WALI PILGRIMAGE AS RELIGIOUS COPING AMONG GENERATION Z: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF RELIGIOUS MEANING-MAKING AND EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES IN KUDUS

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Wali Pilgrimage as Religious Coping among Generation Z: A Phenomenological Study of Religious Meaning-Making and Emotional Experiences in Kudus Licensed Under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

Abstract
This study explores how Generation Z experiences *wali* pilgrimage as a religious coping practice when encountering emotional and personal difficulties. It specifically examines participants' motivations, the meanings they attribute to pilgrimage, their emotional experiences before and after pilgrimage, and the role of religious practices in their coping processes. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach with eight Generation Z participants aged 18–26 years, four males and four females, all employed and having visited the Tomb of Sunan Kudus more than once. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation from January to April 2026. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' phenomenological approach, supported by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's qualitative data analysis framework. The findings indicate that participants engaged in *wali* pilgrimage for diverse reasons, including seeking emotional calm, maintaining religious habits, seeking *barokah*, engaging in spiritual reflection, and responding to social and digital influences. Pilgrimage was experienced not only as a religious visit but also as a space for prayer, remembrance of death, self-reflection, seeking closeness to Allah, and temporarily distancing oneself from everyday pressures. Several participants reported experiencing emotional relief, greater inner calm, patience, acceptance, and greater clarity following pilgrimage, although these experiences varied across participants and did not necessarily resolve the practical problems they faced. The findings further indicate that pilgrimage may function as a religious coping resource through prayer, remembrance, reflection, surrender, and the search for spiritual meaning. Social media contributed to the visibility and motivation of pilgrimage for some participants, while established religious practices and personal spiritual intentions remained significant. Overall, *wali* pilgrimage among Generation Z reflects a multidimensional process of religious meaning-making in which emotional experiences, Islamic tradition, social relationships, and digital culture intersect.

Keywords: Generation Z; *wali* pilgrimage; religious coping; religious meaning-making; emotional experience; digital culture

A. Introduction

The development of digital technology and social media has become an important part of the religious lives of young Muslims. Social media is not only a space for interaction and information, but also a platform for religious practices and expressions. Anwar, Surawan, and Awang show that social media use is associated with changes in the lifestyle patterns and religiosity of urban Muslim students (Anwar et al., 2024). At the same time, Mutaqin et al. demonstrate that the religious lives of Muslim Generation Z are also shaped by social, family, and religious environments (Mutaqin et al., 2024). These conditions suggest that digital development does not necessarily diminish young people's engagement with religious life, but may instead coexist with their search for meaning and spiritual experiences.

Ziarah wali (pilgrimage to the graves of Islamic saints) is one religious practice that has also been examined in relation to the religious lives of young Muslims. In the context of Islam in Indonesia, visiting the graves of Islamic saints is part of a religious tradition as well as a spiritual journey associated with seeking blessings, closeness to God, and reflection on life (Ilahi, 2016). Mukaromah and Ramadhani found that Generation Z students who visited Gus Dur's grave interpreted the practice through several forms of social action, particularly traditional and affective actions (Mukaromah & Ramadhani, 2023). Meanwhile, Khasanah found that pilgrimage to the grave of Wali Syekh Wasil Syamsudin among adolescents in Kediri was associated with emotional well-being, strengthened spiritual identity, reduced anxiety, and processes of reflection and healing (Khasanah, 2024). These findings suggest that pilgrimage among young people is not only related to the preservation of religious tradition but can also become an experience imbued with significant religious and emotional meanings.

The development of social media has introduced a new context into the pilgrimage practices of young people. Social media can become a space for presenting religious experiences as well as shaping how young people express their spiritual identities (Haliza et al., 2025). Haliza et al. show that Instagram is not merely used as a communication medium but can also function as a space for reflection, spiritual expression, prayer, and the sharing of personal experiences (Haliza et al., 2025). In the context of Generation Z in Kudus, Maghfirotunnisa and Savitri found that pilgrimage to the tomb of Nyai Hamdanah is motivated not only by religious purposes and the search for inner peace, but also by social media trends, FOMO, and the desire to create content (Maghfirotunnisa & Savitri, 2025). Thus, Generation Z pilgrimage takes place at the intersection of religious tradition, personal needs, and the digital environment.

