




Article

Religious Tourists' Satisfaction with Services and Their Impacts on Spirituality in the Post-COVID-19 Era

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Abstract: Islamic pilgrimage has social, political, and economic benefits, but there are major challenges in the management of large numbers of groups at one time. This spiritually healing journey is likely to be influenced by the overall experience and the quality of logistical services provided while performing the rituals. In the postpandemic period, challenges were more apparent in preventing the spread of infection while maintaining acceptable levels of spiritual atmosphere. Pilgrims' characteristics might mediate or moderate the changes in spirituality based on individuals' satisfaction with service quality. In the current study, we investigated the potential service quality predictors of spiritual satisfaction among Muslim pilgrims and investigated the potential mediators and/or moderators of such relationships. The results showed that higher spirituality satisfaction scores were independently associated with enhanced satisfaction with medical services, religious guidance, and the overall Hajj experience. These relationships were not mediated by any demographic characteristics. The Hajj experience significantly moderated the relationship between satisfaction with religious guidance and spirituality. It is recommended that the national authorities should ensure the highest levels of spiritual satisfaction via improving medical and guidance services to achieve the spiritual healing of pilgrims.

Keywords: spiritual tourism; religious tourists; pilgrimage; service quality



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1. Introduction

Since the seventh century, Muslims from all over the world have been performing rituals associated with Hajj, the Arabic synonym for pilgrimage, every year. The Hajj is one of the oldest and largest religious gatherings of humans worldwide, where millions of Muslims travel to Mecca and its surrounding areas during distinct days of the respected month of Zul-Hijjah. During such a spiritual journey, every individual is considered equal without discrimination based on sex, race, or social status. Muslims participating in Hajj usually have an exceptional experience [1], such as peaceful feelings and tolerance, as well as promising educational and spiritual experiences [2,3]. Indeed, the Islamic journey of Hajj is a good chance for many pilgrims to heal physically and spiritually. Spiritual purification is specifically attained because Muslims have strong perceptions that Hajj purifies the individual from inside. While there are several interpretations of Hajj by Islamic thinkers and scholars, the spiritual meanings and outcomes have not been universally understood so far [4,5]. Nevertheless, the spiritual aspects of religious tourists play an important role in ensuring pilgrims' satisfaction.

However, this unique type of self-treatment of internal spiritual sickness might essentially be influenced by other external factors. Actually, there are several challenges for the management of Hajj rituals by the national authorities. In general, there are three phases for pilgrims to experience a successful and smooth spiritual journey [6]. These include the planning phase in the home city/country to help prepare the pilgrims before departure, the actual ritual phase in Mecca, and the final return to the home country/region. The second phase is the most important phase, where pilgrims arrive to the sacred places and are subjected to the challenges of overcrowded areas and physical constraints. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed an additional burden by increasing the chances of contracting the infection, particularly if health services are not adequately provided [7]. Within these considerations, spiritual tourists form general perceptions regarding their overall experience towards the provided services by Hajj packages, and this might have an impact on their spiritual experience. Consequently, the national authorities in Saudi Arabia are required to regularly monitor the managerial processes to spiritual tourists and the quality of the provided services that might improve their experience and enhance their satisfaction. It has previously been demonstrated that Hajj organizers around the world and within Saudi Arabia strive to satisfy pilgrims via improving the quality of services [6]. However, an important question remains unanswered: does the pilgrims' satisfaction with the provided services increase the spirituality? Moreover, is the impact of service quality on spirituality influenced by other external factors? The current study aimed to address these questions by investigating the relationship between pilgrims' satisfaction with the logistic services and the perceived satisfaction with spirituality during Hajj. Additionally, we sought to analyze the potential factors that may alter the relationship between service quality satisfaction and spirituality. These factors include the personal characteristics of pilgrims, the type of Hajj package, and the actual experience during Hajj.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Pilgrimage Tourism and Cultural Variations

Researchers from around the world are engaged in the cultural and religious backgrounds of pilgrimage, including sociologists, historians, anthropologists, geographers, and psychologists. In general, religious tourists are motivated by two main theoretical concepts, including the content theories (identifying the actual motivators and the associated factors) and process theories (the process of motivation and identifying the dynamic predictors of motivation) [8]. Both the process and content theories are culturally dependent, and the cultural and societal backgrounds are important factors in the understanding of motivation. Concomitantly, there has been a consensus that pilgrimage is a religious journey with two major elements: an external journey to the destination and an internal journey that entails a transformative spiritual experience [9]. Expectations related to enjoying magical or mystical experiences during the pilgrimage may have their origin in the destination image. Historically and currently, pilgrimage has been identified as an integrative journey that connects individuals from different ethnic and cultural groups. As such, the motivations of pilgrim tourists are likely influenced by the cultural image and cultural variations of tourists [10]. In an analysis of pilgrims' perceptions of the destination image of Kailash-Manasarover, Chakrabarty and Sadhukhan [11] found that pilgrims of varied ethnicities have varying destination image perceptions of Kailash circumambulation. The authors indicated that the perceived image of Mount Kailash had a unique form of spiritual magnetism that is inherently associated with two dominant spiritual symbols in the region, namely Shiva and Buddha. Therefore, it has been argued that religious tourism development includes a special form of cultural landscape that might have evolved in the context of pluralism [11].

