

## The Relationship Between the Type of Cuisine Consumed by Foreign Pilgrims During Hajj and Their Overall Hajj Experience

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### Abstract

Muslims from all over the world visit Makkah, Saudi Arabia, annually to perform the ritual of Hajj (pilgrimage). Food perception of food plays a fundamental role in the organisation of basic psychological processes. It may also influence pilgrims' psychological well-being, such as their emotional stability and resilience during the journey, which is influenced by their satisfaction with the food provided, which can affect their mood and stress levels. Therefore, improving the type of cuisine foreign pilgrims consume during Hajj has the potential to enhance their overall experience. This paper aims to investigate whether foreign pilgrims' consumption of local food during Hajj, as opposed to their national cuisines, has any psychological impact, specifically the affective aspects of satisfaction on their Hajj experience and, if so, how it will affect their Hajj experience. For this research, semi-structured interviews were employed, and online interviews were conducted via Zoom. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse their responses, and coding was used to gain insights regarding their values, attitudes, and beliefs. In this research, five main themes emerged regarding the provision of food during the Hajj: the predominant type of cuisine, the spiritual experience beyond the food, differences in food catering services among accommodations, contradicting incidents and stories with their initial judgments, and finally, a realisation of the link and agreement with the study hypothesis. This study allowed for a better understanding of the psychological impacts of the type of cuisine consumed on improving the experience of pilgrims. The insight of this paper will inform Hajj agencies responsible for food catering during the Hajj journey to consider pilgrims' food preferences to enhance mood, energy levels, and the overall Hajj experience.

**Keywords:** cuisines, satisfaction, Hajj experience, mood, energy levels, hajj rituals.

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### 1. Introduction

Local food and beverages fulfil tourists' nutritional needs and offer them local cultural experiences (Kim et al., 2009). Food is not only considered an important tourist attraction but also a physiological need, tourists' desire to try local food and beverages can significantly influence their overall travel experience and satisfaction. (Kim et al., 2009). Such experiences can be impacted by various factors, such as food flavour, food variety, type of food, price range, location, environment, ingredients and availability (Hendijani, 2016). Research examining the relationship between food-neophobic tendencies and the perceived well-being of tourists has found that some tourists prefer the comforts of familiar foods when travelling abroad (Chang et al., 2021).

Food is fundamental in supporting psychological well-being by influencing mood, emotional balance, and overall mental health. In the case of hot springs tourists in Taiwan, the results indicate that their intention to revisit

was influenced by psychological well-being and the cuisine experience, suggesting that the cuisine experience primarily shaped their psychological well-being. (Lin, 2013). On the other hand, another study demonstrated that food consumption during travel can detract from the overall tourist experience (Dedeoğlu et al., 2021).

It is well-established that food contributes to the organisation of basic psychological processes for individuals, especially those on a spiritual or religious journey (Joseph et al., 2020). For instance, one study investigating the satisfaction of pilgrims visiting the Sabarimala Hill Temple (a central Sastha temple in India) from 30 different destinations identified five key factors, including food (Joseph et al., 2020).

Hajj is an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah, the holiest city for Muslims. Hajj is a mandatory religious duty for Muslims that must be carried out at least once in their lifetime. Visitors to Makkah, known as pilgrims, arrive yearly in the holy city of Makkah to perform Hajj rituals at a specific annual time (Kaysi et al., 2013). The number of pilgrims gathering in this holy city is expected to reach above 10 million in 2030. Various agencies serve Hajj events, including the government, private organisations and volunteers (Kaysi et al., 2012). The Saudi government is dedicated to providing the best services to the House of God pilgrims and working to raise their satisfaction levels. This could take them up to 3 months (or more) to prepare for this holy event.

It is postulated that improving the type of cuisine consumed by foreign pilgrims during their Hajj may positively improve their mood, energy levels, and overall experience. To test this hypothesis, this study was conducted to illustrate the link between the type of cuisine consumed by foreign pilgrims and their satisfaction during their Hajj experience.

This specific cohort was chosen for three main reasons: their home-country cuisine is totally different from the Saudi cuisine and the GCC cuisines, the duration of their stay during Hajj time is longer than for local or GCC pilgrims, and, finally, their Hajj journey can be expensive and tiring. These factors may affect their food intake due to lack of appetite, eventually affecting their mood or energy levels during the performance of physically demanding hajj rituals.

