

## VERNACULAR CYBER-SUFISM: Digital Ritual, Mediated Authority, and the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** The article analyzes the incorporation of digital media within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order in Indonesia and argues that it represents a significant transformation in contemporary Sufi practice. Based on qualitative interviews with members of local *ẓāwiyahs*, the study shows that digital platforms facilitate core *tariqa* practices, including online *bay'ā*, virtual *dhikr*, and *digital ṣahba*. These practices demonstrate that digital space functions not merely as a medium of communication but as a legitimate site of ritual performance and spiritual experience. The findings challenge the conventional distinction between "religion online" and "online religion" by illustrating how *barakah* and spiritual authorization are reconfigured through technological mediation. The article contributes theoretically by introducing the concept of *vernacular cyber-Sufism*, in which local *ẓāwiyahs* act as esoteric intermediaries translating transnational Sufi authority into locally meaningful forms. This process reflects a pattern of negotiated authority shaped by the interaction of global charisma, local mediation, and platform visibility. At the same time, digital expansion

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produces ambivalent effects, simultaneously widening access to Sufi learning while raising concerns about authenticity and the commodification of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Cyber-Sufism; digital religion; Naqshbandi Haqqani Order; Sufi authority; Religious Mediation.

## Introduction

The transformation of religious practices and modes of learning within digital environments has emerged as a global phenomenon attracting sustained scholarly attention across religious studies, communication, and sociology. This development is commonly conceptualized as *digital religion*.<sup>1</sup> Within the Islamic context, the expansion of digital spaces has generated what scholars describe as *cyber Islamic environments*—virtual arenas in which Islamic discourses, religious practices, and Muslim identities are continuously produced, negotiated, and contested.<sup>2</sup> These environments function not merely as instruments for *da'wa* but also as dynamic spaces of interaction, debate, and ideological contestation operating at both global and local levels.<sup>3</sup> Such transformations have significantly affected Sufi orders, enabling spiritual connections across geographical boundaries,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sonny Eli Zaluchu, “Digital Religion, Modern Society and the Construction of Digital Theology,” *Transformation* 41, no. 4 (2024): 285–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02653788231223929>; Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. (New York: Routledge, 2022); Soleh Hasan Wahid, “Exploring the Intersection of Islam and Digital Technology: A Bibliometric Analysis,” *Social Sciences and Humanities Open* 10, no. August (2024): 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101085>; Christopher Helland, “Online Religion or Religion Online and Virtual Communitas,” in *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises*, ed. Jeffrey K. Hadden and Douglas E. Cowan (London: JAI Press / Elsevier Science, 2000), 205–23.

<sup>2</sup> Gary R Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Rozehnal, *Cyber Muslims: Mapping Islamic Digital Media in the Internet Age*, ed. Robert Rozehnal (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022); Jing Wang, “Cyber Muslims: Mapping Islamic Digital Media in the Internet Age, by Robert Rozehnal,” *Sociology of Religion* 85, no. 1 (March 2024): 112–13, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srad042>.

<sup>4</sup> Francesco Piraino, “Between Real and Virtual Communities: Sufism in Western Societies and the Naqshbandi Haqqani Case,” *Social Compass* 63, no. 1 (March 2016): 93–108, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768615606619>; Ziaulhaq Hidayat and Achyar Zein, “Sufism and Virtual Piety a Narration of the Millennial Murshid in

broadening access to religious learning,<sup>5</sup> and extending ritual practices through digital mediation.<sup>6</sup> Rather than simply relocating Sufi activities into virtual settings, this process reconfigures religious meaning, ethical formation, and structures of spiritual authority, a development increasingly conceptualized as *cyber-Sufism* in both local and global scholarship.<sup>7</sup>

In Indonesia, these dynamics are particularly visible within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, which is widely recognized for its active engagement with digital platforms to facilitate spiritual learning and sustain *murshid-murid* relationships beyond the constraints of physical proximity.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the digitalization of Sufi practice raises a number of theological, ethical, and epistemological concerns, including the potential commodification of sacred knowledge,<sup>9</sup> the

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North Sumatra,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 16, no. 1 (2022): 133–52, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.1.133-152>.

<sup>5</sup> Stéphane A Dudoignon, “Chapter 22 Cyber Sufism,” in *Sufi Institutions* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 405–14, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004392601\\_024](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004392601_024).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Rozehnal, “Chapter 5 Cyber Sufism in the Global West,” in *Sufism in Western Contexts* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2023), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004392625\\_007](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004392625_007).

<sup>7</sup> Dahlia Hidayati, “Online Sufism and Reestablishing Religious Authority,” *Ulumuna* 26, no. 1 (2022): 204–37, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v26i1.488>; Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, “Online Sufism – Young British Muslims, Their Internet ‘selves’ and Virtual Reality,” in *Sufism in Britain*, ed. Ron Geaves and Theodore Gabriel (London: Bloomsbury Academy, 2013), 76–151; Ziaulhaq Hidayat, “Transformasi Sufism Into Digital Media: Eshaykh and Simplification of Tarekat Orthodoxy,” *Epistémé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 17, no. 2 (2022): 197–223, <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2022.17.2.197-223>; Armyun Hasibuan, Ismail Fahmi Arrauf Nasution, and Mowafg Masuwd, “Tarekat in the Digital Age: Transforming Spirituality for the Age of Technology,” *Religia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 27, no. 01 (2024): 13–30, <https://doi.org/10.28918/religia.v27i1.2306>. Rozehnal, “Chapter 5 Cyber Sufism in the Global West”; Dudoignon, “Chapter 22 Cyber Sufism.”

