



Psychosocial and Spiritual Experiences of Young People in Café-Based Dakwah at Ngopi Senja, Trenggalek

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Abstract

Café-based dakwah brings religious learning into an everyday youth setting, but an informal café should not be assumed to be universally inclusive or free of religious authority. Purpose: This study explores the essence and everyday relevance of the psychosocial and spiritual experiences of Ngopi Senja participants in Trenggalek, together with the boundaries and obstacles that shape participation. A qualitative phenomenological study involved five informants: three active participants, the committee chairperson, and a mentor who also serves as a speaker. Data were generated through in-depth interviews, eight documented participant-observation sessions during the formal field period, and documentation. The researcher was an insider member of the organizing committee; bracketing, triangulation, peer discussion, and member checking were used to limit confirmation bias. Peer belonging and social support emerged as the dominant psychosocial domain, accompanied by self-acceptance, emotion regulation, and religious coping. Participants valued the café's informal atmosphere and dialogical discussion, yet openness remained conditional on café consumption, social and religious affinity, and the continuing authority of the speaker. Disagreement was possible but uncommon, and the study did not directly trace participants who stopped attending. The meaningfulness of café-based dakwah is produced through the interplay of informal space, relational support, guided religious dialogue, and participants' own meaning-making; its inclusivity is therefore contextual rather than universal.

Keywords: Café-based dakwah, psychosocial experience, spiritual experience, religious community, phenomenology.

Introduction

Young people face a range of decisions that shape the direction of their lives, from education and work to social relationships, life partners, and religious life. This process unfolds amid rapid social change and the continually evolving expectations of family and community. Uncertainty about one's own abilities and future can generate pressure while navigating this phase. In the global context, one in seven individuals aged 10 to 19 experiences a mental disorder, with peer pressure and identity exploration among the factors shaping their well-being (World Health Organization, 2025). This picture among adolescents underscores the importance of attending to psychological and social needs during the passage toward adulthood.

The search for identity involves an effort to understand oneself and to find a place within one's social environment. Religious values also serve as a source of orientation in this process (Rusuli, 2022). The support available is likewise tied to family circumstances, friendships, one's residential environment, and socioeconomic conditions (Haniyah et al., 2022). The issues young people face therefore need to be understood together with their experiences of gaining acceptance, building relationships, and finding direction in life. This need creates space for forms of mentoring that allow them to talk about difficulties and weigh their choices openly.

Spiritual life carries meaning within this process because it supplies values for understanding life's purpose and for making sense of difficult experiences. The meaningfulness of religion in adolescents' lives is associated with better mental well-being (Bamford et al., 2023). Among young adults, religiosity is also associated with a lower level of quarter-life crisis (Shafrina et al., 2025). This relationship still calls for attention to how religion is actually lived out. Religious experience can be linked to calm and to the capacity to withstand pressure, while at the same time being linked to feelings of guilt and a tendency toward self-blame (Brečka et al., 2024). How religious values are received and drawn upon in facing life's problems is therefore important for understanding the psychological and spiritual experiences of young people.

Dakwah has room to respond to these needs through mentoring that stays close to the lives of those who receive its message. The principle of *hikmah* (wisdom) in Surah An-Nahl, verse 125,

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِهِمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۖ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and engage with people in the best possible manner. Your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way, and He knows best who is rightly guided.”

Provides a foundation for delivering teaching wisely and with attentiveness to the circumstances of those being addressed. Within *irsyad* dakwah, religious guidance is linked to helping people understand personal problems and find direction for action (Ramadhani & Halwati 2024). This kind of mentoring draws support from a psychosocial approach that attends to social relationships, counselling, and spiritual guidance (Pramesti & Thohir 2025). Empathy, acceptance, dialogue, and reflection are elements relevant to examining how this process is experienced by young people.

The closeness of dakwah to the lives of young people is also visible in its use of everyday youth language, popular culture, social media, and informal meeting spaces. The encounter between Islamic values and these habits has become part of the formation of young Muslim identity in urban life (Saputra & Rosidi 2022). Cafés provide one context for such encounters. As places for conversation and for building togetherness, coffee shops can be read as a “third place” outside the home and the workplace. Their function is tied to the atmosphere of interaction, the character of the space, and the cultural and religious values of those who use it (Nadizti et al., 2022). Within the context of dakwah, this relationship raises questions about what an informal atmosphere and social acceptance mean for young people's involvement in religious activities.

The meeting of dakwah and café culture forms the context of the Ngopi Senja activities in Trenggalek Regency. The religious study sessions held within this activity raise issues close to the lives of young people, such as mental health, careers, friendship, life partners, and daily pressures. The delivery of material is accompanied by conversation and humour, with opportunities for participants to ask questions and share the problems they face. Interactions of this kind become an entry point for understanding the relationship between religious messages, personal experience, and the relationships formed during the activity.

Preliminary observation on 28 August 2025 showed that the café-based activity drew

markedly greater interest from young people than the mosque-based study session observed for comparison. In subsequent observations, participants engaged in conversation about personal issues as well as about religious life. One participant described Ngopi Senja as a place to “come home to” after facing the fatigue of daily life. This remark offered an early clue to the meaning of belonging within the community and to the need for a space that accepts personal experience. This picture prompted further inquiry into the atmosphere participants felt, the relationships they built, and the meaning the activity held for their lives.

Previous work on Ngopi Senja has examined the Islamic education strategy of the NDO community through the planning, implementation, evaluation, and implications of the activity for participants’ religiosity (Lestari et al., 2024). That account provides a foundation for understanding how the activity is organized and its educational orientation. The area this study develops instead concerns how participants personally experience the activity. Attention is directed to the connections between the issues they bring, the café atmosphere, their interaction with speakers and fellow participants, and their interpretation of religious teaching. This inquiry is needed to understand the meaning of religious mentoring from the standpoint of those who live through it.

This experience also needs to be examined alongside the obstacles that arise during participants’ involvement in the activity. Opportunities to speak, comfort in interacting, and the fit between the message and personal needs can be experienced differently by different people. The study therefore covers the conditions that support or constrain involvement, the problems encountered in carrying out dakwah, and the efforts made by participants and organizers to respond to them. Examining these obstacles and the responses to them forms part of understanding the dynamics of the activity and what mentoring means for young people.

This study uses a phenomenological approach to understand the experience of young people who take part in Ngopi Senja in Trenggalek Regency. Its aims are to explore the essence of participants’ psychosocial and spiritual experience, to understand the implications of that experience for their lives, and to identify the obstacles and responses surrounding the implementation of café-based dakwah. Rather than treating the café as an inherently inclusive or emancipatory space, the study also asks who is more likely to enter and remain, how economic and religious-group affinities shape access, and how opportunities for reflection coexist with the authority of the speaker. The intended contribution is therefore an account of how café space, community relationships, religious meaning-making, and their limits are interconnected within participants’ lived experience.

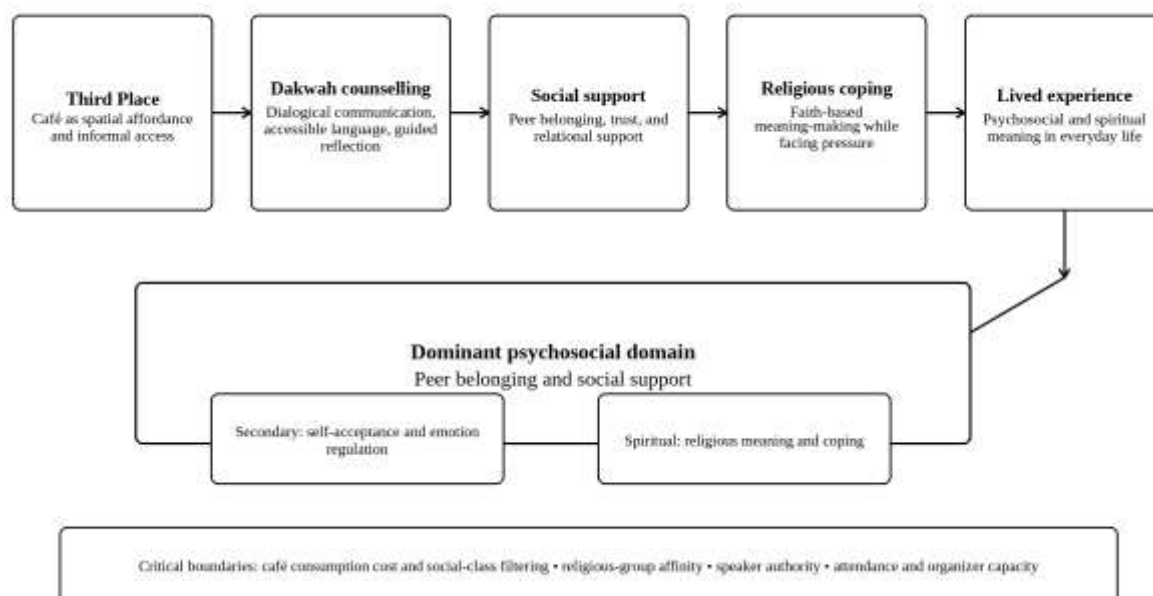


Figure 1. Integrated analytical framework linking space, relational support, religious coping, and critical participation boundaries.

