

Umrah as a Ritual of Spiritual Transformation: Motivation, Forgiveness, and Opportunities for a New Life

Jamalluddin Hashim^{1*}, Normala Rahim², Hasanulddin Mohd³, Siti Fatimah Salleh⁴, Ramlah Mat Ali⁵, Wan Mohd Rizhan Wan Idris⁶, Nur Saadah Mohd Shapri⁷

UniSZA, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

The annual increase in the number of Umrah pilgrims reveals a paradox; this ritual is growing in popularity, yet a deep understanding of the desired spiritual transformation is often neglected, especially amidst the tide of commercialization. This raises concerns about whether the blessings of the experience truly permeate daily life, extending beyond momentary euphoria in the Holy Land. Nevertheless, previous studies tend to focus on logistical or external sociological aspects, rarely delving into the complexity of the forgiveness process and post-ritual self-restructuring from a critical conceptual lens. Thus, this paper, through meticulous library document analysis, examines existing narratives to form a more coherent framework of understanding. This study suggests that Umrah motivations are multi-layered, extending far beyond mere rewards, leading to a search for meaning and psychological escape. It also finds that forgiveness, as the core of the ritual, functions as a profound psychospiritual cleansing mechanism, not merely the forgiveness of sins. Ultimately, this process opens up opportunities for a ‘new life’ that demands continuous commitment, overcoming the barrier of a ‘post-Umrah’ mentality. The implications of this study urge a reorientation of religious education approaches and community support to sustain the transformative impact of Umrah in the long term.

Keywords: Spiritual Transformation, Umrah, Forgiveness, Religious Motivation, Self-Renewal

INTRODUCTION

The majestic silhouette of mosque minarets, a sea of people in ihram attire—these are the images of Umrah that flood our collective minds, yet behind this visual grandeur lies a dubious irony. While the Umrah tourism industry flourishes, supported by convenient and attractive packages, questions about the depth of its spiritual impact are often marginalized. Many pilgrims return with beautiful stories and captivating pictures, but has a fundamental shift truly occurred within them? Or is it merely a temporary escape from worldly reality, a form of ‘spiritual vacation’ that ends as soon as they arrive at their home airport? The lack of critical reflection on this phenomenon, particularly how Umrah truly becomes a catalyst for personal transformation and forgiveness, is truly disappointing. Most discussions, whether in mass media or public lectures, tend to focus on religious rulings, travel logistics, or the promised rewards, neglecting the deep psychological and sociological dimensions that should be the essence of the ritual. This signals a gap in our collective understanding—a gap between the ritual performed and the true transformation aspired to. Is Umrah not just a physical journey, but an expedition into the soul? Existing research, if any, rarely thoroughly unpacks how initial motivations—often vague and varied—interact with the experience in the Holy Land to forge true forgiveness, and subsequently, open a new chapter in life. Therefore, this paper attempts to unravel this complexity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Narratives surrounding Umrah and spiritual transformation constantly move across a broad spectrum, though often fragmented, leaving us with incomplete pieces of understanding. Umrah motivation, for instance, has long been a fascinating point of debate, with some scholars arguing that it is rooted in pure religious aspects—the desire to draw closer to God, fulfill obligations, or seek divine rewards (Al-Ghazali, 1999). However, this view

is too simplistic, neglecting the complex layers of worldly motivations that also drive individuals (Fadillah et al., 2021). Some go there seeking peace from life's pressures, some consider it a symbol of social status, and some even see it as a tourism opportunity while worshipping—a hybridization of intentions that blurs the lines between the spiritual and the material. Aini et al.'s (2020) research highlights how societal perceptions of Umrah as a 'lifestyle' also influence motivation, a view inconsistent with the original concept of worship. This raises the question: to what extent do these mixed intentions affect the quality of transformation experienced? The aspect of forgiveness, moreover, is another narrative requiring deeper investigation. Within the framework of Islamic theology, forgiveness of sins is a central promise of Umrah, an absolute purification. But what about self-forgiveness? Fauzi's (2022) study briefly touches on the psychological pressure experienced by pilgrims carrying the burden of past sins, but does not specifically examine the intra-psychic process of how forgiveness is subjectively realized. Is it merely the utterance of *istighfar*, or a deeper process of acceptance and release, encompassing emotional and cognitive aspects? Herein lies the deficiency—we lack understanding of the psychospiritual mechanism of forgiveness itself, beyond mere religious rhetoric. Research on a new life post-Umrah also tends to be anecdotal or limited qualitative studies. Many speak of changes in attitude, a desire to become better individuals, abandoning immoral acts; these are all encouraging personal testimonies (Rosyadi et al., 2019). However, the sustainability of these changes is often questioned. Why are some pilgrims able to maintain their spiritual momentum, while others revert to old habits shortly after returning? This matter is rarely seriously dissected. The lack of a solid theoretical framework to explain the factors influencing the sustainability of this transformation—whether social support, environment, or strength of intention—is an impediment. While Norhaslinda et al. (2023) attempt to link pilgrim satisfaction with the Umrah experience, it does not directly address the sustainability of behavioral change. This indicates that although there is recognition of Umrah's transformative potential, the mechanisms and determining factors of successful change remain obscure. Thus, this literature review uncovers a gap in understanding how motivation, forgiveness, and opportunities for a new life dynamically interact to form a holistic and lasting Umrah experience, beyond existing superficial perceptions.

