

# Mediating Mecca: Moroccan and Moroccan-Dutch Pilgrims' Use of the Smartphone

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In conversations with pilgrims from Morocco and the Netherlands about their experiences of the pilgrimage to Mecca, more often than not, the authors of this chapter noted that those who were in the possession of a smartphone would reach for their phone to show pictures to accompany their stories. Initially they might do so to illustrate a particular object or location that they were telling about. Nearly always, scrolling through pictures of their hajj or *ʿumra* journey resulted in further recollections of the pilgrimage experience. Quite often, harking back to the photos they had taken whilst on pilgrimage would stir emotions in these narrators. Having a collection of pictures on their smartphones thus functioned both to evoke and revive memories about the pilgrimage for the narrators themselves and to support or even steer narrations about their pilgrimage experiences to others. It is fair to say that using the smartphone to mediate Mecca, either through photographs, WhatsApp messages, or posts on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, has become part of the repertoire of performing hajj itself (cf. Renne 2015).

In this chapter, we explore how pilgrims from Morocco and the Netherlands deploy the affordances of the smartphone to mediate the sacred atmosphere in Mecca and establish co-presence between themselves and their friends and relatives who stayed home.<sup>2</sup> As Birgit Bräuchler and John Postill argue, exactly because the fundamental quality of media as 'something in between', the meaning of a medium like the smartphone is always emergent and contingent on the micro-historical circumstances of its use, and can only be studied in the

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1 We would like to thank Elisabetta Costa and Welmoed Wagenaar for their valuable feedback on a previous draft of this chapter and their encouragement to delve deeper into the field of digital anthropology.

2 Affordances are the enabling and constraining material possibilities of digital media. Affordances do not dictate participants' behaviour, but configure the environment in ways that shape participants' engagement (cf. Davis and Jurgenson 2014; boyd 2011, 39).

practices in which it is used (Bräuchler and Postill 2010, 23). Taking what Elisabetta Costa (2018) has called ‘affordances-in-practice’ as a starting point, in this chapter we sketch how our research participants engage with smartphones to connect the sacred time and space in Mecca with their everyday lives in Morocco and the Netherlands as they imagine, recollect, and narrate the pilgrimage to Mecca. We discuss such instances by asking how pilgrims’ smartphone-related activities are to be understood against the background of the wider social configurations, contexts, and processes in which they are embedded in and, vice versa, what implications their use of a smartphone might have for their various forms of sociality and daily lifeworlds (cf. Bräuchler and Postill 2010, 16; Moores 2000, 56–57). Choosing a practice-related approach over a media-centred perspective, our focus is on the entanglements of pilgrims’ use of digital media with other activities, objects, and feelings through which these media are used, experienced, and operate (cf. Pink et al. 2016a, 10). In this sense, rather than approaching pilgrimage-related uses of the smartphone as a category of practice in and of itself, we conceive of them as activities that are part of other practices, such as keeping in touch with one’s dear ones, identity-construction, or ethical self-formation (cf. Costa and Menin 2016; Couldry 2012; Madianou and Miller 2011; 2004). In doing so, we explore how social change comes to the fore in the appropriation of the smartphone and how cultural-specific use of the smartphone may affect the performance and meanings of ritual.

The data sets we draw on were produced for our respective sub-projects within the larger research project ‘Modern Articulations of the Pilgrimage to Mecca’ that formed the point of departure for this collected volume. Al-Ajarma conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Morocco to study the socio-cultural embeddedness of the pilgrimage to Mecca in the everyday lives of Moroccans (cf. Al-Ajarma 2020). She also visited Mecca twice to conduct participant observation among pilgrims performing the *‘umra*. Her data therefore consists predominantly of her personal observations in Moroccan public and private settings and informal conversations with people among whom she conducted participant observation in Mecca and Morocco. Buitelaar’s project consisted of ethnographic interviews with Dutch pilgrims with Moroccan and Turkish backgrounds in the Netherlands concerning the meaning of the pilgrimage to them in relation to their various senses of identity and belonging.

We did not set out to study the use of the smartphone when we began our research projects. Rather, the topic emerged as an inductive code once we began to realize its significance for many of our research participants in their experiences of the pilgrimage to Mecca. While the smartphone and Internet access are relatively expensive in Morocco in comparison to the Netherlands,

smartphone use has risen enormously over recent years; in 2011 only 12% of Moroccan citizens possessed a smartphone, whereas in 2020 75.5% of the population owned one, using it, amongst other things, to access the Internet and often as an alternative for a computer.<sup>3</sup> Considering that 84.5% of the Moroccan population is younger than 54 years old,<sup>4</sup> these figures appear to confirm our personal observations that it is mostly younger Moroccans and those in mid-adulthood who own a smartphone. Being illiterate considerably hampers the use of the smartphone for the elderly and (rural) lower classes.<sup>5</sup> Since Buitelaar's research project concentrated on the descendants of migrants who grew up in the Netherlands, nearly all interviews were with pilgrims between the age of 20 and 55, all of whom possessed a smartphone. Their parents who came to the Netherlands as economic migrants between the mid-1960s and 1970s originate predominantly from rural areas and most of them are illiterate or low literate. Not surprisingly, the hajj narrations of the ten pilgrims of this migrant generation who were interviewed contained only few references to the use of a telephone whilst on hajj. Indeed, as we shall see later, some older pilgrims prided themselves in having used a phone only rarely or not at all during the pilgrimage to Mecca. Buitelaar's impression that most pilgrims from the Netherlands over the age of 60 did not use a smartphone during the pilgrimage except maybe for taking photographs or making occasional phone calls home was confirmed by interviewees of younger generations, many of whom explicitly mentioned the use of the smartphone as a significant point of difference between their own hajj practices and those of pilgrims of their parents' generation.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which pilgrims use the smartphone during the pilgrimage in Mecca. We will first look into the activity of informing oneself about hajj locations and the appropriate rites and supplication prayers to perform at these locations, and then move on to discuss how pilgrims use their phone to communicate with fellow pilgrims and with relatives and friends at home.

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3 <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/07/278384/telecommunications-76-moroccans-smartphones/>, accessed October 1, 2020.

4 [https://www.indexmundi.com/morocco/demographics\\_profile.html](https://www.indexmundi.com/morocco/demographics_profile.html), accessed October 1, 2020.

5 For an empirically rich and particularly insightful study on how the ways class, age and gender intersect in access to and the use of the smartphone, see Tenhunen (2018) who studied the use of the smartphone in poor rural India.

2 Information Applications

A simple search on an iPhone's or Android's application store shows tens of apps available to help pilgrims perform the pilgrimage rites. A 2016 survey showed that Google Play housed 246 hajj and *'umra* related apps in 24 different languages, of which 51.7% were in English. Most of these apps were downloaded between 10,000 and 50,000 times, while the live video supporting 'Watch Makkah Live HD' was downloaded over a million times (Khan and Shambour 2017, 40).

