

DIGITAL SUFISM: THE TRANSFORMATION OF PIETY IN GUS ULIL'S ONLINE TEACHINGS

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Abstract: *The transformation of da'wah from offline to online is an important issue that needs to be studied in the context of the development of digital technology and changing patterns of social interaction in the modern era. While some previous studies have discussed the impact of digitalisation on religious practice, there is a gap in understanding how social media platforms such as Facebook change the dynamics of da'wah, especially in the context of recitations led by scholars such as Gus Ulil. The focus of this study is to examine how the digitalisation of da'wah affects the spiritual interactions between ulama and their followers, and how these changes affect the meaning and experience of religiosity in the digital era. This study is qualitative in nature with a focus on online recitations on Facebook, where data was collected through participatory observation, content analysis, and in-depth interviews. The data analysis process was conducted through the stages of coding, categorisation, and interpretation to understand the patterns of interaction and the impact of online dakwah. The key findings of this study show that digitalisation not only expands the reach of da'wah, but also changes the structure of religious communities to become more private and exclusive. Recommendations from this study include the development of more inclusive policies to support the sustainability of digital da'wah, as well as methodological approaches that can be used to improve the sustainability of digital da'wah.*

Keywords: *Digital Sufism, Gus Ulil; Online Teachings; Social Media*

Introduction

The digital era has resulted in a shift, interest in Islamic literature has shifted to an online system, resulting in a shift in the method of learning Islamic knowledge from offline to online so that religious

learning becomes easy and practical.¹ Data shows the growth of internet usage using mobile phones in 2020 reached 62.84%, computer ownership 18.83% and will experience a continuous increase in the following.² The increasing phenomenon of the internet also has an impact on the tradition of ngaji in Islamic scholarship, in this case the presence of online ngaji provides at least three basic dilemmas. Firstly, online Quran recitation is a new path that follows modernity which gives a very deep dilemmatic impression to Muslims, especially traditionalist Sufis.³ Secondly, online Quran recitation can erode the tradition that was originally done traditionally by showing that the development of the Qur'an is increasingly dynamic.⁴ Third, online Quran recitation on social media is also equipped with order and control over its content, this order forms a habit that adapts to the conditions of society.⁵

The spread of online learning has increased after the Corona-19 virus was introduced by the government throughout Indonesia to partially replace face-to-face activities with online.⁶ Based on data from Kompas as of 18 June 2020, there were 743,198 (8,074 cases) with a total death rate of 22,138 (2.979% of confirmed) people and a cure rate of 611,097 (82.225% of confirmed) people with a lot of transmission occurring in the family cluster.⁷ This certainly makes it difficult for

¹Evi Fitriana and Muhamad Khoiri Ridlwan, "Ngaji Online: The Transformation of Book Study on Social Media," *Asanka: Journal Of Social Science And Education*, 2021, Doi:10.21154/Asanka.V2i2.3238.

²Bps, "Indonesia Telecommunication Statistics 2020," 2021, <https://www.bps.go.id/Publication/2021/10/11>.

³M Najmudin Rahmatullah, Imam Tholkhah, And Amie Primarni, "Implementation of Student Management to Improve the Academic Quality of Learners at Smp It At-Thohiriah," *Jurnal Dirosab Islamiyah*, 2020, Doi:10.47467/Jdi.V2i1.100.

⁴Anis Zakaria And Nabila Abd Wahab, "Knowledge Level and Selected Factors Toward the Selection of Traditional Kuih In Kalangan Belia Faculty of Education Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia," *Familyedu: Journal of Family Welfare Education*, 2019.

⁵Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy And Althaf Husein Muzakky, "The Dynamics of Online Ngaji in Gus Baha's Hashtag: A Study of Living Qur'an on Social Media," *Poros Onim: A Journal of Social Religion*, 2021, doi:10.53491/Porosonim.V2i1.48.

⁶Ahmad Zubir Rosdi, Syed Najihuddin Syed Hassan, And Nurul Asiah Fasehah Muhamad, "Traditional and Modern Hadith Studies: A Preliminary Review of the Literature," *Al-Qanatr: International Journal Of Islamic Studies*, 2019.

⁷Kompas, "Covid-19 Data in Indonesia," *kompas.com*, 2020, <https://www.kompas.com/Covid-19>.

various communities to meet directly because of the appeal from MUI to stop the activities of this assembly, because basically online recitation is not only about gaining knowledge, but on the other hand it is a place to show self-existence and the occurrence of questions and answers from members of the assembly.⁸ The topic of online ngaji was chosen because it is a very essential phenomenon today, the transfer of Islamic knowledge no longer has to come to an assembly, but can be done by accessing content or live streaming. This study reflects on online ngaji as a new form of learning, which is a very important discussion to have.⁹

So far, studies that discuss the mediatisation of online Quran recitation related to worship activities that have shifted to digital media have only focused on the dynamic aspects of online Quran recitation in Living-Qur'an studies.¹⁰ Other studies discuss the study of the Qur'an and radicalism, analysis of jihad verses in online media.¹¹ In addition, other themes researched are persuasion in religious moderation,¹² and radical Islamic media.¹³ For this reason, studies that discuss the mediatisation of online ngaji do not focus on the routine rituals of the live streaming community in the Facebook landscape. So, it can be concluded that the tendency of the topic of online ngaji as a new ritual that forms the rite of piety of Sufism is still lacking attention, especially to reflect on the habitus of online ngaji rituals through Facebook live streaming.¹⁴ For this reason, the discussion in this study focuses on the

⁸Ahmad Tanthowi, "Pesantren Tradition; A Study of the Kiai's View of Life in Java A Reflection on the Work of Zamakhsyari Dhofir," *Didaktika Islamika*, 2021.

