STUDY OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE ISMAILIDS’ VOLUNTARY PURE OBEDIENCE (VPO) BASE ON FUZZY APPROACH

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Abstract

Hassan Sabah’s1 particular style of leadership, and his followers’ special style of VPO, are among the most outstanding cases in studies of leadership stylistics and the process of VPO; such reports are intriguing, as the Ismailids enjoyed total freedom of choice, while obeying their leader even at the cost of their lives. This study has tried to explore the reasons behind VPO, and using a case study approach, to examine the social group behavior of the Ismailids during the rule of Sabah. To that end, historical and interpretive action research was used to study why the Ismailids purely obeyed Sabah; subsequently, the initial codes were analyzed and revised several times, using the software MAXQDA, and then, 4 main factors and 18 sub-factors were identified; and eventually, experts opinion was sought, and using the Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process, the root causes of the phenomena were ranked. Results indicate that factors including the social status of the leader, his power of coercion and his potential to satisfy material needs had the slightest effect on the group’s VPO, whereas factors such as religious leadership, the leader’s skill of social influence, and the followers’ religious conviction were the most influential on VPO among the group. As to the main factors, Sabah’s special style of leadership was suggested to be the most effective in VPO of the Ismailids

Keywords: Voluntary Pure Obedience (VPO), The Ismailids, the Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process among groups, Sabah

1 Hereafter referred to as “Sabah”
1 Introduction

Browsing man’s history, there were societies that seemed to be mesmerized by their leaders; under such circumstances, the followers demonstrated VPO, free from any coercion from their leaders.

Interactions based on persuading and influencing the followers, and having them obey consciously and voluntarily, would create shared concepts among the leader and the followers; such a set of common values and views could yield extraordinary results.

Many scientists believe that the phenomenon is one of the most value-based and ethics-driven qualities in leader-follower relationships, though rarely achievable. Yet, there are times when pure-obedience, deriving from deep personal satisfaction, was predominant in the followers’ behavior toward their leader.

The case of Ismailids during the period of Sabah’s leadership is one of the most outstanding examples for a study of VPO.

Research goal

The purpose of the study was to identify and rank factors and sub-factors affecting VPO of Ismailids during the period of Sabah’s leadership.

The main questions were:

- What factors caused VPO of Ismailids to Sabah?
- What is the importance and weight of each factor?

Research methodology

This study adopted a descriptive-interpretive approach, which is a type of content analysis.

Practically, content analysis refers to any organized, objective technique for extracting the characteristics of a message (Kidder & Judd, 1986: 306). In this case, MAXQDA\(^2\) was used in order to content analyze the texts.

In the beginning, the raw data was collected and analyzed using semi-structured interviews with experts (aiming at identifying the main factors and their sub-factors that had an effect on VPO of the Ismailids to Sabah). Then the transcriptions of interviews were processed several times, producing 103 codes that were further fed into MAXQDA a few times for analysis. Finally, four basic and eighteen organizing issues were identified.

Due to the predominantly library nature of the study, the researchers utilized various sources of data such as books, articles and dissertations, as well as the internet and indices of articles. As a result, the data used included a variety coming from sources such as interviews, observations, verbal exchanges, general reports and the respondents’ diaries, as well as the interactions and reflections of the researchers. To collect information, deep interviews and an FAHP questionnaire were employed.

Basically, the primary method of data collection was deep interviews with experts.

The process set out on totally open, unstructured interviews with experts, and gradually their responses and the coding of early interviews helped find more clues to the upcoming questions, while they were still within the context and framework of the main research questions.

The population included all experts and specialists in management, history, psychology and anthropology, who were considered to have been well informed of the process of VPO and leadership, and who had reliable historical knowledge of the Ismailids, particularly of the period of Sabah’s leadership. The sample taken included 28 experienced professors in the above fields, coming from the universities of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti, Tarbiat Modarres, Islamic Azad (Science & Research faculty), and Allameh

\(^2\) A computer software
Tabatabaei. The research was basic in its orientation, and exploratory in terms of its goals.

The sampling method used was snowballing, which is a practical one in qualitative and exploratory studies. Here, the first person introduces the second one, and the snowball keeps rolling on (Balter, 2012, p. 60). It provides a goal-directed, strategic sampling method, and in this study, the experts were consulted based on the particular goals of the research, and effective problem solving strategies.

