

Pilgrims Perception Towards Assurance of Service to Hajj and Umrah by Tour Operators – A Study in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract—In Islamic tradition, Hajj and Umrah hold great spiritual importance. One of the five pillars of Islam the Hajj, is a once-in-a-lifetime activity that every financially and physically capable Muslim must perform, while Umrah is optional but strongly advised and offers significant spiritual benefits. Both pilgrimages serve as opportunities for purification and forgiveness. The holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is the site of both the Hajj and the Umrah, they involve different locations and a varying number of rituals. The mass gathering of millions of pilgrims in Makkah represents the universality of Islam. Beyond rituals, the pilgrimage is a journey of inner transformation. The physical and emotional challenges faced during Hajj and Umrah cultivate virtues such as patience, humility, and gratitude, reminding pilgrims of the temporary nature of worldly life and the eternal significance. In essence, Hajj and Umrah are not simply religious obligations or traditions but deeply transformative spiritual experiences that purify the soul, strengthen faith, and bring Muslims closer to Allah while uniting them with the global Muslim community.

Index Terms—Islamic, Service Assurance, Pilgrims, Holy city, Inner-Transformation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage is a process of offering or thanking the 'ALMIGHTY' by the human being, for the life and present state of living or to remove his 'sins' and to purify or enlighten him or her for the rest of the life. A pilgrim is a person who travels to a sacred place for religious or spiritual reasons. Pilgrims undertake journeys, known as pilgrimages, to fulfil religious obligations, seek spiritual enlightenment or show devotion to their 'faith', may be Islam, Christian, or Hindu. Pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place for

religious devotion, spiritual fulfilment, or to perform prescribed rituals.

In Islamic tradition, Hajj and Umrah hold great spiritual importance. One of the five pillars of Islam the Hajj, is a once-in-a-lifetime activity that every financially and physically capable Muslim must perform, while Umrah is optional but strongly advised and offers significant spiritual benefits. Both pilgrimages serve as opportunities for purification and forgiveness. The holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is the site of both the Hajj and the Umrah, they involve different locations and a varying number of rituals. The mass gathering of millions of pilgrims in Makkah represents the universality of Islam. Beyond rituals, the pilgrimage is a journey of inner transformation. The physical and emotional challenges faced during Hajj and Umrah cultivate virtues such as patience, humility, and gratitude, reminding pilgrims of the temporary nature of worldly life and the eternal significance. In essence, Hajj and Umrah are not simply religious obligations or traditions but deeply transformative spiritual experiences that purify the soul, strengthen faith, and bring Muslims closer to Allah while uniting them with the global Muslim community.

Islamic pilgrimage tourism in Tamil Nadu is growing and witnessing a notable evolution with new technology. Its making travel easier and more people able to join the journey. Pilgrimage tourism in Tamil Nadu has undergone significant transformation in recent years, mirroring international shifts in Hajj and Umrah travel while responding to local advancements. A key development is the expansion of organized pilgrimage services, with a growing number of authorized tour operators providing all-inclusive packages designed to be cost-effective, user-friendly,

and high in-service standards. Tourist operators are embracing digital technologies to streamline the process and offering online reservations, assistance with electronic visa applications, secure digital payment options, and mobile-based support systems. This digital shift has greatly improved the overall efficiency, accessibility, and transparency of the pilgrimage experience for travellers. These spiritual journeys hold immense significance in Islam, representing acts of devotion, self-purification, and obedience to divine commandments. The successful execution of these pilgrimages requires comprehensive planning, logistical coordination, and well-structured service provisions to ensure a fulfilling and hassle-free experience for pilgrims.

Pilgrim tour operators play a pivotal role in facilitating various aspects of these journeys, including visa processing, travel arrangements, accommodation, meal provisions, transportation, and medical assistance. As the demand for Hajj and Umrah services increases, the quality of services offered by tour operators has become a crucial factor influencing the overall pilgrimage experience. Any inefficiency or shortcoming in service delivery can lead to significant distress among pilgrims, affecting their spiritual journey and overall satisfaction.

