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Cover Page Footnote

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The Impact of Smart Media Technologies on the Spiritual Experience of Hajj Pilgrims

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Over the last three decades, information and communication technologies have advanced rapidly and continue to do so. Nowadays, the popularity and spread of so-called Smart Media Technologies (SMT) is not only transforming the lives of tourists around the world in general, but is impacting on the experience of pilgrims on the Hajj in Saudi Arabia in particular. Indeed, the Saudi government has undertaken a number of initiatives to encourage the use of SMT in the religious tourism industry. Specifically, the availability of SMT services such as Hajj Apps, E-bracelets for pilgrims, free WIFI and mobile charging services in Grand Mosques (in both Makkah and Madinah), dedicated social media websites, and the ability of pilgrims to take advantage of smartphone activities are facilitating and enhancing their technological and social experience of the Hajj. However, the introduction of 'high-tech' into the Hajj is arguably impacting on the nature of the pilgrims' experience, challenging its fundamental spirituality by transforming it into something more akin to a 'cyber experience', an experience which competes with and jeopardises the principles of the Islamic religious journey of the Hajj with its focus on worship, simplicity and non-ostentatious behaviour. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore how the spiritual experience of pilgrims may be influenced by the availability and use of various SMT services. The findings suggest ways in which these technological services both enhance and impact negatively on the pilgrim's spiritual experience.

Key Words: smart media technologies, the Hajj, 'smart' pilgrims, smartphones and tourism, Hajj apps.

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, the world has experienced a digital revolution. Rapid advances in digital information and communication technology have fundamentally transformed social and commercial life, not least through the increasingly pervasive availability and use of mobile communication technologies in general and smartphones in particular. For example, although the world's first 'smartphone', the Simon Personal Communicator, was produced in the mid-1990s (Tweedie, 2015), Apple's first IPhone was only launched in 2007, when a total of 122 million smartphones of all makes were sold to end-users. By 2016, 1.5 billion smartphones were sold worldwide, double the number sold in 2012 (Statista, 2017), and it is now estimated that not only does around two-thirds of the world population own a mobile phone, but also that more than half of all web traffic is generated through such devices.

As is widely recognised, the increasing use of, and connectivity afforded by smartphones and the other technologies they support, including applications and social media platforms, has impacted significantly on society and social relations (Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu and Sey, 2009; Katz, 2008). Moreover, such use of what may be collectively described as Smart Media Technologies (SMT) has brought both benefits and challenges to many aspects of social life in general, whilst participation in particular activities, including tourism, has also benefited significantly from SMT (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014; Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang & Koo, 2015). For example, Benckendorff, Sheldon and Fesenmaier (2014) list a number of ways in which tourism is influenced positively by SMT, from facilitating access to services to augmenting the tourist experience. It is not surprising; therefore, that tourism providers and destinations alike have embraced the digital revolution, seeking to enhance their business competitiveness through the opportunities afforded by SMT (Boes, Buhalis & Inversini, 2015).

One specific manifestation of tourism that has witnessed the adoption of SMT is the Hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia (Brdesee, Corbitt & Pittayachawan, 2013). Just a decade ago, public and private telecommunication providers alike in Saudi Arabia lacked access to SMT services. However, the Saudi government took steps to liberalise the information technology sector and to increase private sector investment in it, the aim being to increase the national level of Internet use and computer penetration rate to 30% by 2013 (Amro, 2012). In response, both private and public operators in Saudi Arabia adopted new SMT and invested heavily in the telecommunications sector (Aldogily, 2009; Alzhrani, 2009) whilst, more specifically, the Saudi government has in recent years taken a number of initiatives to promote the use of SMT within the country's religious tourism industry, encouraging businesses to adopt SMT innovations not only to facilitate e-commerce but also, in a sense, to create 'smart pilgrims' (Majid, 2016). As a consequence, a number of SMT services, such as Hajj Apps (Naar, 2015), e-bracelets for pilgrims, access to free Wi-Fi in the Grand Mosques in both Makkah and Madinah, and the availability of dedicated social media websites, are facilitating pilgrims and enhancing their social experience of the Hajj (BBC, 2016).

