

Recent Social Concerns Regarding the Integration of Technology in Islamic Pilgrimage

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Abstract. Hajj and Umrah are two major pilgrimage events that bring millions of Muslims together every year, coming from diverse ethnic and theological backgrounds. Creating unique social phenomena in which Muslims experience social identity formation. The integration of technology in pilgrimage has sparked new research on the sociology of pilgrimage, examining the effects of recent technological developments on the social experience of pilgrimage. This paper addresses several social concerns related to the digital experience of pilgrimage. It uses a descriptive method to analyze recent academic research on the probable social consequences of tech-integrated pilgrimage. The findings reveal that social concerns highlighted in literature could be categorized into three dimensions: Authenticity, Spirituality, and community bonding. Such concerns express the significant impact of technology on the social experience of pilgrimage. Future research should focus on the long-term implications of technology and its effect on the formation of social identity during pilgrimage.

1 Introduction

Due to its social nature, the diversity of participants, and scale of engagement, pilgrimage offers a significant discourse for examining the influence of technology on social identity formation. Social identity formation refers to the process by which an individual's sense of self is shaped by their membership in a larger social group, specifically the Muslim community.

1.1 Sociology of pilgrimage

Literature describes the concept of social identity theory as the self-concept of an individual, which is derived from their membership in a larger social group. This theory is particularly relevant to the sociology of pilgrimage, as pilgrimage is a unique social phenomenon that profoundly impacts the collective and personal identities of its participants.

The pilgrimage, symbolized by the simple white cloth worn by all, regardless of social or financial status, is a declaration of devotion. It is an experience shared by millions, a journey that transforms the individual's social identity [3].

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Academic papers across multiple disciplines have explored the unique context of Hajj in shaping social identity. This collective experience, shared by millions, creates a context where individual and collective identities overlap, change, and are redefined [2, 3, 4].

1.2 Tech-integrated pilgrimage

With the rapid development of technology, pilgrimage has seen the integration of mobile apps, navigation technologies, and social media platforms. These technologies, in addition to their regular use in everyday life, have dramatically enhanced the pilgrimage experience. They provide safety, comfort, and effective communication and navigation for pilgrims, as well as better information about rituals and guidance [6, 7].

Considering recent literature, there are two main streams for integrating technology into pilgrimage (Table 1). The first is through government, institutions, and official sources, to ensure safety, monitor logistical needs, and enhance coordination throughout the experience. The second is the personal use of technology by pilgrims to search for and acquire information, document rituals, or communicate through social media. [1,4-7]

Table 1. Main streams for integrating technology in pilgrimage.

Stream	Purpose	Technologies
Official	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crowd safety• Logistiques• Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mobile apps.• CCTV• Ai
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inquartations• Documentation• Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GPS• Chat GPT• Social media apps

To explain the social aspects of the integration of digital technologies in pilgrimage. Researchers conducted specific studies in different streams of technologies used in pilgrimage and their implications on the social experience. Among these technologies are Information technologies, to provide smoother crowd flow, reduce the dangers of stampedes, and achieve a more organized, secure environment. Enhancing the spiritual journey [5]. Pilgrimage Mobile apps are designed to foster a strong sense of connectedness to other pilgrims and create a more conducive environment for sharing information [6]. Social identification techniques [1], digital risk communications [7], and Digital crowd management programs [8] are among other technologies that affected the social facets of pilgrimage.

Other technologies include Virtual reality, used for training pilgrims, as well as artificial intelligence applications that facilitate safety and security proceedings on multiple levels. Even selfies, a seemingly mundane aspect of modern life, became an important tool in documenting the pilgrims' experience. The use of technology may alter traditional patterns in which social identity is formed and the community is engaged in the various stages of the Hajj rituals.

The present study aims to shed more light on the recent social concerns raised by academia regarding the integration of technology in pilgrimage. Consequently, the present study attempted to identify the spectrum of these concerns. It also sought to evaluate the nature of such problems from the author's perspective, a resident in the holy city of Madinah, who constantly witnesses and participates in the pilgrimage.

