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# The Satisfaction of Bangladeshi Pilgrims: Service gaps in spiritual tourism based on gender and expenditure

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This study sheds light on the satisfaction of pilgrims and service gaps of tour operators. Data were gathered from 236 Bangladeshi pilgrims in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at Mecca and Madina and in Bangladesh in 2019. The results reveal that 94.9% of the tourists were satisfied with air services, followed by food, accommodation, Hajj- training, sightseeing, stone-throwing, Arafa, Mujdalifa, Meena and transportation services (75.8%, 61.9%, 56.8%, 54.3%, 54.3%, 53.4%, 52.5%, 51.3%, and 43.2% respectively). Under the Mann-Whitney U test, pilgrims' perceptions of tour operators' services significantly differed based on gender and expenditure of respondents. The results show that satisfaction with accommodation, food, Meena, Arafa, Mujdalifa, Hajj training, sightseeing, stone-throwing, and transportation services significantly varied. This suggests that tour operators need to offer the expected services to the spiritual tourists and minimise the service gaps. The entire hajj journey is full of rituals that require specific rules and Shari'ah knowledge to perform. The pilgrims need profound knowledge, but, they lack proper religious learning. Therefore, tour operators must appoint an Islamic scholar who needs to guide the pilgrims before and during the Hajj journey so that the pilgrims perform each ritual accurately. Spiritual tour operators have to attend to the tourists to make improve their satisfaction as the pilgrims are not simple tourists, rather, they are spiritual tourists, having a good relationship with their Creator, Allah the Almighty.

**Key Words:** Hajj services, halal tourism, pilgrimage, satisfaction, service gap, spiritual tourism

## Introduction

The word 'spirituality' originates from the Latin 'spiritus', which means 'breath of life' (Principe, 1983:128), and it is a firm belief in a 'Supreme Power' (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Mitroff & Denton, 1999). It also refers to a deep realisation and individual belief regardless of the sense of peace, objective and destination of life (Agrawal, Choudhary and Tripathi, 2010) marked as a social phenomenon of personal well-being and self-actualisation (Brownstein, 2008; Fernando & Jackson, 2006; Lewis & Geroy, 2000). Overall, spirituality focuses on faith in God, concentration on self, and seriousness to others (Mitroff, 2003; Piedmont & Leach, 2002).

Spiritual tourism is known as holistic tourism concerned with the tests of wellness (Smith, 2003), and has affected the tourism industries (Andriotis, 2009; Cochrane, 2009; Cohen, 2003; Doohan, 1990; Finney, Orwig & Spake, 2009; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011; Smith & Kelly, 2006). About 330 million tourists make international religious journeys every year, totalling approximately 600 million

when we consider pilgrims travelling to national and international destinations (World Tourism Organization, 2014), linked with faith and spiritual satisfaction (Raj & Morpeth, 2007; Woodward, 2004).

Traveling on a spiritual journey is divine (Haq & Jackson, 2009) and pilgrim tourists are special (Coats, 2008). Their motivation is to ensure self-actualisation, which Maslow (1943) noted as the top of human needs and motivation. Moreover, spiritual tourism is taken as a discovery and an experiment (Campbell, 1972; Lofland & Stark, 1943; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). Also, spiritual tourists experience spiritual feelings on their tour that are not possible to sense in normal life (Synder, 2007), and their journey is made to 'compare the incomparable' by using an individual's taxonomy (Demerath, 2000).

The varieties of spiritual tourist experiences demonstrate spiritual tourism being a part of contemporary religious practice for a range of individuals (Haq & Jackson, 2019; Norman, 2012). Particularly, the satisfaction of the pilgrims needs special care because people around the

globe visit holy sites such as Mecca and Medina to refine their spirits in an attempt to move towards deeper self-actualisation (Dann, 1977; Heidary *et al.*, 2017; Smith, 2003).

Two issues which are important in this particular research are gender and expenditure. Gender is one of the segmentation criteria in the marketing process (Kotler *et al.*, 2013; Kotler & Armstrong, 2016), and consumers' perceptions differ according to their gender identities (Peter & Olson, 2013; Pride & Ferrell, 2010; Schiffman *et al.*, 2010). Expenditure for expected services of tourists and how this links to the service offered by the marketers is crucial in measuring satisfaction (Blanchard & Galloway, 1994; Heskett *et al.*, 1990; Kim & Han, 2010; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990; Zeithaml, 1988).

### *Context of the study*

Muslims are the fastest-growing population in the world, and their most sacred place is the Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia which is visited annually for Hajj by approximately two million Muslims, who are being served by almost 50,000 religious organisations (Heidari *et al.*, 2018). Both the markets and marketers are driven by spiritual satisfaction (Cohen, 1992), and this market is worth around US\$1.5bn (Bowie, 2003).

