

# Spiritual Healing and Self-Discovery in Independent Umrah: A Study of the Perceptions of Young Z Generation Pilgrims

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## Suggested Citation:

Irawan, Adi Roy. (2026). Spiritual Healing and Self-Discovery in Independent Umrah: A Study of the Perceptions of Young Z Generation Pilgrims. *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas*, Volume 6, Number 2: 487–496. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v6i2.53613>

## Article's History:

Received January 2026; Revised March 2026; Accepted April 2026.  
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## Abstrak:

This study aims to analyze the spiritual experiences, motivations, and self-transformation of young Z generation pilgrims who performed the Umrah independently in 2025. A qualitative approach was used with in-depth interviews with eight pilgrims, two mutawifs, and one Umrah travel agency manager. The results show that the decision to perform the Umrah independently is driven by spiritual needs, self-discovery, the need for flexibility, and the influence of social media. The most dominant emotional experiences arise during the moment of seeing the Kaaba and performing the tawaf, which gives rise to feelings of emotion, amazement, and a strong existential awareness. In addition to producing inner peace during the pilgrimage, the independent Umrah also encourages behavioral changes after returning home, especially in worship discipline, emotional management, and a more spiritual orientation. Travel challenges such as language barriers, navigation, and logistics actually strengthen the independence and problem-solving abilities of young pilgrims. This study concludes that the independent Umrah is a form of contemporary religiosity for Z generation that prioritizes authentic experiences, freedom, and self-development. These findings imply the need for Umrah service providers to adapt their approaches to suit the characteristics and needs of the increasingly independent and experience-oriented younger generation.

**Keywords:** independent umrah; self-transformation; spiritual experience; Z generation.

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of pilgrimage travel in the modern era has experienced very dynamic development, particularly with the advent of independent Umrah pilgrimages, which are increasingly being chosen by young pilgrims. Previously synonymous with travel agency packages, Umrah can now be performed independently thanks to the convenience of digital technology, online booking services, and the increasing information literacy of the younger generation. This transformation demonstrates that digitalization has transformed the way Muslims practice their religion, including planning their spiritual journeys, which can now be conducted in a more flexible and personalized manner. The emergence of the independent Umrah model closely aligns with the characteristics of Z generation, the generation born after 1995 and raised in a digital environment. According to (William & Page, 2011), this generation tends to be independent, data-driven, experience-oriented, and heavily influenced by technology in their decision-making. This is reflected in their understanding of worship not only as a religious obligation but also as a life experience that shapes their identity and psychological well-being. Therefore, for some in Z generation, Umrah is not just a ritual, but also a space for spiritual healing and a search for the meaning of life.

In recent years, the terms of spiritual healing and self-discovery have become important parts of the younger generation's discourse. Spiritual healing is understood as a process of inner recovery through a transcendental relationship with God, as explained (Marques et al., 2005) that spiritual healing is a process of improving self-balance through religious values. Meanwhile, the concept of self-discovery according to (Rogers, 1995) ) is the process of discovering one's identity through reflective experiences that touch the deepest aspects of human being. These two concepts are highly relevant to the character of Z generation, which according to (Kring, 2018) is a generation with the highest levels of psychological stress due to social, academic, and digital media demands.

As a transcendental ritual, the Umrah pilgrimage has great potential to become a space for healing and self-discovery. Religious experiences in the Holy Land are often understood as a turning point in one's realization of the true nature of life. (Turner & Turner, 2011) state that the pilgrimage is a form of rite of passage capable of encouraging self-transformation. Thus, the processions of tawaf, sa'i, standing in prayer, and the spiritual atmosphere at the Grand Mosque can be moments of profound reflection for young pilgrims. In the context of an independent Umrah, this experience can become even more personal as pilgrims control the rhythm of their journey and worship without the pressure of a group. However, this phenomenon also holds an interesting dynamic. Social media has made Umrah, for some younger generations, understood not only as a spiritual activity but also as part of a religious lifestyle. The image of "Umrah as healing" is often shaped by touching visual content, such as videos of people crying in front of the Kaaba, self-reflection, and emotional testimonies. (Nasrullah, 2015) explains that the digital generation often constructs religious identities through social media, making worship experiences easily exposed in aesthetic and public forms. This raises the question of whether Z generation is truly experiencing profound healing and self-discovery, or simply following popular spiritual trends.