Scope of the study

This study aims to evaluate the service quality of Hajj and Umrah tour operators by examining how effectively they meet the expectations and needs of pilgrims throughout their spiritual journey. By comparing the expectations and perceptions of pilgrims, the research aims to identify service gaps, develop a framework for evaluating tour operator performance in religious tourism, and suggest ways to improve the quality of services offered by tour operators.

Significance of the study

This study is significant as it addresses the growing demand for quality services in Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage, which is one of the largest forms of religious tourism in the world. With millions of pilgrims traveling annually to perform these sacred rites, the efficiency, reliability, and ethical conduct of tour operators become essential components of the pilgrimage experiences.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the source of awareness among the tourist respondents about the services offered by the tour operators.
2. To investigate the tourist perception towards services offered by the tour operators.

Limitations of the Study

The study is largely confined to the state of Tamil Nadu. More specifically, data were collected from tour operators based in Chennai, along with their associated tour operators located in Tiruchirapalli, Pudukoottai, Madurai, and Nagapattinam. Questionnaires were distributed to these respondents through WhatsApp and e-mail, and the analysis was carried out based on the responses received. The scope of the study was limited due to constraints of time and financial resources, which had a significant impact on the extent of data collection. Furthermore, as the responses were provided voluntarily by pilgrims, the researchers had no direct control over the respondents or the accuracy of their responses. Therefore, the findings of the study are context-specific and may not be generalized or directly applied to other similar studies or geographical regions.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) Although not specific to pilgrimage tourism, this seminal study on service quality provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding pilgrims' perceptions of tour operators. The SERVQUAL model identified dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, which are highly relevant to Hajj and Umrah tour services. Many later pilgrimage studies have applied this model to assess pilgrims' satisfaction with tour operators.

Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) This study explored religious tourism with a special focus on Islamic pilgrimages. The authors observed that pilgrims' satisfaction depends not only on spiritual aspects but also on the efficiency of tour operators. Issues such as accommodation quality, transportation arrangements, and crowd management were found to influence pilgrims' perceptions. The study emphasized that tour operators act as facilitators of spiritual journeys, making their role crucial in pilgrimage tourism.

Battour, Ismail, and Battor (2011) This study focused on the factors influencing Muslim tourists' satisfaction, including pilgrimage-related travel. The authors found that service quality, accommodation arrangements, and tour operator professionalism strongly affect pilgrims' overall experience. The research emphasized that pilgrims expect tour operators to understand religious requirements and manage travel logistics efficiently. Poor coordination or lack of responsiveness was found to negatively affect pilgrims' perceptions.

Eid and El-Gohary (2015) examined Muslim tourists' perceptions of service quality in religious tourism, with particular emphasis on Umrah travel services. Their study highlighted that pilgrims place high importance on reliability, assurance, and empathy

offered by tour operators. The findings revealed that well-organized travel arrangements, knowledgeable guides, and transparent communication significantly influence pilgrims' satisfaction and trust. The study also emphasized that spiritual fulfilment is closely linked with the quality of services provided by tour operators.

Rahman, Zailani, and Musa (2017) studied customer satisfaction in Islamic travel services, including Hajj and Umrah packages. The study revealed that pilgrims highly value ethical conduct, honesty in pricing, and clear information from tour operators. The authors concluded that trust plays a central role in shaping pilgrims' perceptions and loyalty. Tour operators who maintained transparency and fulfilled promises were rated more positively by pilgrims.