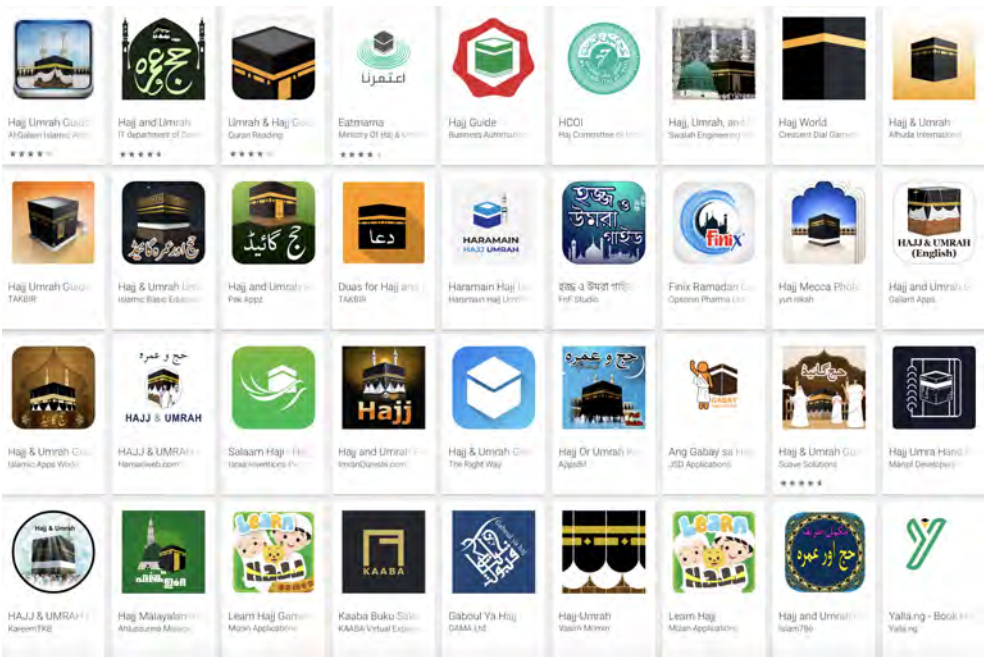


FIGURE 16.1 Screenshot of some Android Store results for 'hajj' search<sup>6</sup>

Such applications provide navigation services, information about the rites of hajj, and lists of suggested supplication prayers for the different steps of the pilgrimage. Many of these apps present themselves as hajj guides. In fact, Khan and Shambour found twelve apps with different publishers and services that went by the name of 'Hajj Guide' (ibid.). The version of an app by that name we looked at contained both text and images. It provided a general introduction to the hajj as well as information about the different rites it consists of.

6 See <https://play.google.com/store/search?q=hajj&c=apps&hl=en>, accessed 13 April 2022.

Pages from the app can be downloaded to be read offline later. The app is suitable as a manual to be studied before or during hajj, but it does not provide an actual virtual on-site guide. We also looked at ‘Tawaf’, an app that helps pilgrims who are circling the Ka’ba keep track of the number of rounds they have completed. Other apps, such as ‘Hajj Salam’ include tools that prompt pilgrims to read, repeat, or simply listen to the appropriate prayers at the right time and place, while some, such as ‘Al Hajj’ are more interactive and provide prospective pilgrims with a pre-hajj preparation checklist, a hajj map, and an emergency contact list in addition to relevant Qur’anic quotations and supplication prayers.

Our conversations with research participants reveal a differential evaluation by pilgrims with regard to the use of mobile information applications. A Moroccan-Dutch male pilgrim in his late thirties, for example, stated that he had been very happy to find all the information he felt he needed on his phone:

It’s an intense journey, that’s for sure. But it is much more difficult and exhausting for older people than for us. They have to memorize supplication prayers or repeat them after the leader. And they have to stick to the group. So, they are dependent on the tour guide. (...) Whereas I, I was very mobile, literally: I had my phone and access to Internet, so I knew exactly where I was, I was in charge myself. I was with a group of guys and we discussed between ourselves what we’d do: Eat in the hotel or dine out? Take the bus or walk to the Grand Mosque? If we decided on a taxi, all I had to do was phone one, easy enough. So, we could go there and perform the prayers on our own. That was great: we knew exactly what supplication prayers to say.

As this interview excerpt indicates, the affordances of the smartphone allow pilgrims to be more ‘in charge’ themselves and personalize the hajj, allowing them to focus on their own, individual journey. Within the limits of the ritual programme, instead of having to rely entirely on tour guides, as older pilgrims who often have enjoyed no or little formal education tend to do, pilgrims in the possession of a smartphone are thus relatively free to shape the hajj experience according to their own wishes.

It would be a mistake, however, to interpret the changes in the hajj experience that result from using information applications exclusively in terms of the possibilities the smartphone offers. In keeping with Costa’s argument about the relevance of studying how users in different socio-cultural contexts actively appropriate affordances, our point is rather that the particular use of hajj information applications is shaped by the desires and needs of pilgrims that

rise from being informed by a specific constellation of cultural contexts and 'grand schemes': powerful yet never fully attainable ideals that operate as models for a good life (Schielke 2015, 13). Daniel Miller and Jolynna Sinanan address the role that digital technology can play in such aspirational models in what they call the 'theory of attainment' (Miller and Sinanan 2014, 12). According to the theory of attainment, the cultural use of technology derives for the most part from the desires of (potential) users rather than being a necessary consequence of the invention of that particular device. Miller and Sinanan argue that once people have gotten used to it, the same technology is likely to stimulate new aspirations (*ibid.*).

As Buitelaar and Kadrouch-Outmany argue elsewhere in this volume, particularly younger pilgrims from Western countries like the Netherlands have developed a desire for autonomy and self-reliance on the basis of their embeddedness in a highly individualistic socio-cultural environment. To a certain extent, this also goes for young urban professionals in Morocco who perform hajj. The specific information services the smartphone enables thus dovetail with the wishes of cosmopolitan urbanites to be 'in charge' themselves rather than having to depend on a hajj tour guide and to adapt to the group of pilgrims they travel with.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, these higher educated younger pilgrims differ significantly from their parents' generation. The latter mostly grew up in a group-oriented lifeworld and often feel more comfortable and safer operating in a group of pilgrims. Similar to what Farooq Haq and John Jackson have described for different generations of Pakistani pilgrims from Pakistan and Australia (Haq and Jackson 2009), older Moroccan and Moroccan-Dutch pilgrims tend to be content to rely on a group leader to guide them through the rituals and more readily accept his authority than younger pilgrims do.<sup>8</sup> In keeping with the critique formulated by Miller and others concerning an anxiety that is often expressed in popular discourse about hyper-individualism fostered by the smartphone, we argue that this particular use of the smartphone should not be interpreted as causing the desire for and a specific cultural style of individualism, but rather as reflecting it before further stimulating it (Miller et al. 2016, 181–192).

Our data indicates, for instance, that most pilgrims do not uncritically accept all the possibilities the smartphone offers. Reservations concerning the use of

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7 According to Saudi hajj regulations, pilgrims cannot organize their own hajj journey, but have to book a package tour through Saudi recognized tour operators.

8 See the chapter by Buitelaar and Kadrouch-Outmany in this volume for more information about the experiences of a Dutch-based hajj travel agent concerning differences in the attitudes of older and younger pilgrims.

the device pertain mostly to the spiritual dimensions of their pilgrimage. For instance, most hajj applications focus on the bare facts about the correct performance of hajj rites rather than on their spiritual dimensions. Also, depending on one's smartphone rather than on others can have its drawbacks. While operating in a group can be a burden, it is exactly being part of a flow of millions of other pilgrims which contributes to the spiritual experience of the hajj and its power as a 'sensational form' (cf. Meyer 2016). Indeed, the hajj stories of most of our interlocutors contain narrations about enriching encounters with fellow pilgrims. As a 30-year-old female pilgrim from Morocco who performed the hajj with her 70-year-old father noted, following one's smartphone too much can deprive pilgrims from such experiences:

During the hajj, we went out to perform the hajj rites by following other pilgrims. When we lost the way to the hotel, we asked other pilgrims. An Egyptian young man showed us the way and we had an enjoyable conversation ... This kind of conversation I cannot have with a mobile app.