The pilgrims start their religious rituals at the airport, putting on two-pieces of white, plain cloth which is free of stitching, and then they begin to prepare for Umrah (the first part of pilgrimage) during their journey. As such, this is the first potential service gap - by the air service providers - which may affect the satisfaction of the spiritual Hajj journey.

The pilgrims are accommodated in Mecca, and the devotees aspire to be close to the Kaabah to offer their various prayers and to circulate around it for the purification of their souls. The pilgrims also go to Medina, expecting accommodation that is close to the mosque of Nobobi (Prophet's mosque) to offer prayers. Sometimes, married couples demand accommodation so that they can stay together. When the accommodation services in either location fall short of their expectations, the pilgrims can be dissatisfied.

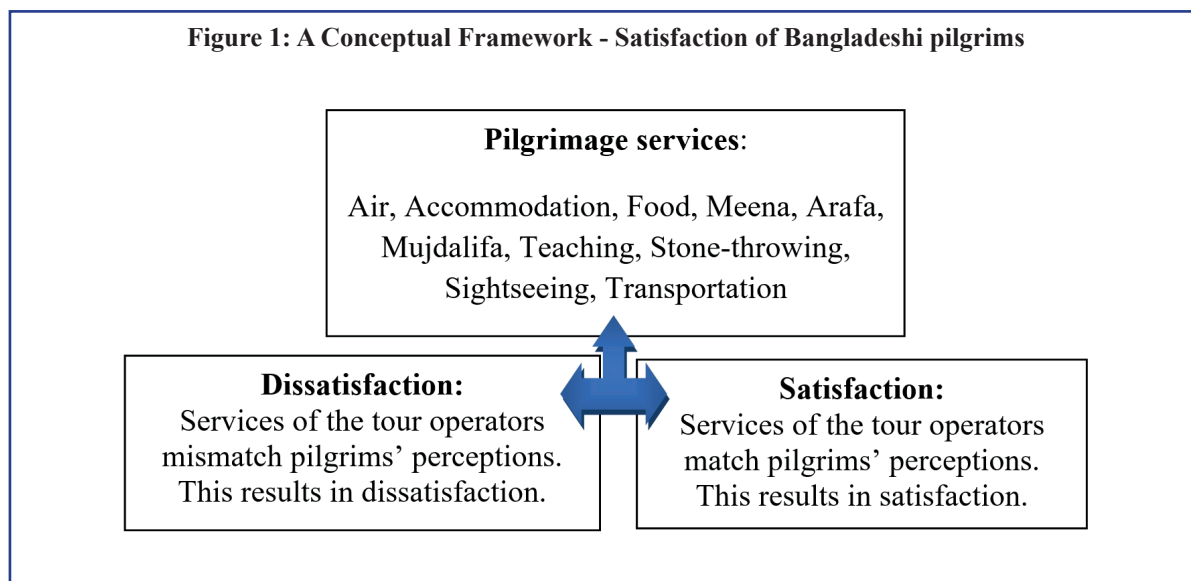
During the entire trip to pilgrimage, travel agents arrange three meals a day for the guests. As the culture and food habits of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are different, the pilgrims might be dissatisfied with having different food, resulting in an adverse impact on the entire stay.

In Mecca, at Meena, the pilgrims stay about four days in tents. This place is supplied with temporary air-conditioned accommodation - sleeping arrangements, washrooms and food arranged by the local service providers recognised as *Muallems*. Their service significantly influences the satisfaction state of the devotees, and the service gaps might make them dissatisfied.

After Meena, all the pilgrims must be present at Arafah as an obligation in the Hajj ritual, and the pilgrims need to stay there from morning till sunset. After leaving Arafah, the pilgrims go to Muzdalifa to sleep there under the open sky. They need transportation services to reach Muzdalifa and food. Lack of the required services at Muzdalifa might seriously impact the perceptions of the guests regarding the pilgrimage.

In the early morning, the pilgrims leave Muzdalifa and this day is the one with most hardship, requiring extensive learning as to performing Hajj, like throwing stones, making prayers (dua) at the pillar (*Jamarat*), sacrificing the animal, shaving their heads, circulating the Kaabah, praying and wandering between Safa and Marwah mountains and among others. An appointed religious leader (*Imam*), knowledgeable about Islam and Hajj is needed to render the teachings to the pilgrims. This service is crucial for the Hajj to Allah, and the limitations of such knowledge-based service might dissatisfy the pilgrims.