Table 1 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

GENDER	Frequency	Percent
MALE	342	51.8
FEMALE	318	48.2
Total	660	100.0
AGE	Frequency	Percent
UNDER25	99	15.0
26-35	120	18.2
36-45	152	23.0
46-55	138	20.9
ABOVE 55	151	22.9
Total	660	100.0
EDUCATION	Frequency	Percent
UPTO MATRIC	137	20.8
HSC	124	18.8
GRADUATION	131	19.8
DIPLOMA	137	20.8
NO FORMAL EDUCATION	131	19.8
Total	660	100.0
EMPLOYMENT	Frequency	Percent
HOME MAKER	85	12.9
GOVERNMENT SERVICE	87	13.2
SELF EMPLOYED/BUSINESS	67	10.2
PROFESSIONAL	95	14.4
AGRICULTURE	73	11.1
STUDENT	88	13.3
PRIVATE SERVICE	86	13.0
RETIRED	79	12.0
Total	660	100.0
INCOME	Frequency	Percent

BELOW Rs.50000	140	21.2
Rs.500001 - Rs.1,00,000	135	20.5
Rs.100,001 - Rs.150,000	96	14.5
Rs. 150,001 – Rs. 2,00,000	170	25.8
ABOVE Rs. 2,00,000	119	18.0
Total	660	100.0
FAMILY SIZE	Frequency	Percent
UP TO 2	154	23.3
3-4	170	25.8
5-6	179	27.1
ABOVE 6	157	23.8
Total	660	100.0
PERFORMED HAJJ/ UMRAH	Frequency	Percent
YES	311	47.1
NO	247	37.4
3+	102	15.5
Total	660	100.0
NO OF VISITS TO HAJJ/UMRAH	Frequency	Percent
ONCE	178	27.0
TWICE	152	23.0
THREE	168	25.5
3+	162	24.5
Total	660	100.0
SOURCE OF INFORMATION	Frequency	Percent
FAMILY FRIENDS	180	27.3
RELIGIOUS TEACHING	99	15.0
SOCIAL MEDIA	142	21.5
MOSQUE/RELIGIOUS GATHERING	122	18.5
PAMPHLETS/BROUCHERS	117	17.7
Total	660	100.0
INFLUENCE	Frequency	Percent
RELIGIOUS OBLIGATION	113	17.1
RELIGIOUS TEACHING AND BELIEFS	127	19.2
SOCIAL MEDIA AND BLOGGERS	92	13.9
FELLOW PILGRIMAGE	91	13.8
TRAVEL AGENT REPRESENTATIVE	108	16.4
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY	129	19.5
Total	660	100.0
PURPOSE OF VISIT	Frequency	Percent
HAJJ	131	19.8
UMRAH	123	18.6
VISIT PROPHET MOSQUE AND MADHINA	136	20.6
EXPLORE ISLAMIC CULTURE AND HERITAGE	138	20.9
TO FULFIL PERSONAL PROMISE	132	20.0
Total	660	100.0

Data Source: Primary

Table 2

AGE	SERVICES OFFERED BY OPERATOR						Total
	MEALS PLAN	ACCOMMODATION DETAILS	TRANSPORTATION DETAILS	SAFETY DETAILS	VISA AND IMMIGRATION PROCESS	LUGGAGE HANDLING	
UNDER25	26	13	16	20	16	8	99
26-35	31	23	14	18	17	17	120
36-45	49	22	21	17	23	20	152
46-55	37	34	19	14	15	19	138
ABOVE 55	47	23	20	19	19	23	151
Total	190	115	90	88	90	87	660

AGE	TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION OFFERED						Total
	DORMITORY	BUDGET HOTEL	SERVICED APARTMENT	TENT	GUEST HOUSE	SHARED ROOM	
UNDER25	23	11	15	26	10	14	99
26-35	29	20	22	23	11	15	120
36-45	28	21	23	28	25	27	152
46-55	22	26	42	20	14	14	138
ABOVE 55	25	30	30	26	20	20	151
Total	127	108	132	123	80	90	660

Table 3

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
SERVICES OFFERED AT HAJJ/UMRAH	660	3.95	2.216	45.784	659	0.000
SERVICES AVAILED AT HAJJ/UMRAH	660	3.59	2.010	45.908	659	0.000
TOURIST SPOTS VISITED	660	5.23	2.827	47.540	659	0.000