## **2. Materials and methods**

For this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the psychological impact of the cuisine consumed by foreign pilgrims during the Hajj. Interview questions were designed to first assess and evaluate the current food catering situation and then explore the impact of serving the pilgrims their home country's cuisine in the future. This research was approved by the Biomedical Research Ethics Committee at Umm Al-Qura University (HaPO-02-K-012-2024-06-2194).

Participants were interviewed online via Zoom for convenience and to accommodate geographical diversity. Thematic analysis was implemented to evaluate their responses, and codes provided insights regarding their values, attitudes, and beliefs. The study was conducted through intensive interviews, lasting between 30-45 minutes, which included the following questions: (you can see the interview guide in appendix A).

### **Participants criteria & recruitment**

This study's target sample comprised Muslims who had performed the Hajj between 2018 and 2022. The participants' ages ranged between 23 and 65. Facebook and Twitter were used to search for eligible candidates. All participants signed the consent form electronically before the interviews and agreed to take part in the study.

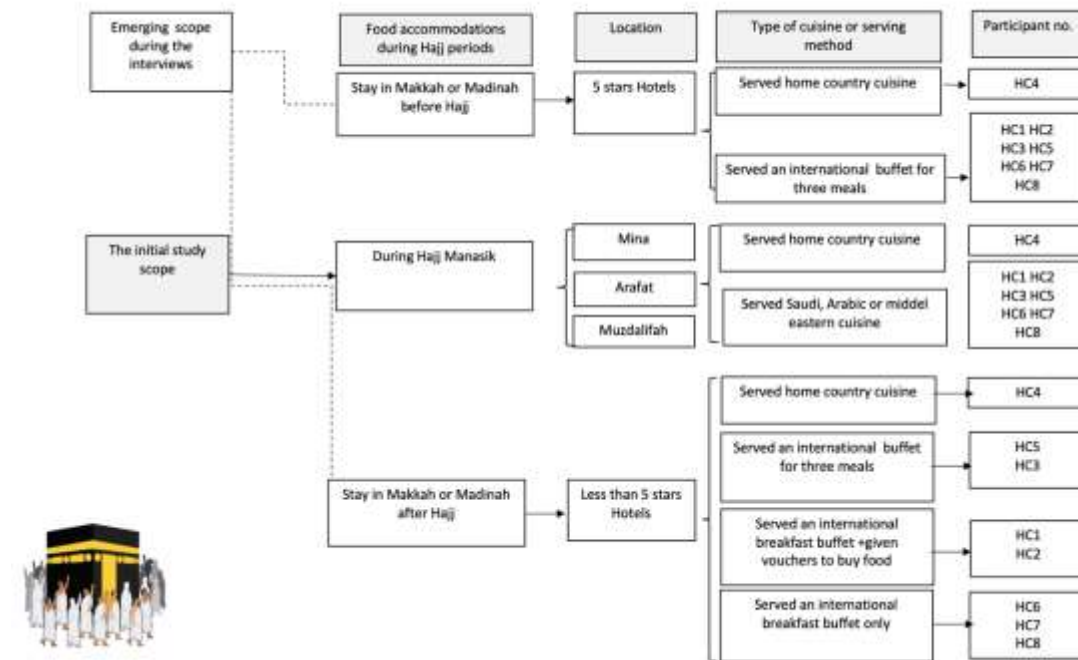
Out of 200 screened participants, only eight were eligible and completed the study due to strict inclusion criteria. Many of those who expressed interest via email were either not Muslims, had never performed Hajj, or had completed the pilgrimage before 2018. Each candidate received a \$10 Amazon voucher as a gesture for their involvement.

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Table 1 provides more details about the participants' demographic information.