However, the influence of social media does not by itself explain the entire experience of young pilgrims. Research on Generation Z pilgrimage in Kudus indicates that psychological and religious factors remain part of the experience alongside social and social-media influences (Maghfirotunnisa & Savitri, 2025). This creates an opportunity to examine pilgrimage not merely in terms of its popularity or changing motives in the digital environment, but also in terms of how individuals experience religious practices when dealing with personal difficulties.

This perspective can be understood through the concept of religious coping. Pargament defines religious coping as the process through which individuals use religious beliefs, practices, and resources to deal with stressful life circumstances and

to find meaning in their experiences (K. I. Pargament, 1997). Within this framework, religion functions not only as a system of belief but also as a resource that individuals may use to respond to stress, maintain meaning, and deal with life difficulties (K. I. Pargament, 1997). A study by Fatima, Arshad, and Mushtaq among young adults found that positive religious coping was associated with mental well-being and emotional regulation through positive reappraisal (Fatima et al., 2022). These findings provide a conceptual basis for examining how religious practices may serve as resources for interpreting and responding to emotional difficulties.

The context of Generation Z also demonstrates the use of religious resources as strategies for dealing with pressure. Ramadhanti, Amalia, and Surawan found that Generation Z university students use positive religious coping, including prayer, worship, Qur'anic recitation, and spiritual meaning-making, when dealing with academic burnout (Ramadhanti et al., 2025). Similarly, Graça and Brandão examined the relationship between religious/spiritual coping, emotion regulation, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction among university students. Their findings indicate that religious/spiritual coping is closely related to emotion regulation and psychological well-being, although the relationship is complex and does not necessarily produce uniformly positive outcomes (Graça & Brandão, 2024). These findings indicate that religious practices and religious/spiritual coping can constitute important resources through which young people navigate emotional and psychological pressures, although previous studies have primarily examined university students and academic or psychological contexts rather than pilgrimage as a specific religious practice.

A critical synthesis of the existing literature reveals that research on pilgrimage and research on religious coping among Generation Z can be seen to have developed along partly separate lines. Research on youth pilgrimage has examined pilgrimage as a religious tradition and spiritual journey, the meanings of pilgrimage among Generation Z, experiences of healing, and changing motives influenced by social, psychological, and social-media factors. Meanwhile, research on religious coping among young people has largely focused on the use of prayer, worship, and religious resources in dealing with stress, burnout, and psychological well-being. This leaves room to bring these two areas together through a more specific question: how is *ziarah wali* experienced by Generation Z when they are facing emotional difficulties, and how is that experience subsequently understood as a form of religious coping?

This area deserves further attention because the issue is not simply whether Generation Z engages in pilgrimage or whether religious practices can help individuals deal with pressure. More importantly, it is necessary to understand how the experience unfolds: what emotional difficulties encourage individuals to undertake pilgrimage, how religious practices and experiences are encountered during the pilgrimage, and how pilgrims understand their emotional condition afterward. This question connects research on youth pilgrimage with research on religious coping among young people, while also providing space to examine pilgrimage from the subjective perspective of pilgrims.

Based on this gap, this study positions *ziarah wali* as a religious experience that can be understood through the perspective of religious coping. The novelty of this study lies in its phenomenological examination of the relationship between the emotional difficulties experienced by Generation Z, the practice of *ziarah wali*, and the interpretation of pilgrimage as a religious resource for dealing with emotional difficulties. Theoretically, this study brings together research on youth pilgrimage and religious coping; contextually, it focuses on Generation Z pilgrims at the Tomb of Sunan Kudus; and methodologically, it examines pilgrimage through the lived

experiences and meanings described by the pilgrims themselves. From this perspective, pilgrimage is not understood merely as a traditional practice, a religious journey, or an activity shaped by social media, but as a personal experience through which individuals may seek inner peace, construct meaning, and draw upon religious resources when dealing with emotional difficulties.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) identify the motives of Generation Z for undertaking *ziarah wali*; (2) analyze the meanings attached to pilgrimage by young pilgrims; (3) examine their emotional experiences before and after pilgrimage; and (4) explain how *ziarah wali* is understood as a form of religious coping in dealing with emotional difficulties within contemporary digital life.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to understand the lived experiences of Generation Z in interpreting z*iarah wali* (pilgrimage to the graves of Islamic saints) as a form of religious coping and the emotional experiences associated with it. A phenomenological approach was selected because the study focuses on participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they attribute to those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The study did not aim to measure the effectiveness of pilgrimage, but to understand participants' experiences, motivations, religious practices, and the meanings they attached to their emotional experiences.

