



Algorithmic Spiritual Authority: Digital Sufism and the Reconfiguration of *Sanad* in Indonesia

Digital platforms increasingly mediate the circulation of *dhikr*, *salawat*, Sufi aphorisms, healing narratives, devotional music, and online majelis in Indonesia. This article examines how platform visibility reshapes public perceptions of Sufi authority and how this transformation interacts with *sanad* (spiritual lineage), embodied guidance, and institutional recognition. Rather than claiming a statistically bounded netnography, the study adopts a conceptual–interpretive design that synthesizes digital religion, mediatization, commodification, and Indonesian Sufism, supported by illustrative observations of publicly accessible platform genres. The analysis identifies five forms of digital Sufism and develops a five-stage mechanism: visibility production, credibility inference, authority performance, institutional legitimation or contestation, and consequences for spiritual formation. Algorithmic spiritual authority does not simply refer to authority produced by algorithms but to a platform-conditioned regime in which metrics, repetition, aesthetics, and affective resonance become proxies for spiritual credibility. Digitalization thus produces hybrid legitimacy negotiated by institutions, creators, and audiences. The article explains when visibility becomes authority and distinguishes observable platform cues from inferred recommendation effects. Responsible adaptation requires spiritual literacy, credential transparency, layered pedagogy, and pathways toward accountable learning.

Keywords: Algorithmic spiritual authority, digital Sufism, religious mediatization, *sanad*, platform religion.

Platform digital semakin memediasi peredaran zikir, selawat, aforisme sufi, narasi penyembuhan, musik devosional, dan majelis daring di Indonesia. Artikel ini menelaah bagaimana visibilitas platform mengubah persepsi publik mengenai otoritas sufi serta bagaimana perubahan tersebut berinteraksi dengan sanad, bimbingan yang berwujud, dan pengakuan kelembagaan. Alih-alih mengklaim netnografi dengan korpus statistik yang terbatas, penelitian ini menggunakan desain konseptual–interpretatif yang mensintesis kajian agama digital, mediatisasi, komodifikasi, dan tasawuf Indonesia dengan pengamatan ilustratif terhadap genre platform yang dapat diakses publik. Analisis mengidentifikasi lima bentuk tasawuf digital dan mengembangkan mekanisme lima tahap: produksi visibilitas, inferensi kredibilitas, performa otoritas, legitimasi atau kontestasi kelembagaan, serta konsekuensi bagi pembentukan spiritual. Otoritas spiritual algoritmik bukanlah dihasilkan algoritma semata, melainkan rezim yang dikondisikan platform ketika metrik, pengulangan, estetika, dan resonansi afektif menjadi proksi kredibilitas spiritual. Digitalisasi menghasilkan legitimasi hibrida yang dinegosiasikan oleh lembaga, kreator, dan khalayak. Artikel ini menjelaskan kapan visibilitas berubah menjadi otoritas serta perbedaan antara petunjuk platform yang teramati dan efek rekomendasi yang disimpulkan. Adaptasi yang bertanggung jawab memerlukan literasi spiritual, transparansi kredensial, pedagogi berlapis, dan jalur menuju pembelajaran yang akuntabel.

Kata kunci: otoritas spiritual algoritmik; tasawuf digital; mediatisasi agama; sanad; agama platform.

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Introduction

Digital spirituality has become an integral part of religious life in Indonesia. *Dhikr* and *salawat* circulate as short videos; Sufi aphorisms appear as polished visual quotations; live-streamed majelis bring together dispersed participants; devotional music and healing narratives move fluidly across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.¹ The analytical challenge is not merely that Sufism has entered digital media, but that a tradition organized around lineage, disciplined companionship, ethical formation, and gradual transformation now encounters infrastructures designed to rank, repeat, recommend, and monetize attention. Mediatization scholarship is particularly valuable because it treats media as institutions with their own formats, incentives, and temporalities, rather than as neutral conduits. Similarly, digital religion scholarship cautions against separating online and offline religious practices, while critical mediatization studies emphasize that media effects must be understood in relation to specific traditions and contexts.² Taken together, these perspectives provide a way to examine how media logics interact with religious traditions without

assuming that their effects are uniform across contexts.³

Indonesia provides a particularly fertile context for this inquiry. Sufism has remained deeply embedded in revivalist, urban, educational, and devotional life, rather than persisting merely as a residual premodern form. Scholarship on Indonesian Islam demonstrates that Sufi institutions and idioms have consistently adapted to modernity, urbanization, formal sharia discourse, evolving *guru-murid* relationships, and multicultural social conditions. This adaptive history is significant because digital transformation should not be mistaken for the first encounter between Sufism and modernity.⁴ Instead, the defining characteristic of the present moment is the commercial and transnational architecture of digital platforms: religious actors engage in systems whose ranking criteria are neither generated nor fully controlled by tarekat, pesantren, or individual teachers.⁵

The same media environment has reorganized the Indonesian economy of preaching. Attention, posting frequency, visual identity, audience intimacy, and branded self-presentation have become resources through which religious messages gain reach.⁶ Studies of

¹ Dahlia Hidayati, 'Online Sufism and Reestablishing Religious Authority', *Ulumuna* 26, no. 1 (August 30, 2022): 203–236; Arif Wibowo, 'Spiritual Consumption Culture in the Digital Age: Islamic Influencers and New Ethics of Piety among Students at Diponegoro University', *Jurnal Keislaman* 9, no. 1 (February 27, 2026): 1–9; Dudung Abdurahman and Bambang Hariyanto, 'The Transformation of the Zawiyah Into Digital Spaces', in *Digital Hate Speech, Disinformation, and Peace in Religiously Diverse Regions* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2026), 317–340.

