

SPIRITUAL TOURISM AND GENEROSITY: THE INFLUENCE OF WALI SHRINES' PILGRIMAGE ON ALMSGIVING IN EAST JAVA, INDONESIA

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Abstract

This article explores how Wali pilgrimage tourism influences the formation of pilgrims' attitudes toward charity in East Java. This study aims to understand how the spiritual experiences and cultural values associated with the Wali pilgrimage site can shape pilgrims' socio-religious behavior. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation at key pilgrimage sites in East Java. The findings reveal that Wali pilgrimage tourism is not only a form of religious fulfillment but also enhances pilgrims' awareness and commitment to charity through almsgiving. The management of pilgrimage sites that blend Islamic values with local culture plays a crucial role in fostering a spiritual environment conducive to generosity. Local leaders and community figures serve as catalysts in reinforcing social and religious values that promote community solidarity. This research highlights the significance of spiritual tourism as a tool for cultivating positive social attitudes and offers insights for the sustainable development of religious tourism in Indonesia. Consequently, ongoing efforts to strengthen spiritual and social values within pilgrimage tourism are essential to maximize its positive community impact.

Keywords: Wali Pilgrimage Tourism, Pilgrim Attitudes, Almsgiving, Spiritual Tourism, East Java

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji pengaruh wisata ziarah Wali terhadap pembentukan sikap peziarah dalam mengamalkan praktik sedekah di Jawa Timur. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana pengalaman spiritual dan nilai-nilai budaya yang melekat pada situs ziarah Wali dapat membentuk perilaku sosial keagamaan para peziarah. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi di beberapa lokasi ziarah utama di Jawa Timur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa wisata ziarah Wali tidak hanya menjadi sarana pemenuhan religius, tetapi juga memperkuat kesadaran dan komitmen peziarah dalam beramal melalui sedekah. Pengelolaan situs ziarah yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam dan budaya lokal berperan penting dalam menciptakan suasana spiritual yang mendukung praktik kedermaawanan. Para pengelola dan tokoh masyarakat setempat berkontribusi sebagai penggerak dalam memperkuat nilai-nilai sosial dan keagamaan yang mendorong solidaritas komunitas. Studi ini menegaskan pentingnya wisata spiritual sebagai media pembentukan sikap sosial yang positif dan menjadi inspirasi dalam pengembangan pariwisata religius yang berkelanjutan di Indonesia. Oleh karena itu, penguatan nilai-nilai spiritual dan sosial dalam wisata ziarah perlu terus dikembangkan agar dapat memberikan dampak luas bagi masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Wisata Ziarah Wali, Sikap Jemaah, Sedekah, Wisata Spiritual, Jawa Timur

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, religious tourism has experienced considerable growth as a form of spiritual travel that not only seeks to fulfill individual faith but also plays a role in shaping the socio-economic dynamics of local communities (Cheer et al., 2017; Van Niekerk, 2018). In Indonesia, particularly in East Java, the tradition of Wali pilgrimage has become one of the most prominent religious practices and continues to evolve within the frameworks of modernity and cultural diversity. The tombs of the Wali (figures credited with spreading Islam in Java) serve not only as sites of spirituality but also as social spaces fostering interactions across diverse social classes, generations, and even across religious and economic distinctions (Rohmawati & Ismail, 2017). This phenomenon underscores that Wali pilgrimage tourism cannot be dissociated from the broader local and global contexts related to spirituality, social solidarity, and community development.

Amidst the global trend regarding pilgrimage as a form of hybrid tourism, an amalgamation of religious travel and economic activity, there exists an active debate concerning the values of spirituality versus the principles of commercialization (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011; Smith et al., 2021). Some advocates contend that pilgrimage should remain within a sacred context, untainted by market influences and economic interests. Conversely, another perspective acknowledges that pilgrimage tourism possesses considerable potential to empower local communities by fostering employment opportunities, strengthening micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), and developing infrastructure (Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023). Within this framework, the practice of almsgiving during pilgrimage emerges as a pivotal intersection where spiritual expression aligns with social contribution. Alms are regarded not solely as a religious obligation but also as a means to engage in the moral economy, thereby fostering community solidarity and resilience.