The participants consisted of eight Generation Z individuals aged 18–26 years, comprising four males and four females, all of whom were employed. Participants were selected purposively based on the following criteria: (1) being aged 18–26 years; (2) having performed pilgrimage at the Tomb of Sunan Kudus more than once; (3) having experienced emotional or personal difficulties associated with the motivation to undertake pilgrimage; and (4) being willing to participate in an in-depth interview. Participants were identified and selected directly by the researcher at the Tomb of Sunan Kudus based on these criteria (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

The participants consisted of eight Generation Z individuals aged 18–26 years, comprising four males and four females, all of whom were employed. They were selected purposively based on the following criteria: (1) aged 18–26 years; (2) had undertaken ziarah wali at the Tomb of Sunan Kudus more than once; (3) had experienced personal or emotional difficulties associated with their motivation for pilgrimage; and (4) were willing to participate in an in-depth interview. To protect participants' confidentiality, each participant was assigned an anonymous code (P1–P8), which was used consistently throughout the findings and interview quotations.

The study was conducted from January to April 2026 at the Tomb of Sunan Kudus, located in the Menara Kudus area, Kudus Regency, Central Java. Interviews were conducted at the pilgrimage site.

The adequacy of the data was assessed by examining the recurrence of information and themes across interviews. Data collection concluded after eight participants had been interviewed because the subsequent analysis indicated that no substantively new information had emerged and recurring patterns were evident, particularly concerning emotional difficulties, pilgrimage motivations, religious practices, and the meanings attributed to the pilgrimage experience (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. Each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and addressed pilgrimage motivations, emotional conditions before and

after pilgrimage, religious practices, spiritual meanings, experiences of calmness or relief, self-reflection, and the role of social media. Interviews were recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed. Non-participant observation was conducted during pilgrimage activities, focusing on religious practices, emotional expressions, reflection, and the interactional context of the site. Documentation was used as supporting data, including field notes, photographs, transcripts, and relevant digital materials, while maintaining participants' privacy and permission for data use (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Data were analyzed using Moustakas' phenomenological approach through repeated reading of transcripts, identification of significant statements, grouping statements into meaning units and themes, development of textural and structural descriptions, and synthesis to identify the essence of the pilgrimage experience (Moustakas, 1994). Each participant's experience was first analyzed individually and then compared to identify similarities and differences. The resulting themes were subsequently interpreted using the concept of religious coping to understand how participants used religious beliefs, practices, and meanings when dealing with emotional difficulties. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's model was used as a supporting framework for organizing the data through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014).

Data trustworthiness was established through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation involved comparing the experiences of the eight participants, while technique triangulation involved comparing interview, observation, and documentation data. Member checking was conducted by confirming selected interpretations with participants for confirmation and clarification (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical procedures included providing participants with information about the study and its procedures, ensuring voluntary participation, informing them of their right to decline questions or withdraw, and obtaining informed consent before interviews. Participants' identities were anonymized, and the data were used for research purposes. Digital materials were used only when relevant and with attention to participants' privacy and permission.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Findings

The findings of this study are based on in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and documentation involving eight Generation Z participants aged 18–26 years who had undertaken *ziarah wali* at the Tomb of Sunan Kudus more than once. To protect participants' privacy, all participants are identified using codes P1 to P8. The analysis focuses on four dimensions corresponding to the objectives of the study: the motives for undertaking pilgrimage, the meanings attached to pilgrimage, emotional experiences before and after pilgrimage, and the ways participants experienced pilgrimage as a religious resource when facing personal or emotional difficulties.

The participants described pilgrimage in different ways. For some, pilgrimage was associated with moments of emotional uneasiness, overthinking, personal problems, or mental fatigue. For others, pilgrimage was part of an established religious habit, a means of praying and seeking *barokah*, a space for reflection, or an activity undertaken with peers. Social media and peer interaction appeared in several accounts, but their roles varied across participants. Thus, the findings do not indicate a single motive or uniform experience of pilgrimage among the participants.

a. Motives for Undertaking Ziarah Wali

The participants reported diverse motives for undertaking *ziarah wali*. One recurring motive was the search for inner calm when experiencing personal or emotional difficulties. P1 and P2 described pilgrimage as an activity they undertook when experiencing emotional uneasiness, excessive thoughts, or problems that were difficult to manage. For these participants, pilgrimage provided an opportunity to pray, express personal concerns to Allah SWT, and seek a calmer emotional condition.