Despite the advantages offered by SMT services, however, at the same time the authentic nature of the pilgrim's experience is arguably being diluted. In other words, since the Hajj has become 'high-tech', the fundamental spirituality of the pilgrim's experience is arguably being transformed into something more akin to a 'cyber experience', an experience which competes with and challenges the principles of the Islamic religious journey of the Hajj with its focus on worship and simplicity. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to consider the extent to which this is indeed the case. Drawing on qualitative research, specifically semi-structured in-depth interviews, undertaken during the Hajj in 2016, this paper seeks to explore how the spiritual experience of pilgrims may be influenced negatively or otherwise by the availability and use of various SMT services. First, however, it reviews briefly the emergence of SMT and the implications for tourism and tourist experiences in general before going on to consider the introduction of SMT into the Hajj experience in particular, as a framework for the subsequent discussion of the empirical research.

The digital revolution and the tourist experience

As already noted, over recent decades the world has experienced a digital revolution that has touched upon and fundamentally transformed almost every aspect of social life, and is continuing to do so. Indeed, such is the ubiquity of digital information and communication technologies in contemporary society that, as Sharpley (2018:169) observes:

> for people of a certain generation, it is difficult to imagine how they managed before the digital age without personal computers, mobile phones, digital cameras and other 'gadgets' that are now considered essential.

The roots of that revolution lie, of course, in the development of computers from the 1950s onwards and, in particular, the invention of the microprocessor in 1970. It was the latter that laid the foundation for the rapid development of smaller, faster and more powerful computers with increasingly remarkable memory capacities, as well as the introduction of the mobile phone and, subsequently, the smartphone with its ever-increasing variety of functions and capabilities. It was, however, the creation of the Internet and the World Wide Web that was of greater significance, the subsequent development of Web 2.0 allowing for interaction between websites and users. And it is this ability of the user, through SMT, to communicate and interact with service and information providers and with other users through social networking sites, that has brought the greatest benefits to both businesses and their customers or, in the context of this paper, to the travel and tourism sector and tourists themselves.

Unsurprisingly, increasing academic attention has been paid to the relationship between tourism and information technology (for example, Benckendorff *et al*., 2014; Buhalis, 2003; Egger & Buhalis, 2008). Perhaps equally unsurprisingly, much of the literature adopts a more 'technical' perspective, focusing on the ways in which the application of SMT may contribute to the efficiency and competitiveness of tourism businesses and organisations and to destination marketing (Pearce, 2011). Nevertheless, attention has also been paid to the potential benefits that SMTs have brought to tourists themselves, both in practical terms in facilitating access to and purchasing tourism products and services (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012) and also in enhancing the tourist experience more generally (Neuhofer, 2014; Wang, Park & Fesenmaier, 2012). For example, Benckendorff *et al*.'s (2014:261-9) list of the roles of technology in creating tourist experiences,

referred to earlier in this paper, includes, amongst others: enabling access to tourism services; acting as an attraction in its own right; both protecting and educating / informing tourists; providing memories (digital photography and photo sharing); and, providing substitute experiences (virtual tourism).

In a similar vein but of greater relevance to this paper, Wang and Fesenmaier (2013) studied smartphone use amongst American tourists, not only identifying a number of purposes for which smartphones were used but also how this changed tourists' experiences. They found that, first, the use of SMT results in tourists feeling more connected (with the 'outside world' beyond the liminal tourism zone) and moreover, that this sense of being connected was beneficial, not least because of the ability to share novel experiences with friends and family back home. However, it was also recognised that such connectivity might dilute the sense of being away. Second, SMT empowers tourists; that is, they feel better informed, more knowledgeable and, hence, more in control of their holiday experience. In particular, and as others have also identified, on-line 'word of mouth' recommendations from other tourists are considered to be more trustworthy than information from official websites and, consequently, tourist feel more confident in their buying decisions (Filieri, Alguezaui & McLeay, 2015). Third, smartphones allow tourists to be more entertained and, hence, more relaxed; that is, they contribute to the hedonic tourist experience whether through communicating on social media platforms or more simply 'gaming'. And fourth, the use of SMTs enhances tourists' sense of security, reducing uncertainties and providing connectivity in unfamiliar or challenging circumstances.

