THE TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN TASAWUF IN INDONESIA: CYBERMEDIA AND THE EMERGENCE OF DIGITAL RELIGION

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of cybermedia on urban *tasawuf* (Islamic mysticism) in Indonesia, focusing on its adaptation to digital platforms and the emergence of a digital religious atmosphere. A qualitative approach grounded in constructivist and interpretivist paradigms was employed. Data were collected through scholarly literature and digital sources, and analyzed thematically to examine key themes, including typologies of urban *tasawuf* (orthodox, marginal, modern Sufism fellowship) and their interactions with digital media. The findings reveal that urban *tasawuf* integrates seamlessly with digital technology, enhancing accessibility and fostering spiritual communities. For instance, the *tarekat* Qudusiyah uses Zoom for *dzikr*, and the Shift movement integrates youth culture with *tasawuf*. This adaptation has facilitated the emergence of a uniquely Indonesian expression of digital religion. Urban *tasawuf* reflects a transformative shift in religious practices through digital adaptation. However, challenges such as one-directional engagement and diluted sacredness pose risks to the depth of spiritual practices. Future research should explore specific phenomena within the paradigm of digital religion, focusing on long-term impacts on religious identity and spirituality.

Keywords: Urban *Tasawuf*, Digital Religion, Cybermedia, Indonesian Islam

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengaruh cybermedia terhadap *tasawuf* perkotaan di Indonesia, khususnya dalam adaptasinya pada platform digital dan kemunculan atmosfer agama digital. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan dengan paradigma konstruktivisme dan interpretivisme. Data diperoleh melalui literatur ilmiah dan sumber digital, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik untuk mengkaji tema utama, termasuk tipologi *tasawuf* perkotaan (ortodoks, marginal, komunitas Sufi modern) dan interaksinya dengan media digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *tasawuf* perkotaan terintegrasi secara mulus dengan teknologi digital, meningkatkan aksesibilitas dan membangun komunitas spiritual. Sebagai contoh, *tarekat* Qudusiyah menggunakan Zoom untuk *dzikir*, dan gerakan Shift memadukan budaya anak muda dengan ajaran *tasawuf*. Adaptasi ini menunjukkan kemunculan ekspresi agama digital khas Indonesia. *Tasawuf* perkotaan mencerminkan perubahan signifikan dalam praktik keagamaan melalui adaptasi digital. Namun, tantangan seperti keterlibatan satu arah dan berkurangnya kesakralan memerlukan perhatian lebih lanjut. Penelitian mendatang disarankan untuk mengeksplorasi fenomena spesifik dalam paradigma agama digital, terutama dampaknya dalam jangka panjang terhadap identitas religius dan spiritualitas.

Kata Kunci: *Tasawuf* Perkotaan, Agama Digital, Cybermedia, Islam Indonesia

A. Introduction

Since the emergence of the internet decades ago (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020), discussions surrounding digital religion have increasingly shaped the ritual practices of religious communities. Cybermedia, as a medium for the rapid dissemination of information, has had a profound impact on social life, particularly in religious contexts. The polemics arising from this development are diverse, encompassing issues such as religious moderation and the dissemination of propaganda or hate speech (Mubarok & Sunarto, 2024). For instance, negative content and comments on social media—such as labeling minority religions as "infidels" or portraying Islam as a source of intolerance—have been documented (Ash-Shidiq & Pratama, 2021). Moreover, misinterpretation of religious messages disseminated through online platforms poses a significant risk of fostering radical ideologies (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019).

Despite these challenges, the intertwined relationship between humanity and technology remains inevitable (Bingaman, 2023). Similarly, the human pursuit of spirituality, often embodied in the teachings of tasawuf (Islamic mysticism), continues to be an integral aspect of human existence (Al-Kumayi, 2016). Recent trends illustrate the integration of religious teachings and spiritual experiences with technological advancements. For instance, initiatives such as the hijrah movement and youth-focused Islamic activities in urban areas exemplify this dynamic. A notable example is the "Healing Satnight" event organized by Masjid Malikal Mulki in Bogor, which utilizes social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram to disseminate information. Technology not only serves as a communication tool but also facilitates innovative forms of da'wah (Islamic teachings). Virtual reality-based programs, such as "Understanding the Struggles of the Prophet for His People through Virtual Reality," invite participants to immerse themselves in and empathize with the Prophet's challenges, thereby fostering a profound spiritual connection. These experiences often ignite a sense of inner transformation, resonating with the principles of *tazkiyatun nafs* (self-purification) embedded in *tasawuf*.