Other participants described pilgrimage as a religious practice that had become familiar through their personal and family religious experiences. P3 explained that pilgrimage had been practiced since childhood and was not primarily motivated by contemporary social media trends. In this case, pilgrimage was connected with religious habituation and continuity rather than a response to a particular emotional problem.

A different motive was expressed by P4, who associated pilgrimage with personal religious intention and the desire to obtain *barokah*. For this participant, pilgrimage remained meaningful even when there was no specific emotional difficulty preceding the visit. This indicates that pilgrimage was not necessarily undertaken only in situations of distress.

Social relationships and digital media also appeared in the accounts of some participants. P5 described how interactions with peers and exposure to pilgrimage-related content on TikTok contributed to enthusiasm for visiting pilgrimage sites. Group religious activities, such as *tahlil* and *yasinan*, also provided a social context in which pilgrimage became more familiar. Nevertheless, exposure to social media did not automatically mean that the participant understood pilgrimage solely as a digital trend.

Overall, the participants' motives can be grouped into several forms: seeking emotional calm, maintaining religious habits, seeking *barokah*, engaging in spiritual reflection, and responding to social or digital influences. These variations show that the motivation for *ziarah wali* cannot be explained solely by emotional difficulties or the influence of social media.

b. Meanings Attached to Ziarah Wali

The participants attached different meanings to their pilgrimage experiences. P1 and P2 primarily associated pilgrimage with inner peace, prayer, reflection, and closeness to Allah SWT. The pilgrimage site was described as a setting in which they could temporarily distance themselves from everyday concerns and concentrate on religious activities. Their accounts indicate that the meaning of pilgrimage was closely related to perceived emotional calmness and spiritual reflection.

P3 emphasized a different dimension, namely remembrance of death and reflection on the temporary nature of worldly life. Visiting the grave of a *wali* encouraged reflection on human mortality, the importance of good deeds, and the need to prepare oneself spiritually. Thus, the meaning of pilgrimage extended beyond the immediate emotional condition experienced before the visit.

P6 described pilgrimage as a form of temporary withdrawal from everyday concerns and an opportunity for *khalwat* and reflection. The participant also associated the practice with learning from the life and example of Islamic saints. Meanwhile, P4 emphasized *ngalap barokah* as an important meaning attached to pilgrimage. For this participant, the practice represented an expression of religious intention rather than merely an attempt to obtain emotional relief.

The accounts therefore demonstrate that *ziarah wali* carries multidimensional

meanings for the participants. It can function as a space for prayer and seeking closeness to Allah SWT, remembrance of death, self-reflection, *ngalap barokah*, and temporary distance from everyday pressures. Although social media may make pilgrimage more visible among young people, the participants' accounts show that the meanings they attach to the practice are not uniform and cannot be explained by digital visibility alone.

c. Emotional Experiences Before and After Pilgrimage

The participants described different emotional conditions before undertaking pilgrimage. P1 and P2 associated their visits with periods of emotional uneasiness, overthinking, disappointment, or personal difficulties. P6 also described pilgrimage in relation to mental fatigue and a desire to temporarily distance oneself from everyday pressures. P5, meanwhile, related pilgrimage to feelings of boredom and having many thoughts. These accounts indicate that emotional circumstances were present in several participants' experiences, although they were not shared equally by all participants.

Following the pilgrimage, several participants reported experiencing a calmer emotional condition. P1 and P2 described feelings of relief, calmness, and greater clarity after completing the pilgrimage. Some participants also reported becoming more patient and accepting when dealing with problems. The changes described by participants primarily concerned their subjective emotional and reflective experiences rather than the disappearance of the problems that had preceded the pilgrimage.

For some participants, pilgrimage was associated with a process of accepting circumstances rather than directly solving the underlying problem. Feelings of surrender, patience, and *ikhlas* were mentioned as part of this experience. In this sense, the participants distinguished between feeling emotionally calmer and actually resolving the external problem they were facing.

Not all participants reported the same degree of change. One participant explained that pilgrimage did not substantially alter the practical process of solving a personal problem. Instead, advice from other people, religious lectures or podcasts, and reading were perceived as more directly helpful in considering possible solutions. Nevertheless, pilgrimage could still provide a calmer state from which the participant reflected on the situation.