2.2. Spirituality and Hajj Services

The unique features of Hajj constitute an integral form of worship with the whole of individuals' well-being, including Muslims' bodies, souls, minds, time, and possessions. Each Muslim have to assume the condition of being at God' service and disposal. Indeed,

the increasing interest in spirituality has affected several industries, including the tourism industry [12]. Joseph et al. [13] showed that the satisfaction with the spiritual aspects gained the highest scores among other parameters of satisfaction, and this observation has consistently been reported in other investigations [14,15]. Bozonelos and Raj [16] indicated that pilgrims heading to Mecca from the United States are usually motivated to attend the annual Hajj journey to fulfil spiritual enhancement and religious obligations and to adhere to the teachings of the Holy Quran. The most important spiritual aspects of pilgrims included hardship/sweetness, love, unity, and equality, and individuals are touched spiritually so they cry. Furthermore, pilgrims feel the existence of God and the intimate desire to be spiritually closer to God [16]. Basically, pilgrimage centers have been classified by Cohen [17] into formal and popular types. Formal pilgrimage centers mainly emphasize serious and sublime activities, and the primary motive for the pilgrimage journey is to perform distinct religious obligations. On the other hand, in a popular pilgrimage center, folksy and ludic activities are more apparent than other serious and sublime activities [17]. A more pragmatic approach was carried out by Wuthnow [18] to define the spiritual aspects of Hajj. The author conducted in-depth interviews with pilgrims of ten religious groups in the United States, and they stressed the changes that occurred in personal spirituality that shaped the religious life on the national level [18]. A spiritual tourist has been defined in other research articles in the literature as an individual who heads to a specific place out of the usual environment in order to satisfy his/her spiritual meaning or growth without a clear obligation from the religious or nonreligious perspectives. Alternatively, a spiritual tourist would travel to the destination within the divine context irrespective of the main reason for traveling [19,20]. However, for pilgrims who perform Hajj more than once (as traditionally required) and those who travel to other sacred places in Medina and other nonobligatory places, Hajj can be considered a spiritual journey out of the basic religious objectives. These observations are retrieved based on face-to-face interviews with stakeholders [19,20].

Collectively, spirituality is an important component of pilgrims' experience; however, there are potential factors that affect pilgrims' spirituality. The satisfaction with the quality of provided services during Hajj is a potentially significant factor. These services include the efforts or deeds offered by service providers to induce good impressions. By synthesizing the previous perspectives of various authors [21–25], we found that the most important services are related to food, accommodation, and transportation as well as the services pertinent to medical care and religious guidance. Food quality has been cited as an effective factor of tourist attraction and spiritual preservation among pilgrims heading to a Buddhist temple [26] as well as Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land [27]. The quality of food and accommodation (as a single combined factor) was also an antecedent predictor of the overall satisfaction of pilgrims at the Sabarimala destination in India. These perceived quality levels were primarily linked to satisfaction with the spiritual atmosphere [13]. Interestingly, health and sanitation services and transportation were also significant predictors of spiritual satisfaction in the Indian study [13]. Finally, it is also important to ensure the optimal levels of guidance at the sacred places to support the spiritual atmosphere. These guiding materials can be provided in written or electronic forms, and some Hajj packages employ authentic scholars to guide pilgrims before and after the pilgrimage. Facilitating the religious guidance provides adequate knowledge to perform the rituals safely and correctly [28].

Overall, based on the above observations, we hypothesize the following:

H1: *Satisfaction with Hajj services can directly and significantly impact pilgrims' satisfaction with the spiritual aspects.*

H1a: *Satisfaction with food services can directly and significantly impact pilgrims' satisfaction with the spiritual aspects.*

H1b: *Satisfaction with transport services can directly and significantly impact pilgrims' satisfaction with the spiritual aspects.*

H1c: *Satisfaction with accommodation services can directly and significantly impact pilgrims' satisfaction with the spiritual aspects.*

H1d: *Satisfaction with medical services can directly and significantly impact pilgrims' satisfaction with the spiritual aspects.*

H1e: *Satisfaction with religious guidance can directly and significantly impact pilgrims' satisfaction with the spiritual aspects.*

2.3. The Concept of Mediation and Moderation Analyses

A causal relationship is an integral part of many studies in social science, health, and psychology. A causal model entails a postulated path about how changes in a given variable would result in changes in another [29]. Moderation and mediation are theories for understanding and refining causal relationships. They are therefore used to explain how a cause would lead to an effect [30]. Understanding the effects of moderators and mediators requires performing an integrated research plan based on a theoretical framework, selecting a robust research design, analyzing the data, and obtaining reliable conclusions. Obtaining insights into cause-and-effect relationships would not only verify the hypothesized framework as postulated by the authors but would also reveal practical conclusions about the true and direct effects of the potential causal variables [31].

Mediation and moderation effects are inherently related to a third variable that changes the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable. A mediator is a separate variable that links these independent and dependent variables, and a mediation model would explain the process of how and why cause and effect take place [32]. As a consequence, the mediation effect includes how an independent variable might cause the mediator, which in turn would cause the dependent variable. A mediator would therefore act via an indirect effect (average causal mediation). On the other hand, a moderator modifies the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable. The moderation model explains “when” and “for whom” the independent variable can strengthen or weaken the relationship between the cause and effect [32,33]. The moderation effect is commonly related to the interaction effect, where it can alter the strength of the causal association.