A Dutch-Moroccan woman in her early forties similarly expressed ambivalence about her tendency to habitually grab her phone. In response to a question whether she had used her phone during the hajj rites, she stated: 'Sure, to do supplication prayers. But ... uhm, I was always in two minds: will I do that, or will I get my *tasbīh* (string of prayer beads) or Qur'an, you know?' She then explained that she sometimes deliberately suppressed the habit to use her phone and instead opted for reading out her printed copy of the Arabic Qur'an in sotto voce or saying supplication prayers by using her *tasbīh*.<sup>9</sup>

What makes this woman's story particularly interesting is that it points to the importance of the materiality of mediating devices to both affect and shape the content which they transmit, rather than merely acting as tools for transmission (Meyer 2011, 27–28). As Daniel Miller and Heather Horst argue in the introduction to their influential book *Digital Anthropology*, artefacts like the smartphone do far more than just express human intention. Miller and Horst point out that we become human 'through socializing within a material world of cultural artefacts that include the order, agency and relationships between things themselves and not just their relationships to persons' (Horst and Miller

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9 Some Moroccan pilgrims that Al-Ajarma spoke to, reported a similar hesitance to use apps that provide 'recommended' supplication prayers, stating that they while they are all good, they do not come from one's heart, nor are they specific enough to convey what one wants to ask from God. For this reason, some people said that the simpler a prayer, the better it is.

2012a, 24). They therefore identify materiality as the 'bedrock for digital anthropology' (ibid.).

The fact that the female pilgrim quoted above pondered which device to choose for her worshipping acts illustrates that her affective relationship with each of the three options available to her is different. In the context of its dominant use in her daily lifeworld, the smartphone belongs to what Arjun Appadurai (1986, 34) would call a 'different regime of value' than the printed Qur'an copy and the *tasbiḥ*, the latter two being situated in a long tradition of Muslim worship, while the former is only recently emerging as a tool in worship in addition to serving numerous other purposes as well. As a result, these three alternative devices to mediate the sacred have different symbolic meanings for their owner, illustrating that it is not technical affordances as such that shape the use and meanings of the smartphone, but rather the relationship between mediating 'things' and the people who engage with them (Pink et al. 2016a, 62). The woman weighing her options to decide when and for which purposes to use her smartphone, her Qur'an copy, or her *tasbiḥ* points to what Ilana Gershon calls the 'media ideologies' that shape the ways people think about and use different media (Gershon 2010). Gershon argues that people's normative conceptions concerning one medium are always affected by those they have about other media. On the basis of media ideologies that circulate, an 'idiom of practice' is developed, including the development of shared understandings of how different media relate to each other and how they are used in socially appropriate ways (cf. Fernández-Ardèvol et al. 2020).

Such shared understandings do not go uncontested, however. Navigating multiple media ideologies to determine the appropriate use of a medium in a specific situation can be a complex process, as a further remark by the same Dutch female pilgrim about her devotional acts during the hajj illustrates. Concerning her reflections on whether to use her phone, Qur'an copy, or *tasbiḥ*, she elaborated by saying that she had sometimes deliberately chosen to read her printed Arabic Qur'an copy, for example when sitting down in the courtyard of the Grand Mosque of Mecca facing the Ka'ba in order to immerse herself in the sacred atmosphere. At other times, however, such as back in the hotel or in the tent camp in Minā, she preferred to read a translated version of the Qur'an from her smartphone:

That's because I don't understand the Arabic. (...) So, I wanted to read it in translation as it is so terribly important for me understand the text. I have asked my *fqih* (Qur'an teacher) about this: I explained to him that not understanding the Arabic it does not give me the same feeling. He stated that while reading the Qur'an in Arabic gives you more *ḥasanāt* (religious credit), it is allowed to read a translation.



Various considerations thus came into play for the woman when choosing between a *tasbīḥ*, a printed copy of the Qur'an in Arabic, or a translation on a smartphone for engaging in devotional acts during the pilgrimage. For the purpose of experiencing the sacred ambience first and foremost, the sensory dimensions of the mediating device mattered most to her. Using a *tasbīḥ* is a highly tactile act that enables the user to take in the view while passing the beads of the *tasbīḥ* through one's fingers to underscore and keep track of the recitation of Arabic supplication prayers. Similarly, for Muslims the Arabic script of the Qur'an is a highly charged visualization of God's direct words that affects the reader in a very different way than a translation of the text in languages that are not directly associated with Islamic language use. In situations in which the woman wished to focus on the meaning of the sacred text rather than having the Arabic script speak directly to the visual and auditory senses by softly reciting it, the opportunity to read the text in Dutch determined her choice, but it is important to note that 'understanding' for her is not only a cognitive process, but also involves affect. The different considerations that informed her choice of device underscore the point made by several scholars in digital anthropology mentioned above concerning the relevance of media ideologies and contextual needs and desires that shape people's particular use of information applications. More specifically, the situational choices the female pilgrim in this example made for a particular device to access sacredness point to the significance of people's sensory perceptions of the wider environment when deciding which medium is most appropriate to use; like the Qur'an copy and the *tasbīḥ*, her engagement with her smartphone is experienced corporeally. Beyond a focus on its representational or symbolic status, this illustrates that smartphone use should be analysed as a sensory medium (cf. Waltorp 2020; Pink et al. 2016b). The case studies discussed so far all indicate that digital technologies and devices have become part of most of today's pilgrims' sensory embodied experience of the environment, while at the same time, these technologies allow the pilgrimage to be experienced in new ways (cf. Pink et al. 2016a, 23).

### 3 Communication Applications

Pilgrims use the smartphone most frequently for communication services like WhatsApp or Facebook. Often, WhatsApp group is created for pilgrims who travel together. In the Netherlands, many hajj tour operators organize a preparatory meeting for their customers and create a WhatsApp group in advance to provide the prospective pilgrims with tips for what to bring along on hajj as

well as information about the state of affairs concerning visa, flight details, etc. During the hajj journey itself, the WhatsApp group is used to provide updates concerning daily programmes, departure times from hotels, meeting points after the performance of rites, etc.

Several Moroccan-Dutch female pilgrims pointed out in the interviews that being updated through the (gender-mixed) WhatsApp group can be particularly convenient for female pilgrims; as yet, hajj guides are almost invariably men and tend to address male pilgrims rather than female ones (also see Caidi elsewhere in this volume).<sup>10</sup> Especially in the tent camp in Minā, where pilgrims sleep in sex-segregated tents, it can be difficult for female pilgrims to find out what is being discussed and decided in the men's tents. At the same time, however, exactly because hajj guides are in closer contact with men, it often happens that once information is shared orally with male pilgrims, it is not communicated through WhatsApp, leaving women uninformed. 'As women, we're always at least one step behind', a female pilgrim in her early fifties complained.

As this critical remark indicates, the use of a WhatsApp group for pilgrims who travel with the same tour operator can have both positive and negative implications for different categories of pilgrims and for intragroup relationships. The impact on group dynamics extends beyond the pilgrimage journey itself: both in Morocco and in the Netherlands, long after the pilgrims return home, WhatsApp groups tend to be sustained as a platform to share photographs and organize reunions. Thus, a new format for the collective production of hajj stories has emerged.

While a WhatsApp group can be convenient for the communication between pilgrims and guides about the logistics of the hajj journey, far more important for individual pilgrims is their communication with family and friends at home. Without a doubt, the smartphone has an enormous impact on how the pilgrimage to Mecca is currently experienced, as well as on how it is narrated. Until a few decades ago, for most of their hajj journey, pilgrims were not able to communicate with those they left at home. Today, except during flights towards their destination, pilgrims are able to keep in touch with

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10 In addition to the compulsory involvement of a *mutawwif*, an officially appointed local hajj guide, pilgrims are also accompanied by hajj guide who travel with them from the Netherlands. These Dutch tour leaders may either be staff members of the travel agency or imams who accompany a group of pilgrims from their own mosque. Of late, some travel agencies have started to include female assistants to male hajj guides, but going by the accounts of our interlocutors, this is, as yet, rare.

their loved ones 24/7 should they wish to do so. Since 2015, there is even free Wi-Fi in the courtyard of the Grand Mosque in Mecca.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to factors like the reduced period of time that today's pilgrims are away from home in comparison to former times and the less hazardous nature of the journey thanks to modern air travel, the stories of our research participants indicate that the opportunity to remain in contact with friends and relatives at home had a considerable impact on their preparatory activities before departure, notably concerning settling disputes and taking leave of their family and friends. Before they embark on the journey to Mecca, pilgrims should settle their debts and ask forgiveness from people whom they might have wronged. Both in Morocco and in the Netherlands, until recently it was customary for pilgrims to visit or at least phone their family members, friends, and even neighbours and colleagues to apologize for any injustice or harm they may have caused in the past and to ask for forgiveness for their wrongdoings. While some pilgrims continue to make such a generalized round of *musāmaḥa* or forgiveness visits or phone calls, the majority of our research participants indicated that they had contacted only a few people.