Literature review

Youth Dakwah in Informal Social Space

Dakwah aimed at young people takes place at the meeting point of religious values, social habits, and the need to find a place within one's social environment. The form of the activity, the language used, and the atmosphere of the gathering all help determine how the religious message is received. An ethnographic study of Teras Dakwah in Yogyakarta showed the use of popular culture, social media, everyday youth language, and café-like spaces in dakwah activities. This practice opened room for the formation of a young Muslim identity that connects piety with urban life (Saputra & Rosidi, 2022).

The relationship between place and interaction can be examined through the concept of the "third place." This concept refers to settings outside the home and the workplace that enable informal encounters, conversation, and social relationships (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). In this study, Third Place is used as a sensitizing concept for the spatial affordances of the café: relative informality, ease of conversation, and proximity among participants. Its "leveler" assumption, however, is not taken for granted. Café access can still be shaped by consumption costs, lifestyle familiarity, gender, and socioeconomic position; recent work in a Global South university context likewise shows that café-based third places may foster belonging while remaining unevenly inclusive (Makhathini & Kanosvamhira, 2026).

The meaning of a third place is also shaped by the cultural environment of its users. A study of young Muslim visitors to a coffee shop in Bandung found that conversation and togetherness took place alongside the need to carry out religious practice. Facilities for worship and norms governing proximity to the opposite sex also shaped visitors' assessment of the space (Nadizti et al., 2022). This finding points to the need to read the café through the experience of its users. In the context of dakwah, attention can be directed to the relationship between the habit of hanging out (*nongkrong*), social norms, and the opportunity to learn about

religion.

Psychosocial and Spiritual Experience

The term psychosocial is used here in a deliberately bounded sense rather than as a catch-all category. The dominant psychosocial domain emerging from the data is peer belonging and social support: feeling accepted, listened to, and connected to a trustworthy social environment. A secondary domain concerns self-acceptance and emotion regulation, especially how participants interpret personal limitations and pause before responding to pressure.

Identity exploration remains part of the broader context of early adulthood, but it is not treated as the principal outcome of this study, and the research does not make a clinical claim about social-anxiety reduction. The spiritual dimension concerns the use of religious belief, closeness to God, and religious meaning in responding to life problems. This narrower formulation allows the psychosocial and spiritual dimensions to remain connected without implying that every aspect of psychosocial development was examined.

Social support provides a basis for understanding how relationships with others can help a person cope with pressure. The presence of a network of friends and the availability of assistance suited to one's needs are two aspects that warrant attention. Support can function when a person feels they have a source of help for responding to the situation they face (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Within the dakwah community, this concept is used to examine the experience of sharing problems, receiving responses, and finding trustworthy friends. Being present together during the activity becomes a starting point for exploring the quality of relationship participants feel.

The making of religious meaning in facing difficulty can be examined through religious coping. The literature distinguishes uses of religion that reflect a secure relationship with God and spiritual connectedness with others from uses of religion accompanied by struggle within oneself, in social relationships, or in one's relationship with God (Pargament et al., 2011). This framework opens attention to the diversity of religious experience. Accounts of calm, hope, doubt, or the feeling of having been abandoned by God need to be understood in light of each individual's situation and interpretation.

Self-acceptance and emotion regulation are treated as aspects of experience explored through participants' own accounts. Self-acceptance concerns how a person views their limitations, failures, and life process. Emotion regulation is examined through how feelings are understood and how responses to problems are determined. The analysis attends to the relationship between these experiences and the conversations that take place within the community, as well as to religious meaning-making. The changes participants describe are read together with their context, including difficulties that remain ongoing after taking part in the activity.

Dialogical Approaches and Dakwah Counselling

The perspective of dakwah counselling links the delivery of religious values to mentoring in facing life's problems. In studies of *irsyad* dakwah, religious guidance encompasses the provision of direction as well as the cultivation of spiritual life and behaviour through various forms of communication. This body of work places the relationship between religious teaching and its application in daily life at the centre of attention (Ramadhani & Halwati, 2024). This perspective is relevant for examining conversations in which participants

bring personal problems into the dakwah activity.

Mentoring requires attention to the circumstances of those who receive the message. A literature review on the psychology of dakwah for Generation Z highlights the search for identity, the need for social acceptance, peer influence, and emotional condition as considerations in designing a dakwah approach (Pratiwi, 2025). In this study, that attention is translated into an examination of the relationship between the material presented and participants' concerns, the use of accessible language, and opportunities to raise questions or share experiences.

Dialogue creates room to trace how problems are voiced and responded to. Elements of mentoring can be recognized through a willingness to listen, an effort to understand context, responses to anxiety, and invitations to reflect on possible courses of action. The term “dakwah counselling” is used in this study to read the guiding elements present in religious interaction. Its form and boundaries are determined based on the field data. With this understanding, the discussion focuses on the experience of receiving direction and support, without assuming the presence of professional psychotherapy services.

Inclusivity, Barriers to Participation, and the Position of the Study

Inclusivity in this study is treated as an empirical question rather than an assumed quality of café-based dakwah. It refers not only to formal permission to attend but also to whether people with different economic resources, social habits, religious-group backgrounds, and degrees of religious knowledge can comfortably enter, speak, and remain involved. A study of hybrid young Muslim identity shows the meeting of multiple Islamic orientations with popular culture inside dakwah communities (Saputra & Rosidi, 2022), while research on coffee-shop third places underscores that social space is shaped by the cultural and material conditions of its users (Makhathini & Kanosvamhira, 2026; Nadizti et al., 2022).

Barriers to participation are traced at the level of personal experience and at the level of how the activity is organized. Attention covers responses from participants' social circles, differences in religious understanding, the adjustment of language, the availability of time, and the management of the activity. These aspects are used to examine the conditions that ease or hinder involvement. Efforts to overcome these barriers are then read in terms of the actions taken, the parties involved, and participants' responses to those actions.

The prior study closest to this context examines the Islamic education strategy of the NDO community through the Ngopi Senja activity in Trenggalek. Using a case-study approach, that study describes the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the activity, along with its implications for Islamic education and the religious attitudes of the millennial generation (Lestari et al., 2024). That study provides a basis for understanding the activity as a process of religious education organized by the community.

The theoretical lenses are therefore used sequentially and relationally rather than as separate explanatory silos. Third Place identifies the spatial affordances that make an informal encounter possible; dakwah counselling explains the communicative process through which religious guidance is translated into accessible dialogue; social support explains the relational mechanism of listening, trust, and peer belonging; and religious coping explains how participants draw on faith when interpreting pressure and making sense of their lives. These concepts are used as sensitizing lenses, not as a causal model. Each also has limits: Third Place can overstate neutrality and social leveling; social-support theory does not establish that

supportive interaction automatically improves well-being; and religious coping includes both supportive and conflictual forms of religiosity, so religion cannot be presumed to be beneficial in every case. The framework therefore guides interpretation while leaving room for contradiction, exclusion, and continuing struggle in the participants' accounts.

Research method

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the psychosocial and spiritual experience of young people taking part in the Ngopi Senja activity in Trenggalek Regency. Attention was directed to how participants made sense of their involvement in café-based dakwah, what this experience meant for their lives, and the obstacles they faced along with their efforts to overcome them. Each individual's experience was understood within the context of their life and their interactions while taking part in the activity.

Data collection took place from December 2025 to May 2026. The study involved five informants selected purposively: three women participants aged 24 to 30, the committee chairperson, and the mentor who also serves as a speaker. Participant inclusion required direct and repeated attendance at Ngopi Senja, sufficient involvement to reflect on the psychosocial and spiritual meaning of the activity, and willingness to discuss personal experience in an interview. Individuals who knew the activity only through publicity, had not attended directly, or had only incidental attendance that did not provide enough experiential depth were not recruited as participant informants. The two organizer informants were selected because they were directly involved in planning, delivering, and evaluating the activity. Attendance was not converted into a numerical exposure variable; repeated participation was used to ensure experiential familiarity, so the study does not claim that more frequent attendance causes deeper psychosocial or spiritual experience.

The researcher was an insider-researcher who served on the Ngopi Senja organizing committee and had attended its activities routinely for approximately two years. This prolonged engagement provided detailed knowledge of the locus, including patterns of communication, speaker-participant relations, and changes in the community over time. The same position also created a risk of confirmation bias. To manage this, the researcher practiced bracketing by recording and suspending prior assumptions, distinguishing committee knowledge from participants' own accounts, and revisiting interpretations against interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation. Triangulation, peer discussion, negative-case attention, and member checking were also used to test whether interpretations remained grounded in the participants' meanings rather than in the researcher's expectations.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Within the formal research phase, eight participant-observation sessions were documented on 18 January, 28 January, 20 February, 28 February, 11 April, 24 April, 15 May, and 20 May 2026, in addition to pre-research observations conducted in 2025. Observation covered not only activities and overt behaviour but also the language register used by participants and speakers, humour, religious terminology, patterns of turn-taking, seating arrangements, and the materials used during the sessions. These materials included religious reference works documented in the field (such as *Tazkiyatun Nafs* and other texts on spirituality), psychology-oriented reading used in preparing themes, flyers, and digital communication materials circulated through Instagram and WhatsApp. Interviews explored

participants' involvement, interpretation of the material, relationships within the community, and relevance to problems in their lives; organizer interviews addressed program aims, content adaptation, authority, obstacles, and responses. Documentation included flyers, material notes, photographs, roadmap documents, and activity information circulated through Instagram and WhatsApp.