East Java, as the primary hub for the tombs of Wali or spiritual figures considered saints in Indonesia, offers a distinctive landscape for understanding the relationship between pilgrimage and almsgiving. In this region, pilgrims from diverse areas and social backgrounds not only seek spiritual blessings but also participate in social practices such as giving alms in the form of money, food, and support for local charities. This tradition demonstrates how spiritual experiences during pilgrimage can motivate tangible social actions. Prior research has indicated that pilgrims' involvement in social activities directly impacts the economic empowerment of communities surrounding the tomb sites and enhances the sense of empathy and social cohesion among fellow pilgrims (Beeton, 2010; Fauzan et al., 2022; Rizkitama et al., 2024).

Similar debates are also occurring on a global scale. Across various regions such as the Middle East, South Asia, and Europe, critical questions are being raised concerning the maintenance of a balance between religious authenticity and the requirements of the contemporary tourism industry. Numerous studies indicate that spiritual tourism, including pilgrimage, is increasingly being marketed as a cultural commodity that can be commodified, resulting in modifications to the religious experience itself (Smith et al., 2021; Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Conversely, the perspective of sustainable development regards religious tourism as a potential platform for the integration of spiritual values, cultural identity, and community empowerment through participatory economic mechanisms. Therefore, the Indonesian context is inherently connected to the broader global discourse on the interplay between spirituality, modernity, and capitalism in current pilgrimage tourism practices. This debate is vital for critically addressing the issue to ensure that the flourishing model of religious tourism remains anchored in transcendental values while being adaptable to contemporary socio-economic dynamics.

Almsgiving within the context of pilgrimage is recognized not solely as a religious duty but also as an integral social practice embedded in the fabric of community life. When pilgrims make donations such as whether monetary, material, or in other forms of assistance, they are actively engaging in a moral economy that reinforces social cohesion. The funds collected through almsgiving are frequently allocated toward supporting local infrastructure developments, such as

access roads to sacred sites, sanitation facilities, and additional places of worship. Furthermore, almsgiving also plays a role in the implementation of welfare programs, including support for orphans, educational scholarships, and microenterprise training for local residents. Consequently, the practice of almsgiving in pilgrimage tourism not only enhances personal religious experiences but also serves as a catalyst for community-based socio-economic development (Fauzan et al., 2022; Mustagfiroh & Mustaqim, 2014; Rohmawati & Ismail, 2017; Supratman, 2016; Suroya, 2020).

The values associated with almsgiving are prominently reflected across numerous religious traditions worldwide, demonstrating that the ethos of generosity transcends doctrinal boundaries and constitutes the cornerstone of interfaith ethics. In Islamic doctrine, *ṣadaqah* (voluntary alms) and *zakat* (mandatory alms) are regarded as acts of worship that possess a social dimension, serving as a means to attain closeness to God and to reinforce social justice (Abojeib, Mahaini, & Alchaar, 2025; Shikur, Aslan, & Fodol, 2025; Zunaidi, Maghfiroh, Mushlihin, & Natalina, 2025). In the Christian tradition, charity and almsgiving are considered embodiments of love (agape) and sacrifice for others, as articulated in the teachings of Jesus Christ (Himes, 2025). Hindus are familiar with the concept of *dāna*, which signifies sincere giving to those in need as an expression of devotion to Dharma and self-purification (Heehs, 2024; Munshi & Bhagwan, 2025). Meanwhile, in Buddhism, the practice of *dāna pāramī* is recognized as one of the pathways to enlightenment achieved through selfless giving (Singh, 2024; Zhang, 2025). The historical roots of these values illustrate that the act of giving reflects not only personal spirituality but also functions as a social bridge that fosters harmony among human beings. The contextual message giving is prominently reflected across numerous religious traditions worldwide, demonstrating that the ethos of generosity transcends doctrinal boundaries and constitutes the cornerstone of interfaith ethics.