Overall, then, it is apparent that the use of SMT offers significant operational and commercial advantages to tourism businesses whilst tourists themselves benefit from the functionality of SMT. Equally, the relatively limited research to date suggests that in many ways the use of SMT enhances the tourist experience (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2015), although potential negative consequences have also been identified. For example, Tribe and Mkono (2017) refer to 'e-lienation' as an outcome of SMT amongst tourists; the use and increasing dependence on technology means that tourists exist in a virtual tourist zone and are becoming 'e-lienated' from other tourists and the destination itself. Equally, Sharpley (2018) argues that the digital revolution has diminished the meaning or significance of tourism as a social activity, the authenticity of the experience being challenged by the connectivity afforded by SMT. Further research is necessary to

explore the extent to which particular tourist experiences, including religious tourism and pilgrimage, are similarly affected by the use of SMT, hence the focus of this paper.

Nevertheless, as the following section now discusses, not only has SMT been embraced both by the authorities in Saudi Arabia and by religious tourists / pilgrims on the Hajj, but also, evidence suggests that both advantages and disadvantages have emerged as a consequence.

The digital Hajj

Destinations worldwide have adopted SMT, recognising not only the commercial and competitive advantages it offers (Buhalis & Wagner, 2013; Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica & O'Leary, 2006) but also the necessity to meet the changing demands and needs of tourists (Davis, 1989; de Ascaniis & Cantoni, 2016). Indeed, governments and businesses involved directly in the operation of tourism around the world have responded to challenges arising from the digital revolution, investing heavily in appropriate technology to optimise the economic advantage arising from changing consumer buying behaviours. And as noted above, this has certainly been the case in Saudi Arabia; indeed, in recent years Saudi Telecom has invested approximately US$300 million in SMT in the holy city of Makkah, with the result that during the Hajj in 2013 (STC, 2014):

- Data volume increased by 500 percent

- There was a 600 percent increase in the use of WhatsApp, IMO and other social networking platforms

- 2.4 billion domestic calls were recorded in a six-day period

- 604 billion international calls were recorded

- Corporate media messages totalled some 45 million

- 960 million MMS and SMS messages were sent

- The volume of data transferred by pilgrims amounted to 6.2 thousand terabytes

- The number of pilgrims using Saudi Telecom's services in Makkah in 2013 totalled 2.4 million.

Clearly, the Hajj has become 'high-tech'. The question that must then be asked is: to what extent is the nature of the pilgrims' experience being transformed, either positively or negatively, by the availability and use of various SMT services in Makkah and elsewhere? In

other words, as Raj, Walters & Rashid (2013) explain, assemblies of pilgrims share six objective components, namely, faith, feelings, culture, community, ceremony and contact, but are these being challenged or jeopardised by the advent of what might be referred to as the digital Hajj?

On the one hand, and reflecting the benefits to tourism of information and communication technology outlined above, the use of SMT can be seen as facilitating pilgrims' experiences of the Hajj in a number of ways. For example, generally the immediate access to data through SMT, empowers religious tourists / pilgrims to resolve problems efficiently and quickly, to share experiences and to store memories, (Kramer, Modsching, Hagen & Gretzel, 2007; Wang, Park & Fesenmaier, 2012). More specifically, as commentators observe, SMT can facilitate the behavioural and emotional elements of the touristic experience by enabling fast and effective access to necessary information, thus enabling the tourist / pilgrim to identify additional travel opportunities and to become familiar with a destination, whilst also offering opportunities such as sharing photographs and undertaking other social activities at any time during the journey (Saari, Yoo & Tussyadiah, 2008; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; Wang, Park & Fesenmaier, 2010). Therefore, it is evident that contemporary pilgrims, through the use of SMART gadgets and technologies such as smartphones, tablet computers and a variety of 'apps', are able to research, report and record their behaviour or experience of the Hajj on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Skype, WhatsApp, Viber and Tumbler (O'Connor, 2014:317).