To develop the questionnaire, the fundamentals of usage in Persian and English language were considered, besides expert opinion, in order to identify the potentially relevant factors. After that, the first draft of the questionnaire was drawn up and its validity and reliability were calculated, to produce the final draft. The reliability was measured via the rate of inconsistency, which is acceptable when the figure is less than 0.1. As the overall inconsistency rate in this study was 0.04, the data was considered reliable.

So, four main factors and 18 sub-factors were identified as the root causes of VPO in the group under study. After collecting expert opinion, and using FAHP, those reasons were ranked. Throughout the study, there were times when the attributive method, as exercised in historical research, was used to better establish the issues.

What follows is a review of literature in section 2, and an introduction to FAHP in part 3. Then, in section 4, the primary and secondary factors affecting VPO in the group under study will be analyzed using FAHP, and finally section 5 on discussion and conclusion wraps the issues up.

2 Review of literature

The history of Ismailids dates back to 8th century A.D.; they are considered a branch of Shia Muslims, also known as Hashaashin and Nazaaria (Daftari, 1994: 21). The glory days of Ismailids was during the era of Nazaarian, when Hassan Sabaah was their leader (Khalatbari and BastaaniRaad, 2006: 21). In practice, Sabaah had his own methods of governing people, which has led to numerous myths and also true stories about him and his group (Moezzi, 2008: 93), enthusiastically pursued by many people around the world. Rabbi Benjamin says the sect had a leader whose words were eagerly actualized and followed by his followers, whether it be life or death (Benjamin, 1992: 7-16).

Burkhard Strasbourg believes that although they lived in arid lands surrounded by high, impassable mountains, and were in war with the government, but enjoying a capable and popular leader, their grandeur frightened their enemies. He continues that they followed the orders of their leader, in ways he had never seen among any group of people. The degree of obedience to Sabah was so high that his followers considered no task arduous, and voluntarily pursued the most dangerous missions he would assigned (Scheffer, 1889: 456-77).

Commenting on their VPO, Daftari says the Ismailids showed a high degree of commitment in obeying Sabah’s orders, as if there were no hardships or dangers in the world capable of preventing them from attaining the goals set for them by Sabah; in effect, they obeyed his orders with strong resolve (Daftari, 1999: 135-6).

The author of “psychology: theories, concepts and applications” (Karimi, 2001: 41-139) has extensively discussed the foundations of obedience and its reasons. Also, Pour Moghaddam (1367: 23) in his book titled “Social Psychology” (1988:23) has reviewed stances from various scholars regarding reasons behind VPO of the followers to their leader.

Elsewhere, Beua and Buekley argue that VPO is not always ideal, and dismiss pure obedience induced by the leader, labeling it “crime in obedience”. A walkthrough of the available resources today shows lack of scientifically well-founded studies on the reasons behind pure obedience among social groups in Iran’s history, with the exception of a few remarkable works that have merely touched on the phenomena of obedience from a top-down
perspective. However, there are notable studies on pure obedience in other countries (Werhane & others, 2011: 103-6). Yet, the reasons behind Ismailids’ VPO to Sabah remain among the least studied. The way they obeyed their leader (while they enjoyed full freedom, but were ready to even sacrifice themselves in order to achieve the goals set by their leader) is thought-provoking. Therefore, this study has tried to describe the reasons behind such a type of obedience.

Building on some comprehensive models of pure obedience and the value and concept-based definitions available, this research employs a descriptive approach, in the form of a case study in a real society that existed some time back in history. At times, a narrative approach has been used to shed more light on issues of concern.

The Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process (FAHP)

The method was first introduced in 1983 by Laarhoven & Pedrycz, who based FAHP on logarithmic least squares. Due to the complicated nature of the processes, the method has not been used much (Chang, 1996: 652-3). In 1996, Chang (ibid, 649-55) introduced his extent analysis (EA). The numbers used in his method are triangular fuzzy.

The following is an introduction to the concepts and definitions in FAHP, based on EA.

