

Optimising Hajj Service Management in the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Kotamobagu City

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ABSTRACT

The optimization of Hajj service management stands as a pivotal endeavor for the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Kotamobagu City, North Sulawesi, as it seeks to facilitate a seamless pilgrimage experience for residents embarking on the sacred journey to Mecca. Through a qualitative analysis, this research explores the current practices, challenges, and opportunities for optimization in Hajj service management. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis were employed to gather insights from key informants and stakeholders directly involved in Hajj service management. The results reveal a nuanced understanding of the logistical complexities, communication gaps, and capacity-building needs inherent in managing Hajj services. Furthermore, opportunities for optimization, including leveraging technology, strengthening communication and coordination, and empowering stakeholders, are identified as promising avenues for enhancing the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of Hajj services. By addressing these challenges and embracing innovative strategies, the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs can enhance the pilgrimage experience, uphold the sanctity of the Hajj journey, and serve the needs of pilgrims with diligence and compassion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hajj pilgrimage, an important religious practice in Islam, involves transporting pilgrims between holy places in a specific order, which often leads to congestion and delays [1]. The practice of pilgrimage in Islam not only includes the pilgrimage, but also includes visits to various holy places such as Medina and Jerusalem [2]. Investments in Hajj funds not only help organise the pilgrimage, but also benefit the

wider community in Indonesia, supporting religious, educational, and social initiatives [3]. Hajj involves symbolic and spiritual elements, such as the Kaaba and Safa and Marwah, which have deep meaning [4]. Collaborative governance models, such as the triple helix involving government, private sector, and community, aim to organise the Hajj effectively, but may require additional stakeholders to improve coordination and communication [5], [6].

Efficient management of Hajj services is crucial for a seamless pilgrimage experience in Kotamobagu City. The logistical challenges of Hajj, including transport between sites, have been addressed through simulation tools like ExtendSim [1]. Corruption along pilgrimage routes has historically plagued the process, prompting government intervention to regulate and streamline pilgrim traffic. Continuous improvements in Hajj management systems aim to ensure safety, orderliness, and compliance with Islamic teachings, with a focus on achieving sharia goals through effective organization [7], [8]. The evolution of the pilgrimage from a perilous overland journey to a regulated airlift underscores the impact of decolonization on pilgrimage management, emphasizing the shift towards air travel for efficiency and safety [9], [10]. Collaborative governance models, involving various stakeholders, are essential for effective pilgrimage organization, highlighting the need for improved communication and coordination among stakeholders [7].

The Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Kotamobagu City can enhance Hajj service management by adopting strategic planning stages, implementing effective management strategies [11], and utilizing tools like the Integrated Hajj Information and Computerization System (SISKOHAT) for better fund management [12]. Additionally, the office can learn from the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of Central Java's successful madrasa companion program, fostering mutual assistance and knowledge sharing to improve managerial quality [13]. Furthermore, understanding the policy changes in Bipih (Hajj Travel Expenses) by the Indonesian government can provide insights into cost management and public communication strategies [14], [15]. By amalgamating these approaches, the Office can optimize operations, streamline processes, and elevate the quality of services for pilgrims in Kotamobagu City.

By peering into the nuances of Hajj service management through a qualitative lens, this study seeks to illuminate the

challenges, aspirations, and opportunities that shape the pilgrimage experience in Kotamobagu City. Through dialogue, exploration, and collaboration, it endeavors to contribute to the enrichment of Hajj service management practices, fostering a pilgrimage environment imbued with efficiency, compassion, and spiritual fulfillment.

Against the backdrop of Kotamobagu City's vibrant cultural tapestry and its residents' unwavering commitment to their faith, this research embarks on a journey of inquiry, reflection, and transformation. It is a testament to the enduring spirit of Hajj pilgrimage, resonating across continents, cultures, and generations, and an affirmation of the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs' dedication to serving its community with diligence and integrity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *The Significance of Hajj Pilgrimage*

The Islamic pilgrimage, rooted in the traditions of the Prophet Abraham, symbolises submission to Allah and unity within the Muslim community [1], [16], [17]. Hajj rituals, such as Tawaf, Sa'i, and stoning the Jamrah, embody devotion, sacrifice, and spiritual renewal, which encourage growth and solidarity among pilgrims [2], [18]. This holy journey offers a transformative experience, emphasising purification, forgiveness, and redemption, allowing believers to seek forgiveness, embrace righteousness, and deepen their relationship with God and fellow Muslims [4], [19]. Hajj is not only a religious obligation but also a profound opportunity for spiritual growth, communal bonding, and renewed commitment to piety and devotion.