Data management used the interactive procedures of condensation, display, and conclusion verification described by Miles et al. (2014), while the phenomenological interpretation was made explicit through steps adapted from Moustakas (1994). First, the researcher conducted epoche/bracketing through reflexive notes to identify prior expectations arising from insider involvement. Second, interview transcripts and field notes were read repeatedly and significant statements concerning lived experience were treated as initial horizons. Third, overlapping statements were clustered into meaning units and then into themes across participants. Fourth, textural descriptions were developed to identify what participants experienced, while structural descriptions examined how café space, social relationships, and religious dialogue shaped those experiences. Finally, the textural and structural descriptions were synthesized to formulate the essence of the psychosocial-spiritual experience. Miles et al.'s procedures were used to organize and verify the material; they did not replace the phenomenological focus on lived meaning.

The credibility of the findings was examined through source, technique, and time triangulation; prolonged engagement; peer discussion; attention to negative or contradictory cases; and member checking. Participants' accounts were compared with organizer accounts, observation results, and documentation to identify both consistency and differences in perspective. Documentation supported claims about the implementation of the activity, content, and participation, whereas interpretations of inner conditions remained anchored in participants' own accounts. Because the participant informants were regular attendees who acknowledged meaningful experiences, the findings primarily represent active participants and cannot be generalized to people who attended once, disengaged, or chose not to return.

Consent was obtained verbally from each informant at the start of the interview. This consent covered the conduct of the interview, its recording, and the use of real names. Reporting of age characteristics is presented in grouped form to limit the disclosure of personal details.

Results

The results show a relationship between the atmosphere of the study sessions, conversation within the community, and how participants come to understand the issues in their lives. The three participants each recounted a different experience shaped by their own background and needs. The accounts of the mentor and the committee chairperson complement these experiences with explanations of how the activity is organized, the direction of mentoring, and the obstacles they face.

The café as a space for religious encounter

Della, Indah, and Nabila each came to Ngopi Senja through different needs. Della joined at a friend's invitation after finishing her tertiary education. At the time, she had no fixed activity and wanted to fill the emptiness of her routine. Indah was looking for a new environment after

resigning from her job in Surabaya and returning to Trenggalek. She learned of the activity through a flyer on social media. Nabila brought with her a background in pesantren (Islamic boarding school) education and wanted to maintain a religious learning environment.

For Della, her first experience attending a study session cultivated a comfort that made her want to return. She linked this comfort to the light, easily digestible material and to a meeting atmosphere that suited her needs.

Awalnya saya datang ke kegiatan ini karena diajak oleh seorang teman yang memang sudah lebih dahulu rutin mengikuti kajian. Pada saat itu saya baru saja menyelesaikan pendidikan di perguruan tinggi dan sedang berada pada fase transisi sebagai fresh graduate. Di masa tersebut, saya belum memiliki aktivitas yang benar-benar tetap sehingga cukup sering merasakan kekosongan dalam rutinitas sehari-hari. Ajakan dari teman kemudian menjadi kesempatan bagi saya untuk mencoba mengikuti lingkungan dan kegiatan yang baru. Ketika pertama kali mengikuti kajian, saya merasakan suasana yang berbeda dari yang saya bayangkan sebelumnya. Saya merasa cukup nyaman dan perlahan menemukan kecocokan dengan lingkungan yang ada. Materi yang disampaikan terasa lebih mudah dipahami karena dikemas dengan cara yang ringan dan dekat dengan pengalaman sehari-hari. Hal tersebut membuat saya lebih mudah mengikuti pembahasan serta menikmati proses kajian tanpa merasa terbebani. (Della Septa, participant)

Nabila viewed the activity as a continuation of the learning experience she already had. The café concept caught her attention, while its religious orientation gave her a reason to sustain her involvement.

Latar belakang saya sebagai anak pesantren menjadi salah satu alasan yang mendorong saya untuk mengikuti kegiatan ini. Sejak awal, saya memiliki keinginan untuk tetap berada dalam lingkungan yang sejalan dengan nilai-nilai keagamaan yang telah saya pelajari selama menempuh pendidikan di pesantren. Oleh karena itu, ketika mengetahui adanya kegiatan dakwah yang diselenggarakan dengan konsep yang berbeda, yakni memanfaatkan kafe sebagai ruang kajian, saya langsung merasa tertarik untuk mengenalnya lebih jauh. Ketertarikan tersebut muncul karena bagi saya kegiatan ini tidak hanya menawarkan sesuatu yang baru dari segi konsep dan tempat pelaksanaannya, tetapi juga tetap menghadirkan nilai-nilai yang selama ini saya anggap penting. Meskipun dikemas dalam suasana yang lebih santai dan dekat dengan kehidupan anak muda, saya melihat bahwa substansi kajian yang disampaikan tetap mengarah pada pembelajaran dan penguatan pemahaman keagamaan. Hal itu membuat saya merasa bahwa kegiatan ini mampu menggabungkan suasana yang nyaman dengan nilai-nilai yang saya cari dalam sebuah lingkungan belajar. Dari pengalaman mengikuti kajian tersebut, saya merasa menemukan ruang yang sesuai untuk terus bertumbuh dan mengembangkan diri. Kegiatan ini memberikan kesempatan bagi saya untuk menambah wawasan, mengikuti proses pembelajaran yang berkelanjutan, serta memperoleh pengalaman baru melalui interaksi dengan berbagai peserta yang hadir. Karena itu, tanpa banyak keraguan saya memutuskan untuk bergabung dan hingga saat ini masih terus terlibat dalam berbagai kegiatan yang diselenggarakan. (Nabila, participant)

The organizers chose cafés in order to reach social spaces already familiar to young people. Dedi and Hanif explained that their earlier mosque-based sessions attracted relatively few young participants, so they developed an activity with no entrance fee and formally open attendance. Yet “free” participation did not mean completely costless participation. In practice, most attendees ordered at least one drink or water because the activity took place in a

commercial café; the venues used were relatively inexpensive, with typical drink or simple-menu prices during the field period roughly around IDR 5,000–25,000. Purchasing was not imposed as a condition of attendance, but the consumption norm remained part of the setting.

Field observation also showed that regular attendees were not a socially random cross-section of all young people in Trenggalek. Many were university students or recent graduates, and several participants displayed forms of contemporary hijrah-oriented piety. The social networks around organizers and regular participants also had a recognizable Muhammadiyah-oriented/reformist affinity, although Ngopi Senja did not formally present itself as a Muhammadiyah program or require an organizational identity. This distinction is important: the activity was formally open, but the café lifestyle, peer networks, and religious-cultural familiarity could still function as informal filters on who felt that the space was “for them.”

The feeling of being accepted was a concern for organizers from the earliest meetings. Dedi explained that some prospective participants worried about being labelled as belonging to a particular group if they attended a study session. The organizers allowed them to attend without questioning their organizational background or their past. In the course of observation, participants were seen contacting the admin to ask about the theme, schedule, and how to join the event. This kind of exchange reflected a process of getting to know the activity before attending. For the organizers, building trust also meant giving a chance to learn to people who still felt awkward around a study-session environment.

Semakin kami istiqomah menghadirkan sebuah pendekatan yang baru pelan-pelan mulai muncul hasil yang positif. Anak-anak muda yang awalnya hanya datang karena penasaran mulai merasa nyaman, lalu datang lagi, bahkan mengajak teman-temannya ikut hadir. Dari yang awalnya hanya keresahan kecil, akhirnya berkembang menjadi gerakan komunitas yang sampai sekarang terus berjalan dan bertumbuh. Hasil awalnya ini membuat kami senang, sebagaimana yang saya jelaskan sebelumnya, kami hanya ingin untuk membuat ruang kajian santai yang bisa diterima anak muda tanpa rasa takut atau tekanan. Kami ingin menciptakan tempat di mana mereka bisa datang apa adanya, bisa cerita tentang hidupnya, bisa bertanya soal agama tanpa takut dihakimi, dan bisa belajar pelan-pelan dalam suasana yang nyaman. Makanya sejak awal Ngopi Senja memang dirancang bukan sekadar sebagai forum kajian biasa, tapi sebagai gerakan pendekatan dakwah yang mencoba masuk ke dunia anak muda. (Dedi Mahendra, mentor and speaker)

Della herself still regarded the mosque as a place with its own sanctity and code of conduct. She felt that the café atmosphere gave her flexibility to speak, to respond to the material, and to enjoy humour. Her account shows that comfort was tied to how she positioned herself within the gathering. She linked the suitability of the venue to the opportunity to take part in conversation, so that the activity felt closer to her needs as a participant.

In field observation, participants sat close to the speaker and followed the session in an atmosphere resembling a casual hangout. Photographs of the activity show this informal seating arrangement. The Ngopi Senja 2026 roadmap also lists cafés as target venues. The organizers have used Teras Brawijaya, Panama Café, Café Veteran 44, and Pendopo Garden, as well as mosque courtyards arranged with a relaxed meeting atmosphere. This set of data reflects the organizers' effort to bring together social habits with religious learning. Figure 2 shows the seating arrangement that brings the speaker close to participants.



Figure 2. Proximity of speaker and participants' seating in the Ngopi Senja sessions.

