The Hajar Aswad Jockey Phenomenon: Ethical Analysis and Implications for Pilgrim Management

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Abstract. The phenomenon of Hajar Aswad jockeys, emerging from extreme overcrowding in the Grand Mosque, has triggered multidimensional polemics ranging from physical safety risks and social ethical dilemmas to disruptions in pilgrim management governance. This study aims to examine the Hajar Aswad jockey phenomenon in depth from the perspective of Islamic ethics and its implications for pilgrim management. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with pilgrims, mutawwifs, and travel organizers, documentation observation, and literature study. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that although the practice is perceived as facilitating worship for some pilgrims, it potentially poses safety risks, disorder, and degradation of moral values in worship. From an Islamic ethics perspective, this practice contradicts maqashid al-shari'ah principles, particularly hifz al-nafs (preservation of life) and hifz al-din (preservation of religion). Other implications include the need for pilgrim education, mutawwif accompaniment, and strengthening regulations to ensure safe, ethical practices that uphold the spiritual values of Hajj and Umrah.
Keywords: Hajar Aswad Jockey; Islamic Ethics; Pilgrim Management; Hajj Pilgrimage

Abstrak. *Fenomena joki Hajar Aswad yang muncul akibat kepadatan ekstrem di Masjidil Haram telah memicu polemik multidimensi, mulai dari risiko keselamatan fisik dan dilema etika sosial hingga gangguan terhadap tata kelola ketertiban jamaah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji fenomena joki Hajar Aswad secara mendalam dari perspektif etika Islam serta implikasinya terhadap manajemen jamaah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode fenomenologi. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dengan jamaah, mutawwif, dan penyelenggara perjalanan ibadah, observasi dokumentasi, serta studi literatur. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun praktik joki dianggap mempermudah ibadah bagi sebagian jamaah, praktik ini berpotensi menimbulkan risiko keselamatan, ketidaktertiban, dan penurunan nilai moral ibadah. Dari perspektif etika Islam, praktik ini bertentangan dengan prinsip maqashid al-shari'ah, khususnya hifz al-nafs (menjaga jiwa) dan hifz al-din (menjaga kesucian ibadah). Implikasi lain*

termasuk perlunya edukasi jamaah, pendampingan mutawwif, serta penguatan regulasi dan sosialisasi agar praktik joki berlangsung aman, etis, dan tetap memperhatikan nilai spiritual ibadah haji dan umrah.
Kata kunci: Joki Hajar Aswad; Etika Islam; Manajemen Jamaah; Ibadah Haji.

INTRODUCTION

Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages are forms of obedience possessing complex spiritual, social, and managerial dimensions. Hajj is viewed as a "Jihad" in the form of an inner and intellectual struggle to achieve *kemabruran* (an accepted Hajj) (Samad 2015). Every year, millions of pilgrims from various countries perform rituals at the Grand Mosque (Masjidil Haram), including kissing or touching the Hajar Aswad (Black Stone), which becomes one of the primary goals for Muslims visiting the holy land (Kocak 2023). The belief in the glory of this stone drives a strong desire among pilgrims to touch it physically.

The high volume of pilgrims and the limited space around the Kaaba make the area extremely congested. This condition has given birth to a new phenomenon, namely the emergence of "Hajar Aswad jockey" services people paid to help pilgrims penetrate the crowd to kiss the stone (Yezli et al. 2024). This phenomenon sparks debate regarding ethics, pilgrim management, and implications for Hajj and Umrah organization.

According to Kadi (2024), crowd management governance in the Grand Mosque is a major challenge due to the extremely high dynamics of human movement. This aligns with findings by Mulyana and Gunawan (2010), who emphasized the need for intelligent agent simulations to predict irregular crowd behavior. Technologies such as Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) and the Internet of Things (IoT) have been applied to optimize pilgrim flow (Rmili 2025), along with discourses on using Virtual Hajj simulations in the Metaverse as educational tools (Fadillah and Murad 2024); however, unofficial physical practices like jockeys remain prevalent and potentially disrupt this order.