2.4. The Roles of Demographic Characteristics and Hajj Experience as Potential Mediators/Moderators

Significant literature is readily available on the business and nonbusiness models of Hajj, where the religious importance and the ritual processes have been a matter of research [2,34,35]. The perceptions of the spiritual aspects during Hajj may vary according to specific individual and logistic characteristics, which would inevitably influence the spiritual experience. These might include the personal demographic characteristics, the type of Hajj package, and the personal experience of Hajj. For example, Haq and Jackson [36] examined the aspects of spiritual tourism among Australian and Pakistani Muslims residing in Australia. The authors found discrepancies in individual perceptions towards several aspects of Hajj. While pilgrims from Pakistan perceived Hajj as a religious duty, pilgrims from Australia understood pilgrimage as a spiritual adventure and achievement [36]. In another study, Belgian Muslims residing in Turkey also perceived Hajj as an obligation, although some individuals headed to Mecca with other motivations, such as seeking a spiritual path, a purified mind, or the sense of returning home [37]. American pilgrims have also expressed their satisfaction with travel agents and the journey experience, but they showed concerns about the commercialization of pilgrimage and local price hikes at the time of Hajj [3]. In Turkey, female pilgrims who had visited the sacred places in Saudi Arabia were initially hesitant to express their concerns, given the spiritual and sacred nature of the journey; nevertheless, they eventually mentioned that the main issues during the Hajj journey included the hot weather, hygiene, visa processing, and overcrowding in distinct areas where pilgrims could easily contract infectious diseases or be crushed [38]. Although Hajj is a compulsive cornerstone of Islam, of which the demand has always exceeded the

supply, Haq and Jackson [36] suggested that the Hajj experience is an essential factor that mediates pilgrims' satisfaction with spirituality. This is because any deficiencies in service quality by Hajj packages would have detrimental impacts on the personal experience of spiritual tourists; hence, it would decrease the frequency of future travels and convey negative messages to other Muslims towards the spiritual journeys. Therefore, modern consumer behavior theories are applicable to this model of spiritual tourism, where products and services should be adequately designated to match the philosophies, experiences, and characteristics of pilgrims from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Overall, we hypothesized that there are distinct mediators and/or moderators of the relationship between service satisfaction and spirituality; this can be summarized as follows:

H2: Demographic characteristics and Hajj experience mediate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H2a: Pilgrims' genders mediate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H2b: Pilgrims' ages mediate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H2c: Pilgrims' nationalities mediate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H2d: Pilgrims' marital statuses mediate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H2e: Pilgrims' educational levels mediate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H2f: The type of the Hajj package mediates the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H2g: The Hajj experience mediates the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H3: Demographic characteristics and the Hajj experience moderate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H3a: Pilgrims' genders moderate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H3b: Pilgrims' ages moderate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H3c: Pilgrims' nationalities moderate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H3d: Pilgrims' marital statuses moderate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H3e: Pilgrims' educational levels moderate the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H3f: The type of the Hajj package moderates the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

H3g: The Hajj experience moderates the relationship between the satisfaction with Hajj services and spirituality.

The main theme of the hypothesized model is depicted in Figure 1.

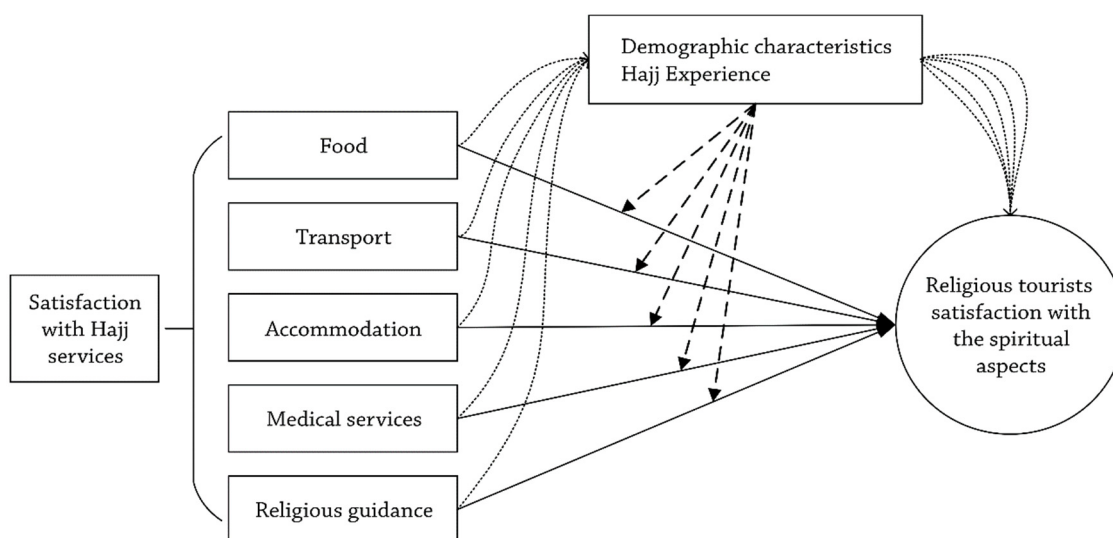


Figure 1. The hypothesized model of the current study. Solid arrows indicate direct relationships, dotted arrows indicate mediation paths, and dashed arrows indicate moderation paths.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Study Sample and Procedures

The methods used in the current study were described in detail in an earlier investigation [39]. In brief, we collected data from domestic religious tourists who headed to Mecca for Hajj in 2021. Domestic pilgrims were allowed to participate in the current study because of the strict health measures that were put in place after the COVID-19 outbreak, where the national authorities sought to limit that particular Hajj season to Saudi citizens and local residents within Saudi Arabia. To better organize the process of rituals, an official website was developed by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah to facilitate Hajj registration. Each pilgrim had to select a suitable Hajj package as offered by a number of licensed agencies. The services provided by these agencies matched those involved in the thematic analysis used in the current study (food, transportation, etc.). Pilgrims were approached via a structured online survey, which was developed on Google Forms and distributed via the authorized agencies.