This study seeks to deepen the understanding of the influence of Wali pilgrimage tourism on pilgrims' attitudes towards the practice of almsgiving, focusing on how the pilgrimage experience encourages social awareness and engagement in humanitarian action. Through the examination of the relationship between pilgrimage activities and social contributions, this study offers a new perspective on the management of religious tourism that not only strengthens the spiritual well-being of pilgrims but also facilitates the socio-economic progress of the community around the site of the tomb of Wali. With this approach, the spiritual tourism model developed is expected to be able to integrate religious values with the community development agenda, while encouraging the creation of tourism governance that is responsive to spiritual needs and collective welfare. Pilgrims who crave spiritual growth often distribute alms as an expression of gratitude, sincerity, and recognition for the sustenance they have received. Research shows that alms carried out during pilgrimage have concrete social impacts, such as strengthening relationships between visitors, strengthening empathy, and supporting the economic empowerment of the surrounding community. In Islam, alms are not limited to material aspects, but also include the giving of time, energy, and other social contributions that strengthen social ties (Beeton, 2010; Henderson, 2016; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

The encounter between the practice of Wali pilgrimage and alms offers a broader understanding of the interaction between the spiritual and social dimensions in a living religious context. Pilgrims who are motivated by spiritual intentions often involve themselves in social activities such as making donations, providing free food, and participating in community service and collective activities. This proves that the religious experience in pilgrimage tourism does not stop at the search for individual meaning, but also encourages concrete actions that bring positive social and economic impacts. These practices show that pilgrimage is not only a spiritual ritual, but also a form of social action that strengthens the network of solidarity and resilience of local communities (Beeton, 2010; Dini et al., 2024; Rizkitama et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the global discussion on religious tourism increasingly emphasizes the role of spiritual tourism as a hybrid space where faith, culture, and development intersect and interact. Findings from South Asia and the Middle East show that pilgrimage tourism not only strengthens

religiosity but also supports the livelihoods of people around sacred sites. Therefore, the integration of pilgrimage and almsgiving in the Indonesian context reflects a broader global trend: the transformation of spiritual journeys into a means of social solidarity and inclusive growth rooted in religious values.

However, the extent to which the pilgrimage experience of the Wali influences pilgrims' attitudes and behaviors regarding almsgiving remains an unresolved scientific question that has not yet been systematically addressed. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the effect of Wali pilgrimage tourism on pilgrims' attitudes toward almsgiving in East Java. By combining sociological and religious approaches, this study seeks to clarify how spiritual and social factors interact to influence philanthropic behavior within religious settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the socio-religious and spiritual dimensions of Wali pilgrimage tourism in East Java, Indonesia. The nature of this research is exploratory and interpretive, aiming to understand the cultural, spiritual, and social nuances surrounding almsgiving (*sadaqah*) practices among pilgrims. Qualitative methods are chosen to capture rich, non-numerical data that reflect the complexity of religious experience and social action in localized pilgrimage contexts. The research was conducted from December 2024 to April 2025, covering three prominent pilgrimage sites. These sites were purposefully selected due to their high volume of visitors and the diversity of pilgrims' religious motivations and social backgrounds. The selection also reflects the strategic cultural significance of East Java as a center of Wali devotion and Islamic local traditions.

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure depth and triangulation (Meydan & Akkas, 2024; Pregoner, 2024). First, in-depth interviews were conducted with six key informants, comprising four pilgrims and two site managers. These interviews explored personal reflections on spiritual experience, the meaning and practice of almsgiving, and perceptions of social responsibility during pilgrimage. Second, participatory observation was carried out at the pilgrimage sites to capture pilgrims' behaviors, interactions, and ritual practices. Additionally, short narrative conversations were collected from 75 pilgrims to document a broader range of viewpoints and emotional expressions. The role of pilgrimage site managers was also a central concern of the study. Interviews with them focused on how they facilitate almsgiving activities (such as donation boxes, public announcements, or organized *sadaqah* events) and how these practices contribute to local community welfare and economic empowerment.