ASSURANCE EXPECTED						
DIMENSIONS OF ASSURANCE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
Offering travel insurance Package	660	3.44	1.277	69.169	659	0.000
Providing Access to Quality health care Services	660	3.27	1.501	56.011	659	0.000
Enhanced security measures	660	3.32	1.483	57.504	659	0.000
Guaranteeing clean, comfortable secured accommodation and food	660	3.06	1.530	51.365	659	0.000
Financial Protection – Transparent pricing, refund policy	660	3.23	1.494	55.546	659	0.000
Providing up-to-date information on rituals	660	3.08	1.443	54.819	659	0.000
Zam-Zam Water Assurance	660	3.29	1.527	55.303	659	0.000

ASSURANCE PERCEIVED						
DIMENSIONS OF ASSURANCE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
Offering travel insurance Package	660	3.02	1.449	53.620	659	0.000

Providing Access to Quality health care Services	660	3.26	1.411	59.403	659	0.000
Enhanced security measures	660	3.29	1.419	59.518	659	0.000
Guaranteeing clean, comfortable secured accommodation and food	660	3.20	1.420	57.964	659	0.000
Financial Protection – Transparent pricing, refund policy	660	3.15	1.437	56.275	659	0.000
Providing up-to-date information on rituals	660	3.32	1.373	62.173	659	0.000
Zam-Zam Water Assurance	660	3.13	1.448	55.441	659	0.000

Table 4

ASSURANCE FACTORS – EXPECTED Vs. PERCEIVED							
		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig.
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1	Offering travel Insurance package.	.414	1.923	.075	5.527	659	0.000
Pair 2	Providing access to quality health care services	.011	2.062	.080	.132	659	0.895
Pair 3	Enhanced security measures	.032	1.973	.077	.414	659	0.679
Pair 4	Guaranteeing clean, comfortable, secured accommodation and food	-.145	2.049	.080	-1.823	659	0.069
Pair 5	Financial protection- transparent pricing, refund policy	.082	2.071	.081	1.015	659	0.311
Pair 6	Providing up-to-date information on rituals	-.244	1.935	.075	-3.239	659	0.001
Pair 7	Zam-zam Water assurance	.162	2.093	.081	1.990	659	0.047

WORSHIP AREA SERVICE EXPECTATION	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	t	df	Sig
Prayer mats and Quran copies for use.	660	3.08	1.419	55.701	659	0.000
Audio system for broad casting prayers and sermons	660	3.00	1.401	54.994	659	0.000
Clean and well maintained ablution (face cleaning) facility	660	3.01	1.448	53.383	659	0.000
Assistance for elderly or disabled worshippers	660	2.95	1.462	51.824	659	0.000
Information boards with prayer times and qibla (West side) direction facility	660	3.13	1.405	57.240	659	0.000
Security personnel to ensure safety and order during prayers.	660	3.07	1.464	53.929	659	0.000
Separate prayer areas for men and women	660	3.00	1.371	56.288	659	0.000
Religious scholars available for guidance	660	3.07	1.404	56.104	659	0.000
Designated areas for group prayers and congregation.	660	2.93	1.395	54.007	659	0.000
WORSHIP AREA SERVICES PERCEIVED	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	t	df	Sig
Prayer mats and Quran copies for use.	660	3.07	1.433	54.982	659	0.000
Audio system for broad casting prayers and sermons	660	3.10	1.422	55.915	659	0.000
Clean and well-maintained ablution (face cleaning) facility	660	3.04	1.398	55.891	659	0.000

Assistance for elderly or disabled worshippers	660	3.05	1.407	55.785	659	0.000
Information boards with prayer times and qibla (West side) direction facility	660	2.97	1.447	52.682	659	0.000
Security personnel to ensure safety and order during prayers.	660	2.95	1.389	54.516	659	0.000
Separate prayer areas for men and women	660	3.00	1.415	54.512	659	0.000
Religious scholars available for guidance	660	3.15	1.437	56.250	659	0.000
Designated areas for group prayers and congregation.	660	2.94	1.390	54.320	659	0.000