⁹Lalu Pattimura Farhan And Prosmala Hadisaputra, "Tasawuf Pesantren: The Path to Spiritual Revolution," *Al-Fikr: Journal of Islamic Education*, 2020, Doi:10.32489/Alfikr.V6i2.74.

¹⁰Qudsy And Muzakky, "The Dynamics of Online Ngaji in Gus Baha's Hashtag: A Study of Living Qur'an on Social Media."

¹¹Alfi Syahriyati, "The Quran and Radicalism: An Analysis of Jihad Verses in Online Media," *Journal Of Qur'an And Hadith Studies*, 2019, doi:10.15408/Quhas.V8i1.13384.

¹²Paelani Setia And Heri M. Imron, *Religious Moderation Campaign: From Traditional to Digital*, Tropical Pharmacy Research and Development Laboratory, Faculty of Pharmacy, Mulawarman University, Samarinda, East Kalimantan, 2016.

¹³Ismail Fahmi Arrauf Nasution And - Miswari, "Islam is a religion of terror (News Framing Analysis of Kompas.Com Online Media in the Charlie Hebdo Case)," *Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi*, 2017, Doi:10.22515/Balagh.V2i1.753.

¹⁴Irwan Abdullah et al., "Religion of Pandemic: Delegitimization of Authority During the Covid-19 Era," *Al-Albab*, 2023, doi:10.24260/alalbab.v12i2.2926.

context of Digital Sufism in the dynamics of Gus Ulil's online recitation as a form of piety in the book *Ihya 'Ulumuddin*.

This paper is here to expand on the literature review we have mentioned. There are at least three questions raised here. First, how Gus Ulil's online Quran recitation can shape the piety of the audience. Second, why followers engage in online Quran recitation practices. Finally, what factors make followers feel that the online recitation of *Ihya' Ulumuddin* is important to study. Thus, this paper aims to gain an understanding of the effective online ngaji paradigm and can also provide comprehensive knowledge as learning on the mediatisation pattern of online ngaji as the latest portrait, not only on social media content, but also in the realm of Facebook media scope as a new topic in social media. Through Facebook, online ngaji allows interaction between teachers and participants to take place even though they are far apart.¹⁵ The mediatised pattern of online ngaji has a significant impact on how people access, participate in and understand ngaji.¹⁶

This article argues that new media changes in the learning of Islamic traditions have given rise to a new spirit of convenience and effectiveness in society. However, this assumption comes at the cost of three social impacts on society. Firstly, the mediatisation of online recitation has become a necessity for traditionalist scholars to respond to the changing times and engage in the digital world, as the main alternative means in contemporary da'wah media. Secondly, the emergence of urban middle-class Muslim communities who often experience spiritual crises, so that online recitation of *Ihya 'Ulumuddin* can actively fill the spirituality drought. Third, there is opposition to the existence of online recitations that are of doubtful validity, so that they often cause conflict for some people compared to direct recitation.

Method

The method used in this article is a comparison of the results of online ngaji research reviewed from existing mediatisation theory to

¹⁵Samsul Arifin, "The Dynamics of Changes in Kiai Santri Relationships in 'Ngaji Online' During the Covid-19 Pagebluk Period," *Indonesian Journal of Population*, 2020.

¹⁶Achmad Zaki Yamani, "Optimizing the Use of Digital Platforms for Online Ngaji Activities in Islamic Boarding Schools," *Ijcosin: Indonesian Journal Of Community Service And Innovation*, 2022, doi:10.20895/Ijcosin.V2i2.606.

conclude the mediation consideration of Gus Ulil's online ngaji live streaming audience habits. This theory can be applied to understand and know how the mediatisation of ngaji through online platforms can affect the audience experience and the participation of followers in religious activities.¹⁷ In addition, this theory can be taken into consideration to understand how online ngaji shape and influence individual social interactions, identity, and fulfil religious spiritual needs in the digital era.¹⁸

This research focuses on the shift of piety in online recitation by Gus Ulil Abshar Abdalla, especially in the context of interaction between Gus Ulil as a public figure and his followers on Facebook. This issue focuses on the fundamental changes of Muslims in accessing and responding to Islamic teachings through digital media. With positive comments such as 'Masya Allah,' 'Amazing,' and 'Assalamualaikum' coming from followers in various regions, this study aims to understand how the phenomenon of online Quran recitation can form a new religious habitus. The focus of this research is on interactions during live streaming that reflect spiritual dynamics in the digital era.¹⁹ Gus Ulil as the central figure and his followers as the object of analysis offer deep insights into how social media mediates religious practice. Thus, the selection of this topic becomes relevant to explore how digital media influences individual and community piety.

This study uses a qualitative approach to dig deeper into the dynamics that occur in Gus Ulil's online recitation. This approach was chosen because it can capture the complexity and nuances of interactions that occur in live streaming on Facebook. The data used in this study includes comments and reactions left by Gus Ulil's followers during the online recitation sessions. This qualitative orientation allows researchers to understand how followers interpret and respond to the teachings delivered in a digital format.²⁰ By focussing on the text and context of

¹⁷Putri Rahmah Nur Hakim et al., "Mediatization of Clothing Consumption Among Muslim Teenagers," *LAS Journal of Localities* 2, no. 1 (June 30, 2024): 52–68, doi:10.62033/iasjol.v2i1.41.

¹⁸Marta Kolodziejcka et al., "Religious Media Settlers In Times Of Deep Mediatization," *Religion*, 2023, doi:10.1080/0048721x.2022.2083032.

¹⁹Henry Fernando et al., "The Controversy of Democracy in Indonesia Presidential Election 2024," no. 3 (2024): 287–301, doi:10.26618/jed.v.