<sup>8</sup> Hidayat, “Transformasi Sufism Into Digital Media: Eshaykh and Simplification of Tarekat Orthodoxy”; Arif Rahmat Triasa, “Tarekat Naqshbandi Haqqaniyyah: Pendekatan Digital Dalam Penyebaran Ajaran Apokaliptik-Mesianik,” *Graduate Forum: International Conference Post-Graduate UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta* 1, no. 01 (2023): 17–28; Abdulloh Hanif, “The Virtual Relationship Between Teachers and Students in Digital Spaces: A Study of the Syadzilyah and Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Orders’ Websites,” *Refleksi: Jurnal Filsafat dan Pemikiran Islam* 25, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.14421/ref.v25i2.5769>.

<sup>9</sup> Sehat Ihsan Shadiqin and Shabrun Jamil, “Mediatisasi Sufisme: Otoritas, Komunitas, dan Autentisitas Tasawuf di Dunia Maya,” *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu*

challenge of preserving spiritual *adab* within technologically mediated interactions,<sup>10</sup> and the question of whether spiritual experiences attained without physical presence before the *mursbid* can be considered authentic.<sup>11</sup> These issues are especially salient given that classical Sufi traditions have historically emphasized the embodied transmission of spiritual discipline and *barakah* through direct, face-to-face encounters between disciple and spiritual guide.<sup>12</sup>

Against this backdrop, this study examines how followers of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order in Indonesia experience and interpret the use of digital media as a medium for spiritual learning and ritual practice. It explores their assessments of the benefits and challenges associated with digital mediation as well as the strategies they employ to mitigate the risks of misinterpretation or deviation from established Sufi teachings. Despite the growing body of literature on Sufism, scholarly engagement with the lived digital experiences of Naqshbandi Haqqani followers, including their development, doctrinal formulations, and conventional ritual practices within Sufi orders, remains limited.<sup>13</sup> Research on Sufism in digital contexts has often treated technology primarily as a means for disseminating information.<sup>14</sup> Employing a reflective theoretical framework that

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*Ushuluddin* 26, no. 2 (2024): 273–88,  
<https://doi.org/10.22373/substantia.v26i2.26654>.

<sup>10</sup> Hidayat, “Transformasi Sufism into Digital Media: Eshaykh and Simplification of Tarekat Orthodoxy.”

<sup>11</sup> Dudoignon, “Chapter 22 Cyber Sufism.”

<sup>12</sup> Julia Day Howell, “Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (2001): 701–29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2700107>; Martin Van Bruinessen, “The Origin and Development of Sufi Orders (Tarekat),” *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1994): 1–23.

<sup>13</sup> Gazali, *Tarekat Naqsyabandi Haqqani Di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2015); Johan Septian Putra and Dudung Abdurahman, “Tarekat Naqsyabandi Haqqani: Peranan Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Masyarakat Kontemporer Kota Padang,” *Kontekstualita: Jurnal Sosial Keagamaan* 38, no. 02 (2024): 115–30, <https://doi.org/10.30631/38.02.115-130>; Retna Dwi Estu, “Eksistensi Tarekat Naqsyabandi Haqqani di Jakarta,” *Pegon: The International Journal of Islam Nusantara Civilization* 7, no. 1 (2022): 137–49; Mohd Asyran Safwan Kamaruzaman, Mohd Haidhar Kamaruzaman, and Kamarudin Salleh, “Dakwah Syeikh Nazim Al-Qubrusi: Antara Penerimaan dan Penolakan,” *Al-Hikmah* 11, no. 1 (2019): 41–59.

<sup>14</sup> Hasibuan, Nasution, and Masuwd, “Tarekat in the Digital Age: Transforming Spirituality for the Age of Technology”; Zulfan Taufik and Muhammad Taufik, “Mediated Tarekat Qadiriyyah Wa Naqshabandiyah in the Digital Era: An

foregrounds critical self-reflection on live experience as a source of meaning-making,<sup>15</sup> this study seeks to address this gap by contributing both theoretically to cyber-Sufism studies and empirically through an analysis of digitally mediated Sufi practice in contemporary Indonesia.

This study aims to explore how Naqshbandi Haqqani followers in Indonesia utilize digital media to support their spiritual learning and religious practices. It is grounded in the assumption that digital space functions not only as an informational medium but also as a transformative arena in which religious authority, ritual practice, and spiritual experience are rearticulated. Adopting an exploratory qualitative approach, the research draws on semi-structured interviews with seven active practitioners of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order who regularly engage with *tariqa* teachings through various digital platforms. The analysis is guided by three central research questions: (1) What benefits do followers derive from the use of digital technologies for spiritual education and ritual practice? (2) To what extent can digital spaces facilitate experiences perceived as spiritually authentic? and (3) What challenges emerge when digital media are employed as sacred venues for ritual engagement? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to enrich scholarly discussion on cyber-Sufism in Indonesia and contribute to broader debates on spiritual education and religious authority in the digital age.