SMT is also advantageous for pilgrims in a variety of other ways. For instance, the majority of Hajj pilgrims are unfamiliar with the surroundings in Makkah, despite any research they may have undertaken prior to the Hajj. It was reported, for example, that there were more than 2,500 cases of missing pilgrims in the area of the Grand Mosque Makkah just during Ramadan. As Koshak and Fouda (2008) observe, such a high figure even before the beginning of the Hajj period suggests that, if no further improvements were made, the safety and security of the pilgrims would be at risk. And indeed, in 2011 around 30,000 pilgrims were reported lost whilst undertaking different activities during the Hajj (Amro & Nijem, 2012: 439). Therefore, the Saudi government decided to introduce a number of tracking and monitoring devices, one of which was the 'radio-frequency identification' or RFID Chip.

In order to have a system that suits events such as the Hajj, Yamin and Ades (2009) proposed that people could be tracked using RFID and wireless technologies which build up a database to store identifying data for each pilgrim. However, installing networks for sensing and reading the chips would have had serious economic implications, particularly for events that happen irregularly. Hence, an alternative approach was for lost pilgrims to use object recognition, whereby a picture, usually a notable landmark, is taken using a built-in camera in any common mobile phone, to identify their location based on the picture taken. In addition, GPS could be employed to identify the actual position and if precise data could not be obtained, an approximate estimation of the cell information of the phone-network provider could be used. However, as good as the system might be, it relies solely on internet connectivity. Hence, tourists / pilgrims need to register to have their internet connection active on their mobile phone and, for those who do not have an internet connection, it is time-consuming to undertake all the requirements to set up such a connection to be used for only a short period time, such as during the Hajj (Mantoro & Ayu, 2011).

More recently, following the 2015 Hajj stampede incident which claimed the lives of 750 pilgrims and injured another 900, the Saudi government introduced the 'Hajj e-Bracelet' for pilgrims. These ID e-bracelets contain crucial information, such as passport number and address, but also offer information to worshippers, such as timings of prayers and a multi-lingual help desk to guide non-Arabic speakers around the event. This is a water-resistant gadget connected to GPS, and the information can be accessed by employees of the Hajj ministry, and security and services bodies via a smartphone (BBC, 2016). Saudi Arabia awarded the British security firm G4S a contract to make electronic bracelets for millions of pilgrims who had to wear them while travelling to Makkah to perform the annual Hajj of 2016 (Press TV, 2016).

Another SMT innovation introduced during the Hajj of 2016 was the 'Hajj Apps'. This smart technology is available in Makkah with different apps offering different features. In addition to features such as the capability to count the number of times the user circles the Kaaba during the mandatory Tawaf (circumambulating the Kaaba), tools are available that include prompts for pilgrims to read or listen to the appropriate prayers at the right time and place, as well as full camera, map and social-media integration. A mapping feature even allows users to virtually tag their tent in the app's map so they can easily find it when

returning to Mina, which is the largest temporary city in the world where millions of pilgrims stay for two of the five nights (Naar, 2015).

On the other hand, this App has attracted significant criticism as it decreases the degree of religious struggle in the divine journey of the Hajj, whilst also providing pilgrims with the opportunity to communicate with the external world, diverting their attention from the fundamental worship purpose of the Hajj. In a similar vein, O'Connor (2014) notes that the six components of the pilgrimage experience are being jeopardised by the continually changing social behaviour and activities of pilgrims to Makkah which reflects their increasing consumption and use of SMT and which, in turn, is jeopardising the spiritual experience of pilgrimage. For instance, Esa, one of the Hajj pilgrims in O'Connor's (2014) study, revealed his discomfort while experiencing the contemporary challenge of technology, he observed that the majority of pilgrims were holding smartphones during 'Tawaf' (circumambulation of Kaaba) and that every minute, ringtones were to be heard, distracting pilgrims' concentration during prayers. Indeed, pilgrims were receiving and making calls, as well as taking selfies, during worship (O'Connor, 2014).