From the aspect of pilgrim service, the existence of jockeys indicates a gap in the pilgrim needs management system. Furthermore, from an Islamic ethics perspective, the jockey practice raises serious moral issues. Business ethics in Islam emphasize honesty, justice, and responsibility (Fitria 2024). This phenomenon can be considered a form of commercialization of

worship, where a *sunnah* (voluntary) act is turned into a business opportunity in a way that potentially violates values of equality and sincerity. Research by Ridho (2024) also indicates that actions exploiting worship situations for personal gain are a deviation from the principles of *maslahah* (public interest) and *adl* (justice). The Hajar Aswad jockey practice thus not only violates *muamalah* ethical principles in Islam but also creates social inequality between pilgrims who can afford the service and those who cannot (Ali, Mafindi, and Muhammad 2023). This phenomenon ultimately impacts the spiritual aspect of pilgrims, as the value of sincerity and equality in worship diminishes due to access differences based on financial capability.

The implications of the Hajar Aswad jockey phenomenon relate not only to ethical and management aspects but also touch upon the overall image of Hajj and Umrah organization. According to Alzeer (2024), negative pilgrim experiences due to overcrowding and disorder can reduce spiritual satisfaction and perceptions of the quality of worship organization. The presence of jockeys can be seen as an indicator of weak pilgrim management systems and supervision in the Grand Mosque area, which should be a center of order and sanctity. Thus, this phenomenon needs to be examined deeply from three perspectives: Islamic ethics, pilgrim management, and implications for Hajj and Umrah organization, to find a balanced solution between pilgrims' spiritual needs and a fair service system.

A review of previous research shows a research gap, which is the main reason for the importance of this study. Several previous studies have indeed discussed Hajj and Umrah management but have not touched upon the Hajar Aswad jockey phenomenon specifically and comprehensively. Kadi (2024) only highlighted crowd management aspects and the use of digital technology in regulating pilgrim movement, but did not review the social behavior of pilgrims that gives rise to jockeying practices.

Furthermore, empirical data from the 2023–2025 period shows that extreme density in the *Tawaf* area is the main physical condition fueling this practice. Although Rmili (2025) offers a technological approach through RFID and IoT implementation, such solutions have proven insufficient to dampen the behavioral factors triggering the demand for these illegal services. Theoretically, various studies related to Islamic business ethics, *maslahah* principles, and spiritual satisfaction are available, but the majority of

these studies stand alone and have not touched the core issue of Hajar Aswad jockeys as a failure of service management implying violations of *muamalah* ethics.

Othman (2021) and Saputri (2023) examined pilgrim satisfaction factors in terms of service quality and trust in organizers but did not mention the jockey phenomenon as a form of service management failure in the field. Ridho (2024) discussed Islamic business ethics but did not link it to real practices of moral deviation in worship areas. Meanwhile, Alzeer (2024) discussed pilgrims' spiritual experiences and their impact on worship satisfaction but did not highlight how certain social behaviors like jockeys can affect that spiritual meaning.

Based on this gap, this study fills the literature void by combining the concept of *Ijarah* Contracts in *Fiqh Muamalah* to analyze the validity of service transactions, juxtaposed with Operational Risk Management theory. This integrative approach aims to formulate mitigation for Hajar Aswad jockey practices that are not only valid according to Sharia but also operationally effective. Therefore, the main focus of this research is directed at describing how the jockey practice mechanism occurs in the context of Hajj and Umrah, reviewing the phenomenon through the perspective of Islamic ethics, and analyzing its implications for Hajj and Umrah organization, both from service quality and pilgrim spiritual experience aspects.

To unravel the complexity of these issues deeply, this study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. This approach was chosen for its ability to explore subjective meanings of individual experiences within the complex social and spiritual context of the Grand Mosque area (Sugiyono 2017). The main data sources were obtained through in-depth interviews with informants determined using purposive sampling techniques. Informants in this study consisted of Hajj and Umrah pilgrims, worship guides (*mutawwif*), and travel managers who have direct experience with the jockey phenomenon. Details of informant data, including identity and interview timing, have been listed completely in the reference list as proof of primary data validity.