2.2 *Hajj Service Management*

Efficient management of Hajj services involves a multifaceted approach encompassing logistical, administrative, and operational tasks to facilitate the pilgrimage journey for millions of Muslims worldwide. From pre-departure preparations to on-site logistics, accommodation arrangements, and health services, various stakeholders

collaborate to ensure pilgrims' safety and well-being. Transportation allocation, accommodation options, medical assistance, ritual guidance, and logistical support are crucial components managed by the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in coordination with governmental bodies, private sectors, and international entities [1], [7], [16], [20], [21]. This collaborative effort aims to enhance the overall pilgrimage experience by providing essential services and infrastructure to support pilgrims throughout their sacred journey.

2.3 Challenges in Hajj Service Management

Managing Hajj services involves addressing logistical, health, crowd control, and accommodation challenges due to the massive scale of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Transportation complexities, crowd management, and infrastructure capacity are key logistical hurdles [1]. Health concerns arise from physical and mental stress, extreme temperatures, and disease risks due to overcrowding [20]. COVID-19 has added a new layer of complexity, requiring public health strategies and risk assessment tools for safe pilgrimages [22], [23]. Effective communication, emergency preparedness, and cultural sensitivity are crucial amidst language barriers and varying pilgrim preparedness levels [23]. To manage these challenges, authorities must implement robust transport strategies, health requirements, and risk assessment tools while ensuring coordination and cultural awareness.

2.4 Strategies for Optimization

Optimizing Hajj service management involves a multifaceted approach integrating technology, infrastructure enhancement, coordination among stakeholders, personnel training, and risk management. Leveraging tools like online registration systems and real-time monitoring aids in streamlining processes and enhancing communication. Investment in transportation, accommodation, and medical facilities is crucial to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims [1], [20]. Coordination

among governmental agencies, private sectors, and religious authorities is vital for seamless service integration [20]. Training programs for service personnel [4] enhance their readiness [23]. Implementing risk management plans and emergency protocols is essential for pilgrim safety [23]. This comprehensive approach ensures efficient, safe, and comfortable pilgrimage experiences.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative research employs a multi-method approach to explore the optimization of Hajj service management in the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Kotamobagu City, North Sulawesi. The research design integrates in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to gather insights from key informants and stakeholders involved in Hajj service management. Additionally, document analysis is conducted to review relevant reports, policies, and documents pertaining to Hajj service management in Kotamobagu City.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study consist of officials, staff members, and stakeholders directly engaged in Hajj service management within the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Kotamobagu City. Five informants are purposively selected based on their expertise, experience, and roles in managing Hajj services. These informants include the Head of the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, responsible for overseeing and coordinating Hajj service management activities; the Hajj Service Coordinator, overseeing logistics, transportation, and accommodation arrangements for pilgrims; the Health Officer, responsible for providing medical services, health education, and emergency response during the Hajj pilgrimage; the Community Leader, providing insights into community perspectives, needs, and concerns related to Hajj service management; and the Hajj Pilgrim Representative, offering firsthand insights into the challenges, experiences, and

suggestions for improvement from the perspective of the pilgrims. Selection criteria ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic from diverse perspectives, considering the knowledge, experience, and involvement of the participants in Hajj service management.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection for the study involves three primary methods: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. In-depth interviews are conducted with individual informants, utilizing semi-structured interview guides tailored to their roles and experiences in Hajj service management. Topics explored include current practices, challenges, opportunities, and optimization strategies. Each interview is audio-recorded with participant consent. Additionally, a focus group discussion gathers collective insights from Hajj pilgrims on various aspects of service management, facilitated by a structured discussion guide covering pre-departure preparations, transportation, accommodation, medical services, and overall satisfaction. Meanwhile, document analysis involves reviewing reports, policies, guidelines, and official communications related to Hajj service management in Kotamobagu City, providing supplementary insights and contextual information. Throughout the data collection process, confidentiality, informed consent, and adherence to research ethics guidelines are prioritized.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is conducted using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to facilitate systematic organization, coding, and interpretation of the data. The process begins with transcription, where audio recordings of interviews and focus group discussions are transcribed verbatim. Next, the textual data undergo systematic coding, identifying themes, patterns, and categories related to Hajj service management. Both deductive coding, based on pre-defined themes from the research questions, and inductive coding, which identifies emerging themes from the data, are employed. These codes are then