² Stig Hjarvard, 'The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change', *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no. 1 (June 1, 2008): 9–26.

³ Mia Lövhelm, 'Mediatization of Religion: A Critical Appraisal', *Culture and Religion* 12, no. 2 (June 2011): 153–166; Hjarvard, 'The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change', 9–26.

⁴ Zulfan Taufik and Muhammad Taufik, 'Mediated Tarekat Qadiriyyah Wa Naqshabandiyah in the Digital Era:

An Ethnographic Overview', *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 22, no. 1 (May 29, 2021): 35–43; Ziaulhaq Hidayat, 'Transforming Sufism Into Digital Media', *Epistémè: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 17, no. 2 (March 6, 2023): 197–223; Kartika, Abdullah Thalib, and Muh. Amri, 'Urban Sufisme Dan Urban Salafi Pada Era Digital', *Jurnal Alwatizkhoebillah: Kajian Islam, Pendidikan, Ekonomi, Humaniora* 10, no. 2 (December 31, 2024): 557–567.

⁵ Julia Day Howell, 'Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (August 26, 2001): 701–729; Hariyanto, 'Transformasi Tasawuf Modern Menurut Nasaruddin Umar Dan Relevansinya Dalam Masyarakat Multikulturalisme Di Indonesia', *Hikamia: Jurnal Pemikiran Tasawuf dan Peradaban Islam* 4, no. 1 (March 31, 2024): 1–21; Rubaidi Rubaidi, 'Kontekstualisasi Sufisme Bagi Masyarakat Urban', *Jurnal Theologia* 30, no. 1 (June 10, 2019): 127–152.

⁶ Annisa R. Beta, 'Religious Influencers and Socially Mediated Cultural Politics', in *Research Handbook on Social Media and Society* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), 58–69; Qurrota A'yuni and Rulli Nasrullah, 'Seeding Peaceful





Instagram *da'wa*, Muslim self-help charisma, mediatized hadith, and virtual Muslim entrepreneurship demonstrate that religious sincerity and commercial form are not mutually exclusive; rather, they can be intertwined within the same communicative act. A devotional clip may serve as a form of remembrance for a viewer while simultaneously enhancing a creator's visibility, data profile, and income. This dual nature necessitates an analysis that neither romanticizes access nor reduces every digital expression to mere deception.⁷

Recent studies in Indonesia describe algorithms as significant mediators of religious reception, authority, and subject formation. These studies suggest that recommendation systems and engagement metrics can fragment authority, privilege emotional and simplified content, and make popularity appear as evidence of credibility. However, the term "algorithmic authority" can be misleading if it implies that algorithms are directly observable causes. Researchers typically analyze outputs—such as repetition, views, comments, creator adaptation, and audience responses—rather than the proprietary ranking systems themselves. Therefore, this article adopts the more precise term "algorithmic spiritual authority" to describe a platform-conditioned process in which observable visibility cues are interpreted as indicators of spiritual credibility. This concept pertains to perceived authority rather than intrinsic sanctity, and to inferred recommendation effects rather than direct access to platform algorithms.⁸

The article addresses three key questions. First, which forms of Sufi discourse are particularly compatible with major social platforms? Second, through what mechanisms

can visibility be transformed into perceived spiritual authority rather than mere exposure? Third, how do classical and platform-based markers of legitimacy interact across institutions, creators, and audiences? The central argument is that digitalization produces a hybrid regime of legitimacy. Traditional elements such as sanad, silsila, adab, embodied guidance, and institutional recognition remain significant, but they coexist with publicly legible indicators such as views, follower counts, production quality, emotional resonance, and repeated recommendations. The crucial analytical approach, therefore, is not to oppose "traditional" and "digital" authority as closed systems, but to trace the conversion of visibility into credibility and the institutional negotiations that may affirm, redirect, or contest that conversion.

This article employs a conceptual-interpretive approach, informed by illustrative observations of publicly accessible digital materials, to examine this process. It does not claim to present a bounded, statistically representative netnographic corpus. This distinction is methodologically important because the available materials do not support precise claims regarding prevalence, saturation, or causal algorithmic effects. Instead, the article explores the analytical patterns that emerge when platform genres are analyzed through the lenses of mediatization, commodification, digital religion, and Sufi authority. Public posts, reels, short videos, livestream formats, comments, prayer requests, quotation practices, and commercial invitations serve as examples that elucidate underlying mechanisms; they are not treated as a comprehensive census of Indonesian digital Sufism.