In addition to interviews, data were also collected through non-participant observation of pilgrim testimonials and field reports, supported by secondary data in the form of academic literature and official regulations

from Saudi authorities regarding crowd management. All collected data were then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (2014), which includes data reduction stages to select crucial information, data display in thematic narratives, and conclusion drawing. Through this methodological series, it is hoped that the research can produce a comprehensive understanding of the Hajar Aswad jockey practice, both from ethical and worship governance sides.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Modus Operandi and Field Dynamics of the Hajar Aswad Jockey Phenomenon

The Hajar Aswad jockey phenomenon is a complex and organized informal practice that emerges as an anomalous response to extreme density in the *Mataf* area. Based on in-depth field observation, this practice is not merely a spontaneous act but possesses a systematic operational pattern. The jockeys, the majority of whom are *mukimin* (residents) or non-procedural informal workers, map the *Tawaf* area into target zones. They operate by exploiting physical gaps in the crowd. This condition is exacerbated by cultural factors, where Indonesian pilgrims, as explained in the study by Noor, Raihani, and Iqbal (2019) regarding the "Urang Banjar" tradition, have a strong cultural drive to obtain social status and maximum spiritual satisfaction in the Holy Land, often without calculating physical risks.

The modus operandi applied is highly varied but tends to be aggressive. The most commonly encountered technique is the formation of a "human barricade," where 3 to 5 jockeys form a circular or triangular formation to split the pilgrim flow, protecting the client in the middle, and forcibly pushing until they touch the Hajar Aswad. Validation of this work pattern was found in an interview with Dewi Arum (December 28, 2025), a jockey service provider active on social media. She revealed that her team works by "opening a path" amidst the density and escorting pilgrims (maximum 1–2 people) intensively. Dewi argues that this practice is valid as long as it is done honestly, with an initial agreement, and claims it actually helps Indonesian pilgrims who have physical difficulties penetrating the crowd. However, when viewed from the study by Yezli et al. (2024) regarding health risks due to heat and overcrowding, this act of forcibly "opening a

path" actually increases the risk of heat stroke and extreme exhaustion for surrounding pilgrims.

This service is offered with highly fluctuating tariffs, ranging from 200 to 500 SAR, depending on the density level and access difficulty at that time. Transactions often occur quickly and covertly (underground transactions) between *Tawaf* rounds, indicating that the perpetrators are aware this action is illegal under Saudi authority rules. This spontaneous transactional dynamic was also confirmed by Ingga Robiatul Salsabila (November 27, 2025), a pilgrim who used the service. She stated that jockey practices often appear suddenly during *Tawaf*, providing easy access for pilgrims struggling to get close. According to Ingga, the existence of jockeys does not disturb solemnity, and spiritual experience is maintained as long as the pilgrim's intention remains pure.

Sociologically, the interaction between jockeys and pilgrims creates a problematic symbiotic relationship. For some pilgrims like Ingga, jockeys are considered "heroes" who facilitate the achievement of peak spiritual satisfaction (Badur et al. 2022). However, this perception is often biased. In the field, it is found that many jockeys perform subtle intimidation, such as initially offering voluntary help, but turning to forced payment (extortion) after the ritual is finished. This changes the sacred atmosphere of the Grand Mosque into a transactional negotiation arena full of tension. The derivative impact of this practice is the destruction of the natural flow of *Tawaf*. Aggressive jockey movements create flow turbulence that increases the risk of crowd crush, physical injury to the elderly, and mass discomfort for other pilgrims worshipping according to the rules.

Distortion of Worship Values in Sharia Review

Ethical analysis of jockey practices reveals a clash between "Intention" (*Niyyah*) and "Means" (*Wasilah*). Ibu Amanah (2025) feels the practice aligns with worship values because it is based on sincere intent. This reflects Quaium's (2023) view that Hajj is an inner struggle. However, that inner struggle is distorted when entering an exploitative transactional realm.

A contrasting reality was expressed by Ibu Evie (December 5, 2025), who experienced post-worship extortion. This traumatic experience damages the process of "refashioning self" post-Hajj which should bring peace, as

explained by Al-Ajarma (2021). Instead of finding peace, pilgrims bring home memories of fraud in the Holy Land.