**Table 1 participants profiles**

<i>Participants' ID</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>BMI (kg/m<sup>2</sup>)</i>	<i>Year of Hajj</i>
<i>HC1</i>	British Pakistani	F	50	28	2019
<i>HC2</i>	British Pakistani	M	53	35	2019
<i>HC3</i>	American Brazilian	F	53	21	2019
<i>HC4</i>	Indonesian	F	58	22	2022
<i>HC5</i>	American Tunisian	M	64	30	2019
<i>HC6</i>	French	M	58	19	2022
<i>HC7</i>	French Moroccan	F	50	17	2022
<i>HC8</i>	British Sudani	F	55	25	2018



**Figure 1 diagram to illustrate the initial and emerging scope of the study.**

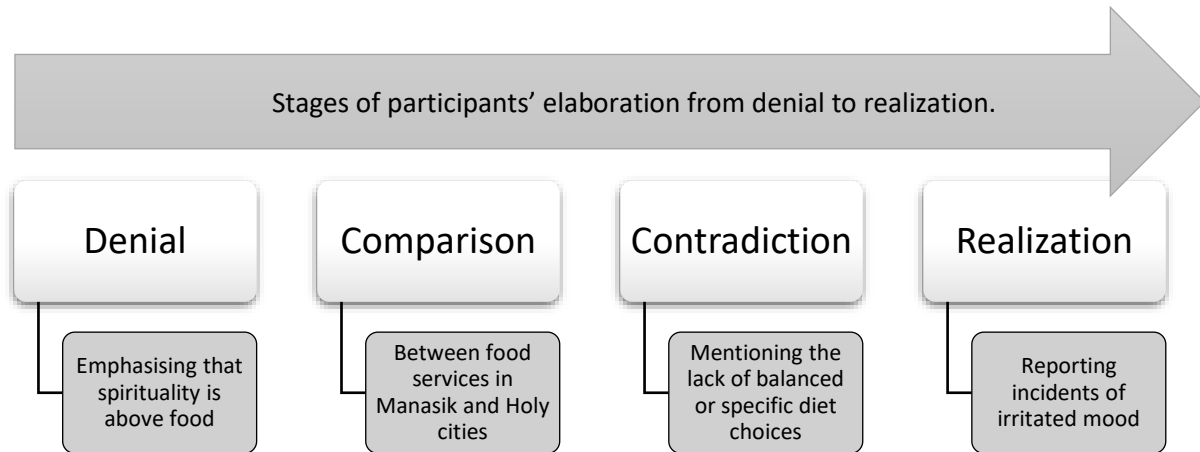


Figure 2 Participants' gradual elaboration through the interview and examples.

### 3. Results and discussion

For foreign pilgrims, the Hajj trip usually includes a stay in Makkah before the actual Hajj period begins (as they arrive much earlier than the local pilgrims) and another stay in Madinah either before or after the completion of Hajj Manasik. Usually, foreign pilgrims stay in the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah in hotels their Hajj organisers book. Although our study targeted food catering during the actual Hajj dates (from the 7th to the 13th of Dhul Hijjah month), All participants discussed their food catering experience as an integral part of their entire visit to the holy cities, encompassing their stays in Makkah and Madinah as a continuous (unseparated) experience. However, they also shared their feelings and reflections on the overall Hajj journey, which occasionally led to significant deviations from the study's primary focus on specific culinary aspects. The comparison made by all eight participants between the food catering services during the Hajj Manasik—specifically in Mina, Arafat, and Muzdalifah—and their stays in both holy cities highlighted significant differences in service quality and quantity. (see Figure 1 for illustration).

This research explores the experience of eight pilgrims who performed Hajj during the last five years. This study focuses on learning about their cuisine experience and how it impacted their mood, energy and overall engagement during this period. At the beginning of the interview, participants expressed reservations about linking their satisfaction to the type of cuisine consumed during their previous Hajj trip. They felt that discussing food might seem trivial compared to the ultimate spiritual purpose of the pilgrimage and were concerned that it could detract from the sanctity of their worship. This reluctance stemmed from a belief that spiritual fulfilment should take precedence over physical aspects of the experience, making them hesitant to prioritise culinary discussions. However, as they continued the interview, they felt more relaxed. They could elaborate on the interview questions more, which helped to highlight stories, incidents and themes that directly or indirectly link their overall experience and the type of cuisines consumed. In this research, five main themes emerged: the predominant type of cuisine, the spiritual experience beyond the food, differences in food catering services among food accommodations, contradicting incidents and stories with their initial judgments, and, finally, a realisation of the link and agreement with the study hypothesis. These themes were determined through a systematic thematic analysis process, which involved coding the interview transcripts, identifying recurring patterns and concepts, and grouping related ideas to form overarching themes. This approach allowed a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding food during their pilgrimage.