In the three days at the tents in Meena, during the stone throwing and praying to Allah at a place called *Jamarat* and for the obligatory circumambulation of the Kaabah, the travel agencies need to guide the pilgrims. Otherwise, the overall pilgrimage can become unsafe. In the past, pilgrims have died at this point of the pilgrimage due to overcrowding. A further less serious, but no less problematic issue is pilgrims forgetting the location of their tents which is quite common and makes the devotees suffer a lot - the lack of a guided service for stone-throwing or at the accommodation can dissatisfy the pilgrims.



The pilgrims are offered transportation services from the airport to the hotel, and hotel to the airport. Also, transportation services are required to take them from the hotel to Meena, Arafah, and Muzdalifa and to Medina. As the temperature in Mecca remains very hot, comfortable transportation is highly desirable, or the tourists can become physically ill.

Finally, the spiritual trip ends with sightseeing of popular destinations in Mecca and Medina concerned with historical interest as well as spiritual purification. The tour operators promise to arrange the sightseeing tours for the pilgrims, which they cherish in their minds. Failure of that service is likely to dissatisfy the pilgrims, leaving a trace of dissatisfaction in their minds.

### *Conceptual framework*

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this project.

The ten points of services comprise the total services in the pilgrimage, and service gaps exist if pilgrims' perceptions fall short of the service providers' services, resulting in dissatisfaction. On the other hand, satisfaction will result from the individual service that fits the perceptions of the pilgrims.

### *Theoretical perspective*

Services can be defined as deeds, efforts, or performance (Berry, 1980) by which the service providers try to fulfil needs and expectations, and raise satisfaction levels

and make a good and impression (Abraham & Taylor, 1999; Gronross, 1984). This overall experience includes unique features such as intangibility, inseparability, and variability (Hoffman & Bateson, 2008; Oliver, 1997). Regarding the measurement of customers' satisfaction, SERVQUAL is an effective tool that notes expectation-related gaps (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985, 1988, 1991). SERVQUAL is well recognised in the hospitality and tourism industry since it covers five gaps in service - the gaps model (Bojanic & Rosen, 1994). The gaps model deals with the deviation between the service provider and the customers. This is measured mainly by the five key dimensions: reliability; tangibility; responsiveness; assurance and; empathy (Hoffman & Bateson, 2008). When customers' service expectations are combined with the above service quality dimensions, service gaps are defined as gaps one, two, three, four, and five (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

**Gap One** exists between customer expectation and management's perception (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). Hoffman and Bateson (2008) have defined gap one as the knowledge gap; the difference between what consumers expect of a service and what management perceives that consumers expect. This is known as the information and feedback-related gap (Antony, Antony & Ghosh, 2004).

**Gap Two** exists between management's perceived customer expectations and actual situation (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). The difference between what management perceives that consumers expect and the quality

specification set for the service delivery is the standard gap (Hoffman & Bateson 2008). Brogowicz, Delene and Lyth (1990) refer to the standard gap as a design-related gap.

**Gap Three** relates to the variance between the company employees and the service specifications designed by management (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). Hoffman and Bateson (2008) termed this as the delivery gap.

**Gap Four** takes place between the promise from the business to the customer and the customer expectation to those external promises (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). This is the communication gap, the difference between the actual services delivered, and the service described (Hoffman & Bateson, 2008).

**Gap Five** results from the difference between customer expectation and customer experience (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985) or service gap (Hoffman & Bateson, 2008). Service gaps can be viewed as customer perceptions and expectation-related gaps (Brogowicz *et al.*, 1990) which thus, determine the extent of satisfaction (Gronross, 1984).

Customer satisfaction is associated with the value which the customer perceives, and this is linked to the price they pay to the service provider relative to the value expected from the transaction - this can be influenced by the comparing the service provider with their competitors (Blanchard & Galloway, 1994; Heskett, Sasser & Hart, 1990; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990). Similarly, customers might consider a specific service feature or may consider cumulative judgment when defining their satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Johnson, Anderson & Fornell, 1995; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Johnson & Fornell, 1991). The role and involvement of the consumer in the service process has direct effects on their satisfaction (Fornell & Johnson, 1993; Oliver, 1980).

#### *Aim, objectives, research questions, and hypotheses*

This study aims

*to investigate the satisfaction of pilgrims in line with their gender and expenditure as to their spiritual journey to Mecca and Medina.*

The overall aim can be summarised into two objectives:

*To identify the services gaps perceived by pilgrims,  
To suggest ways to overcome the service gaps.*

The research objectives further can be refined to form two questions as:

*What are the bases of the service gaps in the pilgrimage?*

*How can the service gaps be minimised?*

Gender is one of the main market segmentation criteria (Kotler *et al.*, 2013; Kotler & Armstrong, 2016), and consumer behaviour varies based on gender identities (Peter & Olson, 2013; Pride & Ferrell, 2010; Schiffman Kanuk & Kumar, 2010). Assuming male and female are the crucial factors in determining service gaps in the Hajj tour, the study assumes a null hypothesis-