Religious dialogue close to real-life concerns

The closeness of the material to everyday concerns is one reason participants enjoyed the sessions. Della highlighted the humour, the chance to ask questions, and the conversation with the speaker. She also recalled the title “Ipar Adalah Maut” (“A Sibling-in-Law Can Be Deadly”), which she recognized from social media. Discussion of relationships, feelings, and the search for a partner made her feel that the session touched her own personal concerns.

Aku suka banget sama tema-tema yang diangkat di kajian ini. Kadang aku sampai penasaran, sebenarnya mereka dapat inspirasi judul dari mana, karena menurutku banyak yang unik dan jarang kepikiran sebelumnya. Beberapa judul bahkan langsung menarik perhatian sejak pertama kali aku lihat di flyer. Salah satu yang paling aku ingat adalah judul “Ipar adalah Maut” yang waktu itu memang sedang viral di media sosial. Menurutku pemilihan judul seperti itu membuat orang jadi lebih tertarik untuk datang dan mencari tahu isi pembahasannya. Yang aku suka, mereka bukan sekadar ikut-ikutan tren, tetapi bisa mengaitkan sesuatu yang sedang ramai diperbincangkan dengan materi yang lebih reflektif dan bermakna. Jadi ketika melihat judulnya, aku merasa dekat karena topiknya familiar, tetapi setelah mengikuti kajiannya ternyata ada banyak sudut pandang dan pelajaran yang bisa diambil dari tema tersebut. Selain itu, tema-tema yang dibahas juga terasa sangat dekat dengan kehidupan anak muda sekarang. Banyak pembahasan yang berangkat dari pengalaman sehari-hari, hal-hal yang sering dipikirkan, atau persoalan yang memang sedang dialami oleh orang-orang seusia kami. Apalagi di usia 20-an seperti aku, topik tentang hubungan, patah hati, perasaan, pencarian pasangan, dan berbagai dinamika percintaan menjadi sesuatu yang cukup relevan. Karena itulah aku sering merasa materi yang disampaikan seperti mewakili kegelisahan, pertanyaan, atau pengalaman yang sedang aku rasakan sendiri. Hal tersebut membuatku lebih mudah terhubung dengan materi dan lebih tertarik untuk mengikuti kajian sampai selesai.. (Della Septa, participant)

Dedi explained that he begins his material from situations familiar to participants, such as fatigue from work, pressure from study, or family problems. He tries to understand participants' circumstances before connecting these to the management of the heart and closeness to Allah.

Biasanya materi dimulai dari kasus umum yang sering dialami anak muda sehari-hari, seperti cuma pengen denger kajian aja, gabut di rumah, atau lagi stres. Pembahasan awal sengaja dibuat ringan dan dekat dengan realita mereka supaya muncul perasaan, “Oh iya ini saya banget,” atau “ternyata wajar kalau saya pernah merasa seperti ini.” Pada tahap ini, saya tidak langsung membawa dalil yang berat, tetapi lebih fokus membangun suasana nyaman dan membuat jamaah merasa

dipahami terlebih dahulu. Sebab ketika seseorang merasa dipahami, mereka biasanya lebih terbuka untuk mendengarkan pembahasan selanjutnya. Setelah dakwah mulai di terima barulah materi diarahkan secara perlahan kepada solusi yang lebih mendalam. Di bagian akhir biasanya mulai dimasukkan pandangan Islam tentang cara mengelola hati, menjaga emosi, dan mendekat kepada Allah ketika menghadapi tekanan hidup. Jadi strategi Ngopi Senja itu bukan langsung memberikan solusi di awal, tetapi memahami dulu kondisi jamaahnya, lalu pelan-pelan mengarahkan mereka kepada solusi spiritual yang lebih dalam. Itu sebabnya materi di Ngopi Senja terasa lebih mudah diterima anak muda, karena pendekatannya dibangun secara bertahap.. (Dedi Mahendra, mentor and speaker)

The researcher observed participants responding to one another and continuing to ask questions after the session, especially when the material touched on relationships and partnership. Photographs of the activity captured moments of laughter, while flyers showed the use of popular titles. Conversations about work, economic matters, and personal issues also continued through WhatsApp. The forum gave participants room to bring their own experience into the religious discussion. Figure 3 captures participants' laughter during one of the sessions.

Observation also recorded a moment of partial disagreement that helps clarify the limits of the activity's dialogical character. In one discussion, the speaker associated divorce primarily with weak faith. A participant responded that marital breakdown could not be reduced to faith alone and pointed to economic pressure and household financial conflict as additional causes. The speaker continued to defend the importance of faith but allowed the alternative explanation to remain in the discussion. Such exchanges were uncommon, but this case shows that participants could negotiate particular points rather than merely repeat the speaker's interpretation; at the same time, the speaker retained a stronger position as the person recognized as possessing religious knowledge.



Figure 3. Participants' laughter during a Ngopi Senja session.

The committee discusses participants' needs when selecting themes. Documentation of material preparation includes discussion of forgiving the past and its connection to religious references. Dedi combines religious explanation with psychological and social perspectives he has studied. In practice, he links issues such as envy, the need for recognition, and the comparison of achievements to how participants go about their lives.

Popular titles function as an entry point toward more specific discussion. Dedi gave the example of "Syawaland Core," used to discuss the practices of the month of Syawal and the continuation of worship after Ramadan. The title "Pelan-Pelan Pak Sopir" ("Slow Down, Driver") opened a conversation about patience in making decisions. Flyers for both activities show the use of these titles. Through such examples, the organizers connect familiar

expressions with the religious content they wish to convey, then invite participants to weigh how it applies to their own lives.

The organizers also encounter limits in adapting their material. Hanif once tried to deliver heavier content drawing on his pesantren background. He noticed that a number of participants struggled to follow the explanation and lost focus. That experience pushed him to pay closer attention to simplicity of language. Dedi faced a similar issue when a session's theme was not well connected to the conversations then current among participants.

Self-interpretation and spiritual experience

Participants carried the conversations from the sessions back with them when facing problems outside the activity. Della described work-related pressure arising from being compared with others, and said she often dwelt on relationship problems late into the night. At one gathering, another participant's story about the pressure of comparison within a family felt close to her own situation. She later recalled that conversation when trying to compose her response to a problem.

Aku sebenarnya termasuk orang yang gampang kepikiran. Ketika ada masalah, baik yang berkaitan dengan pekerjaan maupun hubungan dengan pasangan, sering kali pikiran itu terus terbawa bahkan sampai malam hari. Kadang masalah yang sebenarnya sudah selesai tetap teringat dan membuatku sulit benar-benar tenang. Waktu itu aku sedang berada dalam kondisi yang cukup tertekan di tempat kerja karena merasa sering dibanding-bandingkan dengan orang lain. Situasi tersebut membuatku merasa tidak nyaman dan terus memikirkan berbagai penilaian yang datang dari sekitar. Kebetulan pada malam yang sama aku mengikuti kegiatan Ngopi Senja. Tema yang dibahas saat itu berkaitan dengan cara menghadapi tekanan hidup tanpa melupakan hubungan dengan Allah. Awalnya aku hanya datang untuk mengikuti kajian seperti biasa, tetapi ternyata materi yang disampaikan terasa cukup dekat dengan apa yang sedang aku alami. Yang paling aku ingat bukan hanya penjelasan dari pemateri, tetapi juga sesi ketika salah satu peserta membagikan pengalamannya. Ia bercerita tentang perasaan gagal dan tekanan karena sering dibanding-bandingkan oleh keluarganya. Sejak saat itu, ketika sedang merasa cemas, kecewa, atau marah karena suatu masalah, aku biasanya mencoba menenangkan diri terlebih dahulu sebelum bereaksi. Dalam beberapa momen, aku juga teringat kembali pada obrolan-obrolan yang pernah muncul di Ngopi Senja. Rasanya seperti ada pengingat yang muncul di kepala untuk tidak terburu-buru mengikuti emosi dan mencoba menjalani setiap persoalan secara lebih tenang. Kalimat sederhana seperti "jalanin aja pelan-pelan" menjadi salah satu hal yang sering teringat ketika menghadapi tekanan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. (Della Septa, participant)

Nabila faced pressure while helping to look after children at the pesantren. She felt anxious about deciding how to act because she had to understand a wide range of characters and emotional needs. The material from the sessions gave her a perspective she used in facing this responsibility, even though the speaker did not always address child-rearing directly.