Specifically, Osborne (2014:1) noted that 'selfie fever' was gripping pilgrims. That is, that during the Hajj of 2014, pilgrims were snapping their own pictures during 'Tawaf', smiling and adopting different poses during the time of self-effacement and spiritual tranquillity. Consequently, sacredness is losing its authenticity, though this is not only occurring in Makkah. Pope Francis authorised his first papal 'Selfie' in 2014, and told the children who took selfies with him to 'have courage', 'go forward, and make noise'. This 'noise' as witnessed in Rome, has travelled through technology and entered all religious tourism events, including at Makkah, and has arguably fuelled the egotism in Makkah's pilgrims; in short, this practice has turned pilgrims and the ritual of the Hajj into one epic selfie (Keen, 2014). Iman Ajmal Masroor, an Islamic cleric in the United Kingdom, goes further, claiming that the selfie pandemic is destroying not only the pilgrims' spiritual experience but the authenticity of the religious destination as well (Keen, 2014: 1).

More generally, Islamic scholars such as Sheikh Assim Al-Hakeem, based in Jeddah, argue that although using SMT for legitimate reasons makes sense (for example, for reasons of health, safety and security), at the same time it should not impinge on the real meaning of the Hajj and its inherent spirituality. Yet, gadgets such as smartphones that facilitate the taking of selfies and videos and on-line chatting and photo-sharing defy the wish and Hadith of the Prophets (Quraishi, 2014). For instance, one of the Hadiths of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) states that the 'Hajj is not for the show of things, nor for personal fame' (Hadith, cited in Raj & Morpeth, 2007:129).

Additionally, the scholar Sheikh Abdul Razzaq Al-Badr (Quraishi, 2014) noted that even when pilgrims reached the location of Miqat in order to dress in Ihram, the Hajj attire, pilgrims are taking pictures as mementos, whilst also photographs in Arafat and Mina, and also while stoning the devil. This is seen by many Islamic scholars as 'touristy behaviour'. Nowadays, the purpose of the religious trip has become to take pictures, to chat while performing Hajj, so upon return they can show off in front of their friends and relatives 'Come look at me', 'this is me in Arafat', 'this is me in Muzdalifah'.

The conclusion to be drawn from the above discussion is that a dilemma exists. On the one hand, to extricate SMT from a pilgrim's life in contemporary society in general, and during the Hajj in particular is both unrealistic and practically impossible, particularly given the encouragement by the Saudi authorities to increase the availability and variety of SMT products and services to pilgrims. On the other hand, however, it could be argued that it is the duty of the pilgrim to resist using the functions and facilities of SMT that might divert and challenge their sacred behaviour, transforming their spiritual intentions into more touristic experiences. Whether or not this dilemma can be satisfactorily resolved, however, is addressed by the research now discussed.

The research: The use of SMT amongst pilgrims on the Hajj

Methodology

The qualitative data informing this paper were collected during the first author's participation in the Hajj in August-September 2016. The principal data collection method was semi-structured in-depth interviews. As Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) argue, semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with flexibility in the interview process, allowing the sequence of questions to be varied and emergent issues to be followed and discussed. The interviews were conducted with pilgrims from both developed and developing countries in order to not only explore in depth how pilgrims experience the use

Figure 1: Pilgrims are busy in buying Smartphones and SIM cards in Makkah

Photo: J. Qurashi

of SMT during the Hajj, but also to identify the extent to which these experiences vary amongst pilgrims from contrasting geographical, social and cultural backgrounds. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of the telecom sector in the Makkah.

In order to analyse the qualitative data in a systematic way, thematic analysis was carried out on the semi-structured interview data. Thematic analysis can be understood as a 'way of seeing' and a way of 'making sense of and analysing' that allows the researcher to analyse, process and interpret qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1998). Furthermore, thematic analysis can be defined as a method of 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:79). This analytical approach involves the systematic development of 'codes' and 'themes' interpreted from the data. Whilst the study is interested in the meanings and values of SMT and its impact on the spiritual experience of the pilgrim, it makes no attempt to pre-determine or anticipate what these meanings or values may be, nor how SMT and the spiritual experience is understood and negotiated as a topic by participants. With no definition or framework of SMT and the spiritual experience provided to participants, the codes and themes developed during the analysis were driven by the interests and foci of the participants themselves and the data obtained from semi-structure discussions and participative observation.