grouped into broader themes and sub-themes during theme development, organizing the data into meaningful categories that capture the nuances and complexities of Hajj service management. Data interpretation involves iterative analysis of coded data, exploring connections, contradictions, and relationships between themes. Reflective discussions among researchers help interpret the findings and derive meaningful insights. Triangulation is employed to enhance validity and reliability by comparing and contrasting data from multiple sources, including interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Finally, the findings are synthesized and presented in a coherent narrative, supported by quotations, examples, and evidence from the data, adhering to principles of transparency, clarity, and rigor in reporting the research findings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis conducted through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis yielded valuable insights into the current state of Hajj service management in the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Kotamobagu City, North Sulawesi. Key themes and findings emerged from the data collected, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and strategies for optimization.

4.1 Current Practices and Challenges

During the qualitative analysis, insights into the current practices and challenges of Hajj service management in the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Kotamobagu City, North Sulawesi, were gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants. The findings shed light on various aspects of Hajj service management, highlighting both the positive practices and the challenges faced by the office.

Interviews revealed that the office puts significant effort into pre-departure preparations for Hajj pilgrims. This includes facilitating visa processing, conducting health screenings, and organizing orientation sessions to ensure pilgrims are well-prepared

for their journey. However, informants mentioned challenges such as limited resources and bureaucratic hurdles, which sometimes lead to delays and inefficiencies in the preparation process. One informant remarked, "We strive to ensure all necessary preparations are made well in advance, but resource constraints and administrative procedures can sometimes slow down the process."

Overall, transportation arrangements, including flights and ground transportation, were reported to be satisfactory by the informants. However, occasional logistical issues, such as delays, overcrowding, and accommodation shortages, were noted. These challenges impact the overall experience of pilgrims and require careful management. One informant stated, "We work closely with transportation and accommodation providers to ensure smooth logistics, but unforeseen issues can arise, especially during peak pilgrimage seasons."

The provision of medical services and healthcare facilities during the Hajj pilgrimage was highlighted as a crucial aspect of service management. Informants emphasized the importance of preventive measures, emergency response preparedness, and collaboration with healthcare providers to address health-related challenges effectively. One informant mentioned, "Ensuring the health and safety of pilgrims is a top priority for us. We have medical teams on standby and collaborate with local healthcare facilities to address any health issues that may arise."

Effective communication and coordination among stakeholders emerged as critical factors in Hajj service management. While efforts are made to maintain communication channels and coordinate activities, informants noted communication gaps, miscommunication, and coordination challenges. These issues sometimes hinder the seamless delivery of services and require ongoing attention. One informant expressed, "We recognize the importance of communication and coordination, but

sometimes there are challenges in aligning efforts among different stakeholders."

4.2 Opportunities for Optimization

In addition to identifying current practices and challenges, the qualitative analysis also revealed several opportunities for optimizing Hajj service management in the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Kotamobagu City, North Sulawesi. These opportunities, as highlighted through interviews with key informants, offer potential avenues for improvement and enhancement in service delivery.

Informants expressed a keen interest in leveraging technology to streamline processes, enhance communication, and improve the efficiency of Hajj service management. Mobile applications, online platforms, and real-time monitoring systems were cited as potential tools to facilitate pre-departure preparations, monitor transportation logistics, and provide timely updates to pilgrims. One informant noted, "Technology can greatly enhance our ability to manage Hajj services more efficiently. Implementing digital solutions can streamline processes and improve communication with pilgrims and stakeholders."

Capacity building initiatives emerged as valuable opportunities to enhance the competencies and readiness of Hajj service personnel. Training programs, workshops, and skill development sessions were identified as effective strategies to equip staff members with the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to manage Hajj services effectively. One informant remarked, "Investing in the training and development of our staff is essential to improving service delivery. By enhancing their skills and expertise, we can better address the diverse needs and challenges of pilgrims."