### **3.1. The predominant type of cuisine and dish.**

#### **3.1.1. Rice everywhere! Everyday!**

Only one of the eight participants was served their home-country cuisine in all Hajj destinations. Participant (Indonesian—HC4) expressed that she had been provided with an excellent experience, emphasising that she enjoyed the "taste, quantity, and quality" of her home country, the Indonesian food she was served. There was almost unanimous agreement among the remaining participants that the type of food served during their Hajj trip could be classified as "Asian," "Arabic," and "Middle Eastern" cuisines. Some participants specified further, categorizing the food as more "Pakistani," "Bangladeshi," and "Indian." The main dish for all lunches and dinners was rice, served with chicken or meat. Comments included: 'fried chicken and rice,' 'it was mainly rice,' and 'rice, mostly rice' (American Brazilian - HC3). One participant noted, *"It was mostly related to that diet; you know, like what Pakistanis, Indians, and Bangladeshis would eat, you know, that food with rice."* However, these remarks seemed more descriptive of the cuisine rather than critical.

Participants' opinions varied regarding their enjoyment or dissatisfaction with the main dish's central component, rice combined with a source of protein. Pilgrims from countries such as Pakistan, Sudan, Tunisia, and Brazil—where rice is a staple in their national cuisines—generally enjoyed the meals. Conversely, participants from France and Morocco, where rice is not an essential component of the daily diet, expressed disappointment with the predominance and repetition of rice dishes. Comments like, *"Rice and chicken all day long... I was very disappointed in terms of quality and variety"* (French Moroccan - HC7) and 'Every day the same thing... poultry and rice. I do not think I will eat chicken ever in my life' (French - HC6) reflect this sentiment.

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#### **3.1.2. Rice cooked with so many herbs and spices!**

Regarding flavour and spices in the rice dishes, participants expressed contradicting opinions based on the similarities between their home-country and Asian or Arabic cuisines. For instance, some pilgrims remarked that the food flavour was unpleasant. One participant stated, *"Rice was cooked with so many herbs and spices that people from Europe are not familiar with"* (French - HC6), explicitly mentioning overpowering herbs like coriander and cumin. These overly seasoned dishes impacted their food intake, with one noting, *"People did not like rice dishes, and when we talked to the organisers, we were served with dry noodles worth 50 cents compared to what we paid."*

In contrast, pilgrims from Pakistan found the flavour and spices of the rice dishes to be insufficient. For example, a participant stated, *"We did not eat that much because, obviously, it was not to our tastes; it tasted more blunt. There were no spices or anything that we normally use"* (British Pakistani - HC2). The missing herbs and spices included garam masala and chilli, staples in their traditional cuisine, highlighting the disconnect between the offered dishes and their culinary preferences.

Analysis revealed notable patterns between participants' nationalities and opinions on the rice dishes. European participants, particularly those from France, tended to find the flavours overwhelming and unfamiliar, primarily due to the intensity of spices like coriander and cumin, which are less common in their traditional cuisines. This resulted in a general dissatisfaction with the rice dishes, leading to decreased food intake. Conversely, participants from Pakistan expressed that the rice dishes needed more flavour, specifically missing spices integral to their culinary heritage, such as garam masala and chilli. This indicates that their expectations were shaped by their cultural background, which emphasises rich and spicy flavours. These patterns highlight how cultural dietary norms shape individual preferences and perceptions of food served during the Hajj, emphasising the importance of considering participants' national backgrounds when planning meals for diverse groups.

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Moreover, the served diet during Hajj, regardless of the type of cuisine, was criticised for being laden with carbohydrates and a lack of fruits and vegetables. As (American Brazilian - HC3) mentioned: *"Yes, it was tasty, but they should put less rice and more vegetables, because when you eat many carbohydrates, you know it spikes your blood sugar level."* The limited availability of fruits and vegetables during Hajj can be attributed to the logistics of catering for many pilgrims, which poses challenges in transporting and storing fresh produce, which has a limited shelf life, especially in the hot climate of Saudi Arabia. As a result, food providers often prioritise non-perishable items like rice and bread for convenience.