### **Cyber-Sufism and the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order in the Digital Age**

In recent years, the rapid expansion of digital platforms has fundamentally reshaped the ways in which Sufi communities worldwide engage in spiritual learning, ritual performance, the construction of religious authority, and the formation of transnational religious networks.<sup>16</sup> A growing body of scholarship demonstrates

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Ethnographic Overview,” *Esensia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 22, no. 1 (2021): 35–43, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v22i1.2511>.

<sup>15</sup> Burcu Şener and Enisa and Mede, “Promoting Learner Autonomy and Improving Reflective Thinking Skills through Reflective Practice and Collaborative Learning,” *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching* 17, no. 2 (March 2023): 364–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2022.2047694>.

<sup>16</sup> Dudoignon, “Chapter 22 Cyber Sufism”; Robert Rozehnal, *Cyber Sufis: Virtual Expressions of the American Muslim Experience (Islam in the Twenty-First Century)* (United Kingdom: Oneworld Academic, 2019).

that Sufi orders increasingly employ websites, social media, and live-streaming technologies to disseminate teachings, facilitate ritual participation, and sustain spiritual relationships beyond the limits of physical proximity.<sup>17</sup> These developments have been described using various analytical terms, including online Sufism, digital Sufism, and cyber-Sufism. Within this study, cyber-Sufism is understood as a mode of spiritual mediation in which guidance, *barakah*, and religious authority are partially rearticulated through digital interfaces rather than being transmitted exclusively through embodied, face-to-face encounters.<sup>18</sup>

While the digital mediation of Sufi practice has expanded accessibility and inclusivity, it has also generated significant theological and sociological debates. Scholars have raised concerns regarding the authenticity of digitally mediated teachings, the potential erosion of orthodoxy, and the commodification of sacred knowledge within market-driven digital environments.<sup>19</sup> Despite these critical insights, much of the existing literature remains descriptive or comparative in orientation, offering broad observations on digital Sufism without closely examining how particular Sufi orders negotiate authority, ritual legitimacy, and spiritual experience in response to digitalization.<sup>20</sup> This limitation highlights the importance of in-depth

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<sup>17</sup> Dini Asmarani and Sarah Monica, “Transnational Tariqa: The Expansion of Naqshbandi Haqqani and the Fulfilment of Urban Spirituality,” *Ulul Albab: Jurnal Studi Islam* 24, no. 2 (2023): 232–55, <https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v24i2.23630>; Piraino, “Between Real and Virtual Communities: Sufism in Western Societies and the Naqshbandi Haqqani Case”; Taufik and Taufik, “Mediated Tarekat Qadiriyyah Wa Naqshabandiyah in the Digital Era: An Ethnographic Overview.”

<sup>18</sup> Hasibuan, Nasution, and Masuwd, “Tarekat in the Digital Age: Transforming Spirituality for the Age of Technology”; Wael Hegazy, “Cyber Sufis: Virtual Expressions of the American Muslim Experience (Islam in the Twenty-First Century),” *CyberOrient* 14, no. 2 (2020): 99–103, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1804-3194.2020.tb00005.x>; Rozehnal, “Chapter 5 Cyber Sufism in the Global West.”

<sup>19</sup> Shadiqin and Jamil, “Mediatisasi Sufisme: Otoritas, Komunitas, Dan Autentisitas Tasawuf di Dunia Maya”; Hidayat, “Transformasi Sufism into Digital Media: Eshaykh and Simplification of Tarekat Orthodoxy”; Dudoignon, “Chapter 22 Cyber Sufism.” Muhammad Anang Firdaus, Muhammad Syihabuddin, and Zein Fuady, “Islam and Artificial Intelligence: Perspectives from Traditionalist and Modernist Muslim Communities in Indonesia,” *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (June 2025): 146–49, 1, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1333>.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Lings, *What Is Sufism?* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1975); Howell, “Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival”; Martin Van Bruinessen,

case studies that examine the internal dynamics of specific orders, their institutional practices, and the lived experiences of their followers.

The Naqshbandi Haqqani Order provides a particularly productive empirical site for such an inquiry. As a *tariqa*—that is, an organized Sufi order structured around a system of spiritual education and ritual discipline under the guidance of a *mursbid*<sup>21</sup>—the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order has demonstrated a notable capacity to adapt to socio-historical change. Within the Indonesian context, it exists alongside other influential *tariqas*, such as the Qādiriyyah wa Naqshbandiyyah,<sup>22</sup> the Naqshbandiyyah Khālidiyyah,<sup>23</sup> the Shaṭṭāriyyah, and the Shādhiliyyah.<sup>24</sup> Among these, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order stands out for its systematic and sustained engagement with digital technologies in both spiritual learning and ritual performance.