Salah satu pengalaman yang paling membuatku merasa stres dan cemas adalah ketika aku dan beberapa teman mendapat amanah untuk mendampingi serta mengurus anak-anak di pondok. Saat itu, kami merasa menghadapi tanggung jawab yang cukup besar karena harus berinteraksi dan memahami berbagai karakter anak, sementara kami sendiri belum memiliki pengalaman sebagai orang tua. Kondisi tersebut sering membuatku bingung dalam menentukan sikap yang tepat, terutama

ketika menghadapi permasalahan atau kebutuhan emosional anak-anak yang beragam. Di satu sisi, kami ingin memastikan bahwa anak-anak merasa nyaman, aman, dan mendapatkan pendampingan yang baik. Namun di sisi lain, kami juga berusaha menjaga kondisi diri sendiri agar tidak terlalu terbebani oleh berbagai tanggung jawab yang ada. Situasi itu terkadang menimbulkan kekhawatiran tersendiri karena muncul pertanyaan-pertanyaan mengenai apakah cara yang kami lakukan sudah tepat atau belum dalam mendampingi mereka. Dalam kondisi seperti itu, kajian yang diikuti di Ngopi Senja cukup membantu bagiku. Beberapa materi dan pembahasan yang disampaikan memberikan sudut pandang baru dalam melihat persoalan yang sedang dihadapi. Meskipun tidak selalu membahas persoalan pengasuhan secara langsung, ada banyak nilai dan pemahaman yang bisa diterapkan ketika menghadapi tekanan maupun tanggung jawab dalam mendampingi anak-anak. Dari sana aku mulai mendapatkan gambaran mengenai bagaimana seharusnya menyikapi berbagai situasi dengan lebih tenang dan tidak terburu-buru dalam mengambil keputusan. Karena itu, ketika muncul masalah atau situasi yang membuatku stres terkait anak-anak di pondok, aku merasa memiliki bekal pemahaman yang bisa dijadikan pegangan. Setidaknya, aku menjadi lebih mampu mengelola pikiran dan tidak langsung larut dalam kecemasan yang berlebihan. Pengalaman mengikuti kajian tersebut membantuku untuk melihat permasalahan dengan lebih tenang sehingga tidak mudah terjebak dalam overthinking ketika menghadapi berbagai tantangan selama mendampingi anak-anak. (Nabila, participant)

During the interview, the researcher noted Nabila's calm tone and expression as she described her experience of caring for the children. Documentation of conversations also includes her questions to the researcher about issues concerning the pesantren students. This evidence reflects her willingness to talk about difficulties and to seek guidance. Nabila herself connected the sessions with a foundation of understanding for managing her thoughts when facing responsibility.

Nabila's unease is also tied to her effort to balance the children's needs with her own capacity. She wanted to provide good care, yet still questioned whether her approach was appropriate, given that she had no experience as a parent. In this account, calm means gaining something to hold on to amid uncertainty. She connected the discussions from the sessions to everyday decisions at the pesantren, while continuing to seek guidance on issues that arose in the course of her caregiving.

Della's experience also touched on how she viewed herself. She had previously often compared her career and achievements with those of her friends, then focused on her own shortcomings. Conversation within the sessions brought her into contact with other people's stories of similar worries and difficulties. She began to see that a person's outward appearance does not capture the whole of their life experience. This awareness accompanied her process of easing the harsh judgment she directed at herself.

Indah linked self-acceptance to her relationship with God. She learned to view failure through a belief in God's presence and compassion, while acknowledging that this process still involves difficulty.

Sekarang aku mulai belajar lebih menerima diri sendiri dan nggak terlalu keras sama diri sendiri, walaupun kadang kalau lagi capek aku masih suka nyalahin diri lagi. Dari sini aku belajar, bahwa Tuhan selalu hadir dalam setiap proses hidupku. Aku juga pelan-pelan belajar kembali dekat sama Tuhan dan percaya kalau kasih

sayang-Nya jauh lebih besar daripada rasa gagal yang sering aku rasakan. Pembahasan itu pernah dibahas di Ngopi Senja, dan buat aku sangat relate. (Indah Juliana, participant)

Observation notes include the speaker's explanation of Allah's compassion for someone experiencing failure, exhaustion, and limitation. A summary of the material also records the theme of self-acceptance. In Indah's experience, this discussion offered a way to understand her sense of failure while also drawing her closer to God. Her admission of a tendency to blame herself when tired shows that she is still living through this process.

The organizers link discussion of inner conditions to everyday religious practice. Dedi mentioned prayer (salat) and improving the recitation of Al-Fatihah as part of foundational learning. In observation, the researcher also noted material on gratitude, self-reflection (muhasabah), and the relationship between human beings and God. Documentation of the material presented includes the themes of gratitude and self-reflection. This material provided the religious context for conversations about self-acceptance and life's pressures. While the organizers emphasized the direction of worship-based mentoring, participants spoke more extensively about what the sessions meant for the problems they were currently living through. The three experiences point to different forms of meaning-making. Della emphasized her response to pressure and the comparison of achievement, Nabila emphasized the responsibility of caregiving, while Indah linked self-acceptance to spiritual belief. Each described change through the concrete situations they faced. The sessions became one source of conversation and understanding they drew on in responding to those situations.

Friendship and involvement in the community

Repeated attendance built participants' closeness to the community. Della gained the chance to meet new people and felt comfortable continuing to learn and interact. Indah viewed friendship as an important need in adult life. She recalled a warm, easy-going atmosphere despite participants' diverse backgrounds and levels of religious understanding.

Salah satu perubahan cara pandang yang paling aku rasakan setelah mengikuti Ngopi Senja adalah kesadaran bahwa memiliki lingkungan pertemanan yang positif merupakan kebutuhan yang sangat penting di usia dewasa. Melalui berbagai pengalaman selama mengikuti kajian, aku mulai memahami bahwa lingkungan sosial yang sehat dapat memberikan dukungan dan pengaruh yang baik dalam menjalani kehidupan sehari-hari. Menurutku, karakter Ngopi Senja cukup unik karena mampu menciptakan ruang yang inklusif dan terbuka bagi berbagai kalangan. Aku sering melihat peserta dengan latar belakang dan tingkat pemahaman keagamaan yang berbeda, termasuk mereka yang secara penampilan terlihat sangat religius. Namun, perbedaan tersebut tidak menimbulkan jarak dalam pergaulan. Justru suasana yang terbangun terasa akrab, sehingga kami dapat berinteraksi dan membaur tanpa rasa canggung maupun sekat sosial. Pengalaman itu membuatku semakin menghargai pentingnya komunitas yang positif. Karena merasa telah memperoleh banyak manfaat, baik berupa relasi pertemanan maupun pengalaman yang berharga, muncul keinginan dalam diriku untuk terlibat lebih jauh. Salah satu bentuk dukungan yang ingin aku berikan adalah bergabung sebagai panitia Ngopi Senja. Bagiku, keterlibatan tersebut menjadi cara untuk ikut berkontribusi dalam menghadirkan lingkungan sosial yang positif bagi lebih banyak anak muda, sebagaimana yang telah aku rasakan selama ini. (Indah Juliana, participant)

The researcher observed a veiled (niqab-wearing) participant mixing freely with other

participants during the activity. Photo documentation captures this interaction. This observation provides context for Indah's account of friendship across differences in religious appearance. Her wish to help organize the activity reflects a form of involvement that grew out of the experience of benefiting from the community. Figure 4 shows a veiled participant interacting with other participants.



Figure 4. Interaction among participants of varied religious appearance.

The organizers provide avenues for involvement through publicity, administrative tasks, event preparation, and thematic research. Field notes and documentation of cadre development show the distribution of roles among active participants. Dedi explained that serving on the committee gives participants a chance to learn responsibility and teamwork. The organizers hope that this involvement will help regenerate the community.

Dedi explained that participants are beginning to take on responsibility through a variety of tasks, including helping with communication with new participants and discussing plans for upcoming themes. The researcher observed the organizers adjusting the distribution of tasks to members' abilities. Closeness formed during the activity then created room for learning to work together. This account complements Indah's wish to contribute after benefiting from friendship within the community. The organizers prepared opportunities for involvement, while participants connected those opportunities to their own experience of becoming part of the community. Figure 5 documents a meeting between the mentor and a new generation in the process of cadre development.



Figure 5. Meeting between the mentor and a new generation in the Ngopi Senja cadre-development process.

The mentor also explained a learning pathway leading from general sessions toward more specialized study at the mosque and involvement in management. The researcher observed thematic sessions at the Al-Furqon Mosque, while the 2026 roadmap sets out plans for deeper study for interested participants. This pathway illustrates the direction the organizers envision for mentoring. The accounts of the three participants each highlight distinct experiences and needs, so that their respective journeys within the community retain their own particular

character.

Obstacles and efforts to overcome them

The experience of attending Ngopi Senja also included unwelcome reactions from participants' own social circles. Della recalled feeling uneasy and self-conscious when a friend teased her as a "pious kid." She chose to respond to such comments lightly.

Kalau hambatan sosial atau gesekan kecil dari lingkungan luar itu kadang muncul dari celetukan atau sindiran temen-temen di luar lingkaran komunitas ini, Mas. Kalau respon keluarga di rumah sih alhamdulillah santai dan mendukung penuh ya karena kegiatannya positif. Tapi tetep aja, sesekali ada temen main aku yang tahu aku sering ikutan acara Ngopi Senja langsung ngeledek pake kalimat yang agak nyindir kayak, 'Wah, Della sekarang gayanya udah beda ya, udah jadi anak alim nih.' Walaupun di awal-awal ucapan atau ledakan sekat sosial kayak gitu sempet bikin kuping panas, risih, dan agak minder, tapi hambatan sosial itu sekarang aku siasati dengan cara dibawa santai aja, aku senyumin, aku bawa ketawa, dan nggak mau aku masukin ke dalam hati biar nggak ngerusak niat baikku.. (Della Septa, participant)

Indah encountered the view that attending sessions at a café was merely following a trend. She tried to limit the influence of such comments. Her family did not forbid her involvement; her mother even occasionally joined her. Field notes and documentation of the activity show that Della and Indah continued to attend the sessions. Both managed the reactions of those around them while continuing an activity they considered worthwhile.