These accounts demonstrate that the emotional experience surrounding pilgrimage was varied. Participants commonly described calmness, relief, reflection, patience, or acceptance after pilgrimage, but the experience was not identical for all participants and should not be understood as evidence that pilgrimage automatically eliminates emotional or personal problems.

d. Ziarah Wali as Religious Coping

The participants' accounts show that *ziarah wali* could become a religious resource for dealing with emotional or personal difficulties. P1 described returning to pilgrimage when facing problems because the practice provided an opportunity to calm the heart and mind through prayer and reflection. The participant used the term "healing" to describe this experience, referring to a sense of emotional and spiritual relief rather than a clinical form of treatment.

P2 similarly described pilgrimage as a way of seeking calmness and strengthening closeness to Allah SWT. The religious activities undertaken during pilgrimage, including prayer, remembrance, and reflection, were experienced as meaningful responses to personal difficulties.

For P3, the coping dimension was expressed differently. Rather than responding

directly to an emotional crisis, pilgrimage encouraged remembrance of death, reflection on life, and consideration of moral and religious responsibilities. P6 described pilgrimage as an opportunity for *khalwat* and spiritual reflection, while P4 continued to view pilgrimage as a religious resource through the intention of *ngalap barokah*, even when no specific emotional crisis was present.

P5's experience demonstrates the role of social and digital contexts. Peer interaction and TikTok content contributed to the participant's interest in pilgrimage. However, the presence of social media did not entirely replace the religious dimension of the practice. The pilgrimage remained connected to religious activities and personal spiritual experience.

The participants also demonstrated awareness of differences between personal religious intention and social influence. Some participants emphasized that their pilgrimage was based on personal religious intention rather than fear of missing out or following online trends. Another participant expressed caution about judging the sincerity of other pilgrims based solely on their social-media posts. This indicates that participants themselves recognized a distinction between the public representation of pilgrimage in digital spaces and the personal spiritual meanings associated with the practice.

Taken together, the findings show that *ziarah wali* was experienced by the participants as a religious resource in several forms: seeking calmness during personal difficulties, engaging in prayer and remembrance, reflecting on life and death, cultivating acceptance and patience, seeking *barokah*, and creating space for spiritual reflection. At the same time, pilgrimage was not always initiated by emotional distress and did not always function as a direct solution to practical problems.

Across the eight participants, *ziarah wali* emerged as a multidimensional religious practice situated at the intersection of personal spirituality, emotional circumstances, religious tradition, social relationships, and digital culture. The participants did not attach a single meaning to pilgrimage. Their experiences ranged from seeking emotional calm and closeness to Allah SWT to maintaining religious habits, remembering death, seeking barokah, and engaging in self-reflection.

The accounts also show a recurring sequence in several participants' experiences: personal or emotional difficulty was followed by pilgrimage and religious practices, which were then associated with feelings of calmness, reflection, patience, or acceptance. However, this sequence was not experienced by every participant in the same way. For some, pilgrimage was a routine religious practice rather than a response to a particular difficulty.

Therefore, the empirical findings position ziarah wali as a religious practice that may serve different functions depending on participants' circumstances and meanings. Social media contributed to the visibility and, in some cases, the motivation to undertake pilgrimage, but the participants' experiences indicate that digital influence coexisted with established religious habits, personal intentions, spiritual reflection, and emotional needs.

2. Discussion

a. Ziarah Wali as a Multidimensional Religious Practice among Generation Z

The findings demonstrate that *ziarah wali* among Generation Z cannot be understood through a single motivational framework. Participants undertook pilgrimage for different reasons, including seeking emotional calm, maintaining religious habits, seeking *barokah*, engaging in spiritual reflection, and responding to social influences. This variation indicates that *ziarah wali* functions as a

multidimensional religious practice whose meaning depends on the personal circumstances, religious background, and social environment of each participant.

This finding is consistent with the study of Mukaromah & Ramadhani (2023), which examined Generation Z students' pilgrimage to the tomb of Gus Dur. Their phenomenological study identified four forms of social action underlying pilgrimage: instrumental rationality, goal-oriented rationality, traditional action, and affective action. Their findings particularly showed the tendency of Generation Z pilgrims toward traditional and affective forms of action. The present study similarly demonstrates that pilgrimage is not exclusively an instrumental response to emotional difficulties. For some participants, pilgrimage was a religious habit inherited from childhood, while for others it was associated with respect for Islamic figures, the search for barokah, or the desire to create a space for spiritual reflection.