Research outcomes

From the research, it immediately became evident that not only was there widespread usage of SMT amongst pilgrims undertaking the Hajj but also that, from the responses of those participating in the interviews, a number of both benefits and disbenefits were experienced. With regards to the use of SMT, it became clear from observations during the research process that many pilgrims were taking advantage of the opportunities offered by SMT; for example, long queues of pilgrims wanting to buy Sim cards were observed at telecom outlets (see Figure 1) whilst it was common to see them taking selfies, recording events or communicating via social media during the Hajj (Figure 2).

During the interviews, the potential benefits were expressed by a number of respondents. Not surprisingly, some stated that they felt happy be able to communicate with friends and family as well as enjoying the facilities offered by smartphones, including taking photographs and videos and sharing experiences on social media. However, for many the main benefits lay in the ability to access information and the sense of safety and security provided by SMT connectivity. For example, one respondent observed:

Well, I liked the concept of the Hajj App; it is a good guide to perform Hajj rites.

Figure 2: Pilgrims using SMT during the Hajj

Photo: J. Qurashi

More specifically, a numbers of respondents expressed positive views about the Hajj e-bracelet. As one said:

> The Hajj e-bracelet is a tremendous technology; it allows Saudi authorities to identify and locate lost pilgrims via GPS; and also in order to deliver care to those in need, disabled pilgrims can also be kept 24hours under surveillance.

Similarly, another respondent suggested that:

> The e-bracelet is a good device, actually nothing to do with our worship or spiritualty, but saving us from difficult situations and helping us in other ways, so we can perform our worship without any fear.

Although, as noted above, widespread use of SMT could be observed during the Hajj, including during prayers and other rituals, interestingly some respondents were anxious to state that they limited their usage to functions that supported their spiritual experience. For example:

> I do not use Smart technologies not during worships. You can have a look in my phone memory; did I take any selfie or do I have WhatsApp for chatting. I only use my smartphone to listen Quran recitation.

In other words, some sought to justify their use of SMT on the basis that it could potentially facilitate or enhance the spiritual dimension of the Hajj although more generally, the benefits of SMT were seen by respondents to be more practical in nature. In particular, technology was considered to be solving some fundamental problems, especially crowd management, whilst SMT tracking and navigation devices were recognised as playing a pivotal role in the Hajj, particularly given the common incidence of pilgrims going missing. Additionally, many respondents praised the Hajj App, which they likened to a guide, providing information and assisting pilgrims through the use of an interactive screen offering live maps indicating a pilgrim's location and their complex movements within Hajj.

At the same time however, the increasing incidence and use of SMT during the Hajj attracted significant criticism from respondents. In other words, despite the evident practical benefits afforded by SMT, particularly with regards to access to important information and safety and security, many respondents expressed the view that such benefits were outweighed by the disbenefits, specifically in the ways which the use of SMT challenges the very meaning or significance of the Hajj. For some, the availability of SMT was seen to be inappropriate; as one respondent argued:

> Smartphones are the 'Fourth devil in Hajj'.

Another more generally suggested that:

> It is not good to use SMT during the Hajj, it is against Islam. You come here actually to discover your past, present and future, but what you are discovering is how to upload selfies on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, or use Facetime and so on. The Saudi government should ban these smart technologies. But why would they ban it? The government is making billions of dollars in telecom sector so it is in their own interest.

Other respondents referred more specifically to what they considered to be the deleterious impact of SMT on the spiritual experience of the Hajj, with many suggesting explicitly or otherwise that the Hajj is being transformed into more of a touristic experience. For example:

> This is totally tourist behaviour, experience and acts. This is nothing but a sin; you are earning sin by using these gadgets here. I have seen a pilgrim who was having a video chat with another pilgrim on his smartphone during 'Tawaf' without using headphones and I understood his language. The person on the other line said I want to Kiss Kaaba can you take me near to it. Another pilgrim who was present held his smartphone against the wall of Kaaba and the person kissed it. The reason I am telling you this that the 'Virtual Kiss' in Kaaba has been started now. I want to tell my

fellow pilgrims, do not bring these gadgets with you into the mosque. This is nothing but a touristic experience, nothing to do with spiritual experience. Those pilgrims will not get the title of Haji but the title of tourist. Look, the world is getting modern now and I am afraid that in future it may be that pilgrims will perform Tawaf on some flying machines.

