

## THE DYNAMICS OF EMOTION AT CROWDED PLACES DURING UMRAH: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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**ABSTRACT** - Although Umrah is a relatively smaller mass gathering event compared to Hajj, it still involves a large group of people confined within a limited space. This paper describes an explorative study focusing on crowded situations during Umrah. More specifically, this paper concentrates on various categories of emotions as experienced and observed by 23 respondents while performing various rituals at various crowded locations during their Umrah's visit to Makkah. Findings from qualitative interviews indicated that the most common emotions were negative type of emotions like anger and frustration. However, there were also positive emotions like calmness and gratitude. Respondents also reported several unique emotions like "restrained anger" and "controlled frustration". There were also reports of general overriding positive emotions. This explorative study highlights the complexity of emotions as experienced during a spiritually-related crowded situation like Hajj and Umrah and the importance for more research to focus on these 'unique' social situations. Findings also have implications on potential evacuation procedures.

**Keywords:** Umrah, emotions, crowds, spiritual

## INTRODUCTION

Although Umrah is a relatively smaller mass gathering event compared to Hajj, it still involves a large group of people confined within a limited space. This working paper describes an explorative study focusing on crowded situations during Umrah. More specifically, this paper concentrates on various emotions as experienced and observed by 23 respondents while performing certain rituals at various crowded locations during their Umrah's visit to Makkah. The general objective of this explorative study is to investigate experience related to crowding situations during Umrah. This paper however focuses only on examining emotions as associated with certain crowded conditions during Umrah.

### Umrah

Hajj and Umrah are two major rituals in Islam and every year millions of Muslims engage in these rituals. During these rituals, people gather in Makkah and Madinah, performing various complicated tasks together with thousands of others and over an extended period of time that range from 11 to 40 days. Some of these rituals are highly demanding and very often requires great physical and mental energy. Each task has to be performed within certain and follow strict guidelines. In additions, some tasks have to be completed within a certain period of time and this add to the demand.

Umrah to a certain extend is similar to Hajj. It is similar in a way that it also involves several complicated rituals and being with a large number of people. Umrah is sometimes considered as a smaller Hajj. The word itself refers "to visit a populated place". During Umrah , there are two most important rituals to be performed. One is Tawaf or the circling of the Ka'aba. The other is Sa'ie i.e. running between the two hills of Al-Safa and Al-Marwah. While Hajj is compulsory for every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it, Umrah is not. Umrah is however highly recommended.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of Hajj or Umrah is having to perform the relatively complicated rituals described above with a large number of people within a limited amount of space. Crowding contribute to the discomfort and stress experienced by people engaging in the ritual of Hajj or Umrah. This paper/presentation focuses mainly on Umrah.

### Assessing crowd within the context of Umrah

Crowd can be defined as a large group of individuals gathered within the same physical environment and sharing a common goal (e.g. people going to a rock show or a football match) (Challenger, Clegg & Robinson, 2009). In the context of Hajj or Umrah, the above definition can be applied where a group of people currently engaging or participating in these two rituals can be considered as a gathering of a large group of individuals all sharing the same common goal of performing the ibadah.

More precisely, whether or not a gathering of a group of people can be considered a crowd is determined by its size, density, time, collectivity and novelty (Challenger, Clegg & Robinson, 2009). In terms of size, there must be a sizeable number of people. Looking into the context of Umrah, yes indeed there is a sizeable number of people gathering at various points of Umrah process. Density is defined by number of people spread out within a certain width of space, the type of event and movement of crowd. In Umrah situation, density may vary across different situations and points in time but generally density can be considered as high throughout Umrah.

In terms of time- in crowd, individuals must be in a group "at in a specific location for a specific purpose, for a measurable amount of time". While the whole Umrah period can be considered as one time frame, Umrah can also be broken in smaller activities and crowd gathering for each of these activities all fit into the time criteria of a crowd. Collectivity is measured in terms of shared social identity, goals, interests and coherent behaviors. In the context of Umrah, people share common identity as Hujjaj and common goals and interest in performing the ibadah and engage in similar behaviors, especially the ones related to the rituals of Umrah. Novelty refers to the crowd ability to act in a socially coherent manner without any prior awareness, or communication, of group norms and values to guide their behaviour. In the context of Umrah and Hujjaj, this may be governed by the general aim to complete the task.

### **Emotions at crowded places during Umrah**

On the other hand, viewing emotions as complex organizations with different components, emotions can be seen as representing one element of behavior. During Umrah, emotions are likely to be influenced by various factors including situational and personal. Current approach to studying emotion differentiates between two broad-range of emotions: positive vs. negative emotions. Positive feelings include calm and happiness whereas negative emotions comprise of anger and frustration, among others.