The presence of multiple motives is also important for understanding pilgrimage among young people in the digital era. Generation Z encounters religious practices not only through family, religious institutions, and local communities but also through digital platforms. In the present study, one participant reported that social media content, particularly TikTok, contributed to enthusiasm for visiting pilgrimage sites. However, the influence of social media did not eliminate the religious meanings associated with the practice. This suggests that digital exposure functions more appropriately as a contextual factor that can increase visibility and accessibility of religious practices rather than as a single determinant of pilgrimage motivation.

This finding is relevant to research on the changing motives of Generation Z in religious tourism in Kudus. Maghfirotunnisa & Savitri (2025), for example, found that pilgrimage to the tomb of Nyai Hamdanah was increasingly exposed through social media and could be associated with motives such as seeking blessings, following social-media trends, and creating content. The present study, however, indicates that digital visibility should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of declining religious meaning. Participants continued to connect pilgrimage with prayer, remembrance, barokah, reflection, and closeness to Allah SWT.

Therefore, *ziarah wali* among Generation Z appears to occupy an intersection between religious tradition and contemporary social conditions. Digital media may alter how young people encounter, discuss, and represent pilgrimage, but the meanings they construct from the practice remain closely connected to their religious experiences. Rather than viewing digital culture and religious tradition as opposing forces, the findings suggest that young people may engage with inherited religious practices through contemporary media environments while continuing to interpret those practices through established religious values. In this sense, Generation Z does not necessarily abandon traditional religious practices when interacting with digital culture. Instead, traditional practices may be reinterpreted and experienced within a changing social and technological environment.

b. The Meaning of Ziarah Wali: From Emotional Calmness to Religious Meaning-Making

The findings further indicate that the meaning of *ziarah wali* extends beyond the physical act of visiting a sacred site. Participants described pilgrimage as a space for prayer, remembrance, self-reflection, remembrance of death, seeking *barokah*, and temporary withdrawal from everyday pressures. These meanings demonstrate that pilgrimage operates as a process through which participants interpret their personal circumstances within a religious framework.

This finding can be understood through Park (2005) concept of religion as a

meaning-making framework in coping with life stress. Park explains that religion can function as a meaning system through which individuals interpret adversity and attempt to restore a sense of meaning when existing circumstances disrupt their understanding of life. Her model emphasizes that religious coping is not simply about reducing negative emotions but also involves the process of constructing or reconstructing meaning in response to difficult experiences.

The participants' experiences correspond with this perspective. P1 and P2 associated pilgrimage with emotional uneasiness, overthinking, and personal difficulties. Their response was not limited to seeking immediate emotional relief but also involved prayer, reflection, and an attempt to place their experiences within a religious understanding. Similarly, P3 interpreted pilgrimage through remembrance of death and reflection on the temporary nature of worldly life. P6 understood pilgrimage as an opportunity for *khalwat* and reflection, while P4 emphasized *ngalap barokah*. These different meanings demonstrate that the same religious practice can provide different forms of meaning depending on the participant's situation.

From the perspective of Pargament (1997), religion can become a coping resource when individuals encounter circumstances that challenge their sense of significance. Coping involves an ongoing process of searching for significance under conditions of stress, and religion may become one of the pathways through which individuals respond to such circumstances. Pargament's framework also emphasizes that religious coping has multiple forms and cannot be reduced to a single psychological mechanism.

The present findings expand this perspective by showing that *ziarah wali* can provide a physical and symbolic space for religious meaning-making. The tomb of the *wali* is not experienced merely as a destination but as a setting in which participants perform religious activities, remember death, reflect on personal circumstances, and reconnect their experiences with religious values. Consequently, the significance of pilgrimage lies not only in the act of visiting the site but also in the meanings constructed during and after the pilgrimage.

This meaning-making dimension is particularly visible in participants who described feelings of acceptance, patience, and *ikhlas* after pilgrimage. The external problem did not necessarily disappear, but the participants experienced a change in how they approached the situation. This distinction is important because it indicates that the coping process identified in this study concerns subjective interpretation and emotional-spiritual orientation rather than the objective resolution of personal problems.

Thus, the meaning of *ziarah wali* among the participants can be understood as a process of religious meaning-making. Pilgrimage provides an opportunity to reinterpret personal experiences through prayer, remembrance, reflection, and religious values. This process helps explain why participants could describe pilgrimage as meaningful even when the practical circumstances that initially motivated the visit remained unresolved.

c. Emotional Experiences Before and After *Ziarah Wali*

The findings reveal differences in participants' emotional experiences before and after pilgrimage. Several participants described emotional uneasiness, overthinking, disappointment, boredom, mental fatigue, or personal difficulties before undertaking *ziarah wali.* Following the pilgrimage, they reported experiences such as calmness, relief, patience, acceptance, and greater clarity. Nevertheless, these experiences varied among participants, and pilgrimage did not necessarily resolve the practical problems they were facing.