²⁰Wiji Nurasih, Ainiyatul Latifah, and Adil Hassan Ibrahim Mohamed, "Spirituality Transformation from Metaphysical to Metaverse," *LAS Journal of Localities*, 2023, doi:10.62033/iasjol.v1i2.17.

the comments, this research seeks to uncover how digital piety is formed and maintained among Gus Ulil's followers. The data is analysed to see the patterns that emerge and how they contribute to the formation of a new religious habitus.²¹

The data sources in this study come from primary data obtained from interviews with several informants related to the case of this article who actively use social media, Gus Ulil's congregation, secondary data from online data, and literature review. Some of the data is used to analyse the characteristics of Gus Ulil's online ngaji in shaping habits in the digital era to understand the implications of such mediation on ngaji practices and social interactions. Secondary data came from online news or screenshots of online ngaji live streaming and hashtag search results #ngajionlinegusulil on various social media platforms. A total of 30 relevant online news articles were selected for analysis, focusing on the appearance and description of Gus Ulil's recitation and the accompanying comments. Each article was analysed in depth to identify relevant quotes that could be used as research data.²² The selection of news is based on the relevance and credibility of the source, ensuring that the data obtained reflects an accurate picture of the phenomenon under study.²³ These quotes are then processed and used as the basis for further analysis to understand how digital media affects followers' piety.

In this context, data collection was carried out by systematically screenshotting online, as well as copying news hyperlinks related to the shift in piety in Gus Ulil's online recitation on Facebook. The data obtained was then converted into a quotation format that had been selected according to the needs of the study. Each quote was classified based on themes relevant to the object of research, such as forms of interaction, emotional response, and spiritual engagement. This process

²¹Ahmad Rahmatullah Airlangga PH, Widya Ajeng Saputri, and Putri Rahmah Nurhakim, "Socio-Religious Behavior on Consumption Pattern during Israel and Palestine Conflict in Muslim Society," *LAS Journal of Localities*, 2024, doi:10.62033/iasjol.v1i2.22.

²²Ismail Ismail, Novi Hendri, and Putri Rahmah Nurhakim, "Minangkabau's Doro Tradition: Coexistence of Customary Law and Islamic Law in Caning Punishment," *Samarah*, 2023, doi:10.22373/sjhk.v7i1.15904.

²³Puja Alviana Dewantri, Selvone Christin Pattiserlihun, and Putri Rahmah Nur Hakim, "Navigating Religious Hegemony and Human Rights Based on KUHP: Al-Zaytun's Controversial Case," *POROS ONIM: Jurnal Sosial Keagamaan*, 2023, doi:10.53491/porosonim.v4i2.742.

allowed the researcher to build a more complete picture of the dynamics of piety in the digital environment. In attempting to interpret this shifting phenomenon of piety, the researcher also considered contextual factors that influence followers' perceptions and participation.

This study uses the process and stages of thematic analysis by emphasising the inductive construction of themes or topics, which are then systematically classified based on themes relevant to the object of research.²⁴ Data analysis in this study follows an interpretative approach, which integrates visual and narrative data to support each other and provide a more comprehensive understanding. Each theme that emerged from the data was analysed to see how it contributes to the overall understanding of shifting piety in the digital age.²⁵ As such, this process of analysis allowed the researcher to present in-depth and evidence-based results, which can be used to assess the impact of digital media on religious practices among Muslims.

Discussion

Dakwah Discourse from Offline to Online

The shift of da'wah from offline to online has become a significant phenomenon in recent years, especially with the advancement of digital technology and the increasing use of social media. The form of recitation conducted in mosques or other places of worship has now shifted to online platforms, such as facebook, youtube, and instagram. This change has had a major impact on the way people interact with da'wah content and religious understanding. As Islamisation in Indonesia initially took place when early Muslim converts established informal learning environments, it evolved into structured educational institutions such as madrasah and pesantren. Using social media, it is possible for the da'wah process to reach a wide public and increase the accessibility of Islamic teachings.²⁶ Entering the 20th century, the use of new media in

²⁴Nurasih, Latifah, and Mohamed, "Spirituality Transformation from Metaphysical to Metaverse."

²⁵Henry Fernando, Yuniar Galuh Larasati, and Novita Cahyani, "Being #wanitasalihah: Representations of Salihah Women on TikTok," *LAS Journal of Localities* 1, no. 1 (May 24, 2023): 1–15, doi:10.62033/iasjol.v1i1.8.

²⁶Muhammad Choirin et al., "Muballigh in the Digital Age Based on Insights From Indonesian Phenomena: Leveraging Digital Learning for the Promotion of Islamic Values," *Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 9, no. 2 (2024): 167–90, doi:10.22515/albalagh.v9i2.7751.

Indonesia such as radio became an important point in the shift of da'wah as utilised by several Islamic organisations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. Radio broadcasts, which can reach large audiences, help in catering to contemporary Muslim audiences through methodologies related to diverse interpretations of Islam.²⁷

After the presence of radio, television technology developed in the 1960s and 1990s, making the trend of Islamic da'wah enter a new era. Television provides a visual dimension through images and videos so that religious messages can be more easily received. Contemporary religious programmes on television serve as an important reference point for effectively engaging audiences.²⁸ The adaptation of the current shift in Islamic da'wah is more flexible while maintaining the substance of religious teachings, utilising social media that quickly attracts public attention such as online book recitations, especially those delivered by scholars who have strong authority and charismatic, for example Gus Ulil Abshar.

The table below illustrates the key differences between offline and online recitation, covering aspects such as interaction, accessibility, flexibility, and spiritual experience. Through this table, it can be seen how the da'wah discourse is evolving and changing from the traditional format to a more private and individualised digital form.