Furthermore, the younger generation's motivations for performing Umrah independently need to be more broadly understood. While previous generations emphasized normative religious motivations, Z generation often combines spiritual, emotional, and reflective aspects. This demonstrates that modern pilgrims possess multidimensional motivations, encompassing the search for meaning in life, the need for tranquility, and the drive for self-improvement. Research (Barbato, 2013), found that independence in worship, such as choosing an independent Umrah, can strengthen a sense of self-control (self-agency) and foster a more authentic spiritual experience.

Given this phenomenon, it's crucial to understand how Z generation interprets independent Umrah as a process of spiritual healing and self-discovery, as the experience is heavily influenced by the psychological context, digital culture, and existential needs of the younger generation. A deeper understanding of their perceptions can help explain how religious transformation occurs in this digital age. Therefore, this study needs to formulate several key questions. First, how do Z generation perceive the experience of independent Umrah? Second, to what extent do they view independent Umrah as a means of spiritual healing or inner recovery? Third, does the experience foster a process of self-discovery? Fourth, what factors influence the quality of Z generation's spiritual experience during independent Umrah, including initial motivation, mental state, social media exposure, and independence in the worship process?

These questions then form the basis of the research objectives. This research aims to: (1) describe the perceptions of young Z generation pilgrims regarding the experience of independent Umrah; (2) analyze how independent Umrah functions as a means of spiritual healing; (3) understand the process of self-discovery experienced by young pilgrims during this pilgrimage; and (4) identify the personal, psychological, and social factors that influence the spiritual meaning they construct during their journey. Theoretically, this research is useful for enriching insights into the psychology of religion, the sociology of religion, and modern spirituality. Academic studies on independent Umrah pilgrimages are scarce, especially those linking it to the Z generation phenomenon and the concepts of healing and self-discovery. Therefore, this research can fill a gap in the literature and provide a new perspective on how spirituality is practiced and interpreted by the digital generation.

Practically, this research is beneficial for various parties. First, for religious leaders and travel agencies, the results can serve as a basis for designing a more relevant and sensitive approach to the psychological needs of the younger generation. Second, for young Muslim communities, this research can provide a source of reflection on how to build more authentic spiritual experiences. Third, for religious educational institutions, the research findings can encourage the development of mental-spiritual development programs based on the needs of Z generation. Fourth, for policymakers, the research findings can help understand the dynamics of young people's

religiosity as a basis for developing community development programs. Thus, including the formulation of the problem, objectives, and benefits of the research into the background is important because the three are interconnected in viewing the phenomenon of independent Umrah as a space for spiritual transformation for z generation. This integrative narrative structure allows readers to understand the logic of research thinking chronologically starting from the underlying phenomena, research questions, to the objectives and benefits to be achieved.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding spiritual healing, self-discovery, Z generation, and the phenomenon of independent Umrah cannot be separated from the theoretical framework that has been developed in the psychology of religion, sociology, and modern spirituality studies. The concept of spiritual healing is generally understood as a process of restoring inner health by strengthening a transcendental relationship with God. (Marques et al., 2005) explain that spiritual healing centers on an individual's efforts to restore balance in life through religious values, worship practices, and self-reflection that bring inner peace. This view aligns with the theory (Pargament, 2013) that defines religious coping as a psychological mechanism that helps one cope with life's stresses through prayer, worship, and the search for spiritual meaning. In the context of a pilgrimage, sacred experiences such as standing in front of the Kaaba or performing the tawaf ritual can be powerful moments of inner healing because they create a deep sense of connection with God. (James, 2015) in his study of religious experiences also emphasized that intense religious experiences can create psychological transformations that result in serenity, emotional relief, and a sense of spiritual rebirth. Thus, Umrah as a physical and mental worship has great potential to be a healing medium for individuals, especially for the younger generation who are in the phase of searching for life direction and emotional stability.