### **THIS STUDY**

This explorative study focuses on the experience of being in crowded places during Umrah. More specifically, this paper analyses emotional experience related to being in a crowded place during Umrah. Other studies have shown how being a crowd can elicit arousals of certain positive (excited) or negative (anger). On the other hand, Umrah itself is likely to promote general overriding emotions of being the selected one. More specific situations as related to specific task or ritual are likely to bring in more intense but specific emotion. For example, being in a crowded place is going to elicit the feeling of frustration and angry. All of these will be explored in this study.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Participant in this study were 23 Hujjaj who were performing Umrah at the time of the study. They were recruited from various places during their Umrah rituals. They then responded to a set of interviews. Interviews were semi-structured in design where respondents were guided by a set of questions to help them describe their general and specific experience of being in a crowd during Umrah. Participants were also asked to report their observation of others during the experience.

## RESULTS

From the responses, a few themes related to reported emotions emerged. The following 3 categories/levels of analysis emerged from the responses. The first section differentiates between general over-riding emotions vs. emotions specific to certain rituals, locations and time of the day. From the responses, it appears that participants were not only experiencing emotion specific to the ritual or location at the time, but they also experienced the more general and persistent emotion. This will be discussed in more details in the first category of analysis. In the second analysis, the focus on identifying between three different categories of emotions i.e. positive vs. negative vs. mixed emotions. The third analysis differentiates between emotions of self vs. emotion of others.

### *General vs. specific emotions*

#### *General Emotions*

A few respondents described the general over-riding positive emotions associated with feeling serene, peace, relax and calm. Some also experienced the general feelings on disbelief (e.g. "I cannot believe I am really here, looking at Ka'abah") and being specially and 'selected' by Allah to visit Makkah.

#### *Specific Emotions*

However, there are specific emotions that can be associated with specific location, ritual and time. These emotions are especially associated with being in a crowded condition with other people. Several locations have been identified as crowded and they include airport, hotels and Masjidil Haram itself. Rituals are mainly related to Tawaf, Saie, prayer and checking in at the hotels and airports. Times associated with most intense crowds were mostly during peak hours of prayer's time. These emotions include both positive such as "fresh/energetic" and "excitement" and negative ones such as "worried" and "puzzled". Specific negative emotions during a specific ritual were mainly elicited by actions of others that were considered as distracting and threatening. The actions include "pushing" and "making a loud noise".

### *Positive vs. negative vs. mixed emotions*

#### *Positive Emotions*

Positive emotions include the general emotions associated with the general experience of being in

Makkah described earlier (e.g. serene, peace, relax, disbelieve, special and 'selected'). Others were related to specific rituals such as "feeling calm during Tawaf". The specific emotion as tied to a specific ritual was experienced especially when the rituals were conducted during less crowded situations such as at midnight or beyond peak hours.

#### *Negative Emotions*

Findings from qualitative interviews indicated that there were common emotions associated with being in crowded places than positive ones. Negative emotions range from mild ones like "feeling annoyed" and "agitated" to more intense ones like "frustration" and "anger". Other negative emotions include "worried", "tense", "frightened" and "panic". Worry was mostly associated with concern for safety of self and traveling companion.

#### *Mixed Emotions*

Respondents also reported several unique emotions like "restrained anger" and "controlled frustration". It is possible that people experienced these mixed emotions as a result of trying to overcome the specific negative emotions by focusing on the more positive emotions.

#### *Emotions of self vs. emotion of others*

When people were asked to describe the emotion of others, emotions of self tends to be relatively more positive compared to emotions of others. For example, while describing their own emotions as "calm" and "patience", others were being described as "impatient" and "inconsiderate".

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This explorative study highlights the complexity of emotions as experienced during a spiritually-related crowded situation like Hajj and Umrah. More importantly, findings have several implications related to potential evacuation procedures. For example the result of this study indicates that people in crowded places during Umrah generally experience intense and negative emotions. Therefore any evacuation procedure must be carefully planned in a way that it will not add on to the negative and intense emotions. In addition, a good evacuation should to instill less intense and more positive emotions such as calmness.

This study also highlights certain high-risk crowded areas (e.g. Ka'abah) during specific rituals (e.g. Tawaf) and at specific time (e.g. prayer's time). Authorities must identify these risky locations, rituals and times and arrange evacuation procedure by taking into account this specific information.

People also described a lot of worry associated with their own safety and the safety of their traveling companion such as family members and friends. Evacuation procedure must take into account this concern and build a system where people can either stay close with their traveling companions and can easily find them should they become separated.

Finally, this explorative, preliminary study highlights the need for more research to focus on a spiritually-related crowded situation like Hajj and Umrah.

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