Settling disputes requires forgiveness from both sides. While asking for forgiveness takes courage, being forgiving can be even more challenging, as several research participants pointed out. A female pilgrim in her mid-thirties related how only on the way to Schiphol Airport to fly to Saudi Arabia did she realize that it gnawed at her not to have reconciled with her sister-in-law. Already getting in touch with the sacred atmosphere now that her journey had started, she felt she was at last ready to forgive her husband's sister, so she phoned her from the car to ask for forgiveness. To her relief, her sister-in-law not only assured her that all was forgiven and forgotten, but in addition she pronounced the wish that the hajj of her brother and his wife would be accepted by God, and she asked for a supplication prayer to be said on her behalf near the Ka'ba.<sup>12</sup>

11 <https://www.phoneworld.com.pk/free-Wi-Fi-facility-introduced-in-masjid-al-haram/>, accessed October 9, 2020.

12 Since the hajj is so special and sacred that no one should wish to prevent a pilgrim from embarking on the journey with unsettled issues, the power of the ritualized act of seeking reconciliation as a preparatory step in going on hajj is considerable. While it would be impolite to refuse reconciliation, pronouncing forgiveness involves more than politesse. This can be illustrated by the story of one of Buitelaar's interlocutors who had an argument with her mother shortly before she was to go on hajj. While her mother forgave her daughter for speaking up her mind, the woman herself realized that although she might be forgiven, the tiff was related to longstanding issues with her mother that she had not yet managed to come to terms with. Realizing that not yet being ready to forgive her mother

The woman who shared this story clearly took the last-minute reconciliatory phone call with her sister-in-law quite seriously. Several research participants indicated, however, that being able to ask forgiveness through the smartphone can also render the practice devoid of meaning. A Moroccan-Dutch female pilgrim in her late forties, for example, was rather sceptical about messages she had received from some people who were preparing to go to Mecca:

What you often see nowadays is that people send you a WhatsApp message with a more or less standard text stating something like 'Dear sister, should I have hurt you, please forgive me.' You know, that kind of standard text. That's not how I did it before I went on hajj. In my view, if there are issues between yourself and another person, you should discuss that person-to-person instead of sending a WhatsApp message to all people in your address list.

[Interviewer]: How do you respond to such messages?

I don't. Well, there was this one person whom I had not been able to say good bye to, so to her I wrote back: have a good hajj and *inshallah* (God willing) we'll meet upon your return. But otherwise ... no.

While it might seem obvious to interpret the quick and less personal way to ask for forgiveness before going on hajj through WhatsApp in terms of the affordances of the device itself, the more interesting question is what circumstances might make pilgrims decide to acquit themselves of the recommended task thus. We suggest that two factors play a role: (1) shifting conceptions on sociality and (2) changes in conceptions on the hajj as a once-in-a-life time event. The types of wide (online) sociality that characterize the networks in which young Muslims in the Netherlands participate are of a different kind than the obligations inherent to the tight-knit sociality in the more traditional communities where older generations operate. The contacts in the networks of young Muslims tend to be looser, more flexible, and operate at least as much online as they do face-to-face (cf. Roeland et al. 2010).

Secondly, a central argument of this chapter is that while digital media obviously contributes to shifts in social dynamics, these dynamics cannot be reduced to the effect of digital media but relate to wider societal changes. The globalized context where events like going on hajj take place is characterized by a rapidly increasing scope and density of people's mobility. As a result, repres-

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for injustice done to her in the past, she decided she was not ready to go on hajj and cancelled her trip.

entations of time and space as well as people's conceptions about the purposes and effects of mobility shift (Buitelaar, Stephan-Emmrich, and Thimm 2021, 7). Mobility no longer necessarily entails a clear-cut rupture or transition from one life stage or territory to another, but concerns a fluid and porous movement, a moving back and forth between here and there, and between past, present, and future (Mincke 2016, 16). In terms of people's expectations with regard to their life-trajectory, this means that rather than conceiving of one's life as going through a limited number of transitions between fairly stable time-space constellations, particularly among younger generations 'being on the move' seems to have become a mode of living and is accompanied with corresponding 'mobile socialities' (cf. Hill, Hartman, and Andersson 2021).

Such lifestyle developments have significant implications on people's travel practices, including hajj performance. Until a recently, most Muslims tended to conceive of the pilgrimage to Mecca as a once-in-a-lifetime event and a major rite of passage marking a radical change in one status and lifestyle. Our own observations and interviews as well as those of other scholars seem to suggest, however, that many younger pilgrims do not expect to perform the hajj just once, but anticipate making multiple pilgrimages to Mecca (cf. the contributions of Buitelaar and the one by Safar and Seurat in this volume; also see Saghi 2010). As a result, we would argue that the hajj tends to become a rite-of-passage 'light' resulting in a decreasing significance of asking everyone in one's network for forgiveness for past wrongdoings. In other words, there is not a one-directional causal relation between the decline of the custom of paying face-to-face *musāmaḥa* visits and the affordance to acquit oneself of the task more quickly through WhatsApp. The new trend of sending out messages to ask forgiveness by phone is at least as much a consequence of the diminishing significance of *musāmaḥa* rites as a factor that contributes to it.

The smartphone does appear to play a more constitutive role in the decline of another separation rite: having farewell parties. Sharing recollections from their childhood in Morocco, older pilgrims, particularly those who grew up in rural areas, told us about farewell parties that could last several days. In the weeks prior to departure, pilgrims would organize one or several *ṣadaqa* meals—charity meals for a wide circle of people. On the day of departure, music bands would accompany the pilgrims to the outskirts of the village, and villagers would walk along while clapping their hands and singing hajj songs. If one is lucky, modest versions of such processions can still be observed at Moroccan airports, but overall, processions and other communal acts when pilgrims take leave are much less common today than they were forty years ago. In the Netherlands, farewell parties for pilgrims are sometimes organized at mosques or community centres, but there too, their occurrence is diminish-

ing.<sup>13</sup> While a new phenomenon among young Dutch Muslims is to organize a ‘hajj shower’ for close friends and relatives, most research participants stated to have only shared a farewell meal with close family members or not to have organized anything special to mark their departure at all. Some stated that to avoid all the ‘hassle’, they had kept their travel plans a secret until the last minute (cf. Buitelaar 2018, 37).

Besides hajj performance becoming more common in Morocco and even much more so among Muslims in the Netherlands,<sup>14</sup> several other factors may account for the decline in celebrations surrounding the departure of pilgrims. First of all, it fits in with a worldwide trend to ‘purify’ religious obligations as stipulated in authoritative texts from what have come to be considered local cultural ‘accretions’ (cf. Roy 2004). An older Moroccan-Dutch interlocutor in her late sixties, for example, stated:

I remember that it [bidding farewell to pilgrims, MB] used to be a lot more fun than nowadays. (...) Now, the imams say that hajj is just like the *ṣalāt* and fasting: everything should be done without calling attention to it. Only your close family should be informed, but otherwise it’s just like saying your prayers: just go, no one else should know about it.