Table 1. Aspects of accessibility, freedom, as well as challenges (loss of direct interaction and non-verbal elements)

Informant	Piety Factor	Statement	Excess
I1	Accessibility and Flexibility	“Ngaji online makes it easier for me to access his lectures because they are not affected by	Easy and flexible access; can follow the recitation from anywhere without space

²⁷Abdulwahab Danladi Shittu and Ibrahim Mubarak Olalekan, “Assessing Contrasting Approaches to Dacwah on Radio in Ilorin, Nigeria,” *International Journal of Emerging Issues in Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2023): 74–84, doi:10.31098/ijeis.v3i2.1979.

²⁸Hadeel Zein Eddin Abudalou and Zawawi Ben Yosuf, “The Modern Religious Programs on Television and Their Impact on Islam Advocacy,” *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 14, no. 1 (2024): 2668–76, doi:10.6007/ijarbs/v14-i1/20707.

Informant	Piety Factor	Statement	Excess
		place and time, so I can watch them anywhere..."	and time constraints.
I.1	Relevance to Da'wah	" This allows me to stay connected with my da'wah and spiritual benefits even if it doesn't happen face-to-face.."	Staying connected to spiritual messages even virtually.
I.2	Participant Interaction and Engagement	" There were many participants on Facebook, probably because it has a wider reach... They exchanged knowledge about religion and spiritual experiences...."	Greater interaction and discussion with participants from different backgrounds.
I.3	Freedom of self-learning	" I can choose what material I want, or play back Facebook-shared recordings as needed...."	Freedom to choose materials and pace of learning according to own interests and abilities.
I.4	Spiritual and Emotional Experiences	" The best way to learn is in person... The lack of direct interaction also seems to reduce	-

Informant	Piety Factor	Statement	Excess
		the depth of spiritual experience...."	
I.5	Missing Nonverbal Elements and Togetherness	" There is no space to share emotions directly, or understand physical presence and togetherness..."	-

Table 1 shows that the shift in piety in Gus Ulil's online recitation shows a transformation in the way people interact with da'wah. The wide accessibility and flexibility of time make it easy for pilgrims to join the recitation without being tied to a specific place and time. However, the loss of face-to-face interaction reduces the depth of spiritual experience previously gained from physical presence and togetherness. Nonetheless, online recitation allows the congregation to learn independently and choose material that suits their interests. Challenges arise in maintaining the authenticity of da'wah messages amidst the rapid and diverse flow of information on social media. Discussions and interactions that occur virtually open up space for wider participation, but also require caution in conveying messages so as not to cause controversy. Piety, which was originally personal, can now be adapted to a digital format that is more structured and flexible. This transformation reflects changes in the Muslim community's efforts to understand and appreciate the role of da'wah in the digital era.

The discourse of da'wah has significantly shifted from physical spaces to the digital realm in line with the development of information technology.²⁹ If in the old period the tendency of da'wah was more often carried out through the pulpits of mosques, taklim assemblies, or recitations in the neighbourhood, now da'wah finds a new stage in cyberspace. This transformation brings changes in the way religious

²⁹Ma'rifatul Munjiah, "Demoralization Narrative: Foul Language of Community Figures," *LAS Journal of Localities* 1, no. 1 (May 2023): 54–66, doi:10.62033/iasjol.v1i1.12.

messages are delivered and received by the people.³⁰ Through platforms such as youtube, facebook, and instagram, preachers and ustaz can now reach a wider audience without being limited by time and space. Interactions that were previously limited to face-to-face, are now more interactive with comments, like and share features that allow da'wah to spread faster. Khumaedi said this change also gave rise to new dynamics in the dissemination of religious knowledge, through da'wah messages that must be adapted to the characteristics of online audiences with diverse tendencies.³¹ This new challenge encourages preachers to be more creative and adaptive in delivering messages to remain relevant and attractive to the digital generation.

On the other hand, the transformation of da'wah from offline to online also invites deep reflection on the essence of da'wah itself. Da'wah, which previously emphasised personal aspects and emotional closeness, must now face the challenge of maintaining authenticity and sincerity in a digital format.³² In a virtual space where everything can be edited and framed, the authenticity of the message is often questioned. However, the digitalisation of da'wah also opens opportunities to spread religious values more widely and inclusively, embracing those who may be difficult to reach through conventional methods.³³ This discourse also raises ethical questions about how to maintain the quality and depth of da'wah during the swift flow of information that is often superficial. Thus, the discourse of da'wah from offline to online is not only a matter of shifting methods, but also about how to understand and live the role of da'wah in the fast-paced digital era.

³⁰Umi Kulsum, Arief Subhan, And Deden Mauli Darajat, "Online Da'wah Practices on Social Media (Case Study on @khalidbasalamahofficial Instagram Account)," *Virtu: Journal of Communication, Culture and Islamic Studies*, 2021, Doi:10.15408/Virtu.V1i1.21749.

³¹Teddy Khumaedi And Siti Fatimah, "The Urgency of Da'wah Through Social Media," *Al-Mubini; Islamic Scientific Journal*, 2019, doi:10.51192/Almubin.V2i2.64.

³²Nunu Burhanuddin et al., "Contextualization Of Tarekat In Modern Society: Study Of The Spiritual Education Of The Naqsyabandiyah Pauh In Padang, West Sumatra," 2019, doi:10.4108/Eai.17-10-2019.2289744.

³³Talia Tri Ananda, "Hijrah Youth Movement Community Innovation Adoption of Shift Media's Hijrah Youth Online Da'wah," *Da'wah: Journal of Da'wah and Community Studies*, 2021, doi:10.15408/Dakwah.V25i2.23234.