Data analysis followed a thematic and interpretive framework, using coding and categorization techniques to identify recurring patterns, symbolic meanings, and relational dynamics within the data (Ahmed et al., 2025; Qaissi, 2024). The analysis also involved comparing the findings with relevant global literature on religious tourism and spiritual giving, to position the study within broader theoretical discussions and cross-cultural contexts. Overall, this methodology enables a contextualized and holistic understanding of how pilgrimage tourism intertwines with spiritual consciousness and social generosity, offering valuable insights for the development of religious tourism in Indonesia and beyond.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pilgrim Demographics and Their Activities

Individuals undertaking visits to pilgrimage sites exhibit characteristics that mirror the diversity of social and demographic backgrounds. In terms of gender distribution, women constitute a predominant 60%, compared to men who account for 40%. This indicates a tendency for women to be more actively engaged in pilgrimage practices, potentially influenced by cultural norms, religious principles, and social roles within family and community settings. Regarding age

demographics, the most prominent group falls within the productive age range of 31-45 years, comprising 40%, followed by the younger cohort of 18-30 years at 26.67%. Additionally, older age groups (46 years and above) participate significantly, though in smaller proportions. Concerning educational levels, the majority of pilgrims possess higher education (S1 and above), representing 60%. Those with secondary education (SMA/SMK) constitute 26.67%, while individuals with basic education (SD/SMP) comprise only 13.33%. These data suggest that pilgrimage is popular among community members across various educational backgrounds, including those with higher academic qualifications, who may view pilgrimage as part of a profound spiritual journey.

Table 1.
Characteristic of Pilgrims Visiting Pilgrimage Sites

No.	Criterion	Number of Pilgrims	Percentage (%)
1.	Gender		
	-Man	30	40%
	-Woman	45	60%
2.	Age of the Pilgrim		
	- 18-30 years old	20	26.67%
	- 31-45 years old	30	40%
	- 46-60 years old	15	20%
	- 60+ years	10	13.33%
3.	Education Level		
	- Elementary/Junior High School	10	13.33%
	- High School/Vocational School	20	26.67%
	- S1 and beyond	45	60%
4.	Employment Status		
	- Civil Servants	15	20%
	- Private Employees	25	33.33%
	-Self-employed	20	26.67%
	-Other	15	20%

Source: The Data was Processed by the Researcher Based on the Location of the Pilgrims

Regarding their employment, pilgrims originate from a variety of professional backgrounds, with private sector employees representing the largest cohort at 33.33%, followed by self-employed individuals at 26.67%, and civil servants accounting for 20%. The remaining 20% are affiliated with diverse occupational categories. This occupational diversity suggests that pilgrimage transcends specific social strata, evolving into a multidisciplinary activity that reflects a balance between spiritual pursuits and worldly obligations. Ultimately, these insights imply that pilgrimage extends beyond a mere religious ritual, embodying a social phenomenon involving various demographic groups driven by a range of motivations encompassing spiritual, cultural, and socio-economic dimensions.

Table 2.
Recapitulation of Almsgiving by the Pilgrims

No	Forms of Alms	Number of pilgrims	Percentage (%)	Average Amount (Rp)
1	Cash	60	80%	50.000
2	Food (Rice, Drinks)	15	33.33%	20.000
3	Goods (Clothing, Medicine)	15	20%	30.000
4	Donations for Cemetery Management	45	60%	100.000

Source: The Data was Processed by the Researcher Based on the Location of the Pilgrims

Almsgiving constitutes a significant aspect of pilgrimage customs that exemplifies the principles of generosity and social consciousness among pilgrims towards others and the environment. According to data, the majority of pilgrims (80%) give alms in the form of cash, with an average donation of IDR 50,000, owing to its flexibility and utility for various purposes such as tomb

maintenance, social aid, or fulfilling the recipient's personal needs a significant aspect of pilgrimage customs that exemplifies the principles of generosity and social consciousness among pilgrims towards others and the environment. A pilgrim (10 January 2025) stated:

"I prefer to give money because it's more practical. Let the recipient determine his or her needs" (*Personal interview, 2025*).