Engaging stakeholders through participatory approaches and consultative forums was recognized as a promising avenue for fostering collaboration, building trust, and addressing the diverse needs and concerns of Hajj pilgrims and stakeholders. Community outreach programs, feedback mechanisms, and partnerships with local organizations

were suggested as ways to involve stakeholders in decision-making processes and ensure their voices are heard. One informant stated, "Involving stakeholders in the planning and implementation of Hajj services is crucial for building trust and ensuring the success of our initiatives. By actively engaging with communities and stakeholders, we can better understand their needs and preferences."

The use of data-driven approaches and analytics was highlighted as an opportunity to inform decision-making and improve the effectiveness of Hajj service management. By collecting and analyzing data on pilgrim demographics, preferences, and feedback, Hajj service managers can gain valuable insights into service delivery gaps, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions to optimize resources and enhance the overall pilgrimage experience. One informant mentioned, "Data-driven decision-making can help us identify trends, anticipate challenges, and tailor our services to meet the specific needs of pilgrims. By harnessing the power of data, we can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Hajj service management."

DISCUSSION

The discussion synthesizes the results of the qualitative analysis and examines their implications for optimizing Hajj service management in the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Kotamobagu City, North Sulawesi. By reflecting on the current practices, challenges, and opportunities identified through interviews and discussions, this section explores potential strategies and recommendations for enhancing the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of Hajj services.

Addressing Logistical Challenges

The logistical complexities associated with Hajj service management require proactive measures to enhance preparedness, mitigate risks, and ensure a smooth pilgrimage experience. Strategies such as advanced planning, contingency planning, and infrastructure development can help address logistical challenges and improve the

overall efficiency of service delivery. By investing in robust transportation and accommodation arrangements, and implementing effective crowd management and logistics strategies, the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs can minimize disruptions and enhance the pilgrimage experience for Hajj pilgrims.

Strengthening Communication and Coordination

Effective communication and coordination among stakeholders are essential for orchestrating Hajj services seamlessly. By fostering a culture of collaboration, transparency, and information sharing, Hajj service managers can enhance coordination, resolve issues promptly, and meet the diverse needs of pilgrims and stakeholders. Regular meetings, clear communication channels, and the establishment of a dedicated coordination mechanism can facilitate effective collaboration among government agencies, private sector entities, and community leaders involved in Hajj service management.

Embracing Innovation and Technology

The integration of innovative solutions and technology-driven approaches can revolutionize Hajj service management, enabling real-time monitoring, predictive analytics, and responsive decision-making. By leveraging mobile applications, online platforms, and data analytics tools, the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs can streamline processes, enhance communication, and improve the efficiency of service delivery. Additionally, embracing digital solutions for pre-departure preparations, transportation logistics, and medical services can enhance the overall pilgrimage experience and ensure the safety and well-being of Hajj pilgrims.

Empowering Stakeholders and Communities

Engaging stakeholders and communities in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of Hajj services is crucial for fostering ownership, accountability, and sustainability. By

involving community leaders, Hajj pilgrims, and local organizations in decision-making processes, the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs can gain valuable insights, build trust, and address the diverse needs and concerns of stakeholders. Community outreach programs, feedback mechanisms, and capacity-building initiatives can empower stakeholders to actively contribute to Hajj service management and strengthen community resilience and cohesion.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research underscores the imperative of optimizing Hajj service management in Kotamobagu City, North Sulawesi, to ensure residents' smooth facilitation of the sacred pilgrimage journey. Through a qualitative analysis, key challenges such as logistical complexities,

communication gaps, and capacity-building needs were identified, highlighting areas for improvement in service delivery. However, the research also unveils opportunities for optimization, including the leveraging of technology, strengthening communication and coordination, and empowering stakeholders. By embracing these strategies and recommendations, the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs can enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of Hajj services, ultimately enriching the pilgrimage experience for Hajj pilgrims and fulfilling its mandate with diligence and compassion. As the custodian of Hajj service management, the office plays a pivotal role in upholding the sacred tradition of Hajj pilgrimage and fostering a pilgrimage environment imbued with efficiency, compassion, and spiritual fulfillment.

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