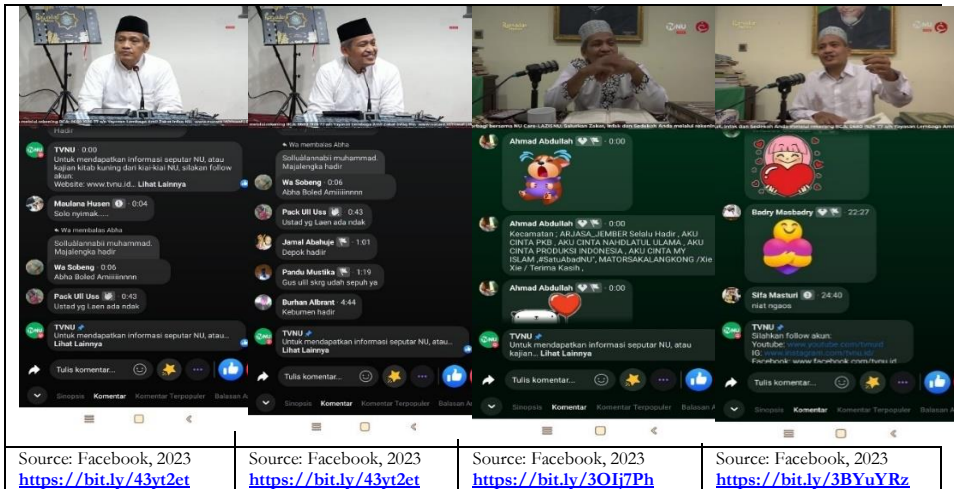


Image 1. Da'wah discourse from offline to online

From the picture above, it appears that the uploaded pictures show a portrait of da'wah discourse that has shifted from offline to online. In this context, social media platforms such as Facebook are used as a medium to convey da'wah messages. In the picture above, a preacher (Gus Ulil) is seen reading the book directly to an online audience, while comments and reactions from the audience appear on the side of the screen. Interaction in the form of comments and stickers illustrates the active involvement of the virtual audience. Despite the physical distance, the digital space allows for real-time communication between the preacher and the audience, which initially only happened in mosques or majelis taklim. This shows how da'wah has now transcended geographical and temporal boundaries, reaching a wider and more diverse audience.

This transformation not only changes the medium of delivery, but also the dynamics of interaction between the preacher and the congregation by combining visual and textual elements in the delivery of religious messages. This online da'wah discourse demands adaptation from both the preacher and the congregation, who must now interact through a computer screen or mobile phone, while still trying to maintain the intimacy and spiritual depth that is usually present in face-to-face meetings. The evidence in the table above is in line with Carmen Backer's argument about communication in chat rooms and online

forums.³⁴ Chat rooms on the Facebook platform are facilitated by software that allows online participants to type text into the general conversation in more or less real time that appears in the main chat room window. This is so that the online congregants can be identified, and their presence acknowledged.³⁵ Thus, Gus Ulil's online ngaji is not only visual but also textual, involving the meaning of interaction through responses in the comment's column.

Privatisation of Community Space

Privatisation of community space is a phenomenon that occurs when spaces that were previously open and accessible to the public at large are transformed into more closed and exclusive spaces. In the context of online recitations, such as those led by Gus Ulil, this privatisation is seen in how interactions between followers and teachers become more limited, both physically and socially. Previously held in mosques or places of worship with open access to the public, recitations are now moving to online platforms with participation often limited by digital access, membership, or certain rules. The table below illustrates various aspects of the privatisation of community space in online recitations, such as changes in accessibility, control, safety, and spiritual experiences experienced by participants. Through this table, a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the community space changes with privatisation and its implications for participants' social and spiritual engagement.

Table 2. Interview on the privatisation of community space in Gus Ulil's online ngaji.

Informant	Description	Shortage	Influence on Spiritual Experience
I.1	Online spaces provide advantages	Difficult for new people to	May decrease opportunities to

³⁴Putri Rahmah et al., "Aceh and the Politics of Islamic Identity : Implications for Social and Political Dynamics" 12 (2024), doi:<https://doi.org/10.24252/profetik.v12i2a1>.

³⁵Bernd W. Becker, "Information Literacy In The Digital Age: Myths And Principles Of Digital Literacy," *School Of Information Student Research Journal*, 2018, Doi:10.31979/2575-2499.070202.

Informant	Description	Shortage	Influence on Spiritual Experience
	in control and safety but lead to exclusivity.	access, exclusive.	learn with others.
I.2	Privatisation leads to limitations in communication and feedback between participants and teachers.	Limited by time and space, lack of direct supervision.	Reduced direct interaction and guidance, affecting spiritual understanding.
I.3	Physical presence is lost, reducing the solemn atmosphere and spiritual experience.	Loss of deep spiritual experiences.	Reduced focus and solemn atmosphere.
I.4	Participating in online ngaji facilitates access but loses direct interaction with the congregation.	Lack of direct interaction with the congregation.	Reduced sense of community and togetherness.
I.5	Privatisation reduces direct supervision and spiritual guidance in online ngaji.	Lack of direct guidance and supervision.	Influencing the quality of spiritual development.
I.6	Privatisation leads to a shallower spiritual experience, especially in an informal setting.	Loss of deep communal atmosphere.	Lack of spiritual depth.

The table above demonstrates the privatization of community space in Gus Ulil's online recitation by showing a significant shift from an open communal space to a more private one. Most informants felt that while the online space offered greater flexibility and access, they also

observed limitations in direct interaction and spiritual experience. This privatization is marked by a decline in the quality of interaction from more intense interactions in physical spaces, such as in mosques or surau, to being limited to brief comments and reactions. This also affects spiritual understanding and development, due to the lack of direct supervision and the solemn atmosphere usually present in face-to-face recitations. Ultimately, this privatization creates a more closed and exclusive space, where access to communal experiences becomes increasingly difficult and limited.