Preaching In The Digital Universe: Mediatization Of Preaching Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar On Instagram', *al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi* 7, no. 2 (December 26, 2022): 345–378.

⁷ Martin Slama, 'A Subtle Economy of Time: Social Media and the Transformation of Indonesia's Islamic Preacher Economy', *Economic Anthropology* 4, no. 1 (January 11, 2017): 94–106; Femi Fauziah Alamsyah et al., 'Konstruksi

Identitas Virtual Muslimah Preneur: Mediatisasi Dan Komodifikasi Agama Dalam Akun Instagram @auliyafadlilah', *Jurnal Khabar: Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam* 6, no. 2 (December 31, 2024): 109–127.

⁸ Muhyidin Abdilah, 'Agama Dalam Cengkraman Algoritma: Polarisasi Otoritas Dan Wacana Keagamaan Di Media Sosial Indonesia', *Jurnal Cakrawala Akademika* 2, no. 4 (December 12, 2025): 168–175.





The interpretive procedure consists of four stages. First, recurring communicative forms are identified at the genre level, including devotional clips, aesthetic quotations, therapeutic spirituality, online majelis, and narrative or music-based expressions. Second, observable features are distinguished from inferences. Observable features include duration, captioning, source disclosure, visible metrics, invitations to paid services, comments, and institutional affiliation. Inferred processes encompass recommendation effects, motives, inner experiences, and the durability of spiritual transformation. Third, patterns are compared across platform affordances. Fourth, these patterns are interpreted using classical and contemporary criteria of authority. This approach draws on qualitative inquiry, thick description, internet ethnography, netnography, thematic analysis, content analysis, and naturalistic standards of credibility, while explicitly limiting claims that cannot be supported without a reproducible corpus or interviews.⁹

Given the use of publicly accessible materials, the analysis adheres to several ethical precautions. It avoids usernames, private messages, identifiable images, and the verbatim exposure of ordinary users. The illustrations are composite descriptions of recurring public patterns rather than traceable case reports. This approach protects users but also limits evidentiary specificity. Accordingly, the article does not infer creators' sincerity, diagnose audiences, or claim that a visible response represents long-term formation. Its contribution is theoretical clarification: it specifies a mechanism that future empirical research can test through interviews, platform-specific sampling, content mapping, and comparative institutional study.

Table 1. Analytical material domains and warranted claims

Material domain	Observable features	Permissible analytical use
Public posts and reels	Text, image, duration, caption, source disclosure, visible metrics	Identify communicative form and publicly displayed authority cues
Short and long video	Sound, editing, narrative structure, lecture length, livestream format	Compare platform-specific presentation and pedagogical depth
Public interactions	Comments, prayer requests, sharing, source challenges	Examine audience participation without inferring durable belief or dependence
Institutional pages	Affiliation, teacher identity, schedules, lineage or study pathways	Assess how classical legitimacy is made digitally visible
Commercial invitations	Paid classes, consultations, donations, merchandise, endorsements	Trace commercial entanglement without presuming insincerity

Source: Author's analytical synthesis.

Table 2. Conceptual analytical matrix

Category	Observable cues	Interpretive question
Devotional compression	Short dhikr, salawat, audio loop, reminder caption	How is repeated practice reformatted as portable content?
Aesthetic decontextualisation	Quotation, calligraphy, minimalist design, unclear provenance	How does circulation detach wisdom from pedagogical context?
Therapeutic marketisation	Healing claim, anxiety language, paid session or class	How do spiritual care and commercial services intersect?
Platformed communal presence	Livestream, prayer request, shared response, moderated group	When does mediated presence support accountable community?
Metric credibility	Views, followers, repetition, production quality, emotional delivery	When are visibility cues interpreted as authority?
Responsible adaptation	Transparent teacher, layered learning, source disclosure, offline route	How can access lead to sustained formation?

Source: Author's analytical synthesis.

⁹ Jhon W Creswell, *Research Design Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, Dan Mixed* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2016); John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3th ed.

(Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2013); Robert V Kozinets, *Netnography: Redefined* (SAGE Publications Inc., 2015).





Mediatization, Commodification, and Sufi Authority

Mediatization refers to a long-term process in which media institutions become increasingly influential in the functioning of other social fields. When applied to religion, it highlights how communication formats transform what can be made visible, repeated, and publicly understood. Instagram favors curated images, quotable text, and identity performance. TikTok emphasizes rapid emotional impact, musicality, repetition, and discovery through a personalized feed. YouTube supports longer instructional content and archived gatherings but still organizes attention through thumbnails, watch time, subscriptions, and monetization. Therefore, “platform logic” is not a singular force; rather, it is a set of affordances and incentives that differentially shape devotional clips, lectures, live sessions, and religious branding.