Institutionally, the order operates a range of digital platforms that function as key nodes in its global spiritual network. These include central transnational websites such as Naqshbandi.org and sufilive.com, as well as the Indonesian-based platform naqsybandi.com, which is managed under the auspices of Yayasan Haqqani Indonesia. Additionally, the order actively utilizes social media platforms—particularly Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook—

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*Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1996); Abubakar Aceh, *Pengantar Ilmu Tarekat: Uraian Tentang Mistik* (Solo: Ramdhani, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam* (USA: The University of Carolina Press, 1975); Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning Pesantren Dan Tarekat* (Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Ihsan Kamaludin and Maya Najihatul Ula, “Sufism Healing Method for Drugs Rehabilitation: A Case Study in Pp. Suryalaya Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia,” *Ulumuna* 23, no. 2 (2019): 384–401, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v23i2.351>. Rubaidi Rubaidi et al., “Resisting the Surge of Salafism among Malay and Javanese Muslims: The Dynamics of the Tarekat Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya Wa Naqshbandiya in Promoting Peaceful Islam in Riau Sumatera,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 13, no. 1 (June 2023): 12, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2023.13.1.1-31>.

<sup>23</sup> S. Maryam Yusuf, “Inter-Subjectivity of Khalwat (Suluk) Members in the Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah Ponorogo,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 103–26, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.103-126>.

<sup>24</sup> Hanif, “The Virtual Relationship Between Teachers and Students in Digital Spaces: A Study of the Syadziliyah and Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Orders’ Websites.”

to disseminate teachings, expand its *da'wa* reach, and maintain ongoing communication with disciples across national boundaries.<sup>25</sup> Through these platforms, the order sustains a digitally mediated religious ecosystem that complements, rather than replaces, its offline institutional structures.

Historically, the contemporary identity and global expansion of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order were shaped under the leadership of Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani, who inherited the Naqshbandi lineage from his master, Shaykh Abdullah ad-Dahestani.<sup>26</sup> Under his guidance, the order developed an extensive transnational following, including substantial communities in Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia.<sup>27</sup> Central to the spiritual formation of the order are practices such as *bay'a* (the pledge of allegiance to the *murshid*), *dhikr* (the remembrance of God, *muraqabah* (inner contemplative discipline), and *suluk* (a structured spiritual path).<sup>28</sup> In the digital era, these practices have increasingly been facilitated through online formats, including virtual *dhikr*, digital *bay'a*, and remote spiritual instruction delivered via livestreamed sessions and recorded media.<sup>29</sup>

Conceptually, the adoption of digital media within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order extends beyond the pragmatic expansion of religious outreach. It also reconfigures the dynamic of spiritual authority and legitimacy within a networked religious environment. Digital mediation enables the *murshid* to maintain symbolic and spiritual authority through virtual presence while simultaneously

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<sup>25</sup> David W. Damrel, "Aspects of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Order in North America," in *Sufism in the West*, ed. Ron Geaves and Theodore Gabriel (New York: Routledge, 2006), 115–26,

<sup>26</sup> A Bottcher, "Religious Authority in Transnational Sufi Networks: Shaykh Nāzim Al-Qubrusī Al-Haqqānī Al-Naqshbandī," *Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia* 100 (2006): 241–68, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004149496.i-310.68>.

<sup>27</sup> Jorgen S Nielsen, Mustafa Draper, and Galina Yemelianova, "Transnational Sufism: The Haqqaniyya," in *Sufism in the West*, 1st ed., ed. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2006), 103–14, <https://doi.org/c>.

<sup>28</sup> Gazali, *Tarekat Naqsyabandi Haqqani di Indonesia*; Estu, "Eksistensi Tarekat Naqsyabandi Haqqani di Jakarta."

<sup>29</sup> Triasa, "Tarekat Naqshbandi Haqqaniyyah: Pendekatan Digital Dalam Penyebaran Ajaran Apokaliptik-Mesianik"; Dudoignon, "Chapter 22 Cyber Sufism."

decentralizing spiritual learning from fixed physical spaces. Practices such as online *bay'at* and virtual *dhikr* thus carry significant theological implications concerning the continuity of *barakah* and the validity of spiritual transmission in non-physical settings. Sociologically, these practices facilitate the formation of transnational religious solidarities that transcend geographical boundaries while remaining embedded in localized institutional structures.

Although cyber-Sufism is a global phenomenon, the Indonesian context introduces distinctive dynamics that merit focused scholarly attention. Indonesia's large Muslim population, rapidly expanding digital infrastructure, and plural religious landscape shape particular modes of engagement with digitally mediated Sufi practices. Local *zāwiyahs* play a crucial role in mediating between the transnational authority, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, and the cultural, linguistic, and social realities of Indonesian devotees.<sup>30</sup> This local mediation differentiates the Indonesian experience from other national contexts, such as Malaysia or Turkey, where religious institutions, political environment, and digital cultures produce alternative patterns of engagement. Consequently, examining the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order in Indonesia offers critical insight into how digital transformation not only reshapes ritual practices but also renegotiates authority, legitimacy, and religious experience within contemporary Sufi communities.