At the organizational level, Dedi noted objections regarding the organizational background of speakers. Hanif faced requests to display an organization's logo and restrictions on the use of certain venues. Documented conversations record issues of permits and cancelled events. The organizers responded through communication with the relevant parties while maintaining the community's openness.

Dari awal kami lebih menekankan keterbukaan, bukan langsung soal identitas atau label tertentu. Makanya kalau ditanya kenapa harus pakai logo ormas tertentu? Itukan malah jadi pertanyaan penting bagi kami. Memang harus ya? Karena di satu sisi kami juga paham, pakai identitas ormas itu ada manfaatnya. Bisa lebih mudah menjaring orang, , bahkan kadang event juga jadi lebih cepat ramai karena sudah ada basisnya. Tapi di sisi lain, kami juga melihat ada konsekuensi yang perlu dipikirkan. Ketika sejak awal sudah terlalu kuat labelnya, yang datang biasanya akan cenderung berasal dari lingkungan yang sama. Akhirnya ruangnya jadi tidak benar-benar terbuka, tapi lebih ke ruang internal yang diperluas. Padahal yang kami cari itu justru kebalikannya kami ingin Ngopi Senja ini jadi pintu masuk untuk anak-anak muda yang mungkin sebelumnya tidak dekat dengan kajian, bahkan yang tidak punya latar belakang organisasi apa pun. Karena itu kami merasa, kalau terlalu cepat mengikat diri dengan satu identitas, ada risiko pesan utamanya jadi tertutup duluan oleh label. Orang belum sempat kenal isinya, tapi sudah keburu punya persepsi dari kemasannya. Jadi di titik ini kami tetap berusaha sesuai prinsip kami yaitu berdiri di atas semua golongan, supaya ruang ini tetap terasa netral, terbuka, dan bisa diakses oleh siapa saja tanpa harus merasa harus jadi bagian dari siapa dulu. (Shofiyuddin Hanif, committee chairperson)

Differences of opinion also arose among committee members. Dedi explained that members brought different organizational backgrounds and religious understandings to decisions about the concept of an event or the choice of speaker. In observed committee

meetings, some members emphasized religious substance, while others paid closer attention to how things were communicated. Documentation of these discussions shows the process of offering input. Dedi kept the direction of the activity on track through conversations in evaluation meetings and on WhatsApp, while reminding the committee to keep participants' needs at the centre of attention. Figure 6 shows a meeting between the mentor and the committee in which direction was given.



Figure 6. The mentor providing direction to the Ngopi Senja committee

The organizers also revisit their approach when participants stop attending for a time. Dedi acknowledged that study, work, friendships, and burnout all affect attendance. He regards the fit of the material and closeness to the community as things that must be continually worked at. Because participants have other study sessions to choose from, he treats their responses as material for evaluating both the delivery of content and the atmosphere of mentoring. Committee communication records show efforts to maintain relationships through both face-to-face meetings and online conversation.

konsistensi anak muda memang tidak bisa dibangun secara instan. Fase kaum muda hingga dewasa awal adalah masa pencarian jati diri, sehingga wajar apabila semangat mereka terkadang naik turun karena dipengaruhi kuliah, pekerjaan, lingkungan pertemanan, bahkan kondisi emosional pribadi. Namun, ketika mereka mulai merasa cocok dengan kajian seperti ini serta menemukan ketenangan emosional dan nilai spiritual dari komunitas ini, biasanya mereka akan kembali lagi meskipun sempat beberapa kali menghilang. Karena itu, menurut saya tugas terbesar bagi para pembina bukan sekadar menghadirkan keramaian atau konsep yang menarik, tetapi bagaimana mampu memberikan nilai spiritual yang benar-benar menyentuh kebutuhan batin anak muda. Anak muda hari ini memiliki banyak pilihan kajian dan akses dakwah yang luas melalui media sosial, sehingga mereka secara tidak langsung membandingkan pengalaman yang mereka dapatkan di komunitas dengan kajian-kajian lain di luar. Hal tersebut menjadi evaluasi bagi kami agar terus memperbaiki kualitas penyampaian, pendekatan, serta suasana pembinaan. Bisa jadi bukan mereka yang sepenuhnya kurang istiqamah, tetapi kami yang belum sepenuhnya mampu menghadirkan ruang belajar yang sesuai dengan harapan, bahasa, dan kebutuhan mereka. Oleh sebab itu, selaku pembina saya dituntut tidak hanya hadir sebagai penyampai materi, tetapi juga sebagai figur yang mampu membangun kedekatan emosional, memberikan keteladanan, serta menghadirkan dakwah yang relevan dengan realitas kehidupan anak muda. Ketika nilai spiritual disampaikan dengan pendekatan yang baik maka proses istiqamah akan lebih mudah tumbuh secara alami. (Dedi Mahendra, mentor and speaker)

The busy schedules of participants, speakers, and committee members also affect the continuity of the activity. Hanif explained that the committee adjusts its schedule to the

availability of speakers. Limited manpower has driven the recruitment of volunteers. At the time of interview, he mentioned that around six to seven people had joined, with roles divided among creative work, administrative communication, documentation, and hosting. Documentation of recruitment and observation notes show the organizers' effort to broaden support for running the activity.

Limited manpower is felt most acutely in design and publicity work. Hanif sometimes makes the flyers himself, asks Dedi for help, or reaches out to people outside the committee. Volunteer recruitment has since opened opportunities for young people with spare time. The organizers divide creative work for researching themes and drafting captions, administrative work for maintaining communication with participants, and documentation work for recording the activity. At the time of interview, Hanif mentioned that only two people were ready to serve as hosts. This division of roles reflects an effort to broaden the committee while also needing to build members' capacity gradually, so that the activity does not continue to depend on the same few people.

Dedi tries to bridge the language gap by interacting directly within youth activities. He takes part in conversations, meetings, and joint activities in order to understand the terms and topics young people use. Documentation of the activity shows collaboration with SMA Negeri 1 Trenggalek (a public senior high school), while committee summaries show the use of popular language in the material. This effort complements the tracking of trends through social media and helps the speaker adapt examples to participants' experience.

Hanif is still searching for an approach to reach male participants. He observes that women attend more consistently, while some of his male friends admit to feeling shy or uncomfortable attending the sessions. Observation notes and photographs of the gatherings likewise show a larger presence of women. This finding indicates that the organizers still face a challenge of reach even though the activity is open to everyone. Table 1 summarizes the obstacles and responses that emerged in the data. Figure 7 shows the larger presence of women at one of the documented gatherings.



Figure 7. Composition of participant attendance at one of the Ngopi Senja activities.

Table 1. Obstacles and efforts to overcome them

Obstacle	Form in the data	Response and development
Reactions from social circles	Teasing about personal change; the view that the sessions are merely a trend.	Della and Indah limit the influence of such comments and continue to attend the activity.
Group identity and differing views	Objections to the speaker, requests for a logo, restrictions on venue use, and differing views within the committee.	The mentor maintains communication, provides direction, and emphasizes openness across groups.

Attendance and scheduling	Busy schedules among participants and conflicting agendas for speakers.	The committee adjusts the schedule. The mentor maintains communication and evaluates the fit of the approach.
Organizing manpower	Limited committee time, particularly for creative and technical work.	Organizers recruit volunteers, divide tasks, and involve active participants.
Language and relevance of material	Differences in terminology across generations and fast-changing conversational trends.	The speaker interacts directly with young people, takes part in school activities, and adapts language and examples.
Involvement of male participants	Less consistent attendance; some prospective participants feel shy.	Organizers are still searching for an approach; the data do not yet show a settled solution.

Source: interview, observation, and documentation data.

Discussion

The experience of attending Ngopi Senja shows the interconnection between social acceptance, the interpretation of personal problems, and one's relationship with religion. Participants brought different needs into the activity, then found the parts of the conversation and the relationships that were relevant to their lives. What their experiences share is the opportunity to learn about religion while still carrying their own anxieties and limitations. This discussion places that experience within the context of the space of encounter, the management of life's pressures, the limits of openness, and the sustainability of the community. The relationship among these aspects explains the essence of the psychosocial and spiritual experience, its relevance to participants' lives, and the obstacles and efforts organizers make to sustain the activity.

The essence of the experience in intimate, meaningful encounter

Ngopi Senja's closeness to participants' lives began through diverse paths of encounter. Della came through a friend's invitation during the period after finishing university, Indah found information about the activity after returning from Surabaya, while Nabila brought a need to continue the religious learning she had already come to know through the pesantren environment. This diversity shows that the activity accommodates the need for social life, adjustment to a new stage of life, and the continuity of religious learning all at once. Their experiences therefore do not fit neatly into a single narrative of moving from a life distant from religion toward a religious one. Each participant's religious history and everyday concerns shaped how they each found meaning in the same activity.

The café atmosphere provided an initial point of closeness through the habit of sitting together, relaxed conversation, and relatively close proximity to the speaker. The concept of the third place helps make sense of what this informal encounter means for social life outside the home and the workplace. However, applying this concept to Ngopi Senja requires caution because the activity is a scheduled religious gathering with a mentoring purpose rather than a neutral, unstructured hangout. Oldenburg's image of the third place as a social "leveler" is especially problematic when the venue is commercial. Studies of café-based third places in the Global South show that belonging and social connection can coexist with socioeconomic differences in access and use (Makhathini & Kanosvamhira, 2026). The Ngopi Senja data therefore support the usefulness of Third Place for understanding informal encounter, but not the assumption that a café automatically dissolves class boundaries.