This call for a certain privatization of religiosity points to the impact of reformist teachings according to which one’s piety is an issue between oneself and God.<sup>15</sup> In particular, having conducted the pilgrimage should not enhance one’s social status. What may also contribute to the decrease of collective farewell celebrations among younger pilgrims is the aforementioned shift for this category of Muslims in the Netherlands away from ‘thick’ social engagement with traditional communities and religious institutions to new, to more loosely and often online operating networked forms of sociality.

The mobile phone also plays an important role in the decline of farewell parties indirectly. For pilgrims with a smartphone (or pilgrims who travel with

13 For an interesting study analysing shifts in other rites of passage among Muslims in the Netherlands with migration backgrounds, see Dessing (2001).

14 Muslims in the Netherlands do not face the same competition for scarce hajj visa as those in Morocco; until the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, any Dutch Muslim resident wishing to perform the pilgrimage could get a visa.

15 Also see Flaskerud (2018, 46), who refers to a Shi’i imam in Oslo who similarly admonishes his audience not to boast about their hajj performance. See Scupin (1982) and Bowen (1992) for more examples of how modernist interpretations have affected local practices concerning the hajj among Thai Muslims and the feast of Sacrifice for Indonesian Muslims respectively.

someone who brings one), bidding farewell to one's loved ones implies a less radical break than in former times; most pilgrims expect to remain in contact with those back home throughout the journey through WhatsApp or Facebook. Our findings indicate that pilgrims' farewell stories are changing accordingly. While the sample of ten interviews with older Moroccan-Dutch pilgrims from the Netherlands is too small to make any statistically significant inferences, it is remarkable that all ten contained a version of a narration about anxiety and sadness about leaving one's loved ones behind—in some cases to the extent of nearly calling off the journey—only to discover that one could miraculously 'leave everything behind' once one had actually departed. A 70-year-old Moroccan-Dutch female pilgrim, for example, stated:

At Schiphol airport already, my mind was already in Mecca. Once in Mecca, you could see people cry and phone their families, but I could think of nothing else than my *'ibādāt*. Only after having concluded my religious duties I was able to think of other things again.

In an article on his study on British Pakistani pilgrims to Mecca, Seán McLoughlin quotes a female pilgrim, in this case a 26-years-old pilgrim, who uses almost exactly the same words as the woman above (McLoughlin 2009, 135).<sup>16</sup> The close resemblance between these stories on forgetting one's everyday life and other identifications than being Muslim suggests that they constitute a trope in conventional hajj storytelling, a recurring self-presentation as a committed pilgrim with a strong *nīyya* (intention) and *īmān* (faith). Playing upon traditional conceptions of women as primary care takers to highlight the extraordinary impact of the hajj on them, older female pilgrims mentioned in particular how difficult it had been for them to leave their children behind, only to find that they had forgotten all about them once their hajj journey had begun. Indeed, several other older Moroccan-Dutch female pilgrims prided themselves in having been so absorbed by their hajj performance that they never once thought of home or felt the urge to talk to their children.<sup>17</sup> A woman in her early sixties, for example, stated:

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16 The exact quote: '[Y]ou forget everything, your children, your families. I thought England was everything for me, my lifestyle was everything, but once I got there all I thought about was me as a Muslim.'

17 Our impression that 'forgetting about one's children' is a trope to express how taken in one is by the sacred atmosphere of the hajj is furthermore confirmed by the story of an older Moroccan-Dutch female pilgrim who has no children herself; recollecting her first sighting of the Ka'ba, she described the experience as being so overwhelming that 'it makes one forget one's children.'

I never talked to anyone at home, no one. For an entire month, I never phoned anybody. My husband would come up to me and say: 'I've phoned the children.' So, I'd say: 'Did you now? How are they?' He'd reply: 'They're fine.' So, I'd say: 'Ok.' That's all! I never phoned anyone, nor did I carry a phone.

Compare the stories above to that of a 42-year-old female pilgrim from the Netherlands regarding the impact of the smartphone on what she called 'farewell pain' (*afscheidspijn* in Dutch):

*Alhamdulillah* (praise be to God) we've got WhatsApp. I did not have that farewell pain. You forget about your children, so to speak,<sup>18</sup> but they were in good hands, and I would get photos every day and speak to them daily. So, there was that permanent connection.

Similarly, in reply to a question concerning her use of a smartphone during the hajj, a Moroccan-Dutch female pilgrim in her late thirties exclaimed laughingly: 'Of course! We are the smartphone generation; I wouldn't know what it is like to go without.' Besides making being away from her children easier for herself, she indicated that talking to them every day was also an effective tool in teaching them about the beauty of the hajj: 'I'd go: "Look, this is what Mecca is like," you know, that kind of thing? It was great being able to share that.'

Nevertheless, like many of our interlocutors she also mentioned the 'danger' of being easily accessible through the phone:

It's not just your kids, you know, there's also your friends, your parents, your sisters. They all want to be kept up-dated all the time, and that can be too much, it can distract you from what you came for. So, I had to make conscious choices when to be online and when not.

Quotations like these illustrate that the smartphone has become an integral part of the lifeworld of younger generations of pilgrims; they are 'digital natives' (Palfrey and Gasser 2008) for whom texting has become 'second nature' and who cannot imagine a world where they cannot be in constant touch

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18 Note that the interjection 'so to speak' seems to confirm our impression that the topic of the 'pain of departure' and its disappearance the moment once on the way to Mecca is a recurring theme in conventional hajj story telling.



with others (cf. Wijers 2019; Miller and Sinanan 2014, 10). Several research participants from the Netherlands stated that although keeping in touch with home can be distracting, they felt that, most likely, not being able to keep in contact would have distracted them even more, because they would have been worrying how their children were doing. In their experience, the fact that they could speak to their kids any time that suited them had helped them to concentrate on their *'ibādāt* or acts of worship while performing them.

From the above it can be concluded that although forgetting about one's dear ones at home and being fully drawn in by the hajj experience continues to be an important topic in the stories of pilgrims from the Netherlands, the plot line has clearly changed. In the narratives of older pilgrims, forgetting about home as such is foregrounded. The stories of younger generations indicate that for pilgrims whose daily lives are characterized by online sociality across different geographic locations the possibility of staying in touch with the people at home when not performing rites is a condition for being able to concentrate when engaged in devotional acts. The stories of older pilgrims point to a time-space conception according to which the hajj implies a radical break with one's ordinary lifeworld, while those of younger pilgrims tend to be based on a time-space conception in which the boundaries between home and Mecca are porous. These different temporalities and spatialities tie in with differences between the view of mostly older people concerning hajj performance as transformational and marking a new life-stage, versus a view that predominates among younger pilgrims about the hajj as a 'spiritual boost' or a step in a process of gradual ethical self-formation (cf. Buitelaar 2020, 7; also see Caidi in this volume).

#### 4 Photography

As we mentioned in the opening section, both in Morocco and in the Netherlands practically all research participants who own a smartphone produced their phones to illustrate their stories with photos. Also, scrolling through their hajj album on their phone almost inevitably prompted more stories. Officially, photography is prohibited in the Grand Mosque in Mecca and in the mosque in Medina where the Prophet Muhammad is buried. In the past this rule was strictly applied; if one was lucky, guards might turn a blind eye, but one could equally well be summoned to remove the film from one's camera or risk having one's camera confiscated. With the introduction of the smartphone, it has become nearly impossible to prevent pilgrims from taking pictures. After hav-

ing tolerated it for some years, in 2017, the Saudi government tried to enforce the ban on photography and filming once more.<sup>19</sup> Their efforts were in vain, however; no measure could stop the huge numbers of pilgrims from eagerly and openly documenting their pilgrimage.