Another critical aspect highlighted in some responses was the absence of specific dishes for pilgrims following particular diets, such as low-carb or keto diets, anti-inflammatory diets, and diabetic-friendly options. Participants expressed a need for more inclusive meal choices that cater to various dietary restrictions. *"I think if they add a few choices, especially for people who are on a special diet or people who have diabetes... also people who have inflammation in the body or are on a low carb diet, for example"* (American Brazilian - HC3).

### **3.2. The spiritual experience was beyond the food.**

#### **3.2.1. My thinking was not to fill my stomach!**

In this study, all eight participants agreed that the spiritual aspect of Hajj was their most important element. The experience of being in the holy city was found to be invaluable, and each participant expressed the importance of having this spiritual experience first and foremost. Very emotional responses were given by pilgrims who had either recently converted to Islam or who performed Hajj for the first time. *"To have that feeling when you arrive, especially if you have recently converted to Islam... This feeling is felt when you go to an ancient land full of history. You connect with the birthplace of Prophet Mohammed, and to do the same thing that your ancestors did, the same path, the same rituals."* (American Brazilian - HC3).

Another participant stated, *"I went for worshipping; my thinking was not to fill my stomach"* (British Sudani - CH8). Another one emphasised that they *"loved everything about it; this was the first time I am getting emotional even talking about it...the place, your emotions, your adrenaline, and this hold different feelings, so you will not be thinking about food at that time; you will be thinking about other things I mean it is the purpose that you know Allah has chosen you to visit his house"* (British Pakistani - HC1). Also, other participants agreed that food *"did not cross my mind"* (British Sudani – HC8). One participant stated, *"Sometimes you eat because you have few choices, but did that impact my mood? I personally do not know because I was not paying attention to that. I was more concerned about doing the rituals... whatever food I eat, it gets digested anyways"* (British Pakistani - HC2).

#### **3.2.2. Collectivism vs individualism**

On the other hand, pilgrims who had performed the Hajj multiple times or were from nationalities more inclined to share their opinions expressed fewer emotions and more critiques. This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of individualism and collectivism, which significantly influenced participants' food preferences and feedback (Saha and Ghosh, 2020).

Individuals prioritise personal identity, preferences, and self-sufficiency in individualistic cultures, such as those represented by many Western nations. Participants from these backgrounds tended to voice their dissatisfaction more openly, as they felt empowered to express their individual opinions. For example, a French participant stated, *"Because I am French, I am going to tell you... I missed everything... Indeed, when you travel, you must adapt, but I was expecting some varieties; I was not asking to have beef mignon"* (French - HC6). This response reflects a strong sense of personal expectation and a desire for variety in their dining experience, highlighting the individualistic tendency to focus on individual preferences over group norms.

Similarly, another participant remarked, *"I did not go to Hajj to eat, but we are not supposed to be fasting also"* (Moroccan French - HC7). This indicates that while they recognise the spiritual significance of the pilgrimage, their culinary expectations still influence their experience. Comments like, *"It was a buffet but with little choice; generally, it was okay"* (American Tunisian - HC5) further illustrate a tendency to evaluate the food experience based on personal satisfaction rather than communal norms.

Conversely, participants from collectivist cultures, emphasising group cohesion and shared experiences, exhibited a different attitude towards food preferences and feedback. These participants were more likely to view the dining

experience as part of a communal journey, focusing on the collective aspects of the pilgrimage. For instance, one American-Brazilian participant articulated this perspective by stating, *"Islam, I think, is a nice social religion; you know you live your life as an individual, but when you pray, you pray together; you fast, you fast together; when you go for Hajj, you don't go on your own; you're happy to mix with your own kind"* (American Brazilian - HC3). This response emphasises the importance of communal experiences over individual preferences, indicating that the collective spirit of Hajj can lead to a more forgiving attitude towards food quality and variety.

Generally, individualism influenced participants to express personal critiques and preferences regarding food during Hajj, while collectivism fostered a more communal perspective, prioritising the shared experience over individual culinary satisfaction. This dynamic illustrates how cultural orientations can shape food preferences and the overall experience of the pilgrimage.