The meaning of a space also follows the values and expectations of the people who use

it. A study of third-place choices among young Muslims shows that comfort in interacting intersects with the need to perform worship and with social norms (Nadizti et al., 2022). At Ngopi Senja, the relaxed atmosphere acquires religious meaning through the material presented, the speaker's demeanour, and the opportunity to ask questions. Della still holds to the sanctity of the mosque even as she explains the comfort of attending sessions at a café. This experience shows a complementary relationship between a house of worship and an everyday space of encounter. The café opens one pathway of involvement that fits participants' needs at a particular moment.

Social acceptance gives depth to this closeness with place. Participants can attend with different appearances, degrees of religious knowledge, and problems, and then meet others without being expected to present themselves as people who have already fully resolved their lives. In a phenomenological reading, the feeling of being accepted is a meaning of the relationship they experience. The seating arrangement and the warmth of the event support that experience, while the responses of the speaker and fellow participants shape how participants feel that relationship. Physical comfort and interpersonal acceptance thus work together in their experience.

The dialogical character of the sessions allows participants to connect the teaching to their work, family, relationships, and worries about the future. Humour and popular themes help open attention, while a willingness to listen and to respond sustains the depth of the conversation. Research on adult religious study circles likewise shows the role of everyday language, storytelling, and preachers' sensitivity to participants' circumstances in religious learning (Minangsih & Fatmawati, 2026). This parallel clarifies that the quality of relationship can develop across various dakwah settings. The essence of the Ngopi Senja experience lies in an encounter that gives participants room to show up as themselves, to voice their needs, and to interpret their lives through religious conversation that feels close at hand. Research on hijrah communities in Bandung similarly describes the use of personal stories, familiar language, and direct mentoring to connect religious messages with young people's concerns (Yusuf, 2025). This comparison places Ngopi Senja within a broader pattern of relational communication in youth dakwah.

The dialogical format should nevertheless not be romanticized as an authority-free space. The divorce discussion described in the findings illustrates a bounded form of disagreement: a participant challenged a single-cause religious explanation by introducing economic and relational complexity, while the speaker maintained the importance of his religious argument. This does not provide evidence of coercive "soft indoctrination," because participants could question and qualify the message and no pressure to formally join an organization was observed. At the same time, it would also be inaccurate to describe the forum as completely free reflection. The speaker remained an older and more religiously knowledgeable figure whose interpretation carried symbolic authority. Research on religious leadership in Java similarly shows how recognized religious knowledge and charisma can structure asymmetrical relations between teachers and followers (Siregar et al., 2013). Ngopi Senja is therefore better understood as guided dialogue: participants have interpretive agency, but that agency operates within an unequal relationship of religious authority.

Peer relationships also provide a setting for religious learning. Research among Muslim youth activists in Bima found that discussions and training within peer groups and student

organizations were important sources for developing and confirming religious understanding (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023). Whereas that study focused on religious knowledge and identity, the Ngopi Senja accounts show how shared conversation helps participants connect religious messages with personal concerns. Together, these findings draw attention to the relationships through which young people interpret religious teaching.

Making sense of life's pressures through relationships and religious belief

The relevance of Ngopi Senja to participants' lives shows up in how they read their problems and respond to their circumstances. Della connected the message of the sessions to the pressure of comparison in achievement and to her experience in personal relationships. Another participant's story brought her into contact with a worry that resembled her own. The message of taking life slowly then became a reminder when she faced pressure. This process shows the connection between hearing other people's experiences, reconsidering the judgments one makes of oneself, and pausing before responding to a problem. The meaning of the sessions resurfaced when participants were away from the activity itself.

Social support is the most prominent psychosocial process in these accounts. Participants repeatedly describe being listened to, encountering others with comparable problems, gaining alternative perspectives, and developing a sense of belonging. The stress-buffering framework helps explain how available relationships can shape a person's appraisal of pressure (Cohen & Wills, 1985), but this study did not test a buffering effect statistically and does not interpret the findings as treatment for social anxiety. Self-acceptance and emotion regulation appear as secondary psychosocial processes that develop within this relational context. Identity formation remains relevant to early adulthood, but the data in this study more directly support peer belonging and relational support than a distinct process of identity reconstruction.

For Nabila, the need for guidance was tied to the responsibility of caring for children in the pesantren environment. She faced situations that demanded decisions even though her own experience as a caregiver was still limited. Religious conversation provided a place to weigh her responses and to find something to hold on to in carrying out that responsibility. This experience broadens the meaning of dakwah's relevance from the fit of a theme toward the usefulness of a message in a concrete situation. Religion took on meaning as participants connected it to how they treated others, restrained impulsive responses, and considered the consequences of everyday action.

Religious belief also provided a source for interpreting the self. Indah linked accepting her own limitations to an understanding of God's compassion. This experience can be read through the concept of religious coping, that is, the use of religious resources in facing pressure and searching for meaning. The literature distinguishes coping orientations that involve closeness and spiritual support from struggles involving conflict or a burdensome religious judgment of the self (Pargament et al., 2011). Indah's account offers an example of using belief as a foundation for treating herself with greater leniency. This study uses that concept as an interpretive lens, without classifying participants according to scores on a coping instrument.

Self-acceptance continues to unfold amid changing circumstances. Indah still describes a tendency to blame herself when tired. This admission shows that the benefit she feels can occur alongside difficulty that remains unresolved. A study of working Muslim women in Yogyakarta shows a diversity in how religious resources are drawn on in facing life's problems (Fatimah et al., 2023). Research on university students in Portugal likewise found differing

direct and indirect relationships among religious coping, difficulties in emotion regulation, and psychological well-being; the context and cross-sectional design of that study limit any claim of a causal relationship (Graça & Brandão, 2024). Both studies help sustain attention to the diversity of these processes, without equating their populations and experiences with those of Ngopi Senja participants.

The psychosocial and spiritual implications in this study therefore lie in the availability of relationships, reminders, and frameworks of meaning that participants draw on in facing life. They describe efforts to pause, to accept their limitations, and to carry out their responsibilities with religious consideration. The data support this reading of the change participants feel, while leaving room for struggles that remain ongoing. This study has not assessed the stability of that change over the longer term, nor has it measured any change in psychological condition through clinical measures. Ngopi Senja's standing as a community of informal learning and mentoring remains the main context for reading these findings.

Community openness and the limits of participation

The feeling of being accepted within the activity meets with judgment from outside the community. Being called a "pious kid" and being viewed as merely following a trend show that other people also interpret participants' involvement in dakwah. Della chose humour to face such comments, while Indah found support from her mother. This difference in response shows that participants negotiate their religious involvement through the relationships they already hold. Support from family and friends can create room to continue attending, while social comment becomes part of an experience they must manage.

At the organizational level, the labelling of speakers, requests to display a logo, and constraints on venue use concern the recognition of identity and of dakwah authority. The community's openness also depends on other parties' willingness to accept an activity that reaches across the boundaries of their own group. Research on the hijrah community in Jember shows variation in group boundaries and practices of marginalization even among fellow Muslims (Fathiyaturrahmah et al., 2025). This finding helps make sense of the possible tension in relationships between groups. The Ngopi Senja data themselves show the organizers' experience of facing restrictions while maintaining openness, so interpretation should remain grounded in the events they describe.

The organizers' effort to explain the community's position and to build communication is ongoing work needed to maintain access. The principle of accepting diverse participants requires application in the choice of speakers, in relationships with venue owners, and in how differences of opinion are handled. Within the committee, differing emphases between depth of content and accessible language also require negotiation. Hanif's experience, when heavier material failed to hold participants' attention, shows the need to read participants' responses. The mentor's willingness to learn young people's language through direct encounter offers one way of improving this communication.

Openness also needs to be read through who attends and who remains out of reach. All three participant informants are women who attend regularly, while the organizers describe engaging male participants as a challenge. Photographs and participants' accounts support a picture of women's comfort with the activity, but do not yet explain the experience of the men who rarely attend. A study of mosque space shows that spatial arrangement and interactional norms can be linked to women's experience of participation (Aryanti et al., 2024). This

comparison is a reminder that access has both a social and a spatial dimension across different settings. For Ngopi Senja, the perspectives of prospective participants and of those who have stopped attending are still needed for the community to more fully understand the limits of its own openness.

The café format introduces another boundary that formal openness alone cannot remove. Although there was no entrance fee and menu prices were relatively low, participation generally involved the social expectation of ordering a drink and familiarity with a nongkrong-oriented café environment. The regular participant profile was also concentrated among students and recent graduates. These features suggest a form of social self-selection: young people without disposable spending, those uncomfortable in cafés, or those outside the relevant peer networks may be less likely to enter even when no one explicitly excludes them. In this sense, café-based dakwah can widen access for one segment of youth while simultaneously creating a different social filter.