Asked about their views on and use of photography during the pilgrimage, pilgrims from Morocco and the Netherlands gave similar answers, which varied between positive and negative stances. A 55-year-old male pilgrim from Morocco, for instance, saw no harm in taking pictures. To the contrary; he had made sure to document every step of his pilgrimage and share them with his family back home. He explained that the pilgrimage is journey of a lifetime that deserves to be shared. In the quotation below, note his efforts to include Muslims from other countries in his photographs, indicating that besides taking pictures of the sacred sites he also values documentation of the ideal of the *umma*, the global community of Muslims:

I took many pictures at the Holy Places, preferably with people from different countries I met, and I made videos. (...) I did not share pictures live on social media but I did share some later when I returned to Morocco. (...) When I was in Mecca, I just shared them with my family over the WhatsApp. (...) A picture is easy and fast to take.

A 65-year-old female pilgrim from Morocco, to the contrary, took a more negative view:

I was very annoyed by all of the people stopping to take selfies. I needed to move out of the way of people taking photos and stopping suddenly to pose ... I myself don't need pictures to remind myself of the beauty of hajj.

Despite her critical stance regarding selfie-taking, the woman cherishes some pictures that others took of her in the Grand Mosque and at other sites around Mecca, and she happily shared them with her daughters over a family WhatsApp group. Many pilgrims we talked to took a similar ambivalent stance. An often-mentioned strategy to deal with this ambivalence concerns carefully planning when to take pictures and when not to. A Moroccan-Dutch female

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19 Cf. <https://egyptindependent.com/no-more-hajj-selfies-photography-banned-at-holy-mosques-in-mecca-medina/>, accessed September 29, 2020; <https://www.dailysabah.com/reigion/2017/11/23/saudi-arabia-bans-photos-videos-at-islams-two-holiest-sites>, accessed September 29, 2020.

pilgrim in her early forties narrated how she had handled the issue of taking pictures during the hajj rites as follows:

I noticed that some people took pictures while doing the *ṭawāf*, can you imagine?! I felt like telling them: 'Are you here for a holiday or for your *'ibādāt*?' But I must admit I was in two minds myself: I really wanted to take a picture of the Ka'ba too, it is so incredibly beautiful. (...) Knowing myself, I deliberately left my phone in the hotel when off to do my first *'umra*,<sup>20</sup> and went back to fetch it and take pictures afterwards.

Besides the pragmatic objection to being hampered in one's own hajj performance by pilgrims who stand still to take photos, in these last two interview excerpts objections of a more normative nature also come to the fore. The statement 'I don't need pictures to remind myself of the beauty of hajj' points to a view according to which it should suffice for a pious pilgrim to remember the sacred ambience of the hajj solely on the basis of one's *īmān* rather than requiring external aids like pictures. The rhetorical question 'Are you here for a holiday or for your *'ibādāt*?' points to a connotation that connects taking pictures with holidaying, something that the narrator apparently considers inappropriate in relation to visiting Mecca (also see Caidi in this volume).<sup>21</sup> The remark illustrates that contrary to most anthropologists, who would argue from an outsider's perspective that pilgrimage cannot clearly be distinguished from tourism,<sup>22</sup> the majority of our interlocutors have ambivalent feelings about the more touristic dimensions of the pilgrimage. Many pilgrims stated that activities like buying souvenirs and taking pictures are a 'waste of time' and not in line with the correct *niyya* or intention of pilgrims, who should be oriented exclusively towards acquitting themselves of their religious obligation.

20 The *'umra* consists of doing the *ṭawāf*, the sevenfold circumambulation of the Ka'ba, drinking water from the well Zamzam, and performing the *sa'y*—the running between the hillocks of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa. All three elements are carried within the premises of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. While performing the *'umra* is part of the hajj ritual, it can also be carried out on its own any other time of the year as a voluntary pilgrimage.

21 Discussing British-Pakistani pilgrims who are critical of the consumerist dimensions of the hajj journey, McLoughlin (2009, 139) quotes a pilgrim who criticizes the behaviour of some pilgrims as holidaying rather than doing their religious duty in nearly exactly the same words: 'Have they been on hajj or some holiday?'

22 Cf. the statement by Victor and Edith Turner that 'a pilgrim is always half a tourist, and a tourist is always half a pilgrim' (Turner and Turner 1978, 20). Also see for example Di Giovine and Picard (2015, 33); Stausberg (2011); Olson and Timothy (2006).

Both quotations also indicate, however, that living up to the image of the ideal pilgrim is difficult to fully realize. Despite her view that one should not need pictures to remember the hajj, the female pilgrim from Morocco was obviously glad to have some pictures to help her to keep in touch with the sacred atmosphere once she had returned home. She was also happy to share them with others and show that she had fulfilled the religious obligation of hajj. That pilgrims can never be 'purely' pilgrims, but operate on the basis of a habitus that is inevitably informed by various cultural traditions and 'grand schemes' simultaneously, comes to the fore even more strongly in the remark 'Knowing myself, I deliberately left my phone in the hotel', stated by the Dutch-Moroccan pilgrim quoted above. This strategy illustrates the performative, situational, and dialogical nature of practical moral reasoning that is also addressed in the chapter by Buitelaar and Kadrouch-Outmany elsewhere in this volume. Acknowledging her habitual self, the pilgrim realized that should her smartphone have been within reach, she might not have been able to resist the tourist in her that would want take pictures regardless of her intentions as a pilgrim.

On a more general level, her remark illustrates the extent to which the use of smartphones has become such an integral part of the daily lives of most younger pilgrims that they need to take strong measures to avoid their habit of documenting their activities and/or directly communicate with others about them. Celebrating or at least respecting the extraordinariness of the pilgrimage and the sacred atmosphere in Mecca entices many pilgrims to distance themselves as much as possible from comportment that marks their ordinary lives in order to try and focus on their religious commitments. Others, however, are more inclined to accommodate their multiple desires, to 'take oneself as one is', and strive to be 'better version of oneself' rather than aiming at a radically transformed exclusively religious self.

This is, for instance, the stance of 'Brother Alkhattab', a self-trained Muslim preacher in his forties who is very popular among young Moroccan-Dutch Muslims. Each year, Alkhattab organizes several *'umra* tours for young Dutch Muslims.<sup>23</sup> In Buitelaar's interview with him, the preacher emphasized the importance of taking into account the different desires and habits of his clients as young modern citizens for whom the use of the smartphone is an important part of their everyday lives and social contacts. Concerning photography, he stated:

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23 Cf. [https://www.instagram.com/p/BtwG3\\_YFwMc/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/p/BtwG3_YFwMc/?hl=en), accessed October 26, 2020.

There is this general sense of discomfort concerning photography: uncertainty regarding what is allowed, and what is *ḥarām* (forbidden). I think we should be realistic: we live in the age of social media. Forbidding it just won't work anymore. (...) My point has always been: live your life by steering the middle of the road. Don't denounce things as *ḥarām* too quickly, but don't take an 'anything goes' attitude either. Strike a reasonable balance instead! So, I tell my group when we get there: 'Listen, we're here for the *ʿumra* rites. So, focus on what you've come for. Enjoy that moment to make a good picture before we start, absolutely fine. But then, open up your heart and soul for the *ʿumra* and put your camera away. Take pictures again once you're done, but don't live stream your *ʿumra*.' (...) Some guys take pictures, others don't. My point is that they should respect each other's choices.<sup>24</sup>

The above quotation illustrates how in specific cultural contexts new normativities quickly emerge to accommodate the use of digital technology (cf. Horst and Miller 2012b, 107). The preacher creatively mixes and merges different moral registers to articulate his take on adapting the use of the smartphone to hajj morality.<sup>25</sup> The ambivalent stances of the female pilgrims concerning taking pictures during the hajj illustrate that this is not a smooth process; practical moral reasoning is situated (cf. Buitelaar and Kadrouch-Outmany elsewhere in this volume). Contradictory views do not only exist between people, but individuals can also experience tension between the different moral registers that inform their normative conceptions (cf. Ribak and Rosenthal 2015).