The rise of cyber da'wah and the emergence of "Muslim cybers" as strategies employed by da'i (preachers) have become indispensable in the era of Industry 4.0 and the advent of Society 5.0 (Muhammad Rizqy et al., 2023; Trisakti, 2022). Tasawuf, as one of Islam's spiritual traditions, has similarly undergone transformations in this digital

era. For instance, the tarekat *Qudusiyah* has adopted Zoom for conducting spiritual interactions between *salik* (spiritual seekers) and *mursyid* (spiritual guides) (Lestari, 2023). Such innovations have subtly reshaped cultural and habitual dimensions of religious practice. Studies on digital religion provide a framework for understanding how cybermedia affects religious experiences and comprehension, focusing on critical aspects such as identity, community, and authority (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019). This shift—from offline to online religious engagement and the increasing reliance on cybermedia for delivering religious messages—raises an essential question: does this phenomenon signify the emergence of a distinct digital religious atmosphere in Indonesia?

The intersection of *tasawuf* and information technology also reveals signs of transformation, mirroring the evolving relationship between humans as spiritual beings and their interactions with technology. A report by the Religion and the Public Sphere Program of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC, 2015) predicts that digital platforms such as websites and blogs will remain vital spaces for producing religious knowledge over the next decade and beyond. This development is expected to impact *tasawuf*, which emphasizes self-purification, as it increasingly intersects with digital media. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of "participatory media" (Cantwell & Rashid, 2015), which bridges the domains of religion and spirituality. However, critical questions remain: to what extent does cybermedia influence the spirituality of Indonesian Muslims, and does this lead to the formation of a uniquely Indonesian version of digital religion? The limited body of research addressing these issues has prompted scholars to investigate the intricate relationship between urban *tasawuf* and cybermedia in Indonesia.

This study explores how digital media affects urban *tasawuf*, particularly in disseminating *tasawuf* teachings through cybermedia to foster spiritual communities and facilitate online spiritual practices. Against this backdrop, the research aims to analyze the impact of cybermedia on the spirituality of urban Muslims in Indonesia, examine the interplay between technology and spirituality, and investigate the broader implications of this phenomenon for the future of religion. Additionally, this study seeks to determine whether these transformations represent a shift from traditional religious practices to a new form aligned with the digital age, commonly referred to as digital religion.

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B. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in the paradigms of constructivism and interpretivism. The primary objective is to uncover the deeper "meaning" behind the intersection of urban *tasawuf* and cybermedia as they are utilized in the practice and transformation of tasawuf teachings. According to Goldkuhl (2012), Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) describe the interpretivist paradigm as intrinsically linked to constructivism, emphasizing that social life is not given or inherent but constructed and continually shaped through human interactions. The researcher interprets the convergence of urban *tasawuf* and cybermedia as two distinct yet interdependent phenomena that evolve through a staged "construction" process, ultimately leading to the consensus of "digital religion."

The study adopts three key approaches: urban Sufism, social, and religious. Urban Sufism refers to a movement studied within anthropology to explore the phenomenon of *tasawuf* in urban environments (Anshori, 2015), a concept popularized by Julie D. Howell after observing the widespread growth of urban tasawuf movements in Indonesian cities, including Paramadina Tazkiya Sejati, ICNIS, IMAN, and others. The social approach investigates how urban *tasawuf* functions within the lives of urban communities, while the religious approach examines the role of *tasawuf* in fostering solidarity, establishing social norms, and driving transformative change within the urban context.