2 Recent social concerns

Literature has analyzed the benefits of tech-integrated pilgrimage while simultaneously making another statement: the reliance on these digital tools challenges the traditional image

of Pilgrimage, especially in its social aspect. Some studies consider the social changes brought about by technologies as “implications on pilgrimage.” However, a recent study analyzes these social changes as “concerns” that require further research and discussion.

The recent social concerns surrounding the integration of technology in pilgrimage could be categorized into three dimensions (Fig. 1), which represent the cornerstone factors of social identity formation in pilgrimage: Authenticity, Spirituality, and community bonding.



Fig. 1. Dimensions of recent social concerns surrounding the integration of technology in pilgrimage

2.1 Authenticity

Authenticity in pilgrimage is about devotion and alignment with one's inner self. Devotion means performing rituals with the correct intention, pure from hypocrisy, doubts, or earthly motives, while alignment emphasizes performing authentic rituals and acts of pilgrimage to the finest details. This experience sets the ground for a total social transformation for a pilgrim [11]. The recent study successfully identified several concerns regarding authenticity at various stages: before, during, and after the pilgrimage.

Traditionally, the preparation for the pilgrimage journey begins months in advance. The autonomy of Muslim pilgrimage lies in learning about each ritual and performing it with sanctity and devotion. Studies suggest that over-reliance on mobile apps may decrease Muslims' preparedness and knowledge of rituals and the right acts of pilgrimage in advance, as access to this information is readily available [6].

During the pilgrimage, being overwhelmed by digital innovations could turn the pilgrims' experience into a superficial, machine-oriented activity, rather than a life-changing, personal, authentic journey that follows the footsteps of prophets [7]. Additionally, Pilgrims may focus more on cyber-documenting their journey rather than authentically engaging with the rituals [12] or even get distracted from the exact rituals due to the digital flow of random information [13].

After returning home, many pilgrims earn a social status and celebration. Studies warn about the overuse of social media in relation to these celebrations. This comes as a continuation of the authenticity principle [10, 14].

The digital breach of authenticity before, during, and after the journey could threaten the Muslim's pilgrimage [14], implying the loss of the reward mentioned for a pilgrim who has devoted himself sincerely to Allah, not for any other worldly matters. The latter concern relates to the reward of pilgrimage, which seems to be outside the scope of this study. However, piety and devotion are essential factors in social identity formation according to studies [8, 11].

2.2 Spirituality

Pilgrimage is characterized as a humbling spiritual journey that takes the individual out of their daily, complicated life to a spiritually focused experience. The inner journey that a Muslim takes and his personal insights are essential aspects of spirituality in Hajj. At the same time, these spiritual values contribute to social identity formation through self-reflection and the acquisition of a higher moral persona, which accompanies the Muslim after pilgrimage [3].

Several social concerns regarding spirituality in tech-integrated pilgrimage have been discussed in recent studies. Pilgrims may experience a weaker emotional connection to holy Muslim sites after having viewed them repeatedly on technical devices before their journey [12]. The constant flow of information and media coverage creates internal conflicts among pilgrims as they navigate this spiritual journey in a modern environment [2], particularly as modern technologies create a materialistic and commodified experience for them [11]. This whole cyber-experience of pilgrimage may not be an ideal capsule for spirituality and personal insight.

Additionally, constant temptation to socialize with families back home could easily prevent the pilgrims from immersing themselves in their personal inner journey [14]. Scholars fear that greater connectivity may undermine the spiritual reflections that arise from the experience. Or at least distract the focus away from what really matters spiritually [6].

2.3 Community bonding

The interactions between Muslims during pilgrimage create a strong sense of community bonding, achieved through shared uniforms, rituals, and mutual support. This bonding transfers the social identity of a Muslim from local to global, establishing shared narratives that create a profound communal experience [15].