Note that Brother Alkhattab objects most strongly to sharing one's pilgrimage experience by live-streaming it. Some of our interlocutors apparently consider live-streaming so absurd that they mentioned the option as though it were a joke, but would not elaborate on it. Most probably, live-streaming occurs only rarely. Taking hajj-selfies and posting them on communication platforms like Twitter and Facebook, on the contrary, is very popular and much discussed, both by our interlocutors, and, more widely, among pilgrims in different

24 In Dutch: *'Laat een ander in zijn waarde'*.

25 Also see Costa, who demonstrates that the desires of the young Kurdish-Turkish women she studied for living both a pious and a romantic life can be fulfilled by new mediated practices made possible by social media. Costa argues that for the women concerned, the moral registers of piety and romance do not oppose but mutually shape each other (Costa 2016, 213).

countries: a critical piece about selfies in the *Arab News* during the hajj of 2014 sparked a public debate.<sup>26</sup> Following Twitter, which had announced 2014 the ‘year of the selfie’, 2014 was coined ‘year of the hajj-selfie’,<sup>27</sup> and the hashtag #hajjselfie went viral on Twitter (Caidi, Beazley, and Marquez 2018, 8). This hashtag, however, raised serious objections from conservative religious leaders, who denounced the self-centredness of taking images during the pilgrimage.<sup>28</sup> However, as Nadia Caid and her co-authors point out, many pilgrims—particularly younger ones—continue to post selfies from Mecca and share their pilgrimage experiences with others.<sup>29</sup>

This is also the case among our research participants. For example, a male pilgrim in his late fifties from Morocco who had been on *‘umra* during the month of Ramadan in 2015 and again in 2017 shared with Al-Ajarma his postings of photos on his personal Facebook page. He showed her a photo of himself in front of the Grand Mosque of Mecca, along with the caption, ‘From the Holy Sanctuary; May God never forbid anyone from such a visit #umrah #Alhamdulillah.’<sup>30</sup> He had shared other pictures with his sisters via WhatsApp. In addition, a friend of him had tagged him in a picture they had taken together near the Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. After returning to Morocco, he carefully filtered the images he had taken in Mecca, and reposted some of them later. Before his second journey to Mecca in February 2017, he posted an image of his 2015 *‘umra* with the caption, ‘May God reward us another visit to the Holy Sanctuaries; and grant the same to all my brothers and sisters; You are the One who accepts our prayers.’ Also, at the end of December 2017, he posted

26 Cf. <https://www.arabnews.com/islam-perspective/news/637771>, accessed October 20, 2020.

27 Cf. <https://time.com/3462348/hajj-2014-the-year-of-the-selfie/>, accessed October 20, 2020.

28 Cf. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/saudi-arabia/11141770/Hajj-selfies-cause-controversy-among-conservative-Muslims.html>, accessed October 26, 2020.

29 For a both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of selfies taken during the pilgrimage to Mecca that are posted on Facebook, see Caidi, Beazley, and Marquez (2018). The authors found that most selfies were taken near the Ka’ba; that pilgrims featuring in them are mostly under 60; and that 55% of the photographs were taken during *‘umra*, versus 33% during hajj. A tentative explanation they offer for the latter is that pilgrims may feel more inhibited to take selfies during the hajj due to its sacred and formal nature. While, indeed, pilgrims may find it more difficult to take selfies whilst being absorbed in the huge crowds during performance of the hajj rites, another possible explanation might be that the number of young pilgrims performing the *‘umra* is much larger than those going on hajj.

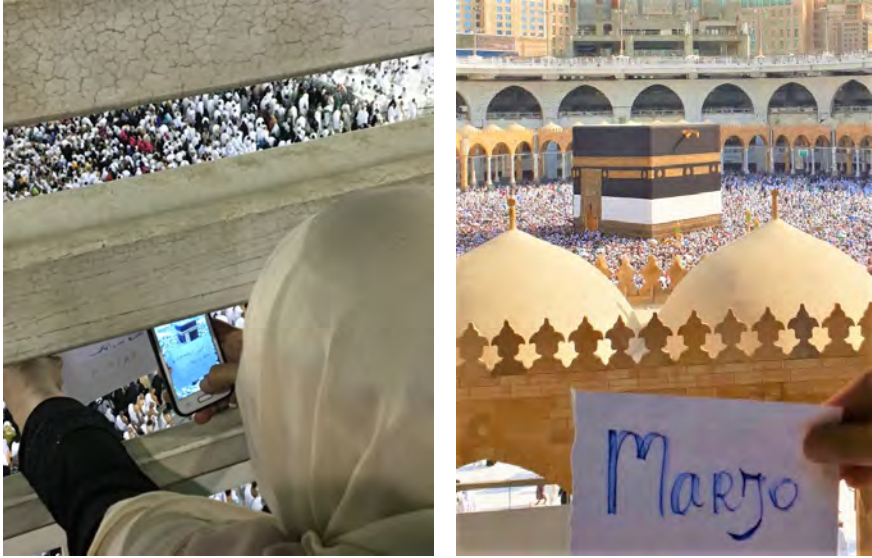
30 In Arabic ‘*Allah lā yahrumunā min dhāḥ al-maqām*’ meaning ‘May God never prevent us from going to that holy place’. It is often used by Moroccans when discussing the hajj.

a picture of his *ramadān 'umra* earlier that year with the caption 'Memories of Ramadan 2017 in the Mosque of the Prophet.'

For this pilgrim, taking a picture in Mecca and then posting it on social media does not go against the spiritual nature of pilgrimage. Rather, like the preacher Alkhatab mentioned above, he views it as 'a sign of the times'. He added that out of respect for the sacredness of the Grand Mosques in Mecca and Medina, he had made sure not to 'overdo' the taking of pictures. Moreover, he objects to pilgrims who are so absorbed by taking selfies that they miss what he called 'the real experience'. A similar concern was expressed by a Moroccan-Dutch interviewee in his forties, who questioned the trend of sharing hajj-selfies by stating that 'documenting one's hajj might easily degenerate into experiencing it through documentation on Facebook.'

In an article on the 'emotional affordance' of smartphones, media studies scholar Christoph Bareither focuses on another dimension of the fine line between experience and documentation referred to above. Bareither points to the affordance of smartphones to closely connect simple documentation and the capacity to mobilize or communicate emotions (Bareither 2019, 15). Bareither's analysis of selfies made at holocaust memorial sites invites us to take the 'emotional affordance' of the smartphone seriously and to look at hajj selfies from another perspective than an often heard critique according to which they hinder the 'real experience' or smack of self-glorification. In line with Bareither's argument, we would argue that reposting pictures, for example to tune in with the passing of religious seasons as the Moroccan pilgrim discussed above did, allows pilgrims to keep alive the memories of their experiences in Mecca. As captions like 'I miss that place' and 'May God grant me another visit' indicate, these images are often imbued with nostalgia and function to fulfil the desire to reminisce about one's pilgrimage. Allowing pilgrims as time passes to continue to tap into the emotions the journey stirred in them, pictures can be used as a tool in an ongoing process of ethical-self fashioning or a source of consolation in difficult times.

Furthermore, another affordance of the smartphone is to enable 'co-presence' (cf. Madianou 2016; Baldassar 2008). Smartphones can be a very powerful tool for pilgrims to mediate the sacred atmosphere to those at home, as Buitelaar experienced when a friend sent her a picture from Mecca through WhatsApp showing her name in proximity of the Ka'ba with the caption 'You are here with us'. Besides being touched by the kindness of her friend to think about her whilst in Mecca, to her own surprise, even as a non-Muslim, it moved Buitelaar to see her own name in close proximity of the Ka'ba, which for Muslims is the most sacred location on earth and closely associated with



FIGURES 16.2–3 Pilgrims creating co-presence with relatives and friends at home by sending them photographs depicting their names in proximity of the Ka'ba  
 PHOTOGRAPH LEFT: TAKEN BY AL-AJARMA, PHOTOGRAPH RIGHT: SENT TO BUITELAAR BY A FRIEND

God's blessings. It gave her a sense of being in touch with the sacred, however one chooses to define it.