Meanwhile, the concept of self-discovery relates to the process of discovering one's identity, life values, and personal direction. (Rogers, 1995) states that self-discovery occurs when an individual interacts with experiences that challenge them to better understand who they truly are. This process typically involves deep reflection on emotional experiences, social interactions, and spiritual moments that touch the deepest aspects of human nature. (Maslow, 1970) through his theory of self-actualization also explains that peak experiences, such as intense religious moments, can expand self-awareness and give rise to new understandings of the meaning of life. In the context of the Umrah journey, activities such as praying at Multazam, contemplating while gazing at the Kaaba, or undergoing the sa'i ritual filled with symbols of struggle can be reflective experiences that trigger the process of self-discovery. This is evident in research that found that young pilgrims interpret the Hajj and Umrah as contemplative moments that help them re-organize their life goals, forgive themselves, and strengthen their spiritual identity.

This statement indicates that the Umrah pilgrimage has undergone a shift in meaning in the eyes of the younger generation, from merely fulfilling a ritual obligation to a profound psycho-spiritual journey. In the silence before the Multazam or amidst the steps of Sa'i, an intense internal dialogue occurs; pilgrims not only communicate with the Creator, but also confront the deepest side of themselves. The exhausting physical activity of the Umrah ritual often serves as a catalyst for the breakdown of the ego, so that the moment of gazing at the Kaaba is no longer simply a physical structure, but rather a mirror for reflecting on human fragility and re-arranging existential priorities often neglected in the hustle and bustle of fast-paced modern life. For young pilgrims, this reflective experience serves as a pause or spiritual reset that is crucial in facing identity crises and mental stress in the digital age. The process of self-discovery that occurs in the Holy Land allows them to process past traumas, learn to forgive themselves, and reformulate a more meaningful vision for life. The spiritual identity that strengthens after Umrah then becomes a new moral compass; They return home not only with the status of "hajj" or "mu'tamir", but as individuals who are more psychologically whole, have better mental toughness, and have a clearer connection to the purpose of their creation.

Understanding Z generation also forms an important foundation for this study. Z generation, born between 1995 and 2012, is characterized by characteristics closely tied to digital technology and social media. (William & Page, 2011) describe this generation as independent, adaptable, and prioritize meaningful experiences. (Kring, 2018) adds that Z generation is the generation with the highest levels of anxiety due to academic pressure, social expectations, and excessive exposure to digital media. This mental state drives them to seek spaces for self-soothing, whether through mindfulness activities, spiritual journeys, or worship. In the context of religiosity, Z generation tends to have a more individualistic yet emotional spiritual style. They interpret religion not merely as a ritual obligation, but as a means to achieve psychological stability, self-identity, and mental well-being. Research

(Smith & Denton, 2009) shows that the younger generation practices religion more flexibly, yet is highly responsive to spiritual experiences that provide inner peace. Thus, their choice to perform Umrah independently is very much in line with the characteristics of this generation, which desires freedom, personal control, and authentic experiences.

The phenomenon of independent Umrah emerged as a form of religious adaptation to the development of digital technology. While previously the Umrah pilgrimage was synonymous with travel agency-based travel, now pilgrims can independently plan all their pilgrimage needs, from tickets, hotels, transportation, to travel management, using digital applications. The phenomenon of independent Umrah is a concrete manifestation of digital disruption that touches the spiritual realm, where the structure of pilgrimage trips, which were once rigid and centered on travel agencies, is now transformed into a more personalized and flexible one. This transformation is driven by open access to information and technology that allows each individual to become their own "travel manager." Using only a device, pilgrims now have full authority to design itineraries, compare flight prices across airlines, and even secure accommodations in Mecca or Medina through a global aggregator platform offering competitive prices. This convenience is further strengthened by the Saudi Arabian government's modernization policies, such as the launch of the Nusuk platform and the expansion of visa types, which consciously remove bureaucratic barriers that previously required pilgrims to rely on third parties.

Independent Umrah is not just a cost-saving trend, but rather an adaptation to a modern lifestyle that prioritizes autonomy and authentic experiences. Pilgrims are no longer tied to the routine schedules of often mass groups, allowing them to adjust their worship rhythm according to their individual physical capacity and spiritual depth. Furthermore, this phenomenon has also created a new support ecosystem, such as the proliferation of online communities sharing tips on navigating local transportation like the Haramain high-speed train or using ride-hailing apps in the Holy Land. While offering efficiency and freedom, this trend demands greater digital literacy and mental preparedness, given that all travel risks—from logistics to mitigating obstacles on the ground—rest entirely in the hands of the pilgrim, marking a new era in which independence has become an integral part of the religious journey in the 21st century.