Mediatization alone does not fully explain commercial pressure. Scholarship on commodification demonstrates how spirituality can be repackaged as private therapy, branded identity, or a marketable experience. This critique is essential when healing sessions, paid classes, donations, endorsements, books, and merchandise accompany spiritual content. However, a totalizing market critique risks erasing religious agency. A single post can simultaneously hold exchange value for the creator and devotional use value for the audience. Therefore, the pertinent question is not whether commerce is present, but how commercial

incentives influence frequency, framing, credential display, promises of transformation, and the boundary between introductory communication and spiritual instruction.¹⁰

Studies in Indonesia on television drama, YouTube content, virtual Islamic culture, film, advertising, the *hijab* economy, and contemporary content production demonstrate that sacred symbols are routinely recontextualized within media markets. While these studies do not assert that Sufi content is uniformly commodified, they identify mechanisms applicable to the present case: the conversion of use value into exchange value, aesthetic packaging, audience segmentation, self-branding, and the treatment of engagement as a measure of communicative success. They also illustrate why commodification should be analyzed as a gradient rather than a binary condition.¹¹

These transformations are significant not only because they influence how religious content circulates and gains market value but also because they may reshape the conditions under which spiritual authority is recognized. The importance of digital mediation becomes clearer when authority is examined within the context of Sufi traditions. *Sanad* and *silsila* signify continuity of transmission; *bay‘a* formalizes commitment; *adab* structures the ethical framework of learning; *ṣuḥba* denotes formative companionship; *riyāḍa* and *tazkiyat al-naḥs* require sustained discipline; *maqāmāt* and *aḥwāl* imply sequence, duration, and transformation. None of

¹⁰ Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (Routledge, 2004); Arie Setyaningrum Pamungkas, ‘Mediatisasi Dakwah, Moralitas Publik Dan Komodifikasi Islam Di Era Neoliberalisme’, *Maarif* 13, no. 1 (June 20, 2018): 55–75; Deepak Sardana, Narain Gupta, and Piyush Sharma, ‘Spirituality and Religiosity at the Junction of Consumerism: Exploring Consumer Preference for Spiritual Brands’, *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 42, no. 6 (November 28, 2018): 724–735; Joerg Stolz and Jean-Claude Usunier, ‘Religions as Brands? Religion and Spirituality in Consumer Society’, *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 16, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 6–31; Diego Rinallo, Pauline Maclaran,

and Lorna Stevens, ‘A Mixed Blessing’, *Journal of Macromarketing* 36, no. 4 (December 26, 2016): 425–442.

¹¹ Latif Fianto and Fathul Qorib, ‘Komodifikasi Agama Dan Kepentingan Ekonomi Politik Media Dalam Sinetron Para Pencari Tuhan’, *Jurnal Komunikasi Nusantara* 4, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 140–148; Aisyah Humaira, ‘Agama Sebagai Produk: Membedah Komodifikasi Agama Islam Dalam Industri Media Perfilman Dan Periklanan’, *Lektur: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 7, no. 4 (January 21, 2024): 271–277; Raymundus Anthony Samadi, ‘Komodifikasi Konten Di Era Digital Indonesia : Pergulatan Nilai Guna Dan Nilai Tukar Dalam Ekologi Komunikasi Kontemporer’, *Dialogika : Jurnal Penelitian Komunikasi dan Sosialisasi* 1, no. 4 (December 2, 2025): 132–145.





these categories can be reduced to mere information transfer. A *murshid's* authority encompasses not only the ability to communicate compelling teachings but also a recognized capacity to guide, correct, and bear responsibility within a lineage and community.

This formulation should not be transformed into an uncritical hierarchy in which every offline practice is deemed authentic and every online practice considered superficial. Sufi institutions themselves differ regarding authorization, lineage, initiation, and the legitimate scope of mediated guidance. Urban Sufi groups have already modified *guru–murid* relationships; *ṭarīqa* movements have adapted to evolving political and legal contexts, and contemporary scholarship continues to document ongoing debates surrounding the figure of the *murshid*. Therefore, the normative vocabulary employed here identifies criteria internal to significant Sufi traditions; it does not assert the existence of a single theological authority capable of judging all neo-Sufi, non-*ṭarīqa*, reformist, therapeutic, or eclectic actors.¹²

The tension between established forms of Sufi authority and platform-conditioned visibility serves as the starting point for the concept of algorithmic spiritual authority. This concept is more specific than digital religious authority, influencer religiosity, or mediatized authority. Digital religious authority broadly refers to leadership and knowledge claims made online. Influencer religiosity emphasizes personality, intimacy, and self-branding, while platformed authority highlights technological and economic affordances. Algorithmic spiritual authority denotes a particular transformation: platform-generated or platform-conditioned visibility is interpreted by audiences as evidence of credible spiritual guidance in a context where

authority traditionally relies on genealogical, relational, and disciplinary markers. Although new media may decentralize access to religious speech, this concept focuses on what occurs after decentralization, how ranked visibility becomes a cue for authority.¹³

Five dimensions are essential to the concept. First, visibility must be generated through platform circulation, repeated exposure, search, sharing, or recommendation. Second, audiences must infer credibility from visible cues; exposure alone is insufficient. Third, creators must perform or be attributed a guiding role, whether through advice, prayer, interpretation, healing, or claims of expertise. Fourth, institutions or communities must legitimize, redirect, ignore, or contest that claim. Fifth, the process must have consequences for spiritual formation: it may direct users toward accountable learning, sustain mediated community, encourage fragmented consumption, or displace disciplined guidance. Monetization can intensify the process but is not a necessary condition.