Data Source: Primary

The demographic profile of the respondents reflects a diverse and representative group of Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. Gender-wise distribution indicates a near-balanced participation of male and female pilgrims, with a marginal predominance of males, suggesting shared spiritual involvement across genders. The age composition reveals a higher concentration of middle-aged and older respondents, particularly those between 36 and 55 years and above, indicating that pilgrimage participation is more common among individuals with greater financial stability, maturity, and spiritual readiness. Educational background shows considerable diversity, ranging from no formal education to graduation and diploma levels, highlighting that the motivation for pilgrimage transcends educational attainment. Occupational distribution further supports this diversity, with respondents drawn from professionals, government and private employees, self-employed individuals, agriculturists, homemakers, retirees, and students, emphasizing that pilgrimage appeals to individuals across varied socio-economic and occupational backgrounds.

Income analysis indicates participation from both modest and relatively higher income groups, demonstrating that Hajj and Umrah are accessible aspirations rather than exclusive to affluent sections. Family size data reveal a predominance of medium to large families, suggesting the influence of collective family decision-making in pilgrimage participation. The frequency of visits shows a notable trend of repeat pilgrimage, reflecting strong religious devotion and continued spiritual attachment. Information sources and influencing factors are largely shaped by family, friends, religious teachings, and community networks, complemented by social media and travel agents. The purpose of visit extends beyond ritual performance to include cultural exploration and spiritual fulfilment. Variations in duration of stay, package preferences, booking methods, and perceptions of Mecca further illustrate the evolving and structured nature of pilgrimage travel, blending spiritual significance with modern service expectations.

The age-wise analysis of services offered by tour operators indicates that pilgrims across all age categories availed multiple service components such as meals, accommodation, transportation, safety, visa processing, and luggage handling.

Respondents in the age groups of 36–45 years and above 55 years reported comparatively higher utilization of most services, suggesting that middle-aged and elderly pilgrims tend to rely more on organized service support due to physical comfort, safety needs, and convenience considerations. Younger pilgrims below 25 years showed relatively lower reliance on certain services, possibly due to greater adaptability and fewer dependency requirements. With regard to accommodation type, serviced apartments, tents, and dormitories emerged as the most preferred options across age groups. Older pilgrims showed a greater inclination towards serviced apartments and budget hotels, reflecting a preference for comfort and privacy, while younger age groups more frequently opted for dormitories and tents, indicating cost sensitivity and flexibility. This demonstrates that accommodation choices are strongly influenced by age-related comfort expectations and affordability.

The comparison between services offered and services availed reveals statistically significant results, indicating that pilgrims actively utilized the services provided during Hajj and Umrah. The significant t-values suggest that the organized nature of pilgrimage services plays an important role in facilitating a smooth travel experience, including visits to religious and tourist locations. Analysis of assurance dimensions highlights that pilgrims place considerable importance on insurance coverage, healthcare access, security measures, transparent pricing, and reliable information on rituals. While perceived assurance levels were generally close to expectations, paired sample t-test results reveal significant gaps in certain assurance aspects, particularly in travel insurance coverage, provision of updated ritual information, and Zam-Zam water assurance. These gaps indicate areas where service providers need to strengthen delivery to better align with pilgrim expectations. Regarding worship area services, both expectation and perception scores indicate moderate to high satisfaction levels. Facilities such as prayer mats, audio systems, ablution areas, guidance from religious scholars, and security arrangements were largely perceived as being adequately provided. Minor variations between expected and perceived services suggest operational challenges due to crowd

intensity, but overall consistency reflects effective management of worship-related facilities.

In conclusion, the findings reveal that age significantly influences service utilization patterns, accommodation preferences, and assurance expectations. While overall service delivery during Hajj and Umrah is positively perceived, targeted improvements in assurance-related services and worship area facilities—especially for elderly pilgrims—can further enhance pilgrim satisfaction and service quality.

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