### **3.3. Differences in food catering services among food accommodations**

The emerging dimension of differences in food catering services among pre-, post-, and during the Manasik of Hajj (Hajj rituals) refers to the newly recognised aspects of food service quality and variety that vary significantly throughout the different phases of the pilgrimage. This dimension highlights the disparity in catering experiences that participants face before, during, and after the core Hajj rituals, indicating a clear differentiation in service levels based on timing and location.

This dimension was identified through qualitative analysis of participant feedback during interviews, where respondents shared their experiences and perceptions regarding food services across various Hajj destinations—Makkah, Arafat, Mina, Muzdalifah, and Madinah. Participants consistently reported a decrease in food quality and variety during the Manasik, particularly compared to their experiences in hotels or the periods surrounding the actual days of Hajj. For instance, comments such as *"there was a huge difference between the stay in the hotel and Manasik, clean, high level impeccable, almost everything was available"* (American Tunisian - HC5) contrasted sharply with remarks like *"in Manasik: the food was poor, very poor"* (French - HC6).

Through these narratives, a pattern emerged, indicating that the quality of food catering was not uniform but rather fluctuated significantly based on the timing of the pilgrimage. Participants noted that while Makkah offered a rich variety of cuisines, the food provided during the actual Hajj rituals needed the same quality and diversity. A similar response was stated by another participant, who said, *"When we went to Madinah, there was more international"* (American Brazilian - HC3), while for others, *"Actually, the lunch and dinner they would give you vouchers for the food courts you know like whichever food you want."* (British Pakistani - HC2). This disparity highlighted the necessity for Hajj organisers to improve the consistency and quality of food services provided throughout the pilgrimage to enhance overall satisfaction.

Thus, the "emerging dimension" serves as an important framework for understanding how varying experiences in food catering impact pilgrims' overall perceptions of their Hajj experience. The identified inconsistencies affected their immediate satisfaction with food and contributed to their overall emotional and spiritual engagement with the pilgrimage. This underscores the necessity for Hajj organisers to improve the consistency and quality of food services provided throughout the pilgrimage to enhance overall satisfaction and facilitate a more fulfilling spiritual journey. The management of food services should be a critical focus area for future improvements, recognising that a well-fed pilgrim is likely to have a more positive and impactful Hajj experience.

#### **3.3.1 skipping a meal**

When the participants, except (Indonesian - HC4) from Indonesia, were asked whether they missed their home-country cuisine during their Hajj trip, the same pattern of prioritising spirituality over food was observed. Again, there was some denial and contradiction in participants' responses, associated with the number of performed Hajj, nationality and their history of being a Muslim. However, many pilgrims have claimed they did not miss their country foods and could not recognise the impact of healthy preferred food on their mood and energy levels. However, their responses on the effect of skipping a meal due to the unpleasant taste illustrate otherwise; *"Poor food, poor appetite...if the food were good, we would not skip a meal... the number of unopened food boxes was very high, it was many wastes... not only our mood or energy but the food was wasted too."* *"Breakfast was almost nothing: there was no Danish, no pastries, and very hard to get coffee: imagine, it was not a great memory for me."* (French, HC6).

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These reflections indicate that while participants may have tried to downplay the importance of food in the context of their spiritual journey, the reality of their experiences revealed a clear connection between food quality, their overall well-being, and the emotional aspects of their pilgrimage. The inconsistency in their reflections underscores the need for improved food services that not only respect the spiritual significance of Hajj but also cater to the pilgrims' nutritional needs and cultural preferences.

#### **3.3.2 Healthwise**

Moreover, the reported health incidents by the pilgrims, which were associated with their lack of food intake due to unfavourable taste, showed another indirect impact of the type of cuisine on mood, energy levels and overall experience. Nevertheless, almost all pilgrims agreed that the Hajj journey is exhausting, as the pilgrim is supposed to perform many rituals involving intensive physical activity and maintaining a clear mind to focus on the Duaa' and worshipping duties. Participant HC2 reported that *"I think when you go to Hajj, there is much walking; I mean, the first day, I walked nearly 30,000 steps"*. He also stated, *"I remember when I was in Makkah, there was this a sister who passed out right there; she just passed out after lunch or breakfast; maybe her sugar level was too high and came back down too low. For energy levels, I was good I think. The only time it was hard for me was when I went for stoning, when you go to Jamarat; it was hard, I felt I needed a good meal."*

Another important point made by one participant: *"The most important element should be food safety;...Some people bring some homemade food and take it with them. Like people from North Africa, they make Besisah made of chickpeas, almond powder, and other ingredients, which gives them much energy to perform Hajj duties."* (American Tunisian- HC5).