3.2. Study Tool

The survey used was meticulously developed based on previous studies [28,40–43]. It comprised four domains: demographic characteristics, satisfaction with Hajj services, the Hajj experience, and satisfaction with spirituality. The latter was not included in the analysis of our previous study [39]. In general, the demographic characteristics domain included seven items. The Hajj experience was evaluated by three items, and the responses were collected on a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Satisfaction with Hajj services included 29 items, and they were categorized into five subdomains, including food services (seven items), accommodation (four items), transportation (four items), religious guidance (seven items), and medical services (seven items). Finally, the satisfaction with the spiritual aspects was quantified by three items. The responses to the satisfaction domains were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (from extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied).

3.3. Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using RStudio (RStudio, PBC., version 4.1.1, Boston, MA, USA). Categorical data were expressed using frequencies and percentages. While we previously validated a simpler form of the model [39], we sought to revalidate the new model after the addition of pilgrims' satisfaction with the spiritual aspects. This was performed by constructing a confirmatory factor analysis to explore the discriminant validity

and convergence validity. A structural equation model (SEM) was fitted, and the following parameters were demonstrated: The Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR). Bivariate correlations between different service quality domains and pilgrims’ experiences were assessed using Spearman’s correlation tests, and the outcomes were visually assessed in a correlation matrix. To obtain insight into the independent associations between pilgrims’ satisfaction with the spiritual aspects and other potential predictors, we constructed a multivariate linear regression model using the spiritual aspects score as a dependent variable, and the following variables were incorporated as independent variables: demographic characteristics, Hajj package, Hajj experience, and pilgrims’ satisfaction with the provided services.

We used the mediation package in R to conduct the mediation analysis [44]. Causal mediation estimates were demonstrated as average causal mediation effects (ACMEs), which were then contrasted to the average direct effects (ADEs) of the independent variables on the spiritual aspects (dependent variables). The analysis employed a bootstrapping method (100 simulations in a quasi-Bayesian Monte Carlo method) to calculate the uncertainty estimates. Furthermore, we used White’s estimators, consistent with heteroscedasticity [44]. For the moderation analysis, we ran multivariate linear regression analyses by adding relevant interaction terms between a given moderator and the independent variable of interest. The results of the regression models are presented as Beta coefficients and their respective 95% confidence intervals (95% CIs). Statistical significance was considered at $p < 0.05$.

4. Results

4.1. The Outcomes of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In the current study, we employed a maximum-likelihood approach in the SEM. This method has been cited as a mainstay approach in studies with medium-sized samples in order to induce standard efficiency indicators [45]. In order to fit the SEM with reliable indicators, we removed two items from the experience domain. Additionally, we omitted three items from the food subdomain, two items from the transportation subdomain, two items from the accommodation subdomain, two items from the medical services subdomain, and one item from the religious guidance subdomain. The SEM showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 339.6$, degrees of freedom (df) = 209, TLI = 0.924, CFI = 0.937, SRMR = 0.064, RMSEA = 0.054, $p < 0.0001$). Additionally, as indicated by the standardized factor loadings (SFLs), the items of the questionnaire were statistically significantly loaded under each domain, and the domains showed good internal consistency values (Cronbach’s alpha) and composite reliability measurements (Table 1).

To further assess the discriminant validity, we developed a correlation matrix, as depicted in Figure 2. The results revealed that the correlation coefficients were generally lower than the square roots of the average variance extracted values, which corroborates the validation of our model (Figure 2).

Table 1. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis.

| Domains and Items | SFL | AVE | C α | CR |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------------|------|
| Satisfaction with food services | | 0.53 | 0.74 | 0.69 |
| Freshness of food | 0.82 | | | |
| Taste and flavor of food | 0.62 | | | |
| Satisfaction with the transportation | | 0.58 | 0.58 | 0.72 |
| Bus lighting | 0.95 | | | |
| Bus heating | 0.51 | | | |
| Satisfaction with the accommodation | | 0.64 | 0.78 | 0.78 |
| Equipping the tents with gypsum board | 0.74 | | | |
| Air conditioning | 0.86 | | | |

Table 1. Cont.

| Domains and Items | SFL | AVE | C α | CR |
|---|------|------|------------|------|
| Satisfaction with medical services | | 0.59 | 0.87 | 0.88 |
| Improved ventilation | 0.79 | | | |
| Routine cleaning to help maintain healthy facilities | 0.85 | | | |
| Medical facilities' equipment | 0.79 | | | |
| Availability of sterilizers | 0.78 | | | |
| Availability of ambulance centers | 0.64 | | | |
| Satisfaction with the religious guidance | | 0.57 | 0.89 | 0.89 |
| Tour guides had knowledge of Islamic culture | 0.68 | | | |
| Tour guides were capable of solving problems and conflicts that emerged from the arrangements | 0.74 | | | |
| Tour guides were polite | 0.68 | | | |
| Tour guides were able to cooperate with other service staff, e.g., driver | 0.83 | | | |
| Tour guides were able to handle pilgrims' complaints | 0.80 | | | |
| Tour guides were able to cope with unexpected urgent incidents | 0.80 | | | |
| Pilgrims' experience | | 0.50 | 0.73 | 0.75 |
| Searching for forgiveness | 0.83 | | | |
| Spiritual heading | 0.74 | | | |
| Devotion to God | 0.53 | | | |
| Satisfaction with achieving the spiritual aspects | | 0.50 | 0.73 | 0.75 |
| Searching for forgiveness | 0.81 | | | |
| Spiritual heading | 0.75 | | | |
| Devotion to God | 0.55 | | | |