Analysis of the reasons behind VPO, using FAHP

The Ismailids purely obeyed Sabah while they were in a state of full consciousness and enthusiasm. Based on the evidence at hand, the following four main factors account for their behavior:

- The leader’s characteristics (Thomas, 2007: 8-10)
- The follower’s characteristics
- Religious beliefs
- Sabah’s particular style of leadership (Poonawala, 2008: 197-209).

Each of the above four factors can be broken down into several sub-factors.

4-1 Ranking of main reasons behind Ismailids’ VPO

After collecting expert opinion and pooling their views, the main factors were compared using FAHP. To pool expert views, geometric mean was used. The Fuzzy scales used for FAHP in the study are shown in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of the Verbal variables</th>
<th>Fuzzy triangular numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exactly the same</td>
<td>(1,1,1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost the same</td>
<td>(0.5, 1, 1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little</td>
<td>(1, 1.5, 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
<td>(1.5, 2, 2.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much more</td>
<td>(2, 2.5, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full and absolute</td>
<td>(2.5, 3, 3.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tabulated figures show that Sabah’s particular style of leadership was the most influential factor on the group’s VPO. However, here the role of personal religious beliefs cannot be ignored (Cinoglu, 2010: 192-209).

Although those beliefs grew stronger during the rule of their successive leaders, Mohammad, Hassan II and Hassan III (due to Sabah’s propagation), none of them managed to gain Sabah’s degree of influence on the group members (Daftari, 1377: 238- 241).
It is therefore suggested that although religious beliefs played an important role in their obedience, the more prominent factor was the leader’s prowess and characteristics in combining such factors with others, and consequently, to yield desired effects.

In fact, Sabah nimbly and intelligently channeled his followers’ mental, intellectual, ethnic and religious backgrounds toward goals he pursued.

### Table 2- Paired comparisons of main factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main factors</th>
<th>Weights</th>
<th>Leader’s characteristics</th>
<th>The followers’ characteristics</th>
<th>Sabah’s particular style of leadership</th>
<th>Religious beliefs</th>
<th>rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious beliefs</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>2.593</td>
<td>2.067</td>
<td>1.513</td>
<td>1.259</td>
<td>.934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabah’s particular style of leadership</td>
<td>.472</td>
<td>2.630</td>
<td>2.094</td>
<td>1.523</td>
<td>2.726</td>
<td>2.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The followers’ characteristics</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>1.442</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.858</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s characteristics</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.165</td>
<td>.884</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4-2 Sabah’s style of leadership

Expert opinions unanimously attributed the group’s VPO to Sabah’s character and particular style of leadership, which can further be broken down into the following five types of styles.

**4-2-1 religious leadership**

Sabah’s style of leadership was based on religious concepts (Keightley, 1837: 26).

History-wise, God’s support for man’s action has been perceived as one of people’s motives, grouped under the umbrella term of religion. Tavakoli & Beheshti Pour (2010: 28) define religion and spirituality as a set of values deeply accepted, and praised by a supreme force or being (Block, 1996: 73). Furthermore, search for meaning has always been considered a fundamental motivation for man’s behavior (ibid, 2010: 30).

In the framework of religious leadership, charismatic leaders are sometimes considered saviors for human beings (Khurana, 2002: 148). As definitions propose, religious leadership often entails one form of pure obedience or another, and introduces impassable red lines. The latter is introduced by leaders, and through time, is transformed into norms, obligatory for all. In Ismailids’ beliefs, these “musts” were perceived as indisputable, divine issues (Tourish, 2005: 455-80) and Sabah particularly took utmost advantage in so doing.

Perhaps he benefited most from the prospect of the doom’s day and a belief in the eternal paradise, to be experienced after death (Kazmi and Tahir, 2011: 578-81).

**4-2-2 Change- Oriented leadership**

As “change- oriented leadership” entered the literature of the field, voluntary obedience came increasingly to the fore (Burns, 1978: 35-82). A real leader will pursue the interests of his followers, rather than his own (Plato, 1992: 29-36). However, Sabah acted in a smarter way. Basically, his followers had a firm belief in Islam, and showed utmost interest in religion. In an astute manner, Sabah presented his own interests spiced with religion, so that his followers would indirectly target and pursue them, while they supposed they were fulfilling religious duties. Having done so, he would paint
himself as an adored leader in the minds of his followers, hence achieving his goals. What he did was practically shaping and orienting his followers’ interests in a certain direction, and then satisfying those goals, thus portraying himself as a change-oriented leader.