In addition to monetary contributions, 33.33% of pilgrims donated alms in the form of food, such as rice and beverages, with an average value of Rp20,000. This type of food almsgiving is typically directed towards grave guards, fellow pilgrims, or the local community in need, serving as an expression of solidarity and reverence for the pilgrimage site. A tomb guard (10 January 2025) stated,

"Sometimes the pilgrims bring rice and drinks, which is very helpful for us who guard the tomb all day without a steady income" (*Personal interview, 2025*).

Almsgiving in the form of goods such as clothing and medicines is also undertaken by 20% of pilgrims, with an average value of Rp30,000, demonstrating a broader social consciousness aimed at providing enduring benefits to the local community. A female pilgrim (10 January 2025) articulated,

"I often bring clothes or medicine to the people around the tomb because they need it more than I do" (*Personal interview, 2025*).

Special donations designated for the administration of tombs constitute one of the predominant forms of almsgiving, undertaken by approximately 60% of pilgrims with an average contribution of IDR 100,000. Such donations are critically significant in ensuring the sustainability of pilgrimage sites, encompassing the upkeep of tombs, infrastructure, and public facilities to facilitate the comfort and convenience of fellow pilgrims. Overall, these findings imply that the act of giving alms during pilgrimage constitutes not merely a religious expression but also exemplifies the pilgrims' social concern for both the environment and their fellow individuals. The diverse forms and values associated with almsgiving substantiate that pilgrimage exerts a broad social influence, thereby reinforcing solidarity and unity within religious communities.

Spiritual Experience as an Encouragement for Interfaith Sharing

The findings in this study demonstrate that the spiritual experiences encountered during the pilgrimage of the Wali in East Java significantly influenced pilgrims' attitudes towards the practice of almsgiving. Pilgrims do not merely perceive pilgrimage as a purely religious ritual activity, but as a reflective moment that deepens a spiritual relationship with God while fostering social awareness to share with others, including members of different religions. The religious nuances of the tomb site—through the chanting of prayers, the recitation of dhikr, and the contemplative atmosphere—frequently cultivate empathy and social sensitivity toward the spiritual experiences encountered during the pilgrimage of the Wali in East Java, significantly influencing the attitude of pilgrims towards the practice of almsgiving. Pilgrims do not merely perceive pilgrimage as a purely religious ritual activity, but as a reflective moment that deepens a spiritual relationship with God while fostering social awareness to share with others, including members of different religions.

An informant, Mrs NH, a pilgrim from Kediri who regularly visits Mbah Sayyid's tomb, revealed:

"Every time I sit in the courtyard of the tomb and listen to people recite *tahlil* together, my heart becomes softer. It feels like reminding you that life is not just for yourself. That's why I always set aside money for almsgiving, sometimes I give it to beggars around, sometimes I leave it to the cemetery administrator" (*Personal interview, 2025*).

This kind of experience reflects a spiritual form of awakening that motivates altruistic actions. Not infrequently, these motivations go beyond the boundaries of religious identity. A young

pilgrim from Surabaya, AN (a Catholic), who came with his friend, confessed:

"I joined the pilgrimage because I was curious as well, and because I respected my Muslim friend. But what I felt was a deep calm there. I wanted to share as well. I don't see who accepts, but more out of gratitude and heartache"(*Personal interview, 2025*).

This quotation suggests that, despite the Islamic context of pilgrimage, its spiritual essence transcends formal religious boundaries, thereby rendering almsgiving a universal manifestation of religious experience. It affirms that spirituality in the guardians' pilgrimage not only reinforces the vertical relationship with God but also broadens the horizontal relationship among individuals (horizontal transcendence), as articulated within the framework of social action theory by Max Weber and the religious empathy theory by Batson (2011).