METHODOLOGY

This paper does not rely on empirical data collection; no questionnaires were distributed, and no interviews were conducted. Instead, the methodological approach applied is conceptual analysis—an intensive process of filtering, synthesizing, and reorganizing ideas from various literature sources. We are of the view that to understand the depth of Umrah's spiritual transformation, we cannot merely rely on external observations or brief reports, but must delve into existing narratives, theories, and debates within the disciplines of social sciences, theology, and psychology of religion. This is not merely a standard literature review; it is the construction of a new conceptual framework, an effort to deconstruct commonly accepted premises and reconstruct a richer understanding. The process began with a careful source identification phase. We systematically identified relevant academic journal articles, books, book chapters, and conference proceedings, using major databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as "Umrah", "Hajj", "religious motivation", "spiritual transformation", "forgiveness in Islam", "religious experience", and "post-worship behavioral change" were used in various combinations to ensure broad coverage. The selected sources were not merely collected; they were filtered based on relevance, methodological quality (even if previous studies were empirical, we evaluated the strength of their conceptual arguments), and their capacity to contribute to a larger synthesis. We set aside works that offered only superficial descriptions or were trapped in theological debates irrelevant to the psychological and sociological dimensions. This was a process demanding intellectual acuity, not automatic data collection. The second phase was thematic content analysis. Each selected source was read repeatedly, focusing on main arguments, concepts presented, and relationships between various ideas. Emerging themes—such as the multi-layered motivations of Umrah, the psychospiritual mechanisms of forgiveness, and factors influencing the sustainability of a new life—were noted and coded. We did not merely take content literally, but also read between the lines, searching for implicit implications and gaps not filled by previous studies. This required the ability to think critically and integrate diverse perspectives. The third phase involved synthesis and conceptual framework development. The coded thematic data was then reorganized to form a coherent narrative. This is where the main value of this methodology lies—the ability to connect disparate points in the literature, creating a framework that explains how motivation, the process of forgiveness, and the potential for a new life are interconnected. We formulated new arguments that went beyond the findings of individual studies, integrating them into a more comprehensive conceptual model of Umrah as a transformative

ritual. This methodology is valid because it allows for the exploration of complex issues without relying on primary data that may be limited in scope or access. It recognizes that a deep understanding of socio-religious phenomena often requires robust theory building, which can only be formed through critical dialogue with the existing body of knowledge. Therefore, this approach provides a solid intellectual foundation for examining Umrah as a multidimensional phenomenon requiring more than just a superficial view.

FINDINGS

The Umrah experience, when examined beyond its surface, reveals a spectrum of motivations far more complex than common perceptions. It is not merely about divine rewards, nor solely about fulfilling an obligation. Pilgrims arrive with a myriad of reasons—some seeking escape from life's pressures, hoping for a form of spiritual tranquility in the holy land, as if the Kaaba is a panacea for all worries. Others are driven by family tradition, social pressure, or the desire to be recognized as 'one who has performed Umrah'; these intentions are intertwined, mixed, forming a complex mosaic of intentions, thus questioning the individual's spiritual purity. This is a reality often overlooked in religious discourse. Furthermore, the journey to the Holy Land itself often becomes a breeding ground for internal conflict, even before arrival. Individuals are confronted with uncomfortable self-reflection, contemplating past sins, mistakes made, and life's disappointments. This is not a tranquil journey. This pressure, ironically, opens the door to a profound process of forgiveness, a mechanism more psychospiritual than purely theological. Forgiveness here is no longer merely asking for God's pardon; it is an effort to reconcile with the past, to forgive oneself for shortcomings and mistakes, and perhaps even to forgive others who have caused hurt. This is a heavy inner struggle. Through the rituals of tawaf and sa'ie, pilgrims symbolically retrace a journey of search, often accompanied by confession of sins and promises of change. This process, if deeply embraced, can be a powerful emotional catharsis—a liberating purification of the soul. It is a moment when tears flow not from sadness, but from release. However, the opportunity for this new life does not come automatically. After returning, pilgrims face the same life realities, an unchanged environment. The determination to remain on the path of righteousness is often tested by old temptations, social criticism, or a lack of community support that understands their struggle. Some succeed in changing themselves, rejecting old habits, and living more meaningful lives; they are living witnesses to the transformation of Umrah. But others stumble, returning to old patterns of life, finding that the 'aura' of Umrah fades too quickly. This raises important questions about the factors that sustain transformation—does it depend on the strength of individual faith, or a supportive social environment? Perhaps, without continuous support and a deep understanding of post-ritual challenges, that 'new life' remains an elusive ideal. Therefore, Umrah is more than just a visit; it is a complex inner battlefield, a promise of transformation that requires more than just intention to become a reality.