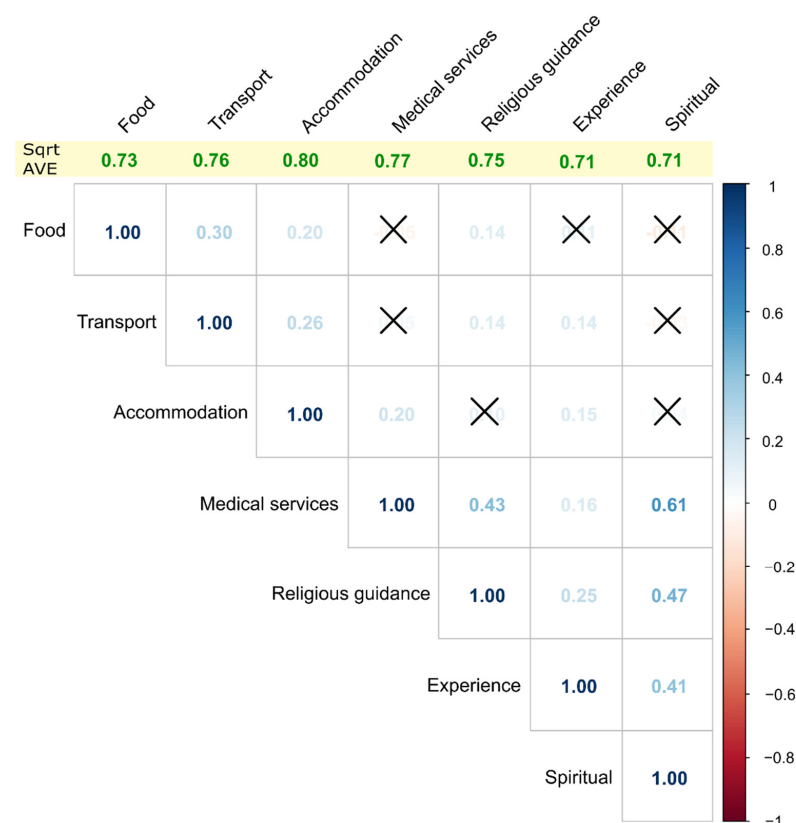


Figure 2. A correlogram depicting a correlation matrix of the coefficients between different constructs. Blue indicates positive correlations, and the color intensity is proportional to the coefficients. Coefficients masked with 'X' symbols indicate insignificant correlations. The square roots of the average variance extracted (Sqrt AVE) are highlighted in yellow.

4.2. Independent Predictors of Pilgrims' Satisfaction with the Spiritual Aspects

The constructed multivariate regression model was well-fit to the data ($F(19,193) = 13.31$, $p < 0.0001$), and the loaded independent variables explained 52.5% of the variance in the

satisfaction with spiritual aspects. The dependent variable was not predicted by any of the demographic characteristics or the Hajj packages. However, higher perceived Hajj experiences were independently associated with better perceived satisfaction with the spiritual aspects ($\beta = 0.36$, 95% CI, 0.25 to 0.48, $p < 0.0001$). Additionally, higher perceived satisfaction with the spiritual aspects was predicted by higher perceived satisfaction with the medical services ($\beta = 0.48$, 95% CI, 0.36 to 0.59, $p < 0.0001$) and religious guidance ($\beta = 0.19$, 95% CI, 0.08 to 0.29, $p < 0.0001$, Table 2).

Table 2. Results of the multivariate regression analysis for the predictors of pilgrims' satisfaction with the spiritual aspects.

| Parameter | Category | Beta | 95% CI | p-Value |
|-------------------|--|-------|-------------|---------|
| Age | 18–25 | — | — | |
| | 26–40 | −0.02 | −0.20, 0.15 | 0.787 |
| | 41–65 | −0.05 | −0.27, 0.17 | 0.669 |
| Gender | Female | — | — | |
| | Male | −0.12 | −0.29, 0.05 | 0.161 |
| Nationality | Saudi | — | — | |
| | Non-Saudi | −0.05 | −0.21, 0.12 | 0.572 |
| Marital status | Single | — | — | |
| | Married | −0.16 | −0.38, 0.06 | 0.154 |
| | Other | 0 | −0.16, 0.15 | 0.970 |
| Educational level | No degree | — | — | |
| | Secondary School | −0.18 | −0.87, 0.52 | 0.612 |
| | Diploma | −0.03 | −0.66, 0.61 | 0.937 |
| | Bachelor | 0.18 | −0.31, 0.68 | 0.463 |
| | Master | 0.04 | −0.30, 0.37 | 0.821 |
| | PhD | 0 | −0.22, 0.23 | 0.978 |
| Hajj package | Camp Hospitality Package | — | — | |
| | Distinguished camp hospitality package | −0.04 | −0.40, 0.32 | 0.813 |
| | Towers special package | 0.11 | −0.26, 0.49 | 0.559 |
| Hajj Experience | Numeric | 0.36 | 0.25, 0.48 | <0.0001 |
| Services | Food | −0.12 | −0.22, 0.01 | 0.058 |
| | Transport | −0.08 | −0.19, 0.03 | 0.175 |
| | Accommodation | −0.05 | −0.15, 0.06 | 0.385 |
| | Medical services | 0.48 | 0.36, 0.59 | <0.0001 |
| | Religious guidance | 0.19 | 0.08, 0.29 | <0.0001 |

CI: confidence interval.

The results of the mediation analysis corroborated the statistical significance of the impacts of two service domains (medical services and religious guidance) on the spiritual aspects of pilgrims. This was apparent in the significant results of ADEs, which indicates the direct effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable irrespective of the mediator. However, by considering the potential mediation effects (ACME), the analysis showed no statistically significant mediation effect of demographic characteristics, Hajj packages, or Hajj experience on the relationship between the aforementioned independent and dependent variables (Table 3). Since the total effects (TEs) of medical services and religious guidance remained significant, we conclude that the significant impacts of these particular service domains are attributed to direct effects rather than a mediating path.

The results of the moderation analysis showed that the Hajj package significantly moderated the relationship between satisfaction with the accommodation and satisfaction with the spiritual aspects ($\beta = 0.21$, 95% CI, 0.03 to 0.39, $p = 0.016$). Furthermore, the impact of religious guidance on individuals' satisfaction with the spiritual aspects was significantly moderated by the Hajj experience ($\beta = 0.16$, 95% CI, 0.06 to 0.26, $p = 0.002$). Other demographic and Hajj-related characteristics did not have moderating roles on the relationship between Hajj services and the spiritual satisfaction (Table 4).

Table 3. Results of the causal mediation analysis for the potential mediators of the relationship between pilgrims' satisfaction with five service domains and their satisfaction with the spiritual aspects.

| Parameter | Category | Food | | Transport | | Accommodation | | Medical Services | | Religious Guidance | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|
| | | B (95% CI) | p | B (95% CI) | p | B (95% CI) | p | B (95% CI) | p | B (95% CI) | p |
| Age | ACME | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.01) | 0.840 | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.01) | 0.780 | 0.00 (−0.02 to 0.01) | 0.720 | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.01) | 0.760 | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.01) | 0.860 |
| | ADE | −0.09 (−0.18 to 0.01) | 0.080 | −0.05 (−0.18 to 0.05) | 0.320 | −0.04 (−0.14 to 0.06) | 0.480 | 0.51 (0.41 to 0.60) | <0.0001 | 0.23 (0.11 to 0.37) | <0.0001 |
| | TE | −0.09 (−0.19 to 0.01) | 0.080 | −0.05 (−0.18 to 0.05) | 0.340 | −0.04 (−0.14 to 0.07) | 0.480 | 0.51 (0.41 to 0.60) | <0.0001 | 0.23 (0.11 to 0.36) | <0.0001 |
| Educational level | ACME | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.02) | 0.740 | −0.01 (−0.02 to 0.01) | 0.360 | 0.00 (−0.02 to 0.01) | 0.820 | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.01) | 0.960 | 0.01 (−0.01 to 0.03) | 0.240 |
| | ADE | −0.09 (−0.21 to 0.01) | 0.060 | −0.06 (−0.16 to 0.03) | 0.300 | −0.04 (−0.16 to 0.07) | 0.520 | 0.51 (0.40 to 0.60) | <0.0001 | 0.25 (0.11 to 0.41) | 0.020 |
| | TE | −0.09 (−0.21 to 0.02) | 0.060 | −0.06 (−0.17 to 0.02) | 0.240 | −0.03 (−0.16 to 0.07) | 0.500 | 0.51 (0.41 to 0.60) | <0.0001 | 0.26 (0.11 to 0.42) | 0.020 |
| Gender | ACME | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.02) | 0.680 | 0.01 (0.00 to 0.03) | 0.400 | −0.01 (−0.04 to 0.01) | 0.180 | −0.01 (−0.02 to 0.01) | 0.420 | 0.01 (0.00 to 0.03) | 0.280 |
| | ADE | −0.10 (−0.19 to 0.00) | 0.060 | −0.05 (−0.14 to 0.03) | 0.280 | −0.03 (−0.11 to 0.05) | 0.700 | 0.51 (0.39 to 0.61) | <0.0001 | 0.23 (0.08 to 0.36) | 0.020 |
| | TE | −0.10 (−0.18 to 0.00) | 0.060 | −0.05 (−0.14 to 0.04) | 0.420 | −0.04 (−0.13 to 0.04) | 0.380 | 0.50 (0.38 to 0.61) | <0.0001 | 0.23 (0.08 to 0.37) | 0.020 |
| Nationality | ACME | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.01) | 0.980 | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.02) | 0.800 | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.01) | 0.580 | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.02) | 0.900 | 0.00 (−0.02 to 0.01) | 0.620 |
| | ADE | −0.09 (−0.17 to 0.02) | 0.120 | −0.07 (−0.18 to 0.05) | 0.180 | −0.03 (−0.13 to 0.08) | 0.540 | 0.52 (0.41 to 0.62) | <0.0001 | 0.24 (0.12 to 0.38) | <0.0001 |
| | TE | −0.09 (−0.17 to 0.02) | 0.120 | −0.07 (−0.18 to 0.05) | 0.240 | −0.03 (−0.13 to 0.08) | 0.520 | 0.52 (0.42 to 0.63) | <0.0001 | 0.24 (0.12 to 0.38) | <0.0001 |
| Marital status | ACME | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.02) | 0.680 | 0.00 (−0.02 to 0.01) | 0.680 | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.02) | 0.860 | −0.02 (−0.05 to 0.01) | 0.180 | 0.01 (−0.01 to 0.03) | 0.380 |
| | ADE | −0.10 (−0.20 to 0.09) | 0.080 | −0.07 (−0.18 to 0.04) | 0.260 | −0.03 (−0.14 to 0.07) | 0.520 | 0.51 (0.42 to 0.62) | <0.0001 | 0.25 (0.12 to 0.36) | <0.0001 |
| | TE | −0.10 (−0.21 to 0.09) | 0.080 | −0.07 (−0.19 to 0.04) | 0.260 | −0.03 (−0.13 to 0.06) | 0.580 | 0.49 (0.39 to 0.61) | <0.0001 | 0.26 (0.12 to 0.37) | <0.0001 |
| Hajj package | ACME | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.01) | 0.800 | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.02) | 0.520 | −0.01 (−0.02 to 0.01) | 0.380 | 0.00 (−0.01 to 0.01) | 0.860 | 0.00 (0.00 to 0.02) | 0.440 |
| | ADE | −0.09 (−0.17 to 0.00) | 0.060 | −0.06 (−0.16 to 0.04) | 0.300 | −0.03 (−0.14 to 0.06) | 0.500 | 0.51 (0.40 to 0.61) | <0.0001 | 0.23 (0.09 to 0.38) | 0.020 |
| | TE | −0.09 (−0.18 to 0.00) | 0.060 | −0.06 (−0.16 to 0.04) | 0.320 | −0.04 (−0.15 to 0.06) | 0.440 | 0.51 (0.40 to 0.61) | <0.0001 | 0.24 (0.09 to 0.39) | <0.0001 |
| Hajj Experience | ACME | 0.02 (−0.02 to 0.06) | 0.520 | 0.02 (−0.02 to 0.06) | 0.280 | 0.02 (−0.03 to 0.07) | 0.240 | 0.01 (−0.04 to 0.06) | 0.820 | 0.06 (0.00 to 0.13) | 0.060 |
| | ADE | −0.10 (−0.20 to 0.04) | 0.070 | −0.08 (−0.16 to 0.01) | 0.100 | −0.06 (−0.14 to 0.03) | 0.180 | 0.49 (0.41 to 0.57) | <0.0001 | 0.17 (0.07 to 0.29) | <0.0001 |
| | TE | −0.08 (−0.18 to 0.02) | 0.100 | −0.06 (−0.15 to 0.02) | 0.160 | −0.04 (−0.12 to 0.06) | 0.460 | 0.50 (0.39 to 0.59) | <0.0001 | 0.23 (0.12 to 0.37) | <0.0001 |

ACME: average causal mediation effect; ADE: average direct effect; CI: confidence interval; TE: total effect.

Table 4. Results of the moderation analysis of the relationship between pilgrims' satisfaction with five service domains and their satisfaction with the spiritual aspects.

| Parameter | Food | p | Transport | p | Accommodation | p | Medical Services | p | Religious Guidance | p |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
| Age | −0.06 (−0.18 to 0.06) | 0.310 | 0.01 (−0.13 to 0.15) | 0.900 | −0.09 (−0.21 to 0.03) | 0.150 | −0.05 (−0.17 to 0.07) | 0.390 | −0.02 (−0.14 to 0.10) | 0.769 |
| Educational level | 0.00 (−0.12 to 0.12) | 0.993 | −0.01 (−0.11 to 0.09) | 0.843 | 0.06 (−0.06 to 0.18) | 0.290 | 0.03 (−0.09 to 0.15) | 0.661 | −0.01 (−0.11 to 0.09) | 0.847 |
| Gender | −0.10 (−0.28 to 0.08) | 0.250 | 0.03 (−0.17 to 0.23) | 0.765 | 0.03 (−0.17 to 0.23) | 0.765 | 0.10 (−0.10 to 0.30) | 0.326 | −0.09 (−0.27 to 0.09) | 0.312 |
| Nationality | −0.07 (−0.25 to 0.11) | 0.450 | 0.09 (−0.11 to 0.29) | 0.356 | −0.08 (−0.26 to 0.10) | 0.416 | 0.09 (−0.11 to 0.29) | 0.365 | 0.11 (−0.09 to 0.31) | 0.277 |
| Marital status | −0.02 (−0.16 to 0.12) | 0.814 | −0.04 (−0.22 to 0.14) | 0.656 | 0.02 (−0.14 to 0.18) | 0.755 | 0.06 (−0.12 to 0.24) | 0.533 | −0.04 (−0.22 to 0.14) | 0.655 |
| Hajj package | 0.13 (−0.05 to 0.31) | 0.150 | 0.09 (−0.11 to 0.29) | 0.402 | 0.21 (0.03 to 0.39) | 0.016 | 0.03 (−0.15 to 0.21) | 0.771 | 0.02 (−0.18 to 0.22) | 0.830 |
| Hajj experience | 0.10 (−0.04 to 0.24) | 0.138 | −0.03 (−0.17 to 0.11) | 0.699 | −0.02 (−0.14 to 0.10) | 0.708 | 0.03 (−0.11 to 0.17) | 0.694 | 0.16 (0.06 to 0.26) | 0.002 |

5. Discussion

Spiritual tourists pursue a unique sense of meaning and distinct paradigms of purpose and identity. Going through a good experience would lead to spiritual and personal renewal and revitalization [46,47]. It is therefore important to assess the factors that influence pilgrims' spiritual journey and the potential variables that might alter such a relationship. Interestingly, the analysis of the current study showed no significant mediators of the relationship between satisfaction with services and pilgrims' spirituality. The lack of indirect effects of the variables under investigation (which were formerly assumed to be mediators), along with the existence of statistically significant direct relationships between the independent and dependent variables, emphasized the correlation between spirituality and satisfaction with medical services and religious guidance. Although the lack of significant mediators might limit our understanding of these associations, we could conclude that the observed correlations are applicable to all demographic classes of pilgrims and all types of Hajj packages. However, we emphasize that these results were exclusively based on domestic religious tourists who were accessed during strict lockdown measures. Therefore, we believe that the current findings may be interpreted with caution for the international pilgrims, and this might be an interesting topic for future research.

In our study, the findings stressed the role of religious guidance as a significant causal factor of higher scores of spirituality. Guiding, or "guided trips", involves performing an activity to support the visitors with a perspective of what took place during certain periods in the past [48]. Generally speaking, the roles of guides fall under two main themes. First, guidance may be an educational activity aiming to focus significance and relations by informing the guided individuals using direct experience and illustrative methods as opposed to simply providing factual information [49]. The first theme might have accounted for a great proportion of the increase in pilgrims' spirituality in the present study since the quality of interpretation has been cited as an essential factor for subsequent satisfaction [50]. Interpretation may be seen from two perspectives: personal contact (services that entail an interaction with an interpreter, such as informal discussions and guided tours) and nonpersonal services (media services, illustrations, electronic media guidance, etc.) [51,52]. Concerning the second theme, the guide may play a role as an intermediary, which ensures pilgrims' physical access to the anticipated places and attendance to the sites of interaction. The impact of the second theme might also be evident since it raises the overall satisfaction via confirming the awareness of pilgrims (cognitive access) and empathy (emotional access) [53,54].

We also revealed a significant impact of the Hajj experience (as a moderator) on the relationship between satisfaction with religious guidance and spirituality. In other words, the higher the experience score, the stronger the relationship between religious guidance and spirituality. During Hajj, pilgrims seek to touch the sacred by physically visiting the religious destinations to satisfy their profound religious values [55]. These intangible values are expectedly influenced by the tangible experience during pilgrims' visits. It seems that going through a better experience during pilgrimage would enhance the spiritual atmosphere (directly), and this experience would help support the receipt of guidance information (indirectly).

From another perspective, health services had a significant impact on the spiritual aspects of religious tourists. Actually, the national government usually dedicates a high budget to support the pilgrimage season. Accordingly, healthcare services are free to all pilgrims [56]. Saudi officials offer health and sanitation logistical services in transportation and accommodation. For example, pilgrims stay in tents made of a fire-resistant fiberglass material, and the authorities ensure that pilgrims receive safe water with continuous monitoring of sanitation supervision and proper waste disposal [57]. More recently, in the post-COVID-19-pandemic era, the Saudi government has launched a number of e-government applications, which are promising legitimate tools for providing faster and cost-effective services and innovative resources [58]. While these applications provide

informative guidance on health measures, they also allow the tracking of pilgrims' health throughout their journey [59].

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study is not without limitations. We distributed a structured survey with a cross-sectional design, and this might limit our understanding of the causal relationships between variables. The questionnaire items were closed questions, and thus no open answers were obtained from participants to gain more insights about their satisfaction attributes. Accordingly, we believe that future studies might implement mixed designs with open and closed questions to efficiently collect reliable data from pilgrims. An important limitation of the current study is that the responses were retrieved from domestic pilgrims, which might limit the generalizability of the outcomes to international pilgrims with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the obtained results might not be applicable to religious tourists from other religious regions and sacred sites. Finally, we did not investigate the role of cultural and ethnic variation on tourists' perceptions of the destination image and brand. These are crucial elements in religious tourism research, particularly from the semiotic perspective. It is therefore necessary to conduct future studies that assess the tourists' satisfaction attributes in the context of national and international pilgrims, preferably including tourists from multiple destinations. Additionally, studies should explore the impact of city symbols and signs (city branding) on the destination image. The significance of such a semiotic study should be related to the three main elements of research, including the iconic signs, indexical signs, and symbolic signs [60].

6. Conclusions and Implications

Pilgrimage occupies an exceptional place in the studies of tourism and religion. Islamic pilgrimage in Mecca has unique challenges in the management of overcrowded groups of pilgrims while maintaining adequate health measures, the highest levels of services quality, an enhanced Hajj experience, and increased spirituality satisfaction. In the current study, we showed that the spiritual satisfaction of domestic pilgrims was independently associated with an enhanced Hajj experience as well as high levels of satisfaction with medical services and religious guidance. The relationship between service quality and spiritual satisfaction was not significantly mediated by any of the demographic characteristics or the Hajj experience. However, the Hajj experience significantly moderated the correlation between religious guidance and spirituality satisfaction.

This article contributes to the literature both practically and theoretically. Practically, we add to the understanding of the drivers of better satisfaction attributes, considering spiritual tourists as consumers who have subjective levels of experience during their journeys. Theoretically, we quantified the levels of satisfaction among national pilgrims. We also provide a reliable instrument that was validated among the national pilgrims to integrate five major domains of satisfaction with services and spirituality into a single model. While little is known in the literature about the domains under investigation, especially among Muslim pilgrims, we believe that our results have uniquely contributed to an important area of research. That is, the findings of the current study will help to focus on selected services to increase spiritual involvement. In line with the national Saudi vision [61], it is recommended to augment the logistical service and religious guidance approaches and health-related measures to support the overall experience of pilgrims and increase their potential for spiritual healing. The development of a unified system for health monitoring may also be beneficial in increasing satisfaction levels. National authorities may also invest in the electronic methods of guidance in order to improve the Hajj experience and enhance the destination image among international pilgrims.

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M.A.A. and S.T.; supervision, T.H.H. and A.E.S.; project administration, T.H.H. and A.E.S.; funding acquisition, T.H.H. and A.H.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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