Data for this study were collected from various sources, including search engines like Google, Scopus metadata, Google Scholar, and other academic resources such as research journals and books. A thematic analysis was employed, with data visualized as a web-like structure of interconnected themes (Suyitno, 2018). The primary themes include urban *tasawuf* and digital religion, which were further divided into sub-themes such as urban *tasawuf* phenomena in Indonesia, the relationship between media and religion, and the influence of cybermedia on Muslim spirituality. These primary themes served as the foundational keywords for structuring sub-themes, which were analyzed to align with the study's objectives: examining the impact of cybermedia on urban *tasawuf* practices in Indonesia. Additionally, the analysis delves into the broader implications and meanings underlying these phenomena, rather than merely assessing their direct impacts.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Typology of Urban Tasawuf in Indonesia

Based on the doctrines of *tasawuf* that have developed in Indonesia, Gazali and Efendi (2023) in Komaruddin (2019) classify the typology of urban *tasawuf* into three main categories: orthodox, marginal, and modern Sufism fellowship. The orthodox typology remains closely tied to traditional Sufi practices associated with *tarekat* orders. The central concept of *tazkiyatun an-nafs* (self-purification) is expressed through *dzikr* (remembrance of Allah) rituals conducted in *zawiyah* (Sufi lodges) or the homes of followers. These *dzikr* sessions must be led by a spiritual guide (*mursyid*) (Gazali, 2023). Urban adherents of this typology typically consist of individuals who initially practiced *tarekat* in rural areas and later relocated to urban settings, seeking continuity with the *tarekat* they followed in their hometowns. The marginal typology, also known as "splinter movements," refers to groups that deliberately separate themselves from the orthodox tradition. According to Van Bruinessen in Gazali and Efendi (2023), these groups are not marginalized by external forces but rather choose to distinguish themselves from mainstream *tarekat* practices. This separation enables them to adopt a critical stance toward traditional religious authorities who oppose their interpretations.

The modern Sufism fellowship represents contemporary Sufi communities that thrive within urban institutions, offering *tasawuf* education through organized and academic frameworks. These groups typically attract middle- to upper-class urbanites who seek structured spiritual engagement that aligns with their modern, fast-paced lifestyles. Beyond these doctrinal classifications, urban *tasawuf* demonstrates unique characteristics in how its adherents receive and apply *tasawuf* teachings in daily life. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the integration of *tasawuf* teachings with cybermedia (Malik, 2021; Sumarti et al., 2022; Trisakti, 2022). Contemporary urban *tasawuf* can thus be characterized by its seamless connection with digital technology, forming a dynamic relationship with online platforms and social media.

Amid the rapid and often overwhelming pace of urban life, *tasawuf* offers a spiritual refuge that provides tranquility and balance. In urban areas, where stress and pressure are prevalent, the accessibility of *tasawuf* teachings through digital platforms addresses the spiritual needs of modern society efficiently and effectively. The phenomenon of urban *tasawuf* in Indonesia highlights the pivotal role of cybermedia in

disseminating *tasawuf* teachings and practices (Afidah, 2021; Anwar, 2023; Setia & Dilawati, 2021). Digital platforms such as websites, social media, and religious applications provide urban Muslims with diverse spiritual resources that transcend geographical boundaries. These platforms also enable practitioners to share knowledge, experiences, and spiritual practices, thereby fostering a collaborative and evolving spiritual ecosystem. In this evolving landscape, the typology of urban *tasawuf* continues to adapt, demonstrating the growing interconnection between spirituality and technology in Indonesia's urban context.

2.   The Impact of Digital Media on Urban Tasawuf in Indonesia

Urban *tasawuf*, or urban Sufism, represents a form of *tasawuf* that has emerged, grown, and evolved within metropolitan areas, including cities in Indonesia (Arvionita et al., 2023). The term gained prominence in the early 21st century, following a training session titled *"Urban Sufism: Alternative Paths to Liberalism and Modernity in Contemporary Islam"* organized by Griffith University of Brisbane, Australia, and IAIN (now UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta (Noer, 2015). The emergence and acceptance of urban Sufism are rooted in both internal and external factors. Internally, it reflects the human need for spiritual fulfillment, while externally, it responds to the fast-paced, modern, and often monotonous urban environment.

The development of *tasawuf* in urban areas is supported by several key factors (Gazali, 2023). These include the urban population's quest for meaning in life, *tasawuf* as a means of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, its role in psychological therapy through *tasawuf*-based psychotherapy, and the emergence of religious trends in urban settings. As Nurkholis Madjid (cited in Janah, 2017) notes, the intrinsic human desire to seek the meaning of life—rooted in the natural disposition (*fitrah*) to connect with one's origin—is one of the fundamental drivers of this phenomenon. This search often leads individuals to *tasawuf* practices, which have evolved into the institutionalized *tarekat* systems seen in urban environments (Gazali, 2023).