***H<sub>01</sub>***: The relationship between satisfaction and service gaps is not significant based on gender.

*H<sub>01</sub>* can be summed up as a consideration of: *H<sub>01a</sub>*, *H<sub>01b</sub>*, *H<sub>01c</sub>*, *H<sub>01d</sub>*, *H<sub>01e</sub>*, *H<sub>01f</sub>*, *H<sub>01g</sub>*, *H<sub>01h</sub>*, *H<sub>01i</sub>*, and *H<sub>01j</sub>* which are all based on the previously discussed ten points of services - and thus linked with pilgrim satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction can also depend on the cost incurred for the expected services. Customers compare their perceived value with the price they pay for the service (Kim & Han 2010). They also connect their perceptions of price, quality, and value (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990; Zeithaml, 1988) relative to the desired product or service benefits per dollar (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016).

Considering expenditure in determining service gaps, the study assumes another null hypothesis as-

***H<sub>02</sub>***: The relationship between satisfaction and service gaps is not significant based on expenditure.

As the ten points of services (discussed above) are concerned with pilgrim satisfaction, *H<sub>02</sub>* can be summed up of: *H<sub>02a</sub>*, *H<sub>02b</sub>*, *H<sub>02c</sub>*, *H<sub>02d</sub>*, *H<sub>02e</sub>*, *H<sub>02f</sub>*, *H<sub>02g</sub>*, *H<sub>02h</sub>*, *H<sub>02i</sub>*, and *H<sub>02j</sub>*.



## Methods

### Data collection

Primary data have been gathered through a survey of pilgrims in holy Mecca and Medina in 2019. As the obligatory rituals of pilgrimage were over on the 10th of August, data were collected from the pilgrims from 11th to 30th of August 2019 in Mecca and Medina. Purposive sampling procedure was followed to complete the survey.

In total, 550 questionnaires were distributed among the pilgrim hotels in Mecca and Medina. Only 90 pilgrims returned these completed questionnaires. An additional 250 questionnaires were distributed to respondents at Dhaka International Airport Bangladesh when they came back to Bangladesh after performing the spiritual journey. 67 pilgrimages gave their responses to the questionnaire this time. Finally, the survey was completed by locating the individual pilgrims and visiting their homes in person - in this step of research, 79 pilgrims agreed to respond. Thus, a total of 236 pilgrimages returned the survey questionnaires out of the 800 questionnaires that were distributed from August 11 to September 30, 2019.

The questionnaire comprised mainly of questions using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 outlining strongly satisfied (1), satisfied (2), neutral (3), dissatisfied (4), and strongly dissatisfied (5). This rating approach was devised by Likert in the 1930s (Likert 1932). At the same time, the author, performed Hajj, while undertaking the data collection process and was able to do this with the assistance of four travel agents who assisted in arranging the spiritual journey. The neutral participatory observation of the author has helped to evaluate the satisfaction state.

Qur'anic guidelines are qualitative and prescriptive (Bainess, Fill & Page, 2010; Islam, 2020; Islam, 2018; Saeed, Ahmed & Mukhta, 2001; Wilson & Hollensen, 2013). Because of this, some related verses of the Holy Qur'an and authentic sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah Bless Him) have been incorporated into the content analysis.

### Data analysis

The Mann-Whitney U test helps in testing hypotheses. It is a non-parametric test to check whether two different samples originated from the same population or not. A more complete and thorough depiction of pilgrims' perceptions of services was obtained by reporting the differences in the rank-sum irrespective of gender and expenditure. The observations were ranked, and the sum of all ranks from one of the groups was compared with the other group, expecting hypothetical identical distribution among the tourists to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in the underlying distribution of the Likert scale items or not. This was undertaken with the help of SPSS (version 20).

## Results and Discussions

### Service gaps of the pilgrims during their spiritual journey

Table 1 profiles the respondents and shows that less than quarter of the respondents were female compared to the male pilgrims. Most of the respondents were aged 51 and over whereas the number of young people was very small.

About one-third of the pilgrims availed of the more expensive tour package, spending BDT 351,000 and more. However, most of the pilgrims availed of the minimum expenditure fixed by the Hajj Association of Bangladesh (HAB), which is BDT 300,000 to BDT 350,000.