The addition of communication technologies and social media affordances for pilgrims provided a higher level of connection with the world. Still, they threaten to undermine the personal fundamental interactions among fellow Muslim pilgrims [5], which might deprive them of enjoying the communal values, social cohesion, and the spirit of brotherhood [9].

Another social concern of tech-integrated pilgrimage is insensitivity to cultural, economic, and generational sensitivities; The overuse of technology could create generational tensions among pilgrim groups [6]. It may also build a digital barrier between individuals who can afford and use the latest technologies, and others who can't [4]. Filming and photography among female pilgrims may spark objections due to cultural sensitivities. Such concerns are very real and threaten the core value of pilgrimage: equity and respect for others.

The integration of technology into pilgrimage leads to a high dependence on mobile apps and social media platforms as sources of religious information, emotional support, and real-time guidance. This situation reduces the dependency on advice and support from other fellow pilgrims. Thus weakening the community bonding [14].

3 Pilgrimage in a new era: a local perspective

The social concerns of tech-integrated pilgrimage may not be easily comprehended in our modern day. An outsider could even view these concerns as an exaggeration or a form of technological conservatism. To get the whole picture, let's compare a Muslim's experience of pilgrimage in the 1950s. His only concern will be surviving the journey of his lifetime and returning home safely; his mindset will be focused entirely on the rituals and duties. No news about the family will reach him. The only source of guidance and support is from other pilgrims around. This solitude and distraction-free environment presents a unique

opportunity to appreciate the fundamental aspects and values of pilgrimage: authenticity, spirituality, and community bonding.

However, Local folks' narratives support the fact that several hardships endured by pilgrims throughout history have surely negatively affected their spirituality, as they were sometimes too sick and exhausted to enjoy the spirituality or perform the rituals as intended. In many incidents, pilgrims lacked proper community guidance and support.

As a resident of the city of Madinah, the researcher has witnessed multiple generations of pilgrims in the town. It is not logical to say that technology is a threat to spirituality. The pilgrim today can experience the digital aspect of pilgrimage before departing his home. Nonetheless, this preparation will not affect the joy and happiness of being in holy places. A fact well known to pilgrims who performed their fortieth pilgrimage with the same sense of longing and spiritual anticipation.

During a pilgrimage, Muslims can utilize technologies for translation and transportation. Incidents of being lost in an unknown land are a part of history. Muslims performing Hajj and Umrah feel more secure and at ease during the rituals. Pilgrims navigate the streets of Madinah and Makkah as natives, exploring and finding their new spiritual spheres, creating their own authentic journeys.

While personal traditional encounters create unique social connections for pilgrims, the new era of Selfies and Instagram posts initiates lasting social engagement. Pilgrims can accompany the live records of their spiritual journey for a couple of years after leaving the holy places.

It is a typical social attitude to favor and feel nostalgic about old methods, while simultaneously criticizing the viability of new techniques. A pilgrim who first used motorcars in pilgrimage described themselves as modern Hajjis. In local social settings, the experience of pilgrimage by car was deemed "less spiritual" and too materialistic when compared to the pilgrimage performed on camels or walking for months in the desert. Between now and then, there is no exact equation for balancing technology in pilgrimage, as each pilgrim is a unique case, and even each pilgrimage performed by the same Muslim in different ages is different. The authenticity and spirituality could be felt deeply, no matter the circumstances.

4 Conclusion

The study examined many social concerns related to tech-integrated pilgrimage. Although some concerns seem reasonable, others appear less realistic. We can't ask the pilgrims to isolate themselves from technology during their pilgrimage, but surely understanding the core social values of pilgrimage is essential to developing a balanced attitude during these journeys, especially as these technologies are likely to evolve in more rapid forms soon. The study highlights the need for more intersectional and in-depth longitudinal studies to investigate social identity formation in Pilgrimage, in light of the increasing use of technology.

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