4-2-3 Champion leadership

Followers always monitor horizons, expecting a leader from the land of champions to arrive (Harvey, 1988:3). Such a phenomenon is more tangible at times of political and cultural slackness. It was at such a time that Sabah emerged as a leader (Khalatbari & Bastani, 2006: 99). Fundamentally, such a period is high time when a hero’s leadership can set people free from the boring daily routines, as a grand leader has the potential to bring about change and improve the quality of life for the general public (Badaracco, 2004: 5-12). People need leaders they can benchmark as beacon lights, and praise (Harvey, 1988:28). For that token, Sabah was considered a perfect model among his followers, and his deeds were narrated in stories, among people (Daftari, 1997: 153-221). People need leaders they can benchmark as beacon lights, and praise (Harvey, 1988:28). For that token, Sabah was considered a perfect model among his followers, and his deeds were narrated in stories, among people (Daftari, 1997: 153-221). Words would spread about his character and practice, at times in the form of myths, which inspired the freedom-seeking people of his era. That is what Jones and Gosling refer to as champion leadership (2005: 5). On the other hand, the idle followers also need a hero, to offer him their praise. Under such circumstances, it is a possibility that a very ordinary leader comes to be known as a hero, with some people going to the extreme of polytheism by worshiping him. Any power-greedy person who is aware of that need and natural tendency in human beings, can easily abuse them (Adair, 1989:83). For this reason, Sabah managed to exploit the natural human need in his followers (Joveyni, 1937: 8-81). Inclined toward their leaders and constantly praising them, the followers may become so radical as to replace praise for their leader, with worshipping. Logically, the latter entails pure obedience, as its inalienable component.

4-2-4 Service leadership

Service leadership is fully centered around the followers (Bass, 2000: 19-23). Generally speaking, the influence originates from the leader, but it is the follower who should provide the proper response, for the interaction to take place. In the long run, only leaders whose followers voluntarily accept the influence may continue to lead (Gardner, 1995:36). History-wise, successful leaders have all enjoyed dexterity in applying the techniques of social influencing (Tavakoli and Beheshti Pour (2011: 20-115). In principle, Sabah was able to make very short lectures, after which a lot of people were attracted to his school of thought. The degree of his influence on his followers was so high that they considered literally nothing as arduous, and passionately carried out the missions that he would assign them (Scheffer, 1889: 456-77).

4-2-5 Dictatorial leadership

Although it seems that this type of leadership aims at pure obedience on the part of the followers, but in the long run, it not only doesn’t succeed to get there, but also disrupts the process of influencing on the followers. Although tinges of dictatorial leadership can be observed in Sabah’s practice, but expert opinion dismisses as slight, the role of such a style of leadership on VPO of his followers.

After performing FAHP and having referred to expert opinion (as shown in table 3), eventually the most influential style of leadership on the leader-follower relations and the formation of VPO, was suggested to have been “religious leadership”. The study also ranked dictatorial leadership as the least influential.
Table 3- Paired comparison of sub-factors in Sabah's style of leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main factors</th>
<th>Religious leadership</th>
<th>Dictatorial leadership</th>
<th>Change-oriented leadership</th>
<th>Hero's leadership</th>
<th>Religious leadership</th>
<th>rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.374</td>
<td>2.056</td>
<td>1.683</td>
<td>1.443</td>
<td>1.683</td>
<td>.758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero's leadership</td>
<td>.203</td>
<td>1.496</td>
<td>1.149</td>
<td>.871</td>
<td>1.149</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change-oriented leadership</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td>1.760</td>
<td>1.380</td>
<td>.944</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictatorial leadership</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.059</td>
<td>.725</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4-3 The role of religious beliefs in motivating the followers to purely obey

The religious beliefs that were influential in Ismailids' VPO to Sabah may be put into two sub-factors:

- attaining the eternal paradise
- belief in the Imamate of Sabah

Legal choice can stem from hope, especially hope in the worldly life, or in the hereafter (Weber, 1947: 94). It can be supposed that the Ismailids demonstrated VPO, hoping to attain their reward in the afterworld. Madolong describe them as volunteers who would sacrifice themselves to withstand Sabah’s enemies. They would wish to satisfy their leader, and enter the paradise after martyrdom (Thomas, 2005: 5-17). Sabah had illustrated paradise in their minds, based on the verses of the Quran, the sayings of Islam’s religious leaders and Islamic teachings (Daftari, 1998: 71-9).