Characteristics of pilgrims		N	%
Gender	Male	194	82.2%
	Female	42	17.8%
Age	20-30	6	2.5%
	31-40	45	19.1%
	41-50	59	25%
	51 and above	126	53.4%
Expenditure	BDT 300000 -350000 (US\$ 3521- 4108)	161	68.2%
	BDT 351000 + (US\$ 4108)	75	31.8%

**Table 2: Perceptions of the Individual Services (%)**

Services	Strongly Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Strongly Dissatisfied	Overall Satisfied	Overall Dissatisfied
Air Services	16.9	78.0	3.8	1.3	0	94.9	1.3
Accommodation	15.3	46.6	11.4	18.6	8	61.9	26.6
Food	16.9	58.9	11.4	10.2	2.5	75.8	12.7
Meena	15.3	36.0	8.5	30.1	10.2	51.3	40.3
Arafa	16.5	36.9	8.5	32.2	5.9	53.4	38.1
Mujdalifa	16.1	36.4	14.0	28.0	5.5	52.5	33.5
Hajj Teaching	19.5	37.3	27.1	13.6	2.5	56.8	16.1
Sight-seeing	14.0	40.3	26.3	16.9	2.5	54.3	19.4
Stone-throwing	14.0	40.3	19.5	20.8	5.5	54.3	26.3
Transportation	14.0	29.2	5.9	28.0	22.9	43.2	50.9

Table 2 shows the survey results, and demonstrates that the spiritual tourists expressed their highest satisfaction with air services constituting 94.9%, when one sums the 'strongly satisfied' and 'satisfied perceptions'. This is followed by the other services which are ranked as

food (75.8%), accommodation (61.9%), Hajj training (56.8%), sightseeing (54.3%), stone-throwing (54.3%), Arafa (53.4%), Mujdalifa (52.5%), Meena (51.3%) and transportation (43.2%). Conversely, the tourists were highly dissatisfied with the transportation services

**Table 3: Relationship Between Gender and Service Gap**

Test Statistics		Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Air Services	( $H_{o1a}$ )	3526	0.059
Accommodation	( $H_{o1b}$ )	3870	0.59
Food	( $H_{o1c}$ )	3952	0.732
Meena	( $H_{o1d}$ )	3877	0.61
Arafa	( $H_{o1e}$ )	3243	0.03**
Mujdalifa	( $H_{o1f}$ )	3922	0.693
Hajj teaching	( $H_{o1g}$ )	3982	0.811
Sightseeing	( $H_{o1h}$ )	3553	0.173
Stone-throwing	( $H_{o1i}$ )	3464	0.112
Transportation	( $H_{o1j}$ )	2945	0.004*

\*Significant at 0.01 level of probability, \*\* Significant at 0.05 level of probability

**Table 4: Relationship Between Expenditure and Service Gap**

Test Statistics		Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Air Services	( $H_{o2a}$ )	5572	0.187
Accommodation	( $H_{o2b}$ )	3735	.000*
Food	( $H_{o2c}$ )	4052	.000*
Meena	( $H_{o2d}$ )	3059	.000*
Arafa	( $H_{o2e}$ )	2766	.000*
Mujdalifa	( $H_{o2f}$ )	2935	.000*
Hajj teaching	( $H_{o2g}$ )	4381	.000*
Sightseeing	( $H_{o2h}$ )	4145	.000*
Stone-throwing	( $H_{o2i}$ )	3351	.000*
Transportation	( $H_{o2j}$ )	3326	.000*

\*Significant at 0.01 level of probability

(50.9%) followed by Meena (40.3%), Arafa (38.1%), Mujdalifa (33.5%), accommodation (26.6%), stone-throwing (26.3%), sightseeing (19.4%), Hajj training (16.1%), food (12.7%) and air service (1.3%).

In general, the satisfaction state of the spiritual tourists varied and this suggests that the tour operators do not serve the pilgrims in a standard manner, resulting in lower perceptions of the ten points of services by some respondents. Looking more closely, gender and expenditure in particular, contributed to variations in the perceived gaps in service and satisfaction, and this suggests a relationship between both gender identity and payment for services with satisfaction levels while undertaking Hajj rituals.

The study assumed a null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) regarding the relationship between satisfaction and service gap - proposing that this is not significant based on gender. As seen in Table 3, the test results show that  $H_{01e}$  is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The satisfaction of Arafa services significantly varied as the  $P$ -value is 0.03, (i.e. less than 0.05).  $H_{01j}$  is rejected, and an alternative hypothesis is accepted, suggesting that the satisfaction of transportation services has significantly differed as the  $P$ -value is 0.004 (i.e. less than 0.01).

The study considered another null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) under expenditure relating to service gaps. According to Table 4,  $H_{02b}$  to  $H_{02j}$  were rejected and alternative hypotheses were accepted, implying that satisfaction with accommodation, food, Meena, Arafa, Mujdalifa, Hajj training, sightseeing, stone-throwing, and transportation services were significantly varied since the  $P$ -value is 0.000 (i.e. less than 0.01).