This finding supports the understanding of religious coping as a process rather than a direct mechanism for eliminating stress. Pargament (1997) conceptualizes coping as a dynamic process through which individuals search for significance in particular circumstances. Religion can become one of the resources used in that process, but its role may differ according to the individual, situation, and religious orientation.

The participants' descriptions of calmness and acceptance can therefore be interpreted as part of their subjective coping experiences. P1 and P2, for example, associated pilgrimage with emotional relief and greater calmness. Rather than indicating that pilgrimage objectively removed the source of their difficulties, these accounts suggest that religious activities undertaken during pilgrimage provided participants with an opportunity to pause, pray, reflect, and reorganize their emotional responses.

Park (2005) meaning-making perspective is useful in explaining this process. According to Park, religion may influence coping with adversity through meaning-making processes, whereby individuals attempt to reconcile stressful experiences with their broader beliefs and values. The present findings suggest that the participants' experiences of patience, surrender, and ikhlas may represent such a process of reinterpretation. The problem itself may remain present, but the participant's relationship with the problem can change through religious reflection.

At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that religious coping always produces positive psychological outcomes. Graça & Brandão (2024) , in a cross-sectional study of 109 Portuguese university students, found a complex relationship between religious/spiritual coping, emotion regulation, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction. Their analysis showed that both positive and negative religious/spiritual coping were associated with lower life satisfaction and psychological well-being, with difficulties in emotion regulation playing an important role in these relationships. These findings underscore the importance of avoiding assumptions that religious engagement necessarily leads to improved well-being.

The relevance of Graça & Brandão (2024) findings to the present study lies not in establishing that pilgrimage produces either positive or negative psychological outcomes, but in emphasizing the importance of examining how religious coping is experienced and interpreted. The present study is phenomenological and therefore focuses on participants' lived experiences rather than measuring psychological well-being or testing the effectiveness of pilgrimage. Consequently, participants' reports of calmness, relief, patience, and acceptance should be understood as subjective experiences emerging from their narratives.

An important finding is that not all participants experienced pilgrimage in the same way. One participant stated that pilgrimage did not substantially change the practical process of resolving a personal problem. Other resources, such as advice from others, religious lectures or podcasts, and reading, were considered more directly helpful in identifying possible solutions. This finding demonstrates that pilgrimage does not necessarily replace other forms of coping. Rather, it can coexist with interpersonal, cognitive, and religious resources.

This interpretation is consistent with Torralba et al. (2021), who examined religious and secular coping among 531 participants in South-East Spain. Their findings indicated that religious coping could coexist with secular coping strategies and was not necessarily used as an exclusive coping mechanism. The present findings show a similar pattern: participants could seek spiritual calm through pilgrimage while simultaneously relying on advice, reading, religious lectures, or other forms of

reflection when dealing with practical problems.

Therefore, the emotional transformation identified in this study should be understood primarily as a transformation in participants' subjective emotional and spiritual orientation. The recurrent experience was not necessarily the disappearance of a problem but the emergence of greater calmness, reflection, patience, or acceptance. This distinction prevents the findings from being interpreted as a clinical claim regarding the therapeutic effectiveness of pilgrimage.

d. Ziarah Wali as Religious Coping in the Digital Era

The findings indicate that ziarah wali can function as a religious coping resource for Generation Z, particularly when participants encounter emotional or personal difficulties. Participants described prayer, remembrance, reflection, surrender, patience, and the search for closeness to Allah SWT as important aspects of their pilgrimage experiences. These practices provided a religious framework through which participants responded to circumstances that they perceived as difficult or emotionally burdensome.

Pargament et al. (2011) theory of religious coping provides an important conceptual basis for understanding this finding. Religion can become involved in coping when individuals experience situations that challenge their sense of significance, security, or meaning. Religious coping may involve religious practices, beliefs, relationships, and interpretations through which individuals respond to difficult circumstances. In the present study, *ziarah wali* represents one concrete religious practice through which participants engaged in prayer, reflection, remembrance, and the search for spiritual meaning.