In a sociological context, this aligns with (Giddens, 2023) view of reflexive modernity, a condition in which individuals increasingly have the freedom to determine their life decisions through widely available information. Ease of access to information and technology has made Z generation more confident in organizing their own pilgrimages. Digitalization has created new opportunities for Muslim religious practices, including the phenomenon of independent Umrah, which has now become part of modern religious styles. Research (Barbato, 2013), found that young pilgrims who perform independent Umrah have a more personalized spiritual experience because they can organize their pilgrimage schedule according to their emotional needs and self-reflection.

Furthermore, the religiosity patterns of the digital generation are also heavily influenced by social media. Social media allows young pilgrims to document and share their spiritual experiences aesthetically, creating a new perception that Umrah is part of a religious lifestyle. (Nasrullah, 2015) calls this phenomenon digital religiosity, namely religious practices influenced by visual narratives, spiritual trends, and forms of religious representation on social media. For Z generation, worship experiences are often part of a search for identity, so Umrah documentation can function as self-expression. However, this also raises another dynamic: are the experiences of healing and self-discovery truly authentic or shaped by social expectations constructed through digital media? This question is crucial in understanding the spiritual experiences of the younger generation during independent Umrah.

Thus, the theoretical framework in this study positions spiritual healing as a process of inner recovery that arises from deep religious experiences, self-discovery as a process of forming self-understanding triggered by reflective and transcendental experiences, z generation as a group with unique psychological and digital characteristics, and independent Umrah as a modern worship phenomenon that provides space for a more personal spiritual experience. The integration of these theories helps explain how z generation interprets the independent Umrah journey not only as a worship ritual, but as an inner journey that touches on aspects of healing, self-identity, and the search for meaning. This theoretical framework also serves as an analytical basis for understanding the perceptions and experiences of young z generation pilgrims towards independent Umrah worship as a process of spiritual transformation.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design, aiming to understand the experiences, perceptions, and subjective meanings of young Z generation pilgrims in performing independent Umrah. The qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of the research is not on quantitative measurements or statistical generalizations, but rather on an in-depth exploration of the spiritual experiences and self-discovery processes experienced by individuals. According to (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), a phenomenological approach is appropriate for examining direct human experiences, especially those of a personal and emotional nature, such as spiritual experiences during worship.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10-15 respondents belonging to Z generation (born between 1995-2012) who had performed Umrah independently. Semi-structured interviews allowed researchers to explore participants' experiences more flexibly, while still having a guideline to focus on the research theme. Interview questions were designed to explore participants' spiritual experiences, self-discovery processes, motivations for performing Umrah independently, and their perceptions of the effects of worship on their inner state and self-identity. Examples of interview questions included: "How did your experience during Umrah affect your inner peace?", "What did you learn about yourself during your Umrah trip?", and "How do you interpret independent Umrah compared to group travel?"

In addition to interviews, this study also utilized limited participant observation, recording participants' behaviors, expressions, and interactions as they recounted their experiences, as additional data to strengthen understanding of context and subjective meaning. This observation was conducted non-intrusively to ensure participants felt comfortable and natural in sharing their experiences. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which involved the following stages: interview transcription, in-depth reading to understand the overall data, initial coding based on emerging themes, grouping codes into thematic categories, and interpreting the meaning of the themes in the context of theories of spiritual healing, self-discovery, and Z generation characteristics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen because it allowed researchers to identify consistent and unique patterns of experience while maintaining the subjective nuances of participants.

To ensure data validity and legitimacy, this study employed a source triangulation strategy, comparing interview findings with observation notes, and member checking, asking participants to review the researcher's interpretations to ensure that the interpretations aligned with their experiences. This step ensured that the research data was reliable and reflective of the pilgrims' experiences. This study also adhered to research ethics by obtaining participants' consent prior to the interviews, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. The collected data will be securely stored and used solely for the academic purposes of this study. Using qualitative methods and in-depth interviews, this study aims to explore in detail Z generation's perceptions of spiritual healing and self-discovery during independent Umrah, understand how these experiences shape their religious and psychological identities, and identify factors that influence their personal and unique spiritual experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Independent Umrah of Young Z Generation