#### *Ways to Minimise the Service gaps in the Hajj services*

Pilgrimage (Hajj) is an obligatory prayer or worship, which must be undertaken once in the life of a Muslim who has the financial and physical capability. The Noble Qur'an says:

*The standing place of Abraham. And whoever enters it shall be safe. And [due] to Allah from the people is a pilgrimage to the House - for whoever is able to find thereto a way (Chapter Ale-Imran: Verse, 97).*

The Hajj journey is spiritual since the reward for those who have accepted Hajj on behalf of Allah is paradise. Narrated from Abu Huraira, the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him) says:

*The reward of accepted Hajj is paradise hereafter (Sahih Bukhari, 1773: Sahih Muslim, 3355).*

The survey results show that 94.9% of the guests were satisfied with the air services. Yet, service marketers might make improve the consumers' satisfaction by attaining a higher 'Strongly Satisfied' ranking (Kotler *et al.*, 2013) by offering augmented services (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). For instance, if pilgrims were informed about prayer time on board that could be quite an easy addition to the service provision.

The overall percentile of perceptions which illustrate dissatisfaction with transportation services is 50.9% which indicates that the pilgrims sensed a definite service gap. The  $P$ -values for the gender and expenditure criteria of  $H_{01j}$  and  $H_{02j}$  are .004 and .000 respectively, proving the service gaps were significant according to these criteria. Thus, the tour operators must arrange and manage comfortable transportation for the pilgrims, and this would minimise the perceived gaps (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Cooil *et al.*, 2007; Johnson *et al.*, 1996; Oliver, 1997).

Meena is located in Mecca, and the pilgrims are to stay there on the 8th of Jilhajj (Arabic month) to undertake their five daily prayers. They also need to stay there on the 11th, 12th, and 13th of Jilhajj to pass time with the remembrance of Allah. Narrated from Nubaisha Hujalli that Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him) said:

*These days are for eating and drinking along with remembering Allah (Sahih Muslim: 2733, 2734).*

The results show that 40.3% of the pilgrims were dissatisfied with Meena services, and the  $P$ -value of  $H_{02d}$  under expenditure is .000 which implies that the satisfaction of the pilgrims significantly varied. Therefore, the tour operators must make sure that the service components for the 4 days in Meena are up to standard to reduce the service gaps (Brogowicz *et al.*, 1990; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).



After Meena, all the pilgrims must be present at Arafa on the 9th of Jilhajj to spend time at dusk as an obligation of Hajj and pray to Allah. In the Noble Qur'an, there is a chapter named Al Arafa. There is an authentic saying narrated from Aesa (May Allah be satisfied with her) that Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him) said:

*There is no other day than Arafa when Allah releases more inhabitants from hell and Allah approaches very close to His servants (Sahih Muslim: 3354).*

The survey results note that 38.1% of the respondents show their dissatisfaction with Arafa services. The  $P$ -value of  $H_{02e}$  (.000) based on expenditure and  $P$ -value of  $H_{01e}$  (.03) under gender both show a statistical significance of variance in satisfaction. As such, the tour operators with the collaboration of the local *Muallem* should work to minimise the service gaps (Brogowicz *et al.*, 1990; Hoffman & Bateson, 2008).

Pilgrims go to Mjudalifa to sleep under the open sky, and this is the symbol of solidarity that every Muslim is simple and equal, and this place has a great connection to spirituality as narrated from Billal bin Rabah (May Allah be satisfied with him) that Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him) said:

*Of course, Allah has blessed on those who stayed at Musdalifah, and has given them much (Ibne Majah: 3024).*

The survey results show that 33.5% of the pilgrims were dissatisfied with the Mjudalifa service, and the  $P$ -value of  $H_{02f}$  (.000) in relation to expenditure of the devotees implies a significant gap in Mjudalifa services. So, the tour operators have to be careful in minimising the perceived gaps (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Cooil *et al.*, 2007).

The overall dissatisfaction with the accommodation service is 26.6%, and the  $P$ -value of  $H_{02b}$  under expenditure is .000 implying a significant variance. This is evidence that communication gaps (Hoffman & Bateson, 2008; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985) persisted between the pilgrims and the tour operators. Hence, the tour operators can either fulfil their promise or not make such a promises that are difficult to entertain.

The overall study results show that 26.3% of the pilgrims were dissatisfied with service in relation to stone throwing, and the  $P$ -value of  $H_{02i}$  (.000) under the expenditure criterion shows a significant gap in these services. The tour operators must minimise the service gaps (Brogowicz *et al.*, 1990; Hoffman & Bateson, 2008) so that the stone-throwing ritual becomes secure.