### Digital Mediation of Sufi Learning and Authority

Digital media has become a central infrastructure through which followers of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order access spiritual teachings and sustain ritual practice within digitally mediated environments. Based on semi-structured interviews, participants consistently emphasized that digital platforms facilitate access to the core teachings of the *tariqa*, including online *bay'at*, virtual *dhikr*, and *ṣubḥa* delivered directly by the *murshid* through Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, as well as structured guidance provided via official websites such as [naqshbandi.org](http://naqshbandi.org), [naqsybandi.com](http://naqsybandi.com), and [sufilive.com](http://sufilive.com). This form of digital mediation is particularly significant in the

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<sup>30</sup> See Mukhammad Zamzami, Fikri Mahzumi, and Abd A'la, "Tarekat and Politics in Indonesia: Contested Authority between Murshids in the Tarekat Qadiriyyah Wa Naqsyabandiyah in East Java," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 12, no. 2 (December 2022): 189, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2022.12.2.187-208>.

Indonesian context, where many local *zāwiyahs* lack a resident *murshid* or *khalifah* capable of providing direct spiritual instruction.

The practice of online *bay'at* within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order does not merely offer pragmatic convenience; it also introduces substantial theological and epistemological implications. Within classical Sufi traditions, *barakah* and *ijāzah* are understood as spiritual qualities transmitted through an embodied presence and an intimate, relational bond between the *murshid* and *murid*. When initiation and knowledge transmission are relocated into digital spaces, these concepts undergo reinterpretation in terms of how they are perceived, internalized, and experienced by disciples. Digital media thus functions not simply as a channel for conveying religious messages but as an active medium that shapes perceptions of spiritual legitimacy, the authority of the *murshid*,<sup>31</sup> and the validity of relational bonds within the *tariqa*—bonds historically grounded in face-to-face encounters.<sup>32</sup>

Empirically, the findings suggest a shift from a predominantly personal and charismatic model of authority toward a more distributed and networked form of religious authority. The *murshid-murid* relationship no longer depends exclusively on physical proximity but increasingly relies on technologically mediated presence. Rather than diminishing spiritual authority, digital mediatization rearticulates it; the charisma of the *murshid* is sustained through digital content, *barakah* is experienced mediately, and *ijāzah* acquires new modes of legitimacy that are not entirely contingent upon physical encounter. In this sense, digitalization reshapes not only access to religious instruction but also the epistemological foundations and structural configuration of authority within contemporary Sufi practice.

Participants' narratives illustrate these dynamics clearly. Participant 1 described using YouTube and Instagram to follow live *ṣubḥa* and *dhikr* sessions led by the *murshid*, enabling a sustained sense of spiritual closeness despite geographical distance from the *tariqa's* central institutions. Participant 3 similarly relied on official websites

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<sup>31</sup> Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Community in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>32</sup> Hegazy, "Cyber Sufis: Virtual Expressions of the American Muslim Experience (Islam in the Twenty-First Century)."

and social media platforms for guidance when unable to attend the central *zāwiyah* in person.

“Having live *ṣuḥba* and *dhikr* delivered by the *murshid* or *khalifah* through social media makes me feel close to the *murshid*, even though I am far from the *tariqa* centre.”<sup>33</sup> (Participant 1)

“Official websites and social media really help me receive direct guidance from the *murshid*, especially as I am based at a local *zāwiyah* and cannot attend the central *zāwiyah*”.<sup>34</sup> (Participant 3)

A particularly significant finding concerns the use of digital media to perform *bay‘a* online. Participant 5 reported undertaking *bay‘a* through video recording available on the *tariqa*’s official websites, following the *murshid*’s guidance and supplications. Despite the absence of physical interaction, the participant perceived this digital *bay‘a* as spiritually valid and meaningful. Such practices suggest that contemporary sufi communities increasingly recognize that the “presence” of both *murshid* and *murid* can be constituted virtually, allowing spiritual authority and legitimacy to operate beyond the constraints of physical encounter.<sup>35</sup>

“I took *bay‘a* with the *murshid* through digital media, as there is no one in our area with the authority to administer it. Through the video recording on the official website of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, I was able to recite my pledge before the *murshid* and *khalifah*.”<sup>36</sup> (Participant 5)

The practice is especially consequential in Indonesian local *zāwiyahs*, where figures with the authority to administer *bay‘a* are often absent. Participant 6 conceptualized digital media as a form of “digital *zāwiyah*”—a virtual space that substitutes for the physical *zāwiyah* as a center of learning, guidance, and initiation. This digital *zāwiyah* enables *bay‘a* to be performed with reverence, legitimacy, and continuity with *tariqa* tradition, illustrating the order’s strategic adaptation to technological constraints.