The results of this study indicate that the experience of independent Umrah has profound spiritual, emotional, and psychological significance for young Z generation pilgrims. Based on interview data, the primary drivers shaping their decisions stem from spiritual awareness, self-discovery, a need for flexibility, and a desire for a more authentic worship experience. Young pilgrims departing in 2025 described their decision to perform Umrah as a sudden, unplanned calling. Some respondents admitted to initially being uninterested, but in the months leading up to their departure, they felt a strong desire to visit the Holy Land. Amalia, for example, expressed a spiritual "calling" after witnessing her friend's experience (Amalia, interview, 2025). On the other hand, some pilgrims departed to fulfill their spiritual needs and deepen their relationship with God, which they believed could not be replaced by daily worship activities in their hometowns (Makhbub, interview, 2025).

The decision to travel independently is a key characteristic of Z generation. They consider flexibility, freedom to manage their schedule, and a desire for a more challenging and personal experience. Independent Umrah is seen as a learning space for independence, decision-making, and the courage to face the risks of international travel without relying on travel agencies. For Izudin, for example, independent Umrah is a way to

prove that sacred worship can be achieved through one's own efforts, rather than simply relying on parental assistance. He views independence as a principle shaped by his Islamic boarding school background and driven by the need to rediscover one's identity (Izudin, interview, 2025). This aligns with Mustofa, who stated that independent Umrah is flexible and suitable for KKN students in Saudi Arabia, as it allows for up to 38 days of adjustment (Mustofa, interview, 2025).

Young pilgrims' emotional experiences peaked at the moment they first saw the Kaaba. Nearly all respondents cited feelings of emotion, amazement, and disbelief as their primary reactions. Many shed tears upon gazing at the Kaaba, feeling unworthy yet still given the opportunity by Allah to come to the House. Maulana, for example, said that he felt unworthy due to his numerous sins, yet was still called to worship in the Holy Land (Maulana, interview, 2025). Meanwhile, Izudin described his first encounter with the Kaaba as akin to "meeting a long-desired lover," an emotional image that underscores the depth of the spiritual connection between young pilgrims and the holy site (Izudin, interview, 2025). Interviewed mutawifs also confirmed this phenomenon. Ustaz Agil explained that young pilgrims often appear mesmerized and immediately tear up upon seeing the Kaaba, due to the spiritual atmosphere that is incomparable to any other experience in life (Agil, interview, 2025).

Besides viewing the Kaaba, the tawaf ritual is the activity that provides the most inner peace for worshippers. Many respondents stated that tawaf creates an intense sense of closeness to God, even among thousands of people. Mustofa sees tawaf as a symbol that the world continues to turn, but humans must always return to God (Mustofa, interview, 2025). Izudin experienced the nighttime tawaf as a powerful form of spiritual healing because the atmosphere is quieter and the focus of worship is more stable (Izudin, interview, 2025). Meanwhile, Nafisa Ahmad admitted that the tawaf, which she had imagined would be crowded, actually felt orderly, calm, and gave her a sense of peace she had never felt before (Ahmad, interview, 2025).

All of their worship activities in Mecca and Medina are oriented towards spiritual deepening. Young pilgrims spend a lot of time in congregational prayer, seclusion, dhikr, reading the Quran, and even making pilgrimages to historical sites. Mustofa stated that during his time in the Holy Land, he "didn't think about this world at all" because the atmosphere made him focus on the afterlife (Mustofa, interview, 2025). Another mutawif, Ustaz Faiz, said that young pilgrims usually pour out prayers and ask for forgiveness deeply, especially since most of them are seeing the Kaaba and performing the Umrah ritual in person for the first time (Faiz, interview, 2025). The intense worship environment, far from daily routines, creates a psychological condition that supports contemplation and purification of the soul.