The distinction between exposure and authority prevents tautology. A highly viewed devotional song is not automatically an authoritative teaching. A viral quote becomes relevant to authority only when viewers regard its creator, attributed source, or circulating account as trustworthy for spiritual guidance. Conversely, a low-visibility teacher may possess recognized lineage and institutional legitimacy, even if platform metrics do not amplify that standing. Algorithmic spiritual authority is thus relational and situational: it emerges at the intersection of platform ranking, creator practice, audience interpretation, and institutional response.

Platformed Forms of Indonesian Digital Sufism

¹² Sehat Ihsan Shadiqin, 'Tasawuf Di Era Syariat: Tipologi Adaptasi Dan Transformasi Gerakan Tarekat Dalam Masyarakat Aceh Kontemporer', *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 20, no. 1 (April 18, 2018): 66–79; Salim Bela Pili, 'Kontroversi Dalam Tasawuf Dan Mursyid', *Hikamia: Jurnal Pemikiran Tasawuf dan Peradaban Islam* 4, no. 1 (May 14, 2024): 33–47.

¹³ Alyna Turner, Brian Kelly, and Amanda L Baker, 'Psychological Impact of Serious and Enduring Mental Health', in *Palliative Care within Mental Health* (London: CRC Press, 2024), 59–79; Lövhelm, 'Mediatization of Religion: A Critical Appraisal', 9–26.





Across the materials examined, five recurring genres of Indonesian digital Sufism emerge. The first genre is the short *dhikr* or *salawat* clip. Its portability is central: a devotional phrase, rhythmic repetition, calming imagery, and concise caption can be saved, replayed, or shared without requiring extensive contextual knowledge. Such clips may support remembrance or emotional regulation. Their limitation lies not in brevity itself, but in the possibility that a repeated devotional fragment becomes detached from guidance regarding intention, discipline, sequence, and ethical practice.

The second genre is the aesthetic Sufi quotation. Minimalist design, calligraphy, warm imagery, and aphoristic language make teachings about sincerity, love, surrender, humility, and purification highly shareable. While portability expands access, it also renders provenance fragile. A statement attributed to a famous Sufi may circulate without an accompanying text, teacher, or interpretive context. Consequently, the account curating the quotation can accumulate credibility from the prestige of the attributed figure, even when the chain of attribution remains unclear.

The third genre is therapeutic or healing-oriented spirituality. It incorporates Sufi vocabulary, prayer, emotional counseling, *ruqyah*-related language, energy discourse, private sessions, and paid classes. These forms are doctrinally heterogeneous and should not be conflated into a single authorized practice. Their common feature is the promise that spiritual language can address anxiety, loneliness, burnout, or loss of meaning. Contemporary studies of spiritual crisis, mental health, and mediated selfhood help explain the demand for such content, but they do not establish that every digital intervention promotes well-being.¹⁴

The fourth genre is the online majelis, which includes livestreamed *dhikr*, lectures, devotional gatherings, and institutional study sessions. Unlike independent quotation accounts, these formats can extend existing communities and make recognized teachers accessible to geographically dispersed participants. Comments, prayer requests, and shared devotional responses foster a mediated sense of presence. The fifth genre is narrative or music-based spirituality, where personal transformation, longing, repentance, and divine love are conveyed through testimony, song, and emotionally structured storytelling. Studies specifically addressing Sufism in cyberspace and Sufi *da'wa* on TikTok support the relevance of authority, community, aesthetics, symbolism, and affect to these genres.¹⁵

Table 3. Recurring genres of Indonesian digital Sufism

Genre	Typical actors	Central authority issue
<i>Dhikr</i> and <i>salawat</i> clips	Preachers, devotional creators, general users	Reminder or practice guidance; context and sequence
Aesthetic Sufi quotations	Curators, graphic creators, followers	Provenance and borrowed prestige
Therapeutic spirituality	Counsellors, healers, religious entrepreneurs	Credentials, scope of claim, and commercial promises
Online <i>majelis</i> and live <i>dhikr</i>	<i>Tarekat</i> , pesantren, preachers, communities	Mediated participation and reciprocal accountability
Narrative or music-based Sufism	Musicians, storytellers, devotional creators	Affective accessibility versus pedagogical reduction

Source: Author's analytical synthesis.

These genres exhibit platform specificity in their formatting, circulation, and visibility. Instagram promotes a curated visual identity, a culture of quotation, and saveable reminders. TikTok emphasizes rapid emotional impact, sound, repetition, and discovery beyond an existing follower network. YouTube supports longer lectures, archived majelis, and devotional

¹⁴ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005); Barokah Mellany Khoirunnisa et al., 'Rekonstruksi Ajaran Tasawuf Awal Dan Relevansinya Dalam Mengatasi Krisis Spiritualitas

Masyarakat Modern', *ARIMA: Jurnal Sosial Dan Humaniora* 3, no. 3 (January 30, 2026): 443–448.