On the other hand, pilgrims who were unsatisfied with the cuisine they consumed clearly stated that they had missed their home country food. For instance, *"Because I am French, I will tell you: everything was missed, everything... I do not want to have my food everywhere I go; however, I am looking for a certain level of quantity and variety worth the money I paid"* (French—HC6).

The lack of food options, limited dishes, and not-so-healthy options did not help pilgrims maintain a healthy and balanced diet nor to make it an unforgettable experience. They reported that the absence of vegetables, fruits, allergies, and lactose-free options did not help balance their diet. *"So much concern about what they would eat...they were not concentrating on their duties... tiredness and lack of food has impacted their mood... People were stressed out. The logistics, the quality of the food boxes...we were chasing for food which was not very pleasant."* (Moroccan French - HC7).

The pilgrims' accounts illustrate how the quality and variety of food during Hajj are deeply intertwined with their physical health, emotional state, and ability to engage in spiritual practices. Addressing participants' dietary preferences and needs could significantly enhance their overall pilgrimage experience, allowing them to focus more on their spiritual journey rather than their physical discomfort or dissatisfaction with food.

#### **3.3.4 Organization level**

Furthermore, some participants attributed the cause of such poor food catering services to the fact that this year, the food menus for pilgrims from Europe and the USA were planned and executed for the first time by the Saudi government rather than the Hajj campaign organisers, which may have impacted the food choices, supply and quality. *"They tried to control and uniform the services for foreign pilgrims with no consideration to our food preferences."* (Moroccan French - HC7). For details on the Saudi government menu, see the appendix.

Finally, participants were asked if serving their cuisine on future Hajj trips would help their mood, energy and overall experience. As one of the participants stated, *"Yes, this will impact their mood differently. Experts say: you are what you eat ... If they have a limited budget, then I guess it is better to give pilgrims a choice from their home culture."* (American Brazilian - HC3). This statement emphasises the importance of dietary familiarity in contributing to emotional well-being and energy levels, particularly during such a physically and spiritually demanding journey.

## **4. Limitations**

It would have been more appropriate to recruit pilgrims who had performed Hajj a year ago exclusively to ensure they could recall information more precisely. However, the five-year window was chosen to allow more volunteers to participate due to the cancellation of two Hajj seasons (2020 and 2021) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



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A comparison between the hajj experience before and after the pandemic would be interesting. Moreover, it would have been more comprehensive to interview some of the Hajj campaign organisers to explore their points of view regarding the importance of serving each pilgrim's nationality with their home country's cuisine, also to know their rationale behind their choices as well as to discuss the difficulty of considering such a service in terms of logistics and feasibility. However, this is the first study to the best of our knowledge that addresses this issue, and due to our time restrictions, we suggest designing a series of studies in the future to investigate this aspect from different angles, including other parties.

Although social media has played a significant role in facilitating the recruitment of our participants, we also received many fake responses from people who claimed that they were Muslims and had performed Hajj. Nevertheless, after a couple of questions during the interview, we discovered they were not eligible for participation. However, this, corresponding with ineligible participants, could have used more time and resulted in a limited number of participants, going against our initial plan.

Conclusion

### **5. Conclusion**

This study aims to help improve the Hajj experience for Hajj pilgrims. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has worked hard to improve everyone's Hajj experience. This topic is understudied and would be the first research to help create a better cuisine experience. The scope of this study is to explore the impact of the food cuisine consumed by foreign pilgrims during Hajj on their performance and mood. The study employed a Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) by applying thematic analysis to the qualitative data. Due to the limited research on this topic, it is essential to document the pilgrims' experiences. This study allowed for a better understanding of the psychological impacts of the type of cuisine consumed on improving the experience of pilgrims. This will inform Hajj agencies responsible for food catering during the Hajj journey to consider pilgrims' food preferences to enhance their mood, energy levels and overall experience.

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