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Digital Media Impact on Sufi Practices: Issuing Online *Ijāzas* for *Dhikr* Litanies

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Abstract: In Sufism, traditional Sufi practices such as granting *ijāzas* require direct transmission from teacher to student. However, with the rapid expansion of digital media, the process of granting *ijāzas* has undergone significant changes. This article examines the influence of digital media on Sufi practices, particularly in the context of issuing *ijāzas* for *dhikr* litanies via digital platforms. This study employs digital ethnography to investigate online participant engagement to analyze the validity of *ijāza* transmission via online platforms, supported by hadith sciences and a triangulation approach. The findings show that the evolution of digital media has transformed the implementation of *ijāzas* for *dhikr* litanies from individual to collective transmission methods. However, the process of authorization also involves the transmission of blessings and spiritual knowledge, which requires close engagement through direct interaction, thus suggesting that the traditional teacher-student relationship cannot be achieved and sustained online.

Contribution: This article offers an understanding of the impact and validity of *ijāzas* offered through digital media, compared to the traditional method of direct transmission from teacher to student.

Keywords: Sufi practices; digital media; *ijāza*; authenticity.

Introduction

The transformative power of digital media platforms has significantly reshaped various aspects of human life. It facilitates global communication, provides easy access to data resources, and expands social environments. Cyberspace, a key component of digital media, serves as a virtual meeting place that opens new avenues for knowledge dissemination and acquisition, provides a platform for sharing diverse perspectives, and, most importantly, connects individuals to a larger community. Those with digital technology skills can harness the significant benefits of social media to engage in various beneficial activities, feeling included and part of a global network.[1]

However, alongside these advancements, there are contrasting perceptions when these developments intersect with religious elements. For instance, such developments may pose challenges to religion, such as the decline of religious institutional authority and the inability to control the circulation of messages. This also applies to Sufi practices that are influenced by the rapid growth of digital media platforms. Digital media have undoubtedly expanded the reach and influence of Sufi orders; however, there are significant concerns regarding their potential dilution or misinterpretation through online media.[2]

Contrary to the belief that the development of digital media platforms might lead to a spiritual crisis, it has played a pivotal role in sparking a revival in religious engagement.[3] This is particularly evident in the sphere of Sufism, which has seen a surge in interest and participation due to the wide accessibility and reach of digital media. Sufism, which strongly emphasizes spirituality as a remedy for alienation and emotional distress, has found a new, optimistic platform for expression and engagement in the

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1 Giulia Evolvi, "Religion, New Media, and Digital Culture," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. John Barton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.917; Giulia Evolvi, "Religion and the Internet: Digital Religion, (Hyper)Mediated Spaces, and Materiality," *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft Und Politik* 6, no. 1 (2021): 9–25, https://doi.org/10.1007/s41682-021-00087-9.

2 Bernard Enjolras and Kari Steen-Johnsen, "The Digital Transformation of the Political Public Sphere: A Sociological Perspective," in *Institutional Change in the Public Sphere: Views on the Nordic Model*, ed. Fredrik Engelstad et al. (Warsaw/Berlin: De Gruyter Open Ltd, 2017), 99–117, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110546330-006; Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2020): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019.

3 Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion* (London: Routledge, 2021), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429295683; Julia Day Howell, "Revival Ritual and the Mobilization of Late-Modern Islamic Selves," *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 1, no. 1 (2015): 47–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/20566093.2015.1047691.

digital age, inspiring and motivating a new generation of believers who join online communities.[4]

Traditionally, Sufi ritual practices rely on direct teaching from a teacher to a disciple to enhance character and awareness of divinity, thereby attaining knowledge of God (*maʿrifa*). The teacher introduces his disciple to Sufi practices, guides his progress, and eventually grants him the authorization or license (*ijāza*) to instruct others in these practices. However, the proliferation of digital media has brought new challenges. Now, the *ijāza* process can also be conducted online through digital platforms such as instant messaging apps, video conferences, or social media, thereby expanding the reach and impact of Sufi practices.[5] This opens up possibilities for remote *ijāza* issuance, thus no longer requiring the physical presence of the teacher and his disciple. Although digital media allows for broader access and speeds up the communication process, new questions arise regarding the impact and authenticity of *ijāzas* granted through digital media.[6]

Online religiosity has drawn the attention of Sufi scholars. The critical literature review completed by Patrick Eisenlohr examined recent research on media practices in the context of religious diversity. Eisenlohr identified three distinct approaches: media politics of diversity, religious diversity in the public sphere, and diversity of religious mediations. These three approaches highlight the complexity surrounding the representation and interaction of religious diversity in media contexts, thereby emphasizing the role of media technology in shaping discourse and religious practice. Eisenlohr argued that these dynamics require a unique perspective that recognizes the intrinsic connection between religion and media and addresses the challenges and implications of their intersection in contemporary social and cultural life.[7] Further, Francesco Piraino contended that Islamic mysticism as a path to purify the soul has gained some traction in Western societies, with the internet serving as a key vehicle for

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4 Syukri Al Fauzi Harlis Yurnalis, Endrika Widdia Putri, and Arrasyid, "Urban Sufism from Exclusiveness to Inclusiveness: A Metaphysical Perspective," *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 11, no. 2 (2022): 183–202, https://doi.org/10.21580/tos.v11i2.14522.

5 Muhammad Akmaluddin, "Sanad Digital: Ijazah Hadis Musalsal Dalam Kajian Hadis Virtual Di Grup Dan Halaman Facebook," *Nabawi Journal of Hadith Studies* 2, no. 1 (2021): 141–61, https://doi.org/10.55987/njhs.v2i1.44.

6 Shaheen A Whyte, "Islamic Religious Authority in Cyberspace: A Qualitative Study of Muslim Religious Actors in Australia," *Religions* 13, no. 1 (2022): 69, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010069.