Spiritual changes after returning home were a key finding in this study. Most respondents experienced significant improvements in their worship, prayer discipline, emotional management, and outlook on life. Makhbub, for example, stated that he became more disciplined in his five daily prayers, which he had often missed before (Makhbub, interview, 2025). Annas stated that the Umrah experience made him more patient, gentler in dealing with others, and more aware of death as the ultimate goal of humankind (Annas, interview, 2025). These changes were also felt by Izudin, who stated that the Umrah experience directed his life toward a more structured and afterlife-oriented goal. He felt calmer, more emotionally stable, and better able to manage life's various pressures after understanding that destiny and sustenance are predetermined by Allah (Izudin, interview, 2025). Mutawif Agil corroborated these findings by stating that young pilgrims "return with much calmer faces and clearer minds," a phenomenon he has observed repeatedly in the field (Agil, interview, 2025).

Another aspect that emerged was the process of self-discovery. Most pilgrims recognized their personal weaknesses, particularly those related to patience, ego, and discipline in worship. On the other hand, they also discovered new strengths such as independence in managing travel, problem-solving skills, and steadfastness in carrying out worship, which is not always easy. Izudin considered this process a very powerful form of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the nafs), because during the Umrah, a person is forced to confront themselves, without the worldly distractions that usually fill daily life (Izudin, interview, 2025). Nafisa found that the Umrah journey taught her that humans will ultimately be accountable for their own lives before God, thus making her more mature in understanding the meaning of her personal relationship with God (Ahmad, interview, 2025).

The study also found that young pilgrims see a clear difference between independent and regular Umrah. In general, they believe that independent Umrah provides complete freedom to organize their worship and visit schedules, thus maximizing the spiritual experience. Independent Umrah allows them to linger at the Grand Mosque, Raudhah, or historical sites without having to follow a group itinerary (Annas, interview, 2025). However, several respondents also acknowledged challenges such as language barriers, transportation, and technical

issues that must be resolved independently. Nafisa experienced transportation problems upon arrival at the airport and had to seek help from local residents (Ahmad, interview, 2025). However, these challenges actually strengthened their sense of responsibility and problem-solving skills. According to Sobat Umrah management, Z generation tends to prefer the independent travel model because it suits their flexible, fast-learning characteristics and dislike of overly rigid rules (Umrah, interview, 2025).

Social media plays a crucial role in the overall experience of performing Umrah independently. Many pilgrims find information, hotel recommendations, visa guides, and even travel communities on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Amalia decided to perform Umrah after seeing a friend's post about performing Umrah independently for two consecutive years (Amalia, interview, 2025). Meanwhile, Nafisa found an independent travel group through social media (Ahmad, interview, 2025). Meanwhile, documenting a trip through photos or videos serves as a form of memory storage and a means of sharing experiences with others. Mustofa, for example, documented his complete trip from departure to return as a source of inspiration for his friends (Mustofa, interview, 2025). However, Mutawif Agil warned that a small percentage of pilgrims (around 20%) are susceptible to distraction by cell phone use during worship, especially when creating content (Agil, interview, 2025). While not dominant, this phenomenon demonstrates that social media can also pose a challenge to the solemnity of worship.

On the service provider side, the shift toward independent Umrah travel is very clear. Agencies like Sobat Umrah state that young pilgrims tend to choose simple packages such as tickets, visas, and hotels without full assistance (Umrah, interview, 2025). They also require quick responses, price transparency, and digital support such as online guides and flexible itineraries. This indicates that the changing Umrah pattern is not only affecting pilgrims but also impacting the service industry, which must adapt to the characteristics of Z generation.

Overall, this study confirms that independent Umrah for young pilgrims is not merely a religious journey, but also a space for character formation, spiritual strengthening, and the search for meaning in life. Their experience is filled with intense emotional dynamics, challenges that shape maturity, and profound reflection on the relationship between humans and God. Independence, flexibility, and self-discovery are key elements that distinguish independent Umrah from regular Umrah. For Z generation, this Umrah model is more relevant to a modern lifestyle that values freedom, personalization, and authentic experiences. These findings suggest that the trend of independent Umrah among young people is not temporary but is expected to continue to grow as the financial capabilities and spiritual needs of this generation increase.

### **New Religious Tendencies**

This research focuses on how Z generation's independent Umrah experiences reflect new religious tendencies, modern psychological needs, and shifts in spiritual orientation influenced by technological developments and digital culture. Interview data reveals that independent Umrah is understood not only as a form of worship that fulfills obligations and increases closeness to God, but also as a space for self-transformation and an existential journey involving deep reflection on the meaning of life. This phenomenon demonstrates that Z generation's religious experiences are inextricably linked to their social and psychological contexts, which differ significantly from those of previous generations.