This existential search for meaning is sometimes referred to as the "God spot" (Afidah, 2021; Anshori, 2015; Anwar, 2023). The "God spot" reflects the innate spiritual intelligence in humans that unconsciously directs them toward deeper spiritual awareness and a connection with the divine. This ever-present spiritual need drives individuals to

maintain and nurture their faith, particularly in urban areas where stress and alienation are prevalent. As a result, urban Muslims often turn to religious gatherings, study forums, and spiritual communities to fulfill their spiritual needs.

Urban *tasawuf* naturally emerges in urban environments where globalization, modernity, materialism, and individualism prevail (Afidah, 2021; Anwar, 2023; Hakim, 2021). The fast-paced and demanding nature of urban life often leads to spiritual fatigue, triggering a profound yearning for tranquility and inner balance. *Tasawuf*, with its focus on *tazkiyatun nafs* (self-purification) and *dzikr* (remembrance of Allah), serves as a spiritual refuge. Digital platforms have amplified the reach of these teachings, providing a "charging station" for urban individuals to replenish their spiritual energy.

The presence of *Majelis Ta'lim* and *Sholawat Qodamul Musthofa* in Pekalongan illustrates the transformative impact of urban *tasawuf* in Indonesia (Hakim, 2021). This community has successfully attracted urban youth, many of whom face moral challenges and spiritual crises. Through its teachings and practices, this community enables its members to find inner peace and improve themselves spiritually. Similarly, religious figures such as Habib Husein Ja'far have leveraged digital media platforms like YouTube to disseminate *tasawuf* teachings in an accessible and relatable manner. Programs such as *Jeda Nulis* and *Login* address everyday issues, including commonly overlooked topics like why the Qur'an is in Arabic and whether its essence is diminished for non-Arabic speakers. These initiatives provide practical insights and foster a deeper appreciation of Islamic teachings among urban audiences (Anwar, 2023).

Movements like the Cyber Islamic Environment initiative, known as Shift, further highlight the intersection of digital media and urban *tasawuf* (Setia & Dilawati, 2021). Originating in Bandung under the leadership of Ustadz Hanan Attaki, Shift combines online and offline activities to provide Islamic studies that align with the interests of urban youth. This movement has gained traction across Indonesia, offering a contemporary approach to *tasawuf* that integrates traditional values with modern, digital mediums. Participants often report enhanced spirituality, underscoring the effectiveness of these initiatives in bridging the gap between tradition and modernity (Setia & Dilawati, 2021). The interplay between digital media and urban *tasawuf* not only expands access to spiritual teachings but also reshapes the way these teachings are delivered and practiced. The rise of platforms like YouTube, Zoom, and social media applications highlights the

transformative potential of digital technology in meeting the spiritual needs of urban Muslims.

3.   Digital Religion and Its Impact on Urban Tasawuf in Indonesia

The concept of digital religion, which emerged approximately 30 years ago, coincides with the initial presence of online religious discussions and practices (Campbell & Vitullo, 2016). Its roots can be traced to the virtual forum *CommuniTree* on the Bulletin Board System (BBS) in the 1980s, which featured the theme *"Create Your Own Religion."* This activity is often regarded as one of the earliest instances of online religious engagement. Rheingold (1993), as highlighted by Campbell and Vitullo, documented this phenomenon and referred to such spaces as "virtual communities," a term that underscored the transformative potential of online platforms for fostering religious discourse.

The rapid development of digital technologies has inevitably penetrated the domain of religion, including in Indonesia (Bingaman, 2023; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Maulana, 2022). While some critics remain skeptical about the implications of technology on spirituality, it is clear that digital platforms and religious practices increasingly coexist in modern life. Humans have naturally adapted to these advancements, making the integration of technology and religion an unavoidable aspect of contemporary spirituality. Digital media plays a pivotal role in shaping public understanding of religion and influencing individual spirituality. Online platforms such as websites, social media accounts, and online study forums have facilitated the dissemination of religious knowledge, marking a significant evolution in religious practice. Moreover, advances in artificial intelligence, including bots and algorithms, now provide comprehensive access to religious teachings, creating new forms of religious authority (Campbell, 2017; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). However, this fusion of religion and technology must be critically examined to mitigate potential issues, such as the dilution of sacredness in religious practices (Muhammad Rizqy et al., 2023; Siuda, 2021).