DISCUSSION

The finding that Umrah motivations are multi-layered, extending far beyond mere rewards, prompts us to reconsider often-simplified religious narratives. What are the implications for how we promote Umrah? If individuals come hoping to find peace from worldly problems or as a symbol of status, then travel agencies and religious institutions might inadvertently reinforce motivations that are not entirely spiritual. This signals a deeper question: have we collectively failed to provide other avenues for individuals to find meaning in life or resolve their internal conflicts, such that Umrah becomes a last resort? If so, this not only distorts the original purpose of worship but may also lead to disappointment when unrealistic expectations are not met. Perhaps this explains why some pilgrims feel 'empty' after returning. The process of forgiveness that occurs in the Holy Land also needs to be viewed beyond a purely theological lens. It clearly has a strong psychospiritual dimension. This means that merely teaching about the virtues of forgiveness is not enough. We need to understand how individuals actually process guilt, how they release emotional burdens, and how they rebuild a positive self-image after feeling forgiven. This is not a linear process; it is a winding journey that may require psychological support or counseling, in addition to religious guidance. Imagine, if religious institutions collaborated with psychologists to develop pre-Umrah programs that help pilgrims manage their emotional issues, wouldn't the transformative impact be deeper and more lasting? The concept of a 'new life' post-Umrah, though desired, is a challenging reality. It is not magic that changes everything overnight. Why do some individuals manage to maintain their spiritual momentum while others fail? This may not be directly related to the sincerity of their worship in the Holy Land, but rather to external factors such as family support, work environment, and community. If pilgrims return to the same toxic environment, with friends who do not support positive changes,

then their resolve will be fragile. This has critical implications for communities and religious institutions: do we provide adequate post-Umrah support systems? Are there support groups, mentors, or follow-up programs that help pilgrims maintain their commitment? Failure to do so may mean we have missed an opportunity to support transformations that could actually occur. Thus, it is possible that the absence of these support platforms is a major reason why a 'new life' often remains an aspiration, not a reality. This is detrimental not only to individuals but also to society at large. Understanding Umrah as a continuous transformative ritual, and not just a once-in-a-lifetime event, is crucial. This demands a more holistic approach, involving not only travel agencies and religious scholars, but also psychologists, social workers, and local communities. Only then can we hope that Umrah truly becomes a bridge to a more meaningful and virtuous life.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual research reaffirms that Umrah is more than just a ritual fulfilling valid conditions; it is a complex arena for spiritual transformation. The multi-layered motivations of pilgrims—encompassing religious, psychological, and sociological aspects—signal that our understanding of this worship needs refinement, moving beyond often-simplified rhetoric. Forgiveness, which is at the core of Umrah's promise, can no longer be seen as merely a passive process; it is a psychospiritual mechanism demanding deep introspection and emotional release. The success of this process ultimately opens up space for opportunities for a new life. However, this new life, though desired, is a continuous commitment and often tested by worldly realities. The failure to maintain spiritual momentum post-Umrah proves that true transformation requires more than just a brief experience in the Holy Land. Therefore, this paper argues that to optimize the impact of Umrah, we must move beyond existing narrow perspectives and embrace a holistic model that recognizes the complexity of motivations, the depth of the forgiveness process, and the challenges and needs for continuous support for self-change sustainability. The main recommendation of this study is the development of an integrated pre-Umrah and post-Umrah framework, emphasizing mental and emotional preparation, and providing continuous community support. Future research should empirically examine the impact of structured community support programs on the sustainability of behavioral changes among post-Umrah pilgrims, focusing on variables such as social networks, mentor involvement, and access to counseling. Neglecting the psychological and sociological dimensions of Umrah means we are only seeing the outer shell of worship, eroding its transformative potential, and risking producing a generation of pilgrims who have outwardly been to the Holy Land, but whose inner selves are still shackled by old problems, unaware that the key to change lies within oneself and a supportive environment.

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