A community space is a place where more than two people with similar interests, visions, and missions come together to share information, experiences, and thoughts.³⁶ This space is used to share information and discuss specific topics, interact with each other, learn and work together towards a common goal.³⁷ In the end, technology turns community spaces into private ones. Privatization of community communal space refers to the transformation or change of space that was originally attended by many people or public and open in nature to become narrower and closed or more exclusive.³⁸ This privatization occurs when communities want and choose to limit access to their community spaces, from creating policies with registration requirements, implementing membership rules, or even requiring prior administrative registration to join to access community resources.³⁹

Digital Sufism Landscape

The presence of traditional scholars in the social media environment in the Indonesian context, realizing that most people, especially the Muslim millennial generation, are so active in getting information instantly on social media. So that it raises a new habitus with da'wah or recitation activities through social media. As Bourdieu's theory

³⁶Rabiah Adawiyah And Darman Manda, "Practice of Islamic Da'wah Implementation in the Hijrah Yuk Ngaji Community Makassar," *Alliri: Journal Of Anthropology*, 2021.

³⁷Haidah Karani And Ali Taufik, "Benefits of Gender-Based Learning Spaces in Improving Learning Quality," *Educative: Journal of Education Science*, 2021.

³⁸Ghoustonjwani Adi Putra And Daim Triwahyono, "Privatization in the Public Sphere," *Pawon: Journal of Architecture*, 2019, Doi:10.36040/Pawon.V3i01.133.

³⁹Fitri Annas Sholikhah & Andhita Risko Faristiana, "Changes in Religious Substance Through Religious Privatization Behavior in the New Media Era," *Proceeding Of The 2nd Conference On Strengthening Islamic Studies In The Digital Era*, 2022.

of habitus is a social process that leads to lasting patterns, and can shift in the context of time to time with its dynamic nature.⁴⁰ The existence of habitus displays a lifestyle and life activities obtained from individual experiences in social interactions.⁴¹ In the case of Gus Ulil's online recitation, the activities of the congregation to study classical Islamic traditions in certain themes such as tazkiyatun nafs or cleansing the soul, have given rise to a habitus or habit that was previously very close to the classical method of boarding school, becoming a new innovation of preachers who see the spiritual needs of the urban Muslim segment with the use of social media.

Media trends that were born as an influence of globalization try to erode more flexible da'wah methods to be displayed to the public. Although the assumption of preaching through television still exists, the presence of social media has led to the complexity of new preachers who are more massive than the presence of television at the beginning of its appearance.⁴² Freedom of expression supported by media sophistication, now preachers do not need to require complicated preaching industry management, but can be done with a small professional team to be displayed to the public through social media. This kind of pattern also reinforces the process of media liberalization, making it easier in the context of independent da'wah. One only needs wifi and other media support devices, to create religious content and upload it independently to social media.

The role of kiai or pesantren scholars in preaching on social media, as an effort to negotiate the role between religion and technology as the main alternative in the sustainability of the role of Islamic preaching in the future. Gus Ulil is one of the kyai who enlivened the world of social media with his da'wah content, namely online recitation of the book of *Ihya' Ulumuddin*.⁴³ Gus Ulil first utilized the social media

⁴⁰Yasmin Moll, "Islamic Televangelism: Religion, Media And Visuality In Contemporary Egypt" *Arab Media & Society*, 2010.

⁴¹Nur Ika Fatmawati and Ahmad Sholikin, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Basic Concept of Symbolic Violence," *Madani: Journal of Politics and Society*, 12, no. 1 (2020): 41–60, doi:10.52166/madani.v12i1.1899.

⁴²Putri Rahmah Nur Hakim, "Representasi Kecantikan Perempuan Berhijab Di Media Sosial: Studi Kasus Selebgram Aceh" (Digilib Uin Sunan Kalijaga, 2024), https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/65249/1/22200011011_BAB-I_IV-atau-V_DAFTAR-PUSTAKA.pdf.

⁴³Book of *Ihya' Ulumuddin* is a major work of Imam Al-Ghazali (d.1111 AH) in

platform Facebook to pioneer an online recitation class in 2016 that was held consistently on Friday nights. Gus Ulil's use of classical texts, which in this case focuses on the works of Imam Al-Ghazali, is the key to Ngaji Ihya' increasing in popularity among Indonesian Muslims, especially traditionalists (NU).

Gus Ulil's intellectual journey experienced a lot of contemplation of thoughts that were present in him since he was at the Mathali'ul Falah pesantren (Pati, Central Java), which had a strong desire to continue his studies after Aliyah. Gus Ulil eventually went to LIPIA (College of Islam and Arabic), to study for free, although Gus Ulil realized that the educational institution often promoted Wahhabi ideas. Nevertheless, Gus Ulil encouraged his father that while at LIPIA, he studied fiqh comparison of Mazhab and his teacher graduated from Al-Khoirot Palu who was of the Syafi'i School of Thought, Dr. Salim Al-Jufri (current PKS figure).⁴⁴

Gus Ulil's activism at LIPIA was accompanied by following the Tarbiyah group to the extent of following some of his peers, but on the other hand Gus Ulil's criticalism dialogued with some of the ideas of the Tarbiyah group and delved specifically into the thinking of the Ikhwanul Muslimin. Gus Ulil saw in the end concluded at that time that the Ikhwan group was totalitarian who wanted a system that controlled humans in detail and the absence of freedom. On this basis, Gus Ulil's unrest left the Tarbiyah group and formed a discussion forum by making the journal "Ulumul Qur'an" editor-in-chief Dawam Rahardjo the main reading of the discussion every week.

Since then, Gus Ulil has been labeled as a Liberal Muslim by his colleagues. Gus Ulil's encounter with critical thinking in reading Islamic texts then led him to form the Liberal Islamic Network (JIL) as a stream of Islamic renewal thought in Indonesia. Gus Ulil's presence as a Muslim intellectual with JIL in the early 2000s after the end of the New Order, aimed to continue the debate about Muslims' efforts to catch up in various fields.

the field of Sufism composed over several years while moving between Damascus, Jerusalem, Hijaz, and Thus, which contains a combination of fiqh, Sufism, and philosophy.