In Indonesia, digital technologies have transformed religious engagement, particularly in urban settings. Platforms like YouTube have become essential tools for disseminating Islamic teachings, including those rooted in *tasawuf*. For instance, Habib Husein Ja'far's YouTube channels, *Jeda Nulis* and *Login*, address practical and often

overlooked religious issues, such as whether the Qur'an's Arabic language diminishes its significance for non-Arabic speakers. These programs foster reflection and engagement, encouraging audiences to find deeper meaning in Islamic teachings (Anwar, 2023). The use of digital media enables urban communities to participate in spiritual practices and discussions, providing them with accessible tools to fulfill their spiritual needs.

The 'share' feature on social media, particularly in urban areas, amplifies the dissemination of religious content. Movements like the *tarekat* Qudusiyah in Yogyakarta exemplify how digital platforms can facilitate spiritual activities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this *tarekat* utilized platforms like Zoom to conduct *serambi muluk* sessions, effectively transforming traditional interactions between *mursyid* and students into an online format. Similarly, the Shift movement, initially centered on the *hijrah* initiative by Ustadz Hanan Attaki in Bandung, has gained nationwide popularity. Combining online and offline activities, Shift provides a contemporary learning experience that resonates with urban youth while maintaining the core values of *tasawuf* (Setia & Dilawati, 2021).

Technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence and digital applications, are also shaping new paradigms for religious engagement. For example, the *Muslim Pro* app, widely used in Indonesia, offers digital Qur'an features that facilitate access to religious texts. Research by Rohmawaty and Nasrulloh (2023) found that the app aids students at IAIN Kediri in understanding and reciting the Qur'an. Similarly, Zulfahmi and Saifuddin A. Gani (2024) argue that the shift from physical to digital Qur'ans reflects an evolving religious identity for devout Muslims. However, some users prefer physical Qur'ans, emphasizing the irreplaceable sanctity of traditional texts (Rohmawaty & Nasrulloh, 2023). This tension highlights the ongoing negotiation between preserving sacred traditions and embracing technological convenience. As digital religion continues to influence urban *tasawuf*, it raises fundamental questions about the nature of religious engagement in the digital age. The integration of digital platforms with *tasawuf* teachings in Indonesia demonstrates the transformative potential of technology in shaping spirituality. While this phenomenon offers unprecedented access to religious knowledge, it also demands careful consideration of how digital tools can preserve the integrity and sacredness of religious practices.

D. Conclusion

The This study set out to explore whether digital media has created a distinct digital religious atmosphere within the context of urban *tasawuf* in Indonesia. The findings confirm that the integration of digital platforms with *tasawuf* teachings has indeed led to the emergence of a uniquely Indonesian expression of "digital religion." Urban *tasawuf* has adapted seamlessly to digital technology, leveraging online platforms to disseminate teachings, foster spiritual engagement, and build vibrant religious communities that transcend geographical boundaries. This transformative shift is evident across various typologies of urban *tasawuf*. The orthodox tradition incorporates digital tools like Zoom to maintain continuity in spiritual practices, while marginal movements utilize technology to engage critically with conventional religious structures. Modern Sufism fellowships, in particular, thrive in organized digital spaces, aligning with the needs of urban professionals seeking structured spiritual engagement.

The interplay between spirituality and technology has redefined religious practices in urban Indonesia. While digital platforms offer unprecedented accessibility and enrich spiritual experiences, they also raise critical concerns, such as the potential dilution of sacredness and the limitations of one-directional engagement. These challenges underscore the need for careful stewardship to ensure that the transformative potential of digital religion does not compromise the spiritual depth and authenticity of *tasawuf* practices. In conclusion, the emergence of digital religion highlights the dynamic and evolving relationship between religion and technology. It not only expands the reach of *tasawuf* teachings but also reflects the adaptability of Islamic spirituality in navigating the complexities of modern urban life. Future research should delve deeper into specific aspects of this phenomenon, particularly the long-term implications of digital religion on religious identity, community building, and spiritual practices. Employing the paradigm of digital religion to analyze these developments will provide valuable insights into the ongoing interplay between technology and spirituality in Indonesia's urban contexts.

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