“For us, digital media serves as a digital *zāwiyah* that replaces the role of the central *zāwiyah* as a place for direct learning, such

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with SR, August 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with MB, August 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Putri Rahmah Nur Hakim et al., “Digital Sufism: The Transformation of Piety in Gus Ulil’S Online Teachings,” *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 22, no. 2 (2024): 191–218, <https://doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v22i2.13872>.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with TF, July 2024.

as receiving guidance and performing *bay'a* through the website @naqsybandi.com.”<sup>37</sup> (Participant 6)

Beyond initiation, social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook—particularly accounts like @sufilive and @haqqaniindonesia—function as repositories of prayers, *dhikr*, and spiritual counsel delivered directly by *murshids* or *kehalifabs*. Participants described this content as essential for sustaining daily devotional practice and spiritual motivation.

“I often visit the Facebook and Instagram accounts @sufilive and @haqqaniindonesia to read the prayers and *dhikr* taught by the *murshid*.”<sup>38</sup> (Participant 4)

“The advice from the *murshid* posted on Instagram @sufilive serves as my guide in carrying out *tariqa* practice.”<sup>39</sup> (Participant 5)

Overall, digital media has become a primary mechanism for sustaining continuity in learning, ritual practice, and spiritual guidance within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order. Through official websites and social media platforms, followers gain access not only to sermons and devotional content but also ritual practices—including *bay'a*—that are perceived as spiritually legitimate within the order.

## **Digitally Mediated Spiritual Experience and Emotional Formation**

Spiritual experience constitutes a central dimension of learning within the *tariqa*,<sup>40</sup> traditionally cultivated through direct guidance and embodied encounters between *murid* and *murshid* as the primary means of nurturing intimacy with the Divine.<sup>41</sup> In digital context, however, spiritual experience emerges not merely as an extension of classical mystical practice but as a form of spirituality mediated by technological infrastructures. Digital platforms enable new modes of

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with SB, December 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with AD, October 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with TF, July 2024.

<sup>40</sup> A. Schimmel, “Mystical Dimensions of Islam,” *Verfassung in Recht Und Übersee* 11, no. 4 (1978): 448–50, <https://doi.org/10.5771/0506-7286-1978-4-448>; J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Faisal Muhammad Nur, “The Naqshbandiyyah Al-Khalidiyyah Tariqah: Perspectives on Tawhid and Spirituality,” *SINTHOP: Media Kajian Pendidikan, Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya* 3, no. 2 (2024): 65–76, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sinthop.v3i2.6096>.

inner connectedness by providing virtual access to rituals, *dhiker*, and the *murshid's* spiritual counsel.

Participant consistently reported that digital media played a crucial role in facilitating and deepening their spiritual experiences, particularly for those residing in local *zawiyahs* with limited access to physical gatherings. Participant 1 described virtual *dhiker* guided by the *murshid* or *khalifah* as fostering a profound sense of closeness to God, while participant 4 emphasized that spiritual experience depends primarily on sincerity and intention rather than physical presence.

“The virtual *dhiker* guided directly by the *murshid* or *khalifah* allows me to feel close to Allah.”<sup>42</sup> (Participant 1)

“Experiencing spirituality through digital space is entirely possible. It all comes down to sincerity and intention.”<sup>43</sup> (Participant 4)

Further reflections reveal that digitally mediated spirituality fosters affective bonds with the *murshid*. Participant 5 expressed deep spiritual closeness and inner tranquility despite never having met the *murshid* in person, while Participant 6 described intense feelings of love triggered simply by viewing digital images or videos of the *murshid*.

“Although I have never met the *murshid* in person, I feel a strong spiritual closeness.”<sup>44</sup> (Participant 5)

“Every time I see the *murshid's* photo or video, my heart fills with deep love.”<sup>45</sup> (Participant 6)

Beyond inward experience, participants also reported positive emotional and social effects. Participant 3 noted that digitally mediated guidance inspired ethical conduct and compassion toward others, while participant 2 described using recorded *dhiker* to regulate anxiety and emotional distress.

“The advice I hear from the *murshid* on social media motivates me to do good.”<sup>46</sup> (Participant 3)

“When I am anxious, I listen to the *murshid's dhiker* recordings. They calm my heart.”<sup>47</sup> (Participant 2)

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that digital media plays a strategic role in cultivating spiritual experience among

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with SR, August 2024.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with AD, October 2024.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with TF, September 2024.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with MH, July 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with SR, August 2024.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with FRP, October 2024.

Naqshbandi Haqqani followers in Indonesia. Digitally mediated learning supports not only ritual continuity but also emotional regulation, ethical formation, and a sustained sense of proximity to both the *murshid* and the Divine.

At the same time, this digital expansion introduces structural ambivalences. While digital technology broadens access and inclusivity, it also generates tensions concerning authority, authenticity, and the preservation of *sirr* (inner spiritual secret) within the *tariqa* tradition. As previous studies suggest, digital spaces may simultaneously reinforce and destabilize traditional religious structures,<sup>48</sup> transforming how spiritual authority and meaning are negotiated across generations.<sup>49</sup> Interpreted through Helland’s distinction between “religion online” and “online religion,” the Naqshbandi Haqqani case illustrates a shift toward interactive ritual engagement that reproduces spiritual experience within digital environments. Within Campbell’s framework of *network religion*, authority emerges as fluid and negotiated, shaped by ongoing digital interaction.<sup>50</sup> These findings further resonate with Bunt’s and Rozehnal’s analyses of cyber-Islamic environments, underscoring that digitalization functions as a dynamic arena for the production of new religious meaning rather than a neutral technological tool.<sup>51</sup>