7 Patrick Eisenlohr, "Media and Religious Diversity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41, no. 1 (October 21, 2012): 37–55, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092611-145823; Jia Lu and Yunxi Qiu, "Microblogging and Social Change in China," *Asian Perspective* 37, no. 3 (2013): 305–31, https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2013.0012.

its dissemination. His study examined four major Sufi orders in Europe, which rely heavily on the internet to gain new followers through i) promoting, sharing information, and educating about Islam and Sufism; ii) bridging the gap between disciples and masters; iii) serving as a digital space where religious experiences are reaffirmed. The second part focuses on the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order. Acknowledging the fact that not all Naqshbandi followers are able to meet in person and attend local Sufi gatherings, they utilize internet platforms to practice Sufi rituals online, submit prayer requests, perform initiation, and make spiritual encounters. Analyzing this specific use of digital media, the author explores how European Sufism is transforming within the context of postmodern religiosity and transnationalism.[8] Meanwhile, Kristin M. Peterson called for a more critical examination of the way in which individuals create meaning in the digital age, with a focus on the intersection of online media and religion. She highlighted recent research trends that challenge traditional boundaries between media spaces and definitions of religion, emphasizing the complexity and fluidity of religious identity and religious expression in the digital era. Peterson identified gaps in the existing research, particularly the need for more studies centered on international contexts and a deeper analysis of the effect of media technologies on aesthetics, identity, and religious practices. She argued for expanding research beyond traditional boundaries, stressing the importance of understanding the interconnected and evolving nature of the digital realm in shaping contemporary human existence.[9]

In addition, Wendi Bellar argued that online users tend to prioritize orthodox practices or those deemed correct according to religious guidelines, rather than selecting various features to create their own religious combinations. The article also discusses issues of authenticity and authority in religious ritual practices in digital spaces.[10] Similarly, Hidayat examined the emergence of the Sufi order (*tariqa*) in the digital public sphere, focusing on prayer apps like Muslim Pro and Eshaykh.com, an online platform operated by the Islamic Supreme Council of America, which provides legal rulings and answers to user questions on various topics, serving as a project dedicated to Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani. Hidayat argued that this website exemplifies how traditional *tariqa* groups adapt through information technology.

[8] Francesco Piraino, "Between Real and Virtual Communities: Sufism in Western Societies and the Naqshbandi Haqqani Case," *Social Compass* 63, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 93–108, https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768615606619.

[9] Kristin M Peterson, "Pushing Boundaries and Blurring Categories in Digital Media and Religion Research," *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 3 (2020), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12769.

[10] Wendi Bellar, "Rituals: Prayer App Rituals," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (London: Routledge, 2021), 150-158; Dahlia Hidayati, "Online Sufism and Reestablishing Religious Authority," *Ulumuna* 26, no. 1 (2022): 204–37, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v26i1.488.

However, this digital shift introduces challenges, particularly regarding access disparities between traditional face-to-face and online instruction and transmission practices. Eshaykh.com offers comprehensive information about the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Order, including its doctrines and *dhikr* liturgies (*awrād*). Additionally, it makes certain teachings accessible to all its online visitors, which used to be shared only within the inner circles of its followers.[11] Notwithstanding this extensive study and similar studies on this topic, the impact of the rapid development of digital media platforms on religious practices, particularly the transmission of *ijāza* through online platforms by Sufis, deserves further scrutiny and analysis. The primary objective of this study is to analyze the direct impact of digital media use on the issuance of *ijāzas* in Sufi practices and to assess their legitimacy.

Literature Review

Ijāza and Its Historical Context

The Arabic term *ijāza* means permit or authorization.[12] According to the Syrian Shafiʿite jurist and hadith scholar Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (1233–1277), the Arabic root verb *ajāza* originally meant watering the field or quenching one's thirst.[13] However, as explained by the Persian lexicographer Abū al-Ṭāḥir Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Fīrūzabādī (1329–1414), in classical Arabic, the verb denotes to give permission, license, or authorization.[14] The term *ijāza* is associated with the transmission and acceptance of hadith (*al-taḥammul wa al-adā' fi al-ḥadīth*). Upon completing a hadith study circle, the hadith teacher will give an *ijāza* to his successful student, who is then permitted to narrate the hadith, either orally or in writing. Such an authorization or license helps hadith scholars to assess the authenticity of the chain of narrators and the transmission of a particular hadith.[15]

Among the hadith scholars who contributed to the development of the authenticity standards of hadith is al-Hasan b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Khallād al-Rāmahurmuzī (died before 971).[16] His first comprehensive, independent book on the fundamentals of hadith terminology discusses, among others, the rules applying to the transmission and

[11] Ziaulhaq Hidayat, "Transforming Sufism into Digital Media," *Epistemé Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 17, no. 2 (2023): 197–223, https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2022.17.2.197-223.

[12] Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān Al-ʿArab*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār al-Ihyā at-Turāts, 1970), 327.

[13] Abū Zakarīyā Yaḥyā Ibn Sharaf Al-Nawawī, *Al-Taqrīb Wa Al-Taysīr Li-Maʿrifa Sunan Al-Bashīr Al-Nazīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabīya, 1985), 59.

[14] Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb Al-Fīrūzabādī, *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muhīt*, ed. M. Nāʿim Al-Araqsūsī, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1993), 507.

[15] Mahmūd Ṭalhān, *Taysīr Muṣṭalaḥ Al-Ḥadīth* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1987), 200.

[16] Ibn Khallad Ar-Ramahurmuzi, *Al-Muḥaddith Al-Fāsil Bayna Al-Rāwi Wa Al-Wāʿī [The Separator Between the Narrator and the Listener]* (Cairo: Dār