⁴⁴Wahyudi Akmaliah And Norshahril Saat, "From Liberalism To Sufism : Ulil Abshar Abdalla Gains Renewed Relevance Online Through Ngaji Ihya," *Perspective: Researchers At Iseas – Yusof Ishak Institute Analyse Current Events*, No. 91 (2022): 1–11.

The post-New Order period (1967-1998) in Indonesia with the arrival of Reformation demands that have the principle of upholding freedom of speech gave birth to new problems for Muslims in Indonesia. For Martin Van Bruinessen, this symptom is a 'conservative turn' that displays a different face of Islam with the emergence of the Jihad movement which then carries the banner of Islam to local conflicts, to terrorist groups with trans-national networks that resulted in a series of bombings in several regions.⁴⁵ Gus Ulil's struggle in the aspect of Islamic thought in the era before the Reformation (1998), was heavily influenced by the writings of Ahmad Wahib, KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur), Harun Nasution. Gus Ulil with his JIL presence has an agenda to reduce the religious fundamentalist movement and oppose the application of sharia (formalization of sharia).⁴⁶

Gus Ulil as a critical Muslim intellectual at the beginning of the Reformation at that time also published a controversial article in Kompas entitled "Refreshing Islamic Thought" on November 18, 2002, which specifically criticized the textualist reading of Islam which interpreted religion in a rigid and closed manner, without considering other aspects such as universality, tolerance, and tolerance. Gus Dur's big role in Gus Ulil, especially for the younger generation of NU in the 1980-1990s period, was to introduce new readings such as Hasan Hanafi to Abid Al-Jabiri who argued that traditional texts must be relevant to today's life, so there needs to be a re-reading.⁴⁷

In the development twenty years later, since Gus proposed the idea of Islamic renewal, Gus Ulil has now begun to explore the digital world in the Ngaji Ihya' session on Facebook. This activity assumes that Gus Ulil is starting to target urban Muslims as a new audience with the ease of accessibility of new media and has serious problems around spirituality. The problem of urban Muslim spirituality lies in the psychological dryness of modernity, so Sufism becomes a solution to overcome their spiritual dissatisfaction.⁴⁸ Traditionalist clerics, including

⁴⁵Martin Van Bruinessen, *Introduction: Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam and the "Conservative Turn" of the Early Twenty-First Century* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2013).

⁴⁶Maarif, "The Sojourn of Islamic Reform in Indonesia with Gus Ulil Abshar Abdalla," 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/Watch?V=Wxrbgoffzg>.

⁴⁷Al Makin, "Talking with Gus Ulil About Ngaji Ihya Online," 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KNrSG8CouA.

⁴⁸Wakhid Hasyim, Ahmad Syafii, and Arifah Fauziah, "Urban Sufism: Spirituality

Gus Ulil, are aware of the current development of conservatism that displays the pure face of Islam with the spirit of “returning to the Qur'an and Hadith” by Salafi preachers, it is also necessary to display traditionalist clerics to fill religious space online.

Gus Ulil's intellectualism in the spirit of Islamic renewal is considered relevant to currently fill the social media space, by presenting the narrative of classical texts, in this case the works of Imam Al-Ghazali in the context of new media. The argument of this study calls it “digital Sufism” which is interpreted as an effort to present the tradition of Sufism in classical Islamic texts, through digital media channels with new reinterpretations according to the current context. So that the re-reading as displayed in each session of “Ngaji Ihya' Online”, Gus Ulil provides an interpretation with new grammar according to the context of today's times.

The inspiration obtained by Gus Ulil in his efforts to revive the classical Islamic tradition through the works of scholars he obtained while studying at Harvard with his teacher at that time, Prof. Sheikh Ahmad (Pakistan).⁴⁹ The thing that amazed Gus Ulil at that time was the method used by Sheikh Ahmad by re-reading the book with a new approach, and narrating according to the context of life today. This condition in Indonesia was realized with the emergence of the Nahdlatul Turats movement as a process of restoring the glory of Islamic intellectualism by reviving the works of classical scholars and contextualizing them according to the times.⁵⁰ The classic book taught at that time was *al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Qur'an* by Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuthi (d. 991 AH) which explains the important parts of the study of the Qur'an.

After Gus Ulil started the inaugural “Ngaji Ihya' Online” in 2016, many traditionalist scholars in various Islamic boarding schools were then inspired and initiated something similar. Reading the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin* for Gus Ulil is understood as a rite that is read regularly. He sees that by reading the book regularly and repeatedly, it can be

Education for Middle Class Muslim,” *Forum Paedagogik* 13, no. 2 (2022): 262–77, doi:10.24952/paedagogik.v13i2.6466.

⁴⁹PARES Indonesia, “PolGov Talks Ft. Ulil Abshar Abdalla,” 2022.

⁵⁰Margo Sampurno, “Nahdlatul Turats: Gerakan Filologi Islam Dalam Melacak Jaringan Keilmuan Ulama Nusantara,” *Muttaqien; Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies*, 2024, doi:10.52593/mtq.05.1.02.

contextualized with the latest developments and new approaches.⁵¹ Gus Ulil cited the example of Darussalam Islamic Boarding School (Banyuwangi, East Java), which recites the book of *Ihya'* alternately by brothers, namely Kyai Hisyam Syafaat and Kyai Hasyim Syafaat. The book was completed within two years and continued repeatedly.