Another said:

Look, before visiting these two holy Mosques I have already received hundreds of pictures of them on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp so, when I saw these Mosques, literally I didn't feel emotional or highly spiritually charged because I already felt them on my (SMT) gadgets.

Similarly, the influence of SMT in diminishing the spiritual experience of the Hajj was explained in detail by one respondent, as follows:

I am really disappointed that pilgrims are busy making movies here, taking selfies, chatting with the external world by using different SMT platforms and gadgets. They are concentrating less on the spiritual aspect of the journey; it is more like fun nowadays, like holidays. This is frustrating now. I came here to find spiritual tranquillity but the majority of pilgrims are busy here with smart technologies, may Allah all mighty bless us and forgive us. The selfie culture which is considered to be like devil's act, now looks like a part of worship, Haji's are switching to ostentatious behaviour, they are

busy showing their relatives, friends, families each and every move of their journey. I want to tell you more if you allow me? . . . I saw lots of pilgrims they are not reciting 'Talbiyah' [Muslim prayer invoked by the pilgrims as a conviction that they intend to perform the Hajj only for the glory of Allah] by themselves, they switched on their smartphones to do so. Imagine, we feel too tired or shy to recite 'Talbiyah'. Imagine the 'Talbiyah', which should come out from our hearts, coming from the machine. The Hajj App, yes, I download it but haven't used it, but my friends are using. This is shame that now a machine is guiding us how to perform Hajj like a Tomtom [satnav], it should be our religious duty to have this knowledge how to perform Hajj. Actually we are now 'e-pilgrims'.

Others expressed the view that, in a sense, it is too late. Not only has SMT been embedded in the Hajj, but its use has become accepted in the Hajj as it has in life and society more generally:

Look actually, there is another perspective as well. I am surprised that in the Haram premises, Wi-Fi is free now, and also inside the mosque the government has provided the mobile charger slots. It looks like the government is supporting this cause; I think, brother, it is out of control now. Pilgrims are addicted to the internet and businessmen are supplying that addiction.

In particular, many referred to what was observed during the research; that is the widespread and constant

Figure 3: Pilgrim sleeping with his smartphone

Source: J. Qurashi

use of SMT by pilgrims during the Hajj:

> *Throughout the Hajj, I have seen people sleeping, eating, drinking, going to toilet, sitting in the Arafat, Mina only with smart gadgets. We are like an e-pilgrim. We should take the selfies of our characters not our physical appearance. Because of smart technologies religion has become fun. Imagine in front of Allah's house, a selfie is more important; we are getting fearless of Allah due to these technologies and taking worship as granted.*

> *Why pilgrims do not understand we are here to achieve spiritual goals, are we achieving this with . . . smartphone or other technologies? This is shame. When I do not have a phone I am happy but, look, this phone has become the family member now, especially for the pilgrims. If this phone is in your pocket something odd happens all the time, the biggest thing that we are losing due to this little devil [smartphone] is our spiritual experience. Look, almost every pilgrim is busy on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Skype, and Twitter etc.*

One respondent summarised:

> *I am saying there is no spirituality existing here anymore; it is only world and world. Now pilgrims sleep with their smartphones . . . in the middle of sleeping, they check their smartphone for messages. So, people are doing Hajj only here to show others not to gain or become more spiritual* (See Figure 3).