### **Vernacular Mediation and Linguistic Authority in Digital Tariqa Learning**

The findings of this study indicate that one of the most salient challenges faced by followers of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order in digitally mediated learning environments concerns linguistic

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<sup>48</sup> Jeffrey Overall, “Self-Inquiry at a Distance: A Qualitative Study of Spiritual Emergence in a 7-Day Virtual Retreat,” *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, Routledge, 2025, 1–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2025.2504958>; Hidayati, “Online Sufism and Reestablishing Religious Authority”; Ruth Tsuria and Heidi A Campbell, “‘In My Own Opinion’: Negotiation of Rabbinical Authority Online in Responsa Within Kipa.Co.IL,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 45, no. 1 (May 2020): 65–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859920924384>.

<sup>49</sup> Ruth Tsuria, “Digital Media: When God Becomes Everybody—the Blurring of Sacred and Profane,” *Religions* 12, no. 2 (2021): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020110>.

<sup>50</sup> Campbell and Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

<sup>51</sup> Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*; Rozehnal, *Cyber Muslims: Mapping Islamic Digital Media in the Internet Age*.

accessibility and interpretive authority. The order's principal digital platforms—such as *naqshbandi.org* and *sufilive.com*, which are administered from the United States—primarily employ English and highly condensed doctrinal formulations. For many Indonesian followers, this linguistic and stylistic configuration limits their capacity to fully comprehend the teachings, thereby shaping distinct pattern of digital engagement.<sup>52</sup>

As a result, followers tend to rely more heavily on locally managed digital platforms, particularly *naqsybandi.com* and the Instagram account *@haqqaniindonesia*, which provide Indonesian-language content and culturally contextualized explanations. This preference reflects not merely pragmatic considerations, but also a deeper concern with avoiding misinterpretation and maintaining theological correctness within the *tariqa* tradition. As one participant explained:

“When I read websites like *naqshbandi.org* and *sufilive.com*, I sometimes get confused because they use English and difficult terms. That's why I prefer visiting *naqsybandi.com*, which uses Indonesian.”<sup>53</sup> (Participant 1)

Similarly, another participant noted that linguistic limitations in accessing international content prompted a consistent turn toward local digital intermediaries:

“I usually check teachings from *@haqqaniindonesia* on Instagram because it's in Indonesia and easier to understand.”<sup>54</sup> (Participant 2)

Beyond language itself, participants emphasized that digitally transmitted teachings—whether in textual or audiovisual form—often require further clarification, particularly given the centrality of direct guidance from a *murshid* within the *tariqa* tradition.<sup>55</sup> This condition reinforces the continued relevance of local *zāwiyah* leaders and senior disciples, who function as interpretive mediators capable of contextualizing global teachings within local epistemic frameworks. As one informant stated:

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<sup>52</sup> Dudoignon, “Chapter 22 Cyber Sufism”; R Rozehnal, “Cyber Sufism in the Global West,” *Sufism in Western Contexts*, brill.com, 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with AD, October 2024.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with FRP, October 2024.

<sup>55</sup> Muhammad Akmansyah et al., “The Essence of Mursyid Teachers in Sufism Spiritual Education in the Framework of Maqāṣid Al-Syarī'ah: The Perspectives of Indonesian Scholars,” *EL-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 8, no. 1 (2025): 50–71, <https://doi.org/10.22373/6m127a63>.

“Sometimes the teachings on the international websites make me hesitant because I’m afraid of misinterpreting them. So, I prefer to ask the *zāwiyah* leader directly.”<sup>56</sup>  
(Participant 4)

These findings suggest that linguistic barriers should not be understood merely as technical obstacles, but rather as critical sites where religious authority and interpretive legitimacy are negotiated. Dependence on local digital platforms and mediators produces a form of *vernacular cyber-Sufism*,<sup>57</sup> in which global Sufi discourses are selectively translated, reinterpreted, and embodied through local cultural idioms rather than reproduced verbatim.<sup>58</sup> In this configuration, local *zāwiyahs* emerge as epistemic gatekeepers that regulate meaning, safeguard doctrinal coherence, and mediate between transnational spiritual authority and everyday devotional practice.

### **Negotiated Authority and Spiritual Experience in Digitally Mediated Sufism**

The use of digital media within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order reflects a broader transformation in how spiritual authority, authenticity, and religious experience are constituted in a digitally mediated religious environment. Digital platforms—ranging from official websites to social media channels—have evolved into alternative loci of spiritual transmission, particularly for followers affiliated with local *zāwiyahs* who lack direct physical access to a *murshid*. In this context, digital media no longer function merely as auxiliary tools for dissemination but as active spaces in which spiritual legitimacy and experience are produced and contested.

Participants consistently reported that digitally mediated practices—such as virtual *dhikr*, online *ṣuḥba*, and recorded guidance from the *murshid*—enabled them to cultivate a meaningful sense of spiritual intimacy despite geographical distance. One participant described this experience as follows:

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with AD, October 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Rozehnal, *Cyber Sufis: Virtual Expressions of the American Muslim Experience (Islam in the Twenty-First Century)*.