Subsequently, Sabah had set paradise as the ultimate goal, for himself and his followers, and preached in that line. After performing FAHP (based on table 4), attaining the eternal paradise gained the highest weight among others, as an influential factor in initiating the process of VPO.

Table 4- Paired comparison of sub-factors of religious beliefs

| Sub-factor                      | attaining the eternal paradise | belief in the Imamate of Sabah | Weight | Rank |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|$\cdot$931                      | 1.316  | 1.655 | .638 | 1 |
| attaining the eternal paradise  | 1                              | .931                          | 1.316  | 1.655 | .638 | 1 |
| belief in the Imamate of Sabah  | .604                           | .76                           | 1.075  | 1     | 1   | .362 | 2 |

4-4 The leader-follower relations

In studying the “leader”, the “followers” should not be overlooked. Indeed, leadership cannot occur without a group to gather around the leader (Fiedler, 1993: 1-28). Therefore, another domain to be investigated in order to understand pure obedience encompasses the relations between the leader and the follower. Often, great leaders are influenced by the people who praise them (Giuliani, 2002: 39). Therefore, to understand leadership, it is necessary
to study the leader-follower relations (Hoyt et. Al, 2006: 96-122).

The process of influence and the resulting obedience are directly proportionate to the perceptual and noetic stage of the followers, i.e. the degree of their knowledge and perceptions.

The “ Implicit Theory of Leadership” suggests that if a person matches the followers’ ideal image, he will become their leader (Lord and Maher, 1991: 23-8). Unsurprisingly, people of low rational/analytic skills are absorbed to their leader, because of his charisma. The Ismailids’ VPO to their leader may also be attributed to their culture poverty and weak rational skills (Daftari, 2002: 235). This is where poisonous leadership comes into play, which stems from a need in human beings for control from the outside. According to Khalatbari and Bastani Rad (2006, 5-104), Sabah emerged at a time of cultural, political and mental deficiency in Iran and its neighboring countries. This coincided with the period during which a group of people joined the Ismailids, for the sake of opposing the government.

### Table 5– Ranking of sub-factors relating the followers’ characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-factor</th>
<th>weight</th>
<th>rank</th>
<th>Sub-factor</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The followers’ religious prejudices</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low noetic and cognitive stage of the followers</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW degrees of Emotional Quotient among followers</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Human need for control from outside</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural, political, mental and social poverty</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Material needs</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4-5 Hassan Sabah

Based on the “Great Man Theory”, the legitimacy of leadership lies in the leader’s character (Weber, 1947: 28). Sabah was a tactful, dexterous politician, a knowledgeable jurisprudent, and an expert in religion (Hamedani, F., 1977: 106). In addition, he was well-informed of racial and ethnic beliefs, and had some basic knowledge of other schools of religion, while he’s also known as the father of some modern war tactics (Joveyni, 1937: 17-212). Also, he possessed some charismatic traits, and developed the acquired characteristics of a leader, throughout the course of his development (Carlyle, 1969: 23). Of course, leadership doesn’t always equate manifest functions. This particular approach is referred to as “silent leadership”. Practically, some duties of a leader need to be performed in isolation, away from the public (Gosling, 2008: 8-15). From this standpoint, silent leadership can be juxtaposed to hero’s leadership. Basically, Sabah implemented a combination of the two approaches, which gives him the qualities of a successful leader. As Imam Ali (Peace Be Upon Him), in Ghorar-ol-Hekam (which is attributed to him) emphasizes that public administration is identical to management (2001: 8), Sabah can be considered an extraordinary manager, as well, although he employed his managerial skills in order to attain what Lawrence and Reynolds (2006: 33-5) describes as a wrong and non-human goal.
Gardner believes that leadership comes in two types, direct and indirect. The former is defined as interacting with the followers, in order to influence their thoughts and behavior, whereas the latter incorporates influencing the followers through spread of values, practical symbols and appropriate models (Christensen and others, 2007:5); it is believed that the indirect style of leadership finally leads to a state of equilibrium (Gardner, 1995:18). Sabah had adopted this style, which can best be exemplified in the case of his beloved son, whom Sabah executed on charges of drinking wine (Daftari, 1997:4-283); therefore, he implemented his values, even at the cost of his son's life. According to the weights and ranks in table 6, it is suggested that acquired characteristics play a more prominent role than the intrinsic ones. Furthermore, factors pertaining to the leader himself (such as sub-factors of his social status) affect VPO the least. Considering the weight attached to the sub-factor of “leader’s power of coercion”, it is suggested that the factor cannot cause VPO (see table 6).