The entire hajj journey is full of rituals that require specific rules and Shari'ah knowledge to perform. The Noble Qur'an motivates the devotees to ask those who have detailed Islamic knowledge. It says the following in chapter An Nahol: 43 and chapter Al Ambia: 7:

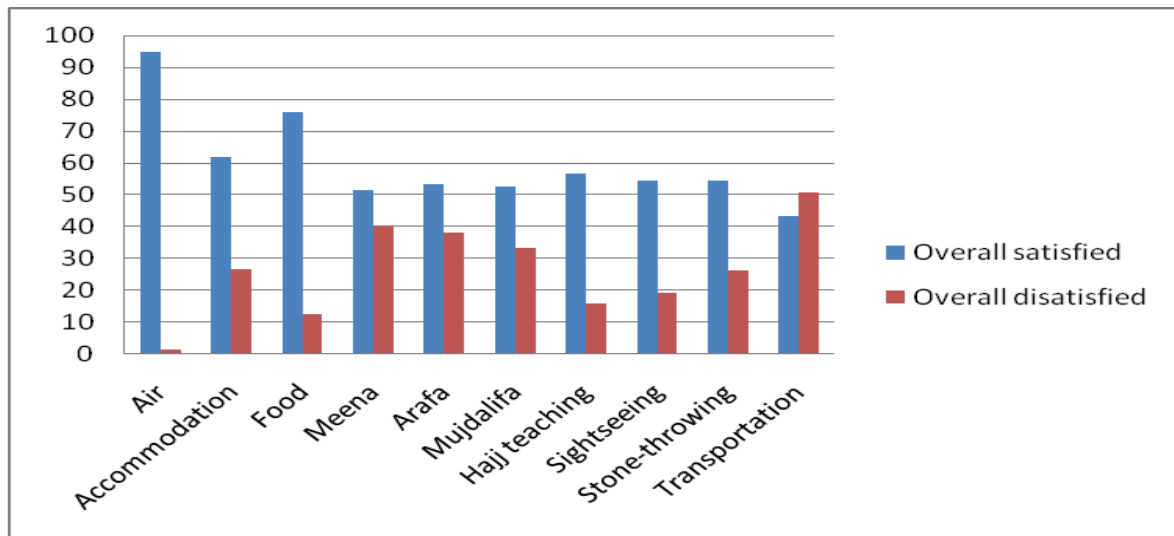
*So ask of those who know the Scripture if you know not*

*So ask the people of the Reminder if you do not know.*

The pilgrims need profound knowledge, and lack of this religious knowledge will spoil the pilgrimage, and the devotees have to wait for the next year to successfully perform the Hajj. Some mistakes require a financial penalty of sacrificing an additional animal or fasting for 3 days (known as *Dom*), for example. Therefore, the tour operators appoint an Islamic scholar who guides the pilgrims during the entire journey so that each ritual is accurately performed. The results show that 16.1% of the pilgrims were dissatisfied as to the provided Hajj training, and the  $P$ -value of  $H_{02g}$  by expenditure is .000 which implies that satisfaction in relation to the provision of pilgrimage training is significantly varied. Besides service gaps, knowledge gaps (Antony *et al.*, 2004; Hoffman & Bateson, 2008) existed. Hence, the tour operators must dedicate a knowledgeable and experienced Islamic scholar (*Imam*) to minimise the knowledge gaps of the pilgrims.

The Hajj agencies promise to arrange a sightseeing tours for the pilgrims. The results show that the percentile of dissatisfied pilgrims regarding sightseeing services is 19.4, and the  $P$ -value of  $H_{02i}$  as per expenditure is .000, showing a significant difference in satisfaction on this service. As such, a communication gap (Brogowicz *et al.*, 1990; Hoffman & Bateson, 2008; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985) exists, along with service gaps. The tour operators must fulfil their promise, by arranging suitable sightseeing to the historical places to satisfy their guests.

**Figure 2: Service gaps, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction in the Hajj services**



The results of the survey show that 12.7% of the pilgrims were dissatisfied overall with a  $P$ -value of  $H_0:2c (.000)$  as per expenditure criterion reveals a significant gap in foodservice. Yet, customisation can help marketers minimise the remaining gaps in food services (Hoffman & Bateson, 2008).