<sup>58</sup> Tsuria and Campbell, “‘In My Own Opinion’: Negotiation of Rabbinical Authority Online in Responsa Within Kipa.Co.IL.”

“The virtual *dhiker* guided directly by the *murshid* or *khalifa* allows me to feel close to Allah, even though I am not physically present at the central *zāwiyah*.”<sup>59</sup> (Participant 1)

Others emphasized that spiritual efficacy in digital spaces is closely tied to personal intention (*niyya*) and sincerity, rather than physical proximity alone:

“Experiencing spirituality through the digital space is entirely possible. It depends on our sincerity in practicing the *tariqa* teachings.”<sup>60</sup> (Participant 4)

Notably, several participants articulated a profound sense of emotional attachment and spiritual closeness to the *murshid*, even in the absence of face-to-face encounters. One informant explained:

“Although I have never met the *murshid* in person, I feel a strong spiritual closeness that brings peace and calm to my heart.”<sup>61</sup> (Participant 5)

These accounts indicate that digital mediation enables the reconfiguration—rather than the erosion—of spiritual experience. *Barakah*, authority, and affective bonds are not eliminated, but rearticulated through technologically mediated presence. At the same time, this transformation introduces a sense of ambivalence. While digital platforms democratize access to spiritual guidance, they simultaneously weaken traditional mechanisms of verification and authorization grounded in embodied transmission.

Theoretically, this dynamic aligns with Campbell’s concept of *negotiated authority*, in which religious legitimacy is continuously produced through interactions between institutional structures, personal interpretation, and digital infrastructures.<sup>62</sup> The Naqshbandi Haqqani community in Indonesia thus exemplifies a *networked religious configuration*, where authority is relational, multi-sited, and shaped by visibility and mediation rather than exclusively by hierarchical lineage.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, authority within this digital *tariqa* operates through a triadic structure: global spiritual figures, local *zāwiyah* leaders, and algorithmic systems that regulate digital visibility. While

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with SR, August 2024.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with AD, October 2024.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with TF, September 2024.

<sup>62</sup> Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Community in Indonesia*; Campbell and Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

<sup>63</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New: The Viking Press, 1961).

global platforms provide access to the *murshid*'s teachings, local *zāwiyahs* contextualize and supervise their interpretation, and algorithmic logics subtly shape which teachings gain prominence. Consequently, spiritual legitimacy emerges as a dynamic outcome of interaction between transnational charisma, local mediation, and digital circulation.

From an academic standpoint, these findings extend existing debates on networked religion<sup>64</sup> and digital mediation<sup>65</sup> by demonstrating that cyber-Sufism does not signify a rupture from tradition, but rather a hybrid reconfiguration of authority. The Indonesian case highlights the central role of localized institutions in sustaining theological coherence within digitally mediated Sufi practice—an aspect that remains underrepresented in much of the Western literature on cyber-Sufism.<sup>66</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

The study demonstrates that the integration of digital media within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order in Indonesia represents a paradigmatic transformation in contemporary Sufi practice. The shift from physically bounded ritual spaces to digitally mediated environments—manifested in online *bay'a*, virtual *dhikr*, and digital *suhba*—signals the emergence of a hybrid spirituality in which *barakah* and *ijāzah* are not eroded but rearticulated through technological mediation. By challenging the rigid distinction between “religion online” and “online religion,” this study shows that digital space functions as a legitimate site for ritual practice, spiritual experience, and the production of religious authority within the *tariqa*. Its principal theoretical contribution lies in advancing the concept of *vernacular cyber-Sufism*, which captures how local *zāwiyahs* in Indonesia operate as epistemic gatekeepers and cultural translators, mediating between transnational Sufi authority and locally embedded devotional practices. In doing so, the study empirically substantiates Campbell's

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<sup>64</sup> Heidi A. Campbell, “Religion and the Internet: A Microcosm for Studying Internet Trends and Implications,” *New Media and Society* 15, no. 5 (2013): 680–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812462848>.

<sup>65</sup> Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Rozehnal, *Cyber Sufis: Virtual Expressions of the American Muslim Experience* (books.google.com, 2019); Dudoignon, “Chapter 22 Cyber Sufism”; Rozehnal, “Chapter 5 Cyber Sufism in the Global West.”

notion of “negotiated authority,” whereby spiritual legitimacy emerges through the interplay of global charisma, local mediation, and algorithmic visibility.

At the same time, the expansion of digital Sufi practices generates an inherent ambivalence. While digital platforms democratize access to spiritual teachings and guidance, they also raise theological and ethical tensions concerning the authenticity of the *murshid-murid* relationship, the presentation of *sirr* (inner spiritual secret), and the potential commodification of sacred knowledge. The sustainability of cyber-Sufism in Indonesia, therefore, depends not only on technological accessibility but also on the cultivation of spiritual digital literacy among adherents and the institutional capacity of *zāwiyahs* to maintain theological coherence and disciplinary authority within a digitally mediated context.

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