In the context of Sharia economics, Mursalat and Asy'ari (2025) exemplify that the Hajj economic ecosystem should be based on Sharia-compliant empowerment (such as waqf or crowdfunding), not opportunistic exploitation like jockeys. Below is the ethical analysis matrix based on these findings:

Table 1. Ethical Clash Analysis Matrix in Hajar Aswad Jockey Practices

Ethical Dimension	Ideal Practice	Jockey Reality	Legal Status
Principle of Justice (Al-'Adl)	Access to Hajar Aswad is equal for all Muslims regardless of status/money.	Access is privatized.	Violation (*Dzalim*)
Safety of Life (Hifz An-Nafs)	Worship is performed calmly, not hurting oneself/others.	Uses physical violence (elbowing, pushing, stepping on).	*Haram* (Forbidden)
Purity of Intention (Ikhlas)	Kissing Hajar Aswad is *Sunnah*, done solely for Allah.	Worship becomes a business commodity.	Moral Defect
Transaction Contract (Muamalah)	Services must be clear, transparent, and mutually consensual (*antaradin*).	*Gharar* (uncertainty) often occurs in tariffs at the start, ending in extortion.	Void (*Fasid*)

Based on the matrix above, it is clear that the argument of "helping" often echoed by jockeys and users collapses when faced with *Maqashid Al-Shari'ah* principles. This analysis is reinforced by Jumali (2020), who concluded that the cancellation of Hajj (or in this context, cancelling the intention to kiss Hajar Aswad) is justifiable if conditions threaten *Hifz al-Nafs*. Forcing oneself to use a jockey who crashes into others is a violation of this Sharia priority.

Implications for Governance and Hajj Organization Risk Management

The existence of jockeys provides systemic implications for risk management. Informant Khulud (December 8, 2025) emphasized that without the accompaniment of a *mutawwif* who understands the *Fiqh* of priorities, pilgrims are vulnerable to entrapment. Theoretically, the persistence of this phenomenon indicates a significant gap in Crowd Control Management applied in the Grand Mosque. Although advanced technologies like CCTV monitoring and AI have been used, micro-crowd dynamics created by jockey groups are difficult to detect and act upon in real-time because they blend in with ordinary pilgrims.

The crucial point of this implication is the increase in Operational Risk. Jockey groups create artificial bottlenecks in the *Tawaf* flow. When they stop suddenly or move against the flow to escort clients out, crowd wave shocks occur, increasing the probability of fatal incidents. For Indonesian Hajj management, this becomes a heavy challenge in pilgrim protection. Many Indonesian pilgrims who are naive and have low literacy become easy targets for this jockey market.

Long-term implications touch on Organizational Behavior and Education aspects. This phenomenon serves as a loud signal for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and travel associations (PPIU) to reform the Hajj ritual (*manasik*) curriculum. Thus far, *manasik* materials often focus too much on the pillars and obligations of Hajj textually, but lack emphasis on *Fiqh al-Waqi'* (Understanding Field Situations) and *Fiqh* of Priorities. Pilgrims need to be educated massively that kissing Hajar Aswad is merely *sunnah*, while maintaining personal safety and not persecuting others is mandatory. Without radical educational intervention and strict field supervision, jockey practices will continue to be a parasite eroding the quality of worship organization, lowering pilgrim satisfaction, and tarnishing the image of Indonesian pilgrim orderliness in the eyes of the international world.

CONCLUSION

The Hajar Aswad jockey phenomenon operates systematically through a *human barricade* modus and informal transactions as an opportunistic response to crowd management gaps in the Grand Mosque. Although some perpetrators and users narrate it as a form of mutual assistance (*ta'awun*), analysis results prove that this practice distorts worship values and

contradicts *Maqashid Al-Shari'ah* principles, specifically *hifz al-nafs* and *hifz al-din*, due to the use of physical methods that endanger life safety and the commodification of rituals that injures the principle of equal access in worship. Its implications for Hajj and Umrah organization are significant, where the existence of jockeys creates artificial bottlenecks that increase the risk of mass accidents (crowd crush), thus demanding the Ministry of Religious Affairs and travel organizers reform pilgrim protection governance through a strict Risk Management approach and strengthening *manasik* literacy that prioritizes safety aspects above pseudo-spiritual ambitions.

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