Whilst another suggested:

> *Actually, the day is not far off when people will perform the Hajj on Facebook. Pilgrims are focusing now on touristic things rather than discovering spirituality.*

Generally then, from both observations and interviews, it became clear that the availability of SMT and its related social media websites are facilitating and enhancing pilgrims' social rather than spiritual experience of the Hajj. In particular, and interestingly, the research revealed that some of those pilgrims who criticised the use of smartphones were also using them, but denying it. Specifically, there was much evidence of people taking selfies or videos of themselves in different places and during different rituals during the Hajj. These pictures or videos were then evidently uploaded onto social media websites so that colleagues, friends, relatives and family could see them and send 'likes' and 'dislikes'. Thus, it could be argued that, in comparison to earlier times, when a pilgrim returned from the Hajj and spoke about his/her experiences and,

perhaps, received admiration and praise, contemporary pilgrims now regularly send videos and whilst undertaking Hajj, hence potentially denigrating the overall Hajj experience. Therefore, it could be argued that there can be little doubt that the era of the 'Smart Hajj' has commenced.

Certainly, the results of the research provide confirmatory evidence that, nowadays, SMT services are facilitating pilgrims but also enhancing their smart social, as opposed to spiritual, experience of Hajj. Since the Hajj has become 'high-tech', the nature of the pilgrim experience is being challenged, its fundamental spirituality being transformed into something more akin to a 'smart touristic experience', an experience which competes with the principles of the Hajj journey with its focus on worship. In addition, the research appears to suggest that the majority of pilgrims have succumbed to the commodification of Makkah and the Hajj, regardless of their financial, social and Hajj package status. Many respondents suggested that the spiritual behaviour of pilgrims is changing as a result of the increasing consumption of SMT commodities which, in turn, results in a more touristic rather celestial spiritual experience.

Putting it another way, there is consistent evidence from the research that through the development and provision of SMT services during Hajj, the emphasis is increasingly being placed on ensuring that pilgrims enjoy a more 'smart' spiritual experience through the various stages of their pilgrimage journey. The implication of this is that it will become increasingly likely that pilgrimage will take on the characteristics of a 'smart' touristic journey, with the result that the spiritual experience becomes increasingly diluted.

Conclusion

Rapid transformations in tourists' technological, social and consumer behaviour in travel in general, is proving to be a powerful factor in motivating the authorities and the private travel sector to adopt SMT in the Hajj in particular, the aim being to not only enhance or facilitate the tourist experience but also to gain optimal economic advantage. However, although government intervention in encouraging the use of SMT, such as creating e-religion portal concepts including Hajj Apps, e-bracelets, Wi-Fi services and dedicated and social media websites, is in some respects enhancing the pilgrim's social and technological experience, it is also impacting negatively on their spiritual experience of the divine ritual which demands a focus on worship and the non-material.

Indeed, the contemporary Hajj is representative of a new global era in which even the sacred has intersections with the mechanisms of global capitalism and the technologies of social networking. However, establishing the individual motivations of pilgrims and their use of SMT is essential and, while the spiritual experience of pilgrims is arguably in decline as a consequence of the ubiquity of SMT, this may not always necessarily be the case. That is, the likelihood of a diminished spiritual experience depends upon a variety factors, including the directions technology takes and the uses made of it, as well as the particular motives of individual pilgrims and the significance they attach to participation in the Hajj. However, in light of the Saudi development of the Hajj over the last 30 years, it can be seen that a new era has emerged, the very modern Hajj. In 1913, Arthur Wavell described himself as a modern pilgrim performing some of his journey by motorcar; however, his experience differs enormously from that of contemporary pilgrims a century later. The Hajj connectivity of contemporary pilgrims via their smart devices signifies a new period in the modern Hajj and in the spiritual experience of pilgrims.

To conclude, then, as this research has revealed, this connectivity brings both advantages in terms of access to information and security, and disadvantages in the nature of spiritual experience. Moreover, it is likely that the incursion of SMT into the lives of pilgrims and on the holy destination of Makkah, will further influence the lives of pilgrims, transform religious destinations and potentially impact upon the traditional spiritual experiences of pilgrims. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to understand the experience of Hajj in the 21st Century, and to recognise the needs and motives of contemporary pilgrims who, familiar with the use of SMT in their everyday lives, inevitably will bring their own interpretation of the spiritual experience to the Hajj.

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