Gus Ulil's love for the tradition of classical Islamic texts channeled in Facebook media is also inseparable from the role of his wife (Lenas Tsuroiyya) who manages Gus Ulil's live streaming and recording and is more popular as mbak admin (assistant staff). Lenas is the daughter of a family of scholars from the Islamic boarding school, Musthofa Bisri (Gus Mus). Lenas' role was also to initiate that Gus Ulil's *Ihya'* recitation be broadcast live via Facebook, which at that time there was a new service from Facebook through the live streaming feature. This relevant condition corresponds to Campbell's argument that the existence of online communities is an understanding that the space of interaction has changed, but the basic actions of social exchange have not changed.⁵²

The phenomenon of religious rites presented online, as a form of media development and mediatization, has blurred regional boundaries in social interaction. This then emphasizes the concept of network society, which makes the network metaphor has become a way to explain the form of community meetings.⁵³ The phenomenon of understanding the tradition of Sufism through the internet by re-reading classical Islamic texts according to the current context, indirectly makes the public discourse of the Islamic da'wah arena more complex. As a continuation of the online *Ihya'* recitation, Gus Ulil initiated the establishment of a virtual pesantren called Ghazalia College. The virtual pesantren "Ghazalia College" is an online pesantren with a curriculum that focuses on re-reading the classical Islamic tradition, through the works of Imam al-Ghazali.⁵⁴ This idea seeks to reintroduce all of Imam

⁵¹Putri Rahmah Nurhakim, "Diskriminasi Upah Terhadap Perempuan Yang Bekerja: A Perspective of Gender Work Place," *Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Antropologi* 7, no. 1 (2023): 16–31.

⁵²Heidi A. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice In New Media Worlds*, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice In New Media Worlds*, 2012, doi:10.4324/9780203084861.

⁵³Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

⁵⁴Nuralwara, "Mengenal Imam Al-Ghazali Dan Ghazalia College," 2022.

al-Ghazali's works in various fields, such as fiqh, theology, philosophy, and Sufism.

The online recitation of Ihya', which is routinely held every Friday night at the beginning of its appearance, was attended by students in various huts who were actively involved in conversations in the comment's column during the recitation session. Although gradually there was a discourse to reduce the conversation in the commentary column during the recitation, so that the ethics of adab were also considered online. One of the online participants, M. Zaki Muharror, who currently works as a history teacher at Dr. Mustain Romly High School, Lamongan, East Java, has been following the online Ihya' recitation since he was in 11th grade high school in 2017:

“The impact of studying Ihya' online has also influenced me, to be more careful in worship, because in the book of Ihya' Ulumuddin there are many guidelines and ways to organize intentions step by step”.

Seeing the phenomenon of Gus Ulil with the online Ihya' recitation, made the informant (Zaki) to be involved as an online santri as a commitment in the process of seeking knowledge. Zaki also practices the ritualism of wudlu before attending online recitations, as well as undergoing formal worship. It gives rise to a form of “online piety”, as an interpretation of religiosity supported by the media. Conditions that also have implications for changes in Zaki's attitude, as evidenced by the caution in carrying out worship as conveyed by Gus Ulil in the online Ihya' recitation with simple, light and contextual language.

The aspect of “digital Sufism” has certainly changed the landscape of one's scholarly patterns in understanding the rich treasures of the classical Islamic tradition. For someone who experiences a change in attitude and perspective after attending the online Ihya' recitation, emphasizing the form of religiosity facilitated by the internet network that gave birth to the discourse on “online piety”. Although this form of piety has also been debated among scholars to understand it proportionally. Martin Slama's study states that there is a review of the form of online piety, by looking at the phenomenon of online One Day One Juz (ODOJ) Qur'an recitation and charitable activities that utilize

social media. Fatima & M Slama argue that forms of expression displayed online have considerable risks with digital footprints, so the potential for *riya'* is very likely to be vulnerable.⁵⁵

Conclusions

This research reveals several important findings relevant to the study's focus on the transformation of *da'wah* from offline to online, particularly in the context of Gus Ulil's recitation on social media. One of the main findings is how the use of digital platforms such as Facebook enables the dissemination of Sufism teachings and classical Islamic texts to a wider and modern audience. The study also shows changes in the social and spiritual interactions between followers and scholars, as the previously open community has now become more private and segmented. These findings confirm that the digitalization of *da'wah* not only changes the medium of communication, but also affects the way Islamic communities interact. In addition, this study highlights that while social media can expand the reach of proselytization, it also creates new challenges in maintaining the authenticity and depth of religious messages. As such, this study provides insights into the new dynamics of religious practice in the digital age.

The main contribution of this study lies in the conceptual understanding of “digital Sufism” as an attempt to present the tradition of Sufism through digital media channels with new reinterpretations according to the current context. This study shows how the reinterpretation of classical Islamic texts can be done through social media, bridging tradition with contemporary needs. Methodologically, this study provides a new approach in analyzing the influence of digital media on religious practices, particularly in the context of *da'wah* and online communities. The study also enriches the literature on the transformation of religiosity in the digital age by highlighting how traditional clerics can remain relevant and influential amidst rapid technological change. As such, this research not only expands the understanding of the relationship between religion and technology, but also offers a new framework for exploring religious phenomena in cyberspace.

⁵⁵Fatimah Husein and Martin Slama, “Online Piety and Its Discontent: Revisiting Islamic Anxieties on Indonesian Social Media,” *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 2018, doi:10.1080/13639811.2018.1415056.

However, this study has some weaknesses that need to be considered and made recommendations for future research. First, this study is limited to analyzing one social media platform, facebook, which may not fully represent the user experience on other platforms such as youtube or instagram. Secondly, this study focuses more on the perspective of the ulama and less on the perspective of the followers or audience, which is also important in understanding the impact of digital da'wah. In addition, the methods used tend to be descriptive and could be further strengthened with quantitative or experimental approaches to measure the specific impact of online recitations on followers' religious behavior. Therefore, future studies are expected to overcome these limitations by expanding the scope of the platform, digging deeper into the audience's perspective, and using more varied methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

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