The motivation for Umrah, which stems from a calling of the heart, spiritual needs, and a desire for a more authentic experience, confirms that Z generation enters the realm of religiosity through an emotional and self-aware trajectory. This drive is not simply adherence to family tradition, but stems from inner struggles and existential needs, as expressed by Amalia, who "suddenly felt called" to perform Umrah after experiencing certain life dynamics (Amalia, interview, 2025). From a psychology of religion perspective, this pattern demonstrates a shift from normative religiosity to reflective religiosity, where decisions to worship emerge from the process of internalizing values, the need for inner healing, and the search for spiritual identity. This phenomenon also aligns with the theory of the spiritual journey, which positions humans as subjects seeking meaning, not simply performers of rituals.

The emotional experiences of young pilgrims upon seeing the Kaaba reinforce the notion that the sacred space serves as a catalyst for spiritual catharsis. Reactions of tears, awe, and inadequacy demonstrate that Z generation experiences worship not simply as a ritual but as an existential encounter between the individual and the transcendent. Izudin describes the moment of seeing the Kaaba as "meeting a long-desired lover" (Izudin, interview, 2025), a narrative that demonstrates a high level of emotional and spiritual engagement. This reaction is also acknowledged by mutawif (religious scholars) who witnessed young pilgrims becoming teary-eyed or transfixed by the Kaaba, signifying the intensity of an authentic spiritual experience (Agil, interview, 2025). In the

context of the study of religious experience, this moment reflects what William James called a "mystical experience," a religious experience that is personal, inexpressible, and brings about profound inner transformation.

The tawaf ritual and other acts of worship play a crucial role as a medium for contemplation and spiritual healing. Z generation perceives tawaf as a ritual that brings a rare inner peace to everyday life, as expressed by Mustofa, who views tawaf as a symbol of the cycle of life that always returns to Allah (Mustofa, interview, 2025). This process can be seen as a form of meditation that helps one regulate emotions, reduce anxiety, and foster spiritual awareness. Respondents like Nafisa experienced tawaf as a calming, healing experience, despite previously imagining stressful situations (Ahmad, interview, 2025). Sociologically, this phenomenon demonstrates that physical worship in Islam has a therapeutic dimension, helping individuals release psychological burdens through repetitive, symbolic, and collective rituals (Eliade, 1991).

After returning from the Holy Land, the behavioral and spiritual changes experienced by young pilgrims further reinforce the interpretation that independent Umrah is a transformational moment. Changes such as increased prayer discipline, emotional control, and awareness of death reflect increased self-awareness and spiritual closeness. Annas acknowledged that he became more patient and continually remembered the ultimate goal of life, namely death, which served as a reminder for him to always worship (Annas, interview, 2025). This finding aligns with the concept of "peak religious experience," which states that intense experiences in sacred spaces have a long-lasting impact on one's life orientation.

In addition to personal transformation, independent Umrah also demonstrates a strong dynamic of self-discovery. Many respondents recognized the limits of their patience, ego, and weaknesses when faced with difficult situations in the Holy Land, such as Nafisa's transportation problems (Ahmad, interview, 2025). However, this process actually fostered self-confidence and more mature problem-solving skills. Izudin described this process as a form of accelerated spiritual purification because the conditions of worship force one to recognize themselves at their most vulnerable point (Izudin, interview, 2025). Self-discovery in this context of worship emphasizes that independent Umrah serves not only as a ritual space but also as a psychological learning space that shapes character and independence.

A comparison between independent and regular Umrah shows that Z generation prefers flexibility and freedom. They consider regular Umrah too structured and restricts the duration of the pilgrimage, thus reducing the opportunity to achieve maximum devotion (Annas, interview, 2025). However, choosing independent Umrah is not without risks. Challenges related to language, navigation, and travel techniques are part of the learning process for young pilgrims. From a sociological perspective, their preference for independent travel aligns with the characteristics of digital natives who are confident in finding information online and relying on technology. The management of Sobat Umrah stated that young people are more independent, quickly grasp information, and do not require full supervision (Umrah, interview, 2025). This phenomenon also indicates a transformation in the religious travel industry, which must now adapt to the worship styles of the younger generation.