**Table 6- Ranking of sub-factors pertaining to the leader’s characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-factor</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Sub-factor</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s social influencing techniques</td>
<td>.277</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Empathy with the followers</td>
<td>.201</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s Emotional Quotient (EQ)</td>
<td>.257</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>the social status of the leader</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s power to motivate</td>
<td>.253</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Leader’s power of coercion</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4-6 comparison of sub-factors**

In order to arrive at better results, all the sub-factors are compared in Table 7.

**Table 7- Ranking all sub-factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-factor</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Sub-factor</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious leadership</td>
<td>.0822</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Change-oriented leadership</td>
<td>.0569</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s social influencing techniques</td>
<td>.0713</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hero leadership</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The followers’ religious prejudices</td>
<td>.0687</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Empathy with the followers</td>
<td>.0431</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attaining the eternal paradise</td>
<td>.06834</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Noetic stage of the followers</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s power to motivate</td>
<td>.0683</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Human need for external control</td>
<td>.0408</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in the Imamate of Sabah</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dictatorial leadership</td>
<td>.0405</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low degrees of Emotional Quotient among the followers</td>
<td>.0651</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Material needs</td>
<td>.0392</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s Emotional Quotient (EQ)</td>
<td>.0634</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Leader’s power of coercion</td>
<td>.0384</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural, political, mental and social poverty</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Leader’s social status</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Discussion and conclusion

VPO is a complicated and astonishing phenomenon, of interest to many throughout the history. Sabah’s particular style of leadership and the special way in which his followers obeyed him, is one of the perfect examples for researching VPO.

This study identified 4 factors affecting Ismailids’ VPO, namely the leader’s characteristics, the followers’ characteristics, religious beliefs and Sabah's particular style of leadership. The four factors were broken down into 18 sub-factors, ranked based on expert opinion and through FAHP. The results can be summarized as:

- Factors relating to religion were the most influential in VPO among the group.
- Some experts consider dictatorial leadership as the primary factor affecting VPO, but in this particular case, it was the least effective.
- Continued appraisal of the leaders results in (at times) worshipping the leader, rather than praising him; the former, which incorporates worshipping, would involve VPO.
- One of the most important goals in dictatorial leadership, is VPO of the followers; whereas, it not only doesn’t achieve that goal, but actually disrupts the process of the leader’s influencing the followers.
- In the factor “leader’s characteristics”, those acquired are more prominent than the intrinsic ones.
- Considering the final weight associated with “the leader’s power of coercion”, it is suggested that the factor does not influence VPO.
- The religious style of leadership was the most important factor affecting the Ismailids’ VPO.
- Among the six primary factors, four of them were directly linked to religious beliefs. Man is motivated to purely obey, when perceiving a supreme being as in command. The root cause of Ismailids’ VPO was that they perceived God, the almighty as the commander-in-chief.
- The fact that “material needs” ranked last is noteworthy. Basically, the factor’s influence on the process of VPO is negligible.
- In the process of VPO, the leader’s Emotional Quotient (EQ) ranked 8th, while EQ ranked 7th among the followers, suggesting that in the process of VPO, the followers EQ is more important than that of the leader’s.
- As the dictatorial style of leadership ranked 15th, it is suggested that the factor plays an insignificant role in the process of VPO.

And last but not least, the Ismailids obeyed Sabah because they identified him as a religious leader, infallible from their stance. Therefore, it is suggested that Sabah had managed to charm his followers and depict himself as an Imam in their minds, thereby making them eager to follow him, to the extent that they considered obeying him, and submitting to God, as equivalent.

References