Another pilgrim, AT, who is from Madura, added a dimension of sincerity to the practice of sharing:

"I never count how much I spend on pilgrimage. The important thing is the intention of *lillahita'ala* (for the sake of Allah). If we have been given the opportunity to come to the graves of pious people, we are ashamed if we do not share, even if it is just a little"(*Personal interview, 2025*).

This spiritual experience is not isolated; rather, it is reinforced through social interaction during the pilgrimage. These findings affirm that spiritual spaces, such as the tomb of the guardian, function as a form of spiritual public sphere (a faith-based communal space) where human values such as empathy, solidarity, and charity are fostered and expressed beyond religious, economic, and ethnic boundaries (Hudaa & Bahtiar, 2024). The context of Wali pilgrimage tourism in East Java demonstrates that spiritual experiences are neither passive nor purely individualistic. On the contrary, they serve as catalysts for shifts in social attitudes and behaviors that are more inclusive, participatory, and transformative. Spirituality operates as an impetus, encouraging pilgrims to embody religious teachings through acts of sharing, giving, and caring, both towards fellow Muslims and non-Muslims in the vicinity; rather, it is reinforced through social interaction during the pilgrimage.

The Role of the Key Person in Facilitating the Desire to Share

The manager of the guardian's tomb holds a strategic role in promoting the practice of almsgiving among pilgrims. They are responsible not only for overseeing physical facilities but also for initiating various social and religious activities involving pilgrims, such as fundraising for the construction of public amenities and social assistance programs. This fosters an environment where pilgrims can distribute alms directly and organically. Moreover, managers act as intermediaries between spiritual principles and the socio-economic needs of the surrounding community. By incorporating Islamic values into the management of pilgrimages, they contribute to strengthening harmonious relations between pilgrims and local residents, whilst also supporting economic empowerment through the collection of alms.

A tomb manager at one of the well-known guardian sites in East Java explained:

"...we not only keep the tomb clean or arrange queues, but also open spaces for pilgrims to share. For example, there is a special charity box that we use the proceeds of for scholarships for children around here. It is important for them to feel that their alms are directly beneficial to the community" (Interview, 12 April, 2025).

In fact, in some cases, managers organize routine activities such as social recitation and mass pilgrimage accompanied by charitable activities to unite the religious and social dimensions simultaneously. A local pilgrimage community administrator added:

"During the Wali haul, we always insert social activities. Usually, we distribute basic necessities, aid for the sick, and also collect funds from pilgrims. Many of them want to

help, but don't know how. Well, our job is to bridge that" (Interview, 18 April, 2025).

These quotes show that the manager is not just the custodian of the site, but also an important factor in facilitating the spiritual transformation into real social action. They help actualize Islamic values in the form of empowerment and solidarity that are directly felt by the surrounding community.

Alms as a Form of Social Solidarity and Empowerment of the Surrounding Community

The manager of the guardian's tomb plays a strategic role in forming a structured and sustainable alms ecosystem. Their role is not limited to the management of physical facilities such as road access, parking lots, or worship areas. It also includes the development of socio-religious programs that connect the spiritual values of pilgrims with the real needs of the surrounding community. At a number of pilgrimage sites in East Java, managers actively initiated activities such as fundraising for the construction of public toilets, renovation of prayer rooms, compensation for orphans, and distribution of basic food packages.

In an in-depth interview, *KH YS*, one of the managers of the tomb complex, explained:

"... some people realized that many pilgrims came with the sincere intention of seeking blessings. But we also want to make sure that the blessing does not only stop at them, but also is felt by local residents. Therefore, we make alms boxes that are clearly intended for scholarships, for older people, and environmental development. So, the pilgrims can immediately know where their alms are going" (Interview, 12 January, 2025).