The findings also resonate with the distinction developed in the religious coping literature between different forms of religious coping. K. Pargament et al. (2011) developed the Brief RCOPE as a measure for positive and negative religious coping. Their framework demonstrates that religious coping is multidimensional and that religious responses to stress cannot automatically be assumed to be beneficial. However, the present study did not employ the Brief RCOPE or classify participants into positive and negative religious coping categories. The concept is used here only as a theoretical framework for interpreting the participants' narratives.

Within the present findings, the coping function of pilgrimage can be observed in several forms. First, pilgrimage provides a space for emotional distancing from everyday pressures. P1 and P2 described returning to pilgrimage when experiencing difficulties because they perceived the site as conducive to calming the heart and mind. Second, pilgrimage provides opportunities for religious practice, particularly prayer and remembrance. Third, pilgrimage encourages reflection on life, death, and personal responsibility, as illustrated by P3. Fourth, pilgrimage can facilitate attitudes such as patience, surrender, and *ikhlas*. Fifth, pilgrimage can provide a social and religious environment in which individuals interact with peers and participate in collective religious practices.

The term "healing" used by one participant requires particular attention. In the participant's narrative, healing refers to an experience of emotional and spiritual relief. It should not be interpreted as evidence that pilgrimage constitutes a clinical treatment or objectively cures a psychological disorder. Such an interpretation would exceed the scope of the present phenomenological study. Instead, "healing" is retained as a participant-derived expression describing how the individual experienced the pilgrimage.

The digital context further complicates the relationship between pilgrimage and

religious coping. Social media can contribute to the circulation of pilgrimage-related information, images, narratives, and motivations. Mukaromah & Ramadhani (2023) found that Generation Z pilgrimage could involve both traditional and affective religious action as well as instrumental and goal-oriented dimensions, demonstrating that young people's religious practices can incorporate both inherited traditions and contemporary forms of engagement. Meanwhile, research on Generation Z pilgrimage in Kudus indicates that social-media exposure can become associated with changing pilgrimage motives, including following trends and producing content (Maghfirotunnisa & Savitri, 2025).

The present study adds that digital influence and religious meaning should not be treated as mutually exclusive. A participant may initially encounter pilgrimage through social media while subsequently experiencing the practice through prayer, reflection, and religious meaning-making. Conversely, other participants may have a longstanding religious relationship with pilgrimage that exists independently of social media. Thus, digital media should be positioned as part of the social context surrounding pilgrimage rather than as the primary explanation for why Generation Z undertakes *ziarah wali*.

This finding is also relevant to Torralba et al. (2021), who showed that religious coping can coexist with non-religious coping resources. In the present study, participants likewise did not rely exclusively on pilgrimage. Religious practices could be accompanied by conversations with others, religious lectures, podcasts, reading, and personal reflection. This indicates that religious coping among Generation Z may operate through a combination of spiritual and everyday resources.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that ziarah wali among Generation Z in Kudus represents a multidimensional religious practice shaped by spiritual intentions, emotional experiences, religious traditions, social relationships, and digital influences. Based on the experiences of eight participants at the Tomb of Sunan Kudus, pilgrimage was understood as a means of seeking inner peace, praying, remembering death, reflecting on life, seeking barokah, and strengthening closeness to Allah SWT. Several participants reported emotional relief, greater calmness, patience, acceptance, and spiritual reflection after pilgrimage, although these experiences varied and did not necessarily resolve their practical problems. The findings suggest that ziarah wali may function as a religious coping resource through prayer, remembrance, surrender, and religious meaning-making, while coexisting with other coping strategies such as interpersonal support and reading. Social media contributed to pilgrimage motivation for some participants but did not replace the personal spiritual meanings associated with the practice. Given the study's limited sample and single research location, the findings cannot be generalized to all members of Generation Z. Nevertheless, this study contributes to understanding how wali pilgrimage provides some young Muslims with a meaningful religious space to navigate emotional difficulties and construct personal meaning at the intersection of Islamic tradition and contemporary digital culture.

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F. Author Contributions Statement

AR conceptualized the study, developed the research design, and supervised the overall research process. RK conducted data collection, performed data analysis, drafted the manuscript, and contributed to the interpretation of the findings. AI assisted in literature review, validated the research data, reviewed and edited the manuscript, and contributed to the final revision of the article. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript. RK conceptualized the study, conducted data collection, analyzed the data, interpreted the findings, and prepared the original draft of the manuscript. AR contributed to the research design, supervised the study, and provided critical revisions to improve the intellectual content of the article. AI assisted in the literature review, validated the research findings, edited the manuscript, and contributed to the final revision. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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