¹⁵ Shadiqin, 'Tasawuf Di Era Syariat: Tipologi Adaptasi Dan Transformasi Gerakan Tarekat Dalam Masyarakat Aceh Kontemporer', 66–79.



music, while still prioritizing watch time, thumbnails, titles, subscriptions, and consistent content production. These differences matter because the same teacher may perform authority differently across platforms: through concise quotations on Instagram, emotionally driven short videos on TikTok, and extended lectures on YouTube. Thus, platform specificity modifies rather than erases institutional identity.

Figure 1 conceptualizes digital Sufism as an ecosystem that connects actors, platforms, genres, audiences, interactions, and visibility cues. No single node determines authority. Institutions can use platforms responsibly; independent creators can disclose sources; audiences can verify or challenge claims; and commercial infrastructures can amplify both careful and careless content. Figure 2 then identifies the common visibility chain through which platform affordances favor compressed and affective forms, generate engagement, create commercial incentives, and reframe authority cues. This same chain can both expand access and introduce risks of oversimplification.

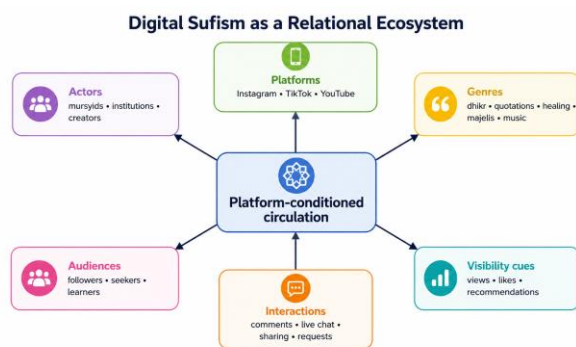


Figure 1. Ecosystem of digital Sufism in Indonesian social media.

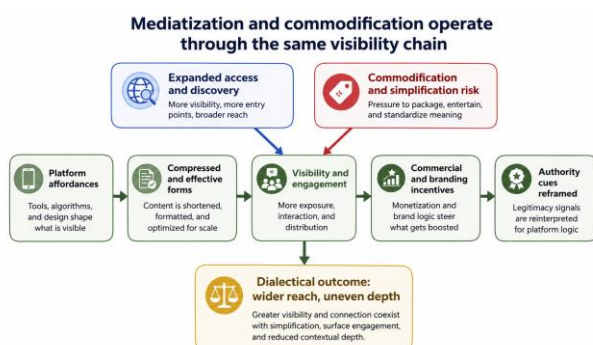


Figure 2. Dialectic of mediatization and commodification in digital Sufism.

From Visibility to Perceived Authority

The process by which visibility becomes perceived authority can be traced through five stages of conversion mechanisms. The first stage is visibility production. Content appears through direct following, search, sharing, paid promotion, or inferred recommendation. The analytical focus is on the outcome, repeated or prominent exposure, rather than on unverifiable claims about proprietary algorithms. The second stage is credibility inference. Audiences interpret indicators such as follower counts, polished production, emotional resonance, consistency, confident delivery, or frequent appearances as evidence that a source is trustworthy. This inference may be provisional, selective, or contested.

The third stage is authority performance. A creator moves beyond mere expression to provide guidance by interpreting teachings, prescribing practices, answering spiritual questions, offering healing, receiving prayer requests, or presenting a pathway for transformation. The fourth stage involves legitimation or contestation. Institutions such as *tarekat*, *pesantren*, recognized teachers, peer communities, and informed audiences may affirm credentials, redirect followers toward deeper study, expose weak attributions, or challenge the scope of a creator's claims. The fifth stage concerns formation: does the interaction lead to sustained learning and accountability, remain a meaningful but limited reminder, or devolve into fragmented consumption? Figure 3 presents these stages as a sequence without assuming that every visible creator passes through all of them.

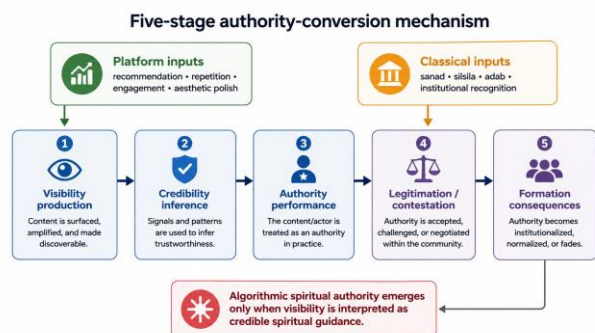


Figure 3. Five-stage mechanism of algorithmic spiritual authority.

The mechanism also explains why monetization is neither sufficient nor necessary. A paid class may be institutionally accountable and pedagogically rigorous, while a free viral account can still accumulate unexamined authority. Commercial incentives matter when they influence frequency, promises, emotional hooks, scarcity, or the maintenance of audience engagement. They intensify the conversion of attention into value, but perceived authority ultimately depends on audience interpretation and social legitimation.