Creating co-presence through taking these kind of pictures has become customary among pilgrims from all countries, as Al-Ajarma noted during her two *'umra* visits to Mecca. One of her interlocutors in Morocco showed her another variety of personalized messages; this woman cherished a series of very short video clips on her smartphone that her brother had sent her from Mecca. The clips showed pilgrims from countries like Indonesia, Sudan, Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan who greeted her in their own language or local Arabic dialect and expressed the wish that she might visit Mecca too. The videoclips of pilgrims directly addressing her had deeply touched her and stimulated her own longing for the Holy Places. She still often looks at the clips fondly and declares that she will never delete them.

The practice of creating co-presence in Meccan sacred space by sending those at home photographs or videoclips that feature their names resonates with Martin Zillinger's argument concerning the redefinition of people's conceptualizations of religious space that may result from media practices (Zillinger 2014). Zillinger describes how adepts of the *'Isāwa* and *Ḥamadsha* trance cults in Morocco integrate the use of the smartphone in their ritual prac-



tices to translate the evocation of *baraka*, God's blessings, across space and time to migrants living in Europe. Although they cannot be physically present, clients attend the event online from their European homes. Alternatively, one of the ritual practitioners sees to it that a smartphone showing the portrait of the absent client is put close to the sacrificial animal or held high in the air for all to see while somebody else films the event, the recording of which is sent to the client in Europe afterwards.

Zillinger makes two points that are relevant to our discussion here. First of all, he argues that his interlocutors do not assume that the *baraka* itself is being transmitted through the smartphone, but rather its evocation is mediated. Secondly, at least as much as the evocation of *baraka*, what is mediated with the aid of a camera is *qarāba*—literally 'closeness' in Moroccan-Arabic, referring to one's ties to family members and other 'close ones' (cf. Eickelman 1976, 95–105). In a similar vein, we would argue that creating co-presence in the sacred space of Mecca operates to confirm pilgrims' ties with their close ones at home and to stir emotions in their friends and relatives that remind them of God's closeness in their own lives.<sup>31</sup>

Once such images are shared, their informational and emotional power reaches pilgrims' broader social networks, enabling a wider circle of people to partake in imparting meaning to the pilgrimage experience (cf. Schwarz 2014). On the basis of the examples that people on the receiving end shared with us, we would argue that pilgrims' motivations to take and share pictures is not limited to concerns with self-promotion, as some critics are inclined to think, but can also include the wish to mediate the sacredness across time and space. How such digitized mediations are assessed by others often depends on whether their circulation is restricted to pilgrims' personal networks or also extends to public platforms (cf. Costa 2018). The materialization of personal

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31 Pilgrims, and Muslims more generally vary in their views as to *baraka* itself can be mediated. Most people would agree that Zamzam water carries *baraka* or at least has beneficial attributes. Some of our interlocutors told us stories about (seeing others) rubbing a Qur'an copy, prayer beads or other objects they intended to give away as souvenirs, such as headscarves or prayer mats against the *kiswa*, the cloth covering the Ka'ba, so as to take home some of its *baraka* (cf. Enes in chapter 10 elsewhere in this volume). For others, the power of *baraka* is only transmitted through one's personal contact with God, even if the idea that an object has been at the sacred site can increase its emotional value. As for those at home 'being there' in the form of pilgrims showing your name on their phones or pieces of paper as they say supplication prayers for you should not be mistaken as vicarious hajj performance. While pilgrims who have fulfilled their religious duty to perform hajj are allowed to perform it again in the name of somebody else, views vary whether this can only be done for people who died before being able to carry out the ritual itself or also for living people who for other reasons are not able to perform the hajj.

hajj experiences in a broader digital environment exposes the personal memories of pilgrims to a large number of different publics.<sup>32</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored how pilgrims from Morocco and the Netherlands appropriate the affordances of the smartphone to mediate the sacred atmosphere in Mecca. Our discussion of hajj-related uses of digital technology illustrates that such affordances only unfold and acquire meaning in the very practices in which they are enacted (cf. Bareither 2019, 18). Our findings demonstrate that the specific use of digital media is shaped by the embeddedness of pilgrims in a specific constellation of cultural contexts and power structures. At the same time, however, these media allow pilgrims to experience the hajj in new ways.

The main purposes for which the pilgrims we interviewed and observed use the smartphone concern information services, communication, documentation, and self-presentation. The dynamics between lifeworld, digital practice, and meaning-making came to the fore, for instance, in the ways that young pilgrims use the informational services the smartphone offers to gain more control over their own, personal journey. Although it is the affordance of the smartphone that makes this use possible, the very desire for oneself to be in charge points to the specific habitus these pilgrims have acquired by having grown up in an individualized, consumerist societal context.

Similarly, this generation of highly mobile 'digital natives' is habituated to continuous connectivity to the world beyond their specific location. Staying connected during the pilgrimage implies a less radical break from daily life than it did for previous generations. We would argue that using WhatsApp in preparatory activities like asking forgiveness and taking leave rather than doing so through face-to-face communication are both an effect of, and co-constitutive to, the modification of conceptions and ideologies about mobility. The diminishing relevance of separation rites characterizing the hajj journey is related to a shift from a representation of space and time in terms of bounded entities that one leaves behind as one moves from one place or phase to the next, towards a conception in which temporal and spatial boundaries are viewed as fluid and porous.

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32 For a comparison of hajj representations posted on YouTube and public Facebook pages by pilgrims from Morocco and the Netherlands, see Al-Ajarma and Buitelaar (2021).

The porosity of boundaries between social orders and between locations that are considered sacred and the domains of everyday life is, of course, not new and has been addressed often in pilgrimage studies (cf. Coleman 2019, 5–7; Gershon 2019). The stories of our interlocutors demonstrate how the use of the smartphone increases this porosity and affects pilgrims' hajj experiences. In addition to the habit of smartphone users to stay connected, the tendency to minutely document moments and interactions in one's life contributes to a further blurring of these boundaries. This works in two ways: firstly, sharing photographs whilst on hajj with those who stayed at home allows mediation of the sacred atmosphere across space. Secondly, archiving photographs on their smartphone allows pilgrims to revive memories and evoke the emotions they experienced during the pilgrimage whenever and wherever they wish afterwards, thus enabling them to tap into the sacred atmosphere of Mecca across time and space.

Exactly because in the Muslim imagination Mecca is—or ideally should be—posited above the messiness of daily life, the stories of our interlocutors indicate that the increased visibility of the interpenetration of the quotidian and sacred space in Mecca due to the use of the smartphone creates ambivalent feelings in pilgrims. These feelings particularly concern the issue of what constitutes an appropriate balance between fully immersing oneself in the ritual on the one hand, and documenting it (as though one were a 'tourist') on the other. Most of our interlocutors have found an effective strategy for dealing with such ambivalence for themselves. Yet, photography, specifically taking selfies that are shared on social media, continues to be a contested practice.

Taken together, the various forms of digital mediation of the hajj discussed in this chapter demonstrate that media technologies and the materiality of digital devices are capable of having enormous symbolic significance. They are embedded in, but also shape the habits, expectations, experiences, and feelings of pilgrims. Digitized mediation of hajj experiences is an 'integrative practice' that combines personal memory, interpersonal bonding, and communal history production (Couldry 2012, 51). As such, they are an important new input in hajj practices as well as adding a new dimension to the socially evolved conventions of hajj-storytelling.

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