The information indicates that managers are actively establishing trusted, transparent, and contextual philanthropic channels. This approach not only enhances public confidence but also fortifies the relationship between personal spirituality and collective social action. In this context, the manager functions as an ethical intermediary, linking the religious intentions of pilgrims with tangible impacts on the local community. Moreover, some managers also provide education to pilgrims regarding the significance of consistent almsgiving, rather than sporadic acts. Through brief sermons, public announcements, or even digital leaflets, the principles of generosity are communicated in accessible and engaging language. This indicates that the administration of pilgrimage sites must be integrated with considerations of moral development and social empowerment. Consequently, the manager of the pilgrimage site assumes not only administrative responsibilities but also cultural and spiritual roles. They serve as pivotal figures in bridging the sacred aspects of the pilgrimage experience with the socio-economic realities of the surrounding community. The alms collected through the mechanisms they facilitate function not merely as a means of sharing, but also as instruments for value-based development and collective participation.

Convergence of Spiritual and Social Dimensions as the Implementation of Halal Tourism

This study discovered that spiritual experiences and social practices in Wali pilgrimage tourism in East Java do not exist independently; rather, they exhibit a harmonious and mutually reinforcing convergence. The spiritual practices, such as worship, prayer, dhikr, and religious reflection, are closely integrated with the social aspect, demonstrated through charitable acts and community empowerment initiatives (Manuain, Mila, & Takoi, 2024). This convergence fosters a spiritual tourism ecosystem that not only addresses the religious needs of individuals but also enhances social solidarity and promotes community development.

One of the informants, *Ustaz HS*, a caretaker of the Islamic boarding school who regularly holds guardian pilgrimages with students, explained:

"We teach that the pilgrimage of the Wali is not only to get blessings, but also as a field to do good. On every trip, we invite students to donate to local residents, whether it's basic necessities, school books, or participating in cleaning the grave area. This is not just worship, but also social education" (Interview, 10 March, 2025).

The statement highlights that the spiritual side is closely connected to social action. In this context, pilgrimage is seen not just as a vertical connection with God, but also as a way to build horizontal relationships through caring for and helping others. This phenomenon is highly pertinent to the concept of halal tourism, which is presently undergoing significant development as a tourism paradigm that comprehensively integrates Islamic values, encompassing both ritual and socio-economic dimensions. Halal tourism not only underscores the importance of fulfilling worship requirements, such as halal dietary provisions and prayer facilities, but also emphasizes principles of social justice, environmental stewardship, and the empowerment of local communities. Within the context of the Wali pilgrimage, the organized practices of almsgiving and socio-economic empowerment of the local populace serve as tangible implementations of inclusive and sustainable halal tourism principles.

This was also confirmed by Mrs. N, the treasurer of the women's pilgrimage community from Lamongan:

"We usually collect contributions before leaving. Later, when we are at the grave of the guardian, we will distribute some of it to local residents. We believe that sharing is part of the blessing of pilgrimage. That's exactly what makes this trip feel meaningful" (Interview, 10 March, 2025).

Furthermore, the manager of the guardian's tomb, including almsgiving and socio-economic programs, reflects halal tourism practices focused on sustainability and community empowerment. The alms collected are not only used for maintaining the tomb and pilgrimage facilities but also support the education, health, and welfare of local residents. In an interview with Mr. SK, the pilgrims of the Syech Imam Sujono tomb, he said:

"...we are transparent in the use of funds. There are regular reports for pilgrims. Alhamdulillah, we can use the proceeds of alms to renovate public toilets, help children's school fees, and also train the skills of mothers in this village" (Interview, 10 March, 2025).

The convergence of spiritual and social aspects in Wali pilgrimage tourism in East Java exemplifies halal tourism principles that merge religious values with social responsibility. This approach not only enhances the pilgrims' religious experience but also creates wide-reaching positive effects on the local community, making pilgrimage tourism a leading example of sustainable and inclusive spiritual tourism. This study highlights opportunities to develop spirituality-based halal tourism that emphasizes not just rituals and consumption but also social and economic empowerment of the community (Ambarita, Siahaya, & Kyong, 2024). Therefore, site managers and stakeholders can adopt a comprehensive strategy that combines spiritual and social elements to establish halal tourist destinations that are genuine, environmentally responsible, and focused on shared well-being.