Social media plays a significant role in the entire chain of independent Umrah experiences. From the decision to depart, through information seeking, to documenting the experience, almost the entire process is supported by digital media. Amalia decided to perform Umrah after seeing a friend's post on Instagram (Amalia, interview, 2025), while Nafisa found an independent travel group through social media (Ahmad, interview, 2025). On the other hand, mutawif (religious leaders) observe that young pilgrims enjoy documenting their journeys as a form of spiritual memory storage and self-expression (Faiz, interview, 2025). However, social media also has its downsides, such as the tendency for some pilgrims to be distracted by the need to create content, thus diminishing their devotion to worship, although this is a small percentage (Agil, interview, 2025). digital culture analysis, this phenomenon demonstrates that Z generation's religious practices interact with the visual and sharing cultures that are the primary characteristics of the social media ecosystem.

From a social psychology perspective, this independent Umrah experience demonstrates a strong connection between the worship space, the process of reflection, and the formation of prosocial behavior. Many respondents experienced increased empathy, patience, and a desire to improve themselves after returning to Indonesia. These changes were not only spiritual but also impacted how they viewed the world and interacted with others. Maulana, for example, stated that he became more patient in facing life after experiencing spiritual serenity in Mecca and Medina (Maulana, interview, 2025). This process of internalizing values demonstrates that intense spiritual experiences can shape better social and moral behavior.

Furthermore, independent Umrah has implications for the religious identity of Z generation. This generation is known as a generation that is not fully bound to formal religious practices like previous generations, but still has

a strong spiritual need. Independent Umrah provides a space for them to carry out worship without social pressure, without binding collective rites, and without a strict schedule structure. The match between the flexibility of worship and the lifestyle of Z generation makes independent Umrah an ideal platform to fulfill spiritual needs as well as the personal need for autonomy. Sobat Umrah managers confirm that this trend is continuing to grow and is predicted to persist as Z generation becomes more financially mature and increasingly seeks authentic religious experiences (Umrah, interview, 2025).

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that independent Umrah is not simply a pilgrimage, but rather a socio-spiritual phenomenon that reflects Z generation's religious patterns, which are oriented towards personal experience, the search for meaning, and independence. The spiritual transformation experienced by young pilgrims demonstrates that an intense religious space can be a turning point in one's life, while the flexibility offered by independent Umrah aligns with the characteristics of the digital generation who value freedom and personalization. The findings of this study explain that changes in behavior, discipline in worship, and increased spiritual awareness are not only the result of religious rituals, but also from reflective experiences and inner journeys shaped by the interaction between the individual, the sacred space, the challenges of the journey, and the digital technology that accompanies the process.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that independent Umrah for young Z generation pilgrims is not simply a pilgrimage, but a profound process of spiritual transformation and self-reflection. Their decision to perform Umrah is not only based on religious motivation, but also on emotional needs, self-discovery, and a desire for a more free and authentic pilgrimage experience. Z generation demonstrates a strong tendency to take full control of their spiritual journey, making flexibility a key factor in choosing an independent Umrah over a regular package.

The emotional experiences that emerge, particularly upon seeing the Kaaba and performing the *tawaf* (circumambulation) serve as turning points that awaken a higher spiritual awareness. These moments evoke feelings of emotion, awe, and a profound closeness to God, which then lead to behavioral changes upon returning home. Young pilgrims feel more disciplined in their worship, more at peace with life, and more aware of the ultimate purpose of human existence. This transformation demonstrates that intense religious experiences in the Holy Land can strengthen spirituality and influence life orientation in a lasting way.

Beyond the spiritual aspect, independent Umrah significantly contributes to the character development of Z generation. Travel challenges, such as managing logistics, navigating language barriers, and resolving technical difficulties, foster independence, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills. Social media influences the entire process, including information dissemination, motivation for travel, and documentation of experiences, although there is still a risk of diminishing the solemnity of worship. Overall, this research confirms that independent Umrah is a new form of religiosity that aligns with the characteristics of Z generation. This pilgrimage is no longer simply fulfilling a spiritual obligation, but also a means of self-discovery, emotional management, and strengthening a personal relationship with God. Independent Umrah is predicted to become a long-term trend as the younger generation's spiritual needs and independence increase.

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