Religious-cultural affinity may operate in a similar way. Ngopi Senja avoids formal organizational labeling, yet field familiarity indicated that many regular participants and organizers were socially connected to a Muhammadiyah-oriented or broader reformist milieu. This does not justify classifying Ngopi Senja as an official Muhammadiyah program. Rather, it indicates that “openness” exists within a recognizable religious-cultural ecology. Recent research on Muhammadiyah youth describes selective accommodation of contemporary culture while maintaining reformist religious commitments (Putri et al., 2026), and research on Muhammadiyah university students likewise shows selective engagement with popular culture rather than simple rejection of it (Kusuma et al., 2026). This pattern helps explain why a relaxed café format may resonate strongly with some young Muslims while feeling less familiar to others with different religious learning traditions.

The study cannot establish why some attendees did not return. No systematic follow-up interviews were conducted with people who discontinued participation, so speaker-related dissatisfaction, theological or organizational affiliation, economic considerations, schedule conflicts, or other personal reasons cannot be ranked empirically. These possibilities should therefore be treated as questions for future research rather than as explanations produced by the present data.

Sustainability through mentoring and the distribution of roles

The sustainability of Ngopi Senja involves the relationship between what the activity means to participants and the organizers' capacity to keep running it. Indah's wish to help with committee work shows the possibility that a sense of belonging can grow into a willingness to contribute. At the point captured by this study's data, that wish remains an orientation toward involvement. This experience matters because it shows the potential for volunteers to emerge from relationships that already feel meaningful, while also leaving open questions about the time, capability, and support a person needs in order to take on a role.

Limited manpower points to a concrete need for mentoring. Dependence on one particular person for publicity design, and the limited number of people able to host, indicate a concentration of skills within the committee. Volunteer recruitment brings in additional hands, while learning-by-doing determines their readiness to work. A study of four faith-based organizations in Indonesia frames recruitment, task distribution, training, and supervision, together with spiritual development and relationship management, as elements of volunteer

management (Faletahan, 2024). Applied to Ngopi Senja, this framework helps clarify that a willingness to serve requires both the opportunity to learn and responsibilities that can realistically be carried out.

New skills also require time from organizers who are already occupied with other work. A study of environmental volunteer leaders in Australia points to the importance of time and relational support, including the burden of training and mentoring volunteers (Gulliver et al., 2023). Although the organizational context differs, this issue of capacity is relevant as a point of comparison. Gradual role distribution and joint training could be a direction for Ngopi Senja's development to reduce its dependence on its principal movers. This recommendation follows from the skill limitations that appear in the data, though its success would still require evaluation in practice. Research on BKPRMI in Medan Denai documents defined organizational roles, regular evaluation, and public-speaking training as approaches to developing members' capacity (Nasution & Tanjung, 2026). These practices offer concrete points of reference for the gradual training of Ngopi Senja volunteers.

Plans for general sessions, mosque-based study, and cadre development reflect the direction of mentoring the organizers envision. The data do not yet show that every participant has gone through this entire pathway, or that the community has produced independent cadres. Cadre development therefore needs to be understood as a process still under construction. Research on community-based education within the Shift Pemuda Hijrah movement likewise treats joint involvement in activities as part of the learning experience, while noting limited evidence regarding long-term impact (Dilawati, 2025). For Ngopi Senja, the depth of learning and the willingness to take on responsibility require attention alongside the number of people who attend the event.

Fluctuating attendance adds a further challenge of time. Work, education, and organizers' own schedules limit meetings, so attendance figures need to be read together with these circumstances. The mentor's reflection on the possibility that the approach used has not always matched participants' needs opens space for a more sensitive form of evaluation. Efforts to adjust communication, maintain relationships, and mentor volunteers address the obstacles at different levels. Future development could focus attention on agreeing schedules, distributing workload realistically, and creating opportunities for participants to voice their needs. Sustainability thus depends on relationships that remain meaningful and on forms of management that allow people to sustain their involvement.

Contribution and limits of interpretation

Previous research on Ngopi Senja has explained its educational pattern through the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the activity (Lestari et al., 2024). This study extends that understanding through the lived experience of those who attend and those who organize it. Its theoretical contribution is not the independent use of several lenses, but their relational integration: the café provides a spatial affordance; dialogical dakwah structures the encounter; social support gives relational depth; and religious coping explains how faith is drawn into meaning-making. The findings also qualify these lenses by showing that accessibility, support, and religious meaning are not automatically positive or equally available to everyone.

The study's three aims converge in this relationship. The essence of the experience lies in an intimate encounter that provides room to learn alongside one's own limitations. Its

relevance appears in the use of religious messages and relational support to interpret pressure and to weigh action. The obstacles include social judgment, group boundaries, the fit of communication, time, and organizers' capacity. The responses that emerged include managing comments on a personal level, drawing on close relationships for support, communicating with openness, adjusting language, and recruiting and mentoring volunteers. The data show efforts that are ongoing, with a number of development needs that remain open.

The scope of interpretation follows from the five informants, comprising three active women participants and two organizers. Selecting regular participants who acknowledged meaningful experiences gives depth to the phenomenological account but also creates a positive-selection bias: the study has limited access to disappointment, passivity, economic exclusion, disagreement, and discontinuation. The researcher's insider role improved contextual understanding while requiring deliberate bracketing and cross-checking. Further research should purposively include infrequent attendees, male participants, people who considered attending but did not, and people who left the community, and should trace participation over time. Such work would clarify whether perceived benefits persist and which social, economic, theological, or organizational conditions restrict access.

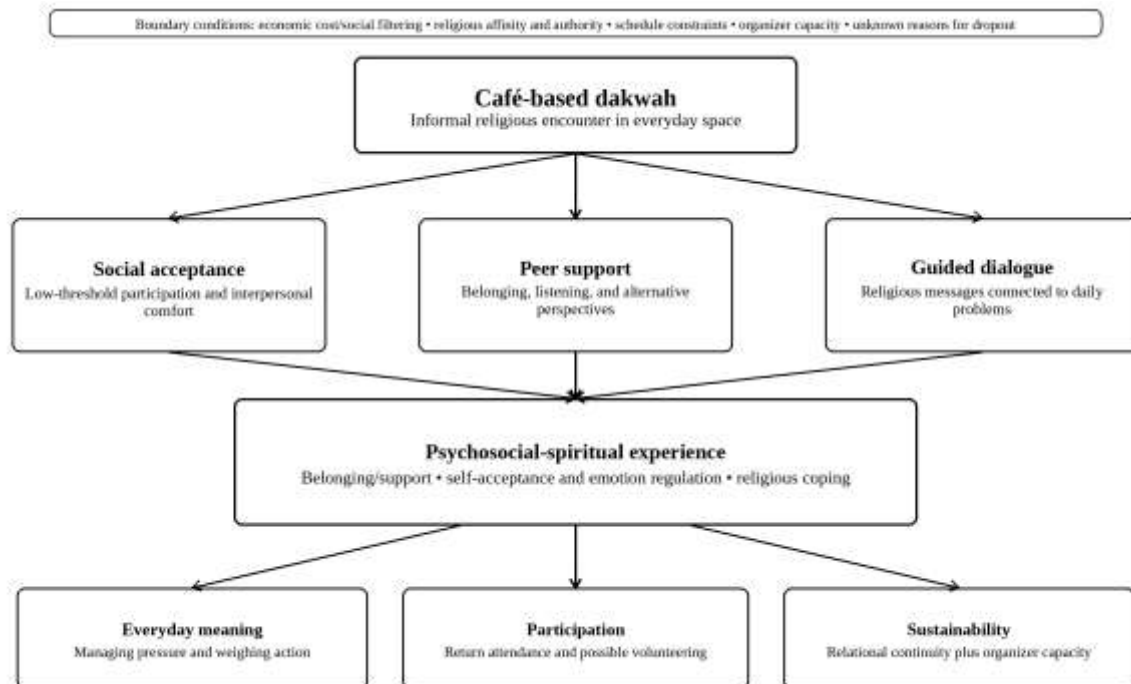


Figure 8. Relational model of psychosocial-spiritual experience, participation boundaries, and community sustainability.

Conclusion

The essence of the psychosocial and spiritual experience of Ngopi Senja participants lies in an intimate encounter that combines social acceptance, peer belonging, and guided religious dialogue with problems drawn from daily life. Peer belonging and social support are the dominant psychosocial domain, while self-acceptance and emotion regulation appear as related processes. Religious coping provides a framework through which participants interpret

pressure, limitations, and responsibility. These experiences are meaningful, but they remain situated and incomplete rather than evidence of uniform psychological change.

Café-based dakwah is therefore neither automatically inclusive nor simply dogmatic. The setting lowers some barriers associated with formal religious venues and gives participants room to ask questions, yet it also carries consumption costs, a café-oriented youth habitus, recognizable religious-network affinities, and an asymmetry of authority between speaker and participant. The observed disagreement shows that religious messages can be negotiated, but the rarity of overt dissent cautions against describing the forum as fully authority-free. The study did not follow people who stopped attending, so reasons for discontinuation remain unresolved.

This study enriches the understanding of contemporary dakwah by showing that its relevance is produced through the interaction of spatial affordance, social support, religious meaning-making, and the boundaries of participation. For organizers, sustainability requires not only attractive themes and volunteer recruitment but also continued attention to affordability, openness across religious-group networks, space for respectful disagreement, and the distribution of organizational capacity. Future research that includes non-returning and marginal participants is necessary to test how far the benefits described by active participants extend beyond the community's core social circle.

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