This pilgrimage activity is not just a physical journey to the grave (Armiah et al., 2023), but also a meaningful way to deepen spiritual appreciation (Timothy & Iverson, 2006; Yousafzai, 2023), reflect on life, and build a closer relationship with God (Bianchi, 2004). Pilgrimage becomes a time for inner reflection where pilgrims foster gratitude and enhance the quality of their social connections, not only with fellow believers but also with the local communities they encounter. In addition to spiritual ceremonies, pilgrimage also involves social activities like almsgiving, which adds further significance to the journey by linking spiritual devotion with tangible social contributions to society.

In East Java, pilgrimage tourism has been an integral part of daily life for a long time, evolving from individual rituals to a widespread cultural activity involving diverse communities. This type of tourism aids in maintaining local traditions and cultural heritage while also boosting the economy around pilgrimage sites. Consequently, pilgrimage tourism in East Java provides spiritual benefits and significantly impacts local communities economically, as many depend on these activities for their livelihoods.

The findings of this study show that pilgrimage is not only a spiritual journey but also a way to strengthen social bonds and foster empathy through actions like almsgiving. Many pilgrims report feeling compelled to share and give after experiencing spiritual calm, which in turn boosts social solidarity and positively affects the wider community. This combination of pilgrimage tourism and alms enriches the spiritual depth of pilgrims while also improving the socio-economic well-being of local communities, including support for vital programs in education, health, and economic empowerment. This study contributes to the global discussion on religious tourism by demonstrating how spiritual practices can translate into meaningful social change. It encourages a shift toward a more inclusive and sustainable model of pilgrimage tourism, where spiritual fulfillment and community building are not separate but integrated and mutually reinforcing.

Future efforts should focus on developing an integrated system that maximizes the positive impact of pilgrims' generosity, thereby encouraging long-term social transformation and sustainable community empowerment. However, the management of alms practices at many pilgrimage sites remains fragmented and lacks transparency, which limits their overall impact. Strengthening the governance of alms through an accountable, transparent, and participatory approach is crucial so donations can be used effectively. This aligns with the global call for better governance in faith-based tourism and highlights the importance of collaboration between pilgrimage site managers, religious institutions, and local governments.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Wali pilgrimage tourism in East Java is not only a form of spiritual worship but also a social space that promotes the development of shared awareness through the practice of almsgiving. The spiritual experiences that pilgrims encounter, such as prayer, dhikr, and reflection at the guardian's tomb, serve as moral and religious motivation to engage in tangible social action. In this context, pilgrimage is more than just a journey to a sacred site; it also provides a way for pilgrims to strengthen solidarity, empathy, and social responsibility. These findings also confirm that the practice of alms during pilgrimage is not isolated, but integrated within the socio-economic system of the local community.

The strategic role of pilgrimage site managers in facilitating alms through religious activities and community empowerment programs makes pilgrimage tourism an inclusive development tool. The funds collected from alms are used to support public needs, such as infrastructure, education, and health. Therefore, the Wali pilgrimage becomes a bridge between spiritual values and social contributions, creating a broad impact on the surrounding community. Moreover, the connection between spiritual and social aspects in Wali pilgrimage tourism reflects the core principles of holistic halal tourism, namely, integrating worship, social justice, and economic empowerment within a mutually supportive system. This indicates that pilgrimage tourism not only enhances individual religiosity but also serves as a tool for sustainable social change.

Therefore, this study suggests that the management of Wali pilgrimage tourism in East Java should move toward a more organized, inclusive, and transparent approach, particularly regarding alms management and social programs. Strengthening collaboration among local stakeholders, religious leaders, and local governments is essential to ensure that the positive effects of pilgrimage are long-lasting, sustainable, and fair. Finally, this study aims to serve as a foundation for developing a spiritual tourism model that emphasizes not only the ritual aspect but also the social benefits for the wider community. The pilgrimage of the guardian, in this context, has the potential to become a new symbol of value-based tourism, where tangible contributions to collective well-being complement spiritual depth.

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