induced tourism presents a prime opportunity. The engagement in a symbiotic relationship between contributing industries offers a realistic and sustainable path to gradual growth and development across these sectors.

The research concludes that promoting Buddhist religious tourism through collaboration with the archaeological industry in Pakistan has fair potential. Existing domestic ties and basic parameters offer a foundation, but a joint venture among stakeholders is essential for the effective and sustainable implementation of the idea.

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