Figure 2 shows the volatility of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in relation to spiritual tourism services. The spiritual tour operators have to attend to the tourists to make them delighted since the pilgrims are not simple tourists; they are spiritual tourists who have a good relationship with their Creator, Allah. As narrated from Abu Hurairah (May Allah be satisfied with him) Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him) said:

*The pilgrims are the special guests of Allah. Allah responds when they call and Allah pardons when they seek forgiveness (Ibne Majah: 2892).*

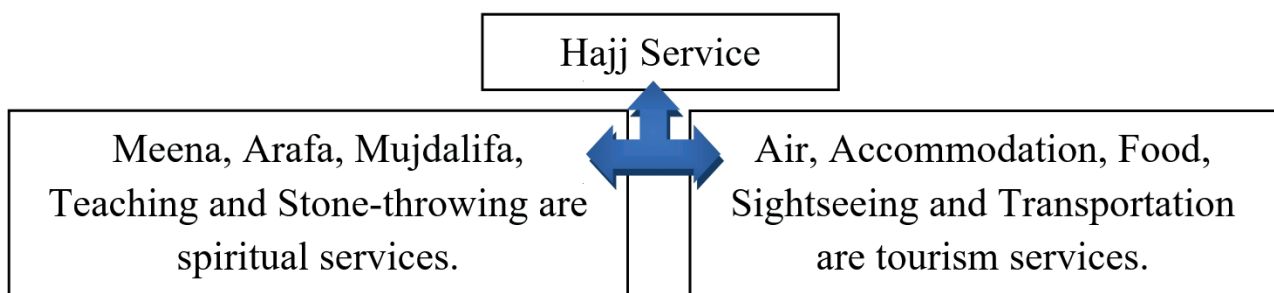
The marketers must try to fulfil the logistical expectations of pilgrims (Oliver, 1993, 1997) so that the devotees leave the holy land in a satisfied state.

Figure 3 shows that service marketers of pilgrimages of Hajj offer services characterised by spiritual and conventional attributes. The satisfaction of the pilgrims relies on the fulfilment of both spiritual and tourism offerings. The perfect accomplishment of the five spiritual rituals and the five touristic services, determines the success and mental happiness of the pilgrims who overall, require a smooth service delivery and minimisation of service gaps.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The pilgrims’ perceived satisfaction was highest in relation to air services followed by food, accommodation, Hajj training, sightseeing, stone-throwing, Arafa, Mujdalifa, Meena, and transportation services. On the other hand, the tourists were highly dissatisfied with transportation

**Figure 3: Spiritual and Tourism Services for Pilgrims**



services, Meena, Arafa, Mujdalifa, accommodation, stone-throwing, sightseeing, Hajj training, food, and air services. As such, satisfaction differed, and the tour operators were not capable enough to serve the ten points of services to a standard which would allow all pilgrims to experience Hajj equally. The relationship between satisfaction and service gaps is crucial based on gender for Arafa services. Additionally, the satisfaction of transportation services significantly differs in relation to what the male and female pilgrimages perceived. The spiritual tourists were very concerned about both Arafa and the transportation services, and thus, the Hajj tour operators need to be extra careful to satisfy the female pilgrims by delivering the expected Arafa and transportation services.

Considering expenditure, satisfaction with accommodation, food, Meena, Arafa, Mujdalifa, Hajj training, sightseeing, stone-throwing, and transportation services were significantly varied. The pilgrims correlate their expenditure with the services they receive during the Hajj tenure which the tour operator offers. Therefore, it is clear that tour operators must concentrate on the value of the cost to ensure the satisfaction of pilgrims.

Though the guests seem to be satisfied with the air services, service marketers might wish to make the satisfaction levels higher (Kotler *et al.*, 2013) - a suggestion here is that the authorities could provide some augmented services (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). For instance, the Muallim could inform pilgrims about the prayer times when they are on board their transport to Mecca. The tour operators must have arranged and managed comfortable transportation for the pilgrims. The marketers needed to make sure that the service components for the four days in Meena are satisfactory. With the assistance of Muallim, they might be able to minimise the service gaps.

Furthermore, arranging suitable sleeping arrangements at night at Mujdalifa can make the pilgrims happy. Regardless of accommodation services, the tour operators either can fulfil the promises they made that closer residence to Kabah and Mosque of the prophet will be arranged or not to make such a promise that is difficult to entertain. To make the stone-throwing ritual secure, service providers must guide the pilgrims to choose a safe time in less-crowded places.

The entire hajj journey is full of rituals that require specific rules and Shari'ah knowledge to perform. The pilgrims need profound learning, and they typically lack proper religious wisdom. Therefore, the tour operators must appoint an Islamic scholar to guide the pilgrims before and during the Hajj journey so that the pilgrims perform each ritual accurately. The spiritual tour operators have to attend to the tourists to make them delighted, as pilgrims are not the simple tourists, rather spiritual tourists who have a good relationship with their Creator, Allah the Almighty.

More empirical research with a larger sample is required to enrich the knowledge gaps in relation to pilgrimage services. Both the Hajj agencies and academics must put forward their insights to look into spiritual tourism, identifying and exploring the service gaps which the pilgrims perceive. At the same time, the pilgrims must know the guidelines to perform the pilgrimage rituals as prescribed in the Noble Qur'an and Sunnah.

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