The language used to describe algorithmic effects must remain precise and disciplined. While views and comments are observable, the exact recommendation logic that generates them typically is not. Creator adaptation can be inferred from repeated use of short-duration content, tags, hooks, thumbnails, or posting schedules; however, determining intention requires interview evidence. For example, a comment requesting guidance is observable, but long-term dependence on a creator is not. This distinction does not weaken the concept; rather, it clarifies what future research must measure and prevents platform rhetoric from being mistaken for evidence.

Table 4 formalizes this distinction by pairing visible indicators with permissible and impermissible inferences. The resulting framework can support empirical studies that systematically sample accounts and posts. Interviews could explore how creators negotiate sincerity and visibility; audience research could examine whether content functions as

remembrance, entertainment, instruction, or entry into a community; platform mapping could compare genre prevalence; and institutional research could trace how authorization is displayed or withheld..

Table 4. Evidence-to-inference safeguards

Visible indicator	Warranted inference	Claim requiring additional evidence
Views, likes, comments	Public engagement is displayed	The platform algorithm caused the reach
Hooks, tags, thumbnails, posting frequency	Content is adapted to platform conventions	The creator's motive is commercial or manipulative
Credential or lineage disclosure	An authority claim is publicly documented	The claim is accepted across Sufi institutions
Prayer requests and advice-seeking comments	Some users attribute a guidance role	Users are durably dependent or transformed
Paid class or consultation	Spiritual communication is commercially entangled	Payment invalidates sincerity or pedagogical value
Repeated appearance in a feed	The user experiences recurrent exposure	Recommendation alone produced spiritual authority

Source: Author's analytical synthesis.

Hybrid Legitimacy, Audience Agency, and Institutional Variation

Platform-based legitimacy does not simply replace *sanad*. In many cases, classical and metric markers reinforce one another. A recognized teacher may use professional media production to extend an existing lineage, while visible institutional affiliation can help audiences interpret popularity as credible outreach rather than self-authorization. In other cases, the two systems diverge: an independent creator may gain visibility without disclosing their training, whereas a lineage-based teacher remains difficult to discover. The key outcome is a hybrid field in which actors compete using various combinations of genealogy, relational accountability, aesthetic competence, emotional accessibility, and metrics.

This hybrid account also clarifies the status of digital *suhba*. Mediated presence can sustain relationships across distances, particularly when



an offline community already exists. A livestream can preserve routine, enable participation, and connect learners with an authorized teacher. However, parasocial intimacy is not equivalent to reciprocal companionship. The distinction hinges on accountability: whether the learner can be recognized, corrected, and situated within a formative sequence, and whether the teacher's responsibility extends beyond merely maintaining audience engagement.

The hybrid nature of legitimacy also means that audiences are not passive recipients of recommendations. They save, ignore, compare, share, verify, challenge, and reinterpret content. Some use short clips as prompts for established practices; others assemble eclectic repertoires from multiple accounts. Comment threads can amplify perceived authority, but they can also contest credentials, request sources, or redirect users to recognized institutions. Therefore, credibility inference is social rather than automatic. A metric becomes authoritative only within interpretive communities that regard it as meaningful.

Audience agency also complicates the language of spiritual depth. A sixty-second clip may seem superficial to one viewer while serving as a meaningful reminder within a disciplined practice for another. Conversely, a lengthy lecture can still amount to passive consumption. Therefore, depth should be operationalized through continuity, contextualization, accountability, ethical consequence, and connection to a formative sequence, not merely by duration or offline setting. Figure 4 employs this definition to differentiate accessible reminders from gateways to guided learning, as well as metric authority from instant or fragmented spirituality.



Figure 4. Risk–opportunity matrix for Indonesian digital Sufism.

These dynamics vary across different institutional settings. *Tarekat* orders, pesantren, celebrity preachers, independent curators, devotional musicians, and therapeutic entrepreneurs should not be analyzed as equivalent actors. *Tarekat* and pesantren often exhibit lineage, official teachers, schedules, and structured study paths. Celebrity preachers may combine institutional recognition with media professionalism. Independent curators can broaden access but may offer limited provenance. Therapeutic entrepreneurs often blend religious care with commercial services and warrant particular scrutiny regarding their credentials and promises. Institutional variation determines the types of accountability possible and the forms of visibility deemed legitimate.

Table 5. Institutional variation in hybrid legitimacy

Actor type	Authority configuration	Key analytical question
<i>Tarekat</i> or pesantren channel	Lineage and institutional recognition combined with platform visibility	Does public content provide a route to accountable study?
Recognised media preacher	Established reputation amplified through professional production	How are Sufi idioms integrated with broader preaching authority?
Independent curator	Aesthetic and affective credibility with variable source disclosure	Whose authority is borrowed, and how is provenance shown?



Devotional musician or storyteller	Affective authority grounded in performance and narrative	Is the content presented as expression, instruction, or both?
Therapeutic entrepreneur	Care, testimony, commercial service, and spiritual claim	Are credentials, limits, and expected outcomes transparent?

Source: Author's analytical synthesis.

Responsible adaptation does not require institutions to imitate influencer culture. A more defensible approach involves a layered strategy: concise public materials for discovery; extended teaching for context; moderated communities for questions; transparent identification of instructors and their lineage; and clear pathways to offline or sustained online learning. Digital visibility thus serves as an entry point rather than a substitute for comprehensive formation. The practical challenge lies in making accountable pathways as transparent and understandable as metrics.

Normative Boundaries and Their Practical Implications

The article evaluates digital Sufism through two explicitly stated lenses. The first is sociological: how publics attribute credibility and how institutions contest or affirm it. The second is internal-normative: how selected Sufi traditions understand lineage, discipline, companionship, and ethical formation. These lenses should not be conflated. A creator can possess sociological authority without recognized lineage, while an authorized teacher can have institutional legitimacy without broad visibility. Therefore, the term “authenticity” is avoided as a definitive judgment. More precise terms, such as source transparency, recognized training, institutional accountability, pedagogical continuity, and scope of claim, are preferable.

Critical spiritual literacy arises from this distinction. It encompasses the ability to ask who is speaking, what training or lineage is being disclosed, whether an inspirational fragment is presented as instruction, what commercial incentives are involved, and what pathways exist for correction or deeper learning. This literacy

does not necessitate rejecting digital reminders; rather, it requires rejecting the equivalence of popularity with realization, or emotional relief with genuine transformation.

The risk of “instant spirituality” should be understood structurally rather than diagnostically. Platforms reward immediate emotional responses, and creators may respond with promises of rapid calm, healing, or insight. The concern is not that comfort is spiritually illegitimate, but that comfort may become the sole measure of value, while the demanding work of ethical self-examination, relational repair, and disciplined practice is neglected. This study does not diagnose individual spiritual bypassing; rather, it identifies the conditions under which bypassing becomes a plausible risk.

For researchers, the proposed model generates testable propositions. Repeated exposure should increase perceived familiarity, but authority attribution is expected to vary depending on source disclosure, institutional cues, and the audience's religious literacy. Monetization is likely to have different effects when pricing is transparent and pedagogical claims are limited, compared to situations where commercial promises imply guaranteed transformation. Hybrid institutions should be able to convert platform reach into sustained learning by providing layered content and fostering reciprocal accountability. These propositions require empirical testing and should not be treated as established findings.

Conclusion

Indonesian digital Sufism is best understood as a field of negotiated visibility rather than a straightforward migration from offline to online religious practice. Five recurring genres: devotional clips, aesthetic quotations, therapeutic spirituality, online majelis, and narrative or music-based expressions; translate Sufi idioms into platform-specific forms. Their circulation can broaden access, sustain mediated communities, and guide users toward recognized teachers. However, this circulation can also detach quotations from their original





context, prioritize affective compression, intensify commercial incentives, and render metrics seemingly evidential.

The concept of algorithmic spiritual authority clarifies the conditions under which such authority becomes relevant. Algorithms do not independently generate spiritual legitimacy. Instead, authority emerges through a five-stage process: visibility is produced, interpreted as credible, enacted as guidance, legitimized or contested, and translated into consequences for formation. This framework maintains the distinction between observable platform cues and inferred recommendation effects, as well as between exposure and accepted authority.

The resulting order is hybrid. *Sanad*, *silsila*, *adab*, embodied guidance, and institutional recognition remain active, yet they coexist with follower counts, repetition, aesthetic polish, emotional resonance, and monetizable attention. The practical task is not to reject media but to reconnect visibility with accountability. Institutions can achieve this through transparent credentials, layered pedagogy, moderated communities, and pathways that lead from introductory content to sustained learning. Audiences require spiritual literacy capable of distinguishing inspiration from instruction and popularity from formation. Future research should test this model through transparent sampling, interviews, comparative platform analysis, and attention to disconfirming cases.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Author's Contributions

All listed authors contributed meaningfully to the development and writing of this article. Eko Harianto: conceptualization, methodology, writing—original draft, supervision. Reni Dian

Lestari: legal analysis, validation, writing—review and editing. Try Riduwan Santoso: investigation, writing—review and editing. Jamaludin: literature review, data curation, writing—review and editing.

Ethical Considerations

This conceptual interpretive study did not involve recruiting human participants or collecting private data. All illustrative materials consist of composite descriptions of publicly accessible platform genres; no usernames, private messages, identifiable images, or traceable quotations from individual accounts are reproduced. Since the study analyzes publicly observable discursive patterns rather than data from identifiable individuals, formal institutional ethics review was not required under the author's institutional policy. Nonetheless, the author adhered to standard ethical norms for internet-based research, including protecting user anonymity and exercising restraint in representing religious practices.

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Data Availability

No bounded research dataset was generated. This article is based on a conceptual synthesis and illustrative analysis of publicly accessible platform forms. Future empirical testing of the model should employ a transparent sampling frame and a minimum dataset that complies with ethical standards and platform constraints.

Declaration on Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT to assist in improving the clarity and readability of the text. The authors reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content of the publication..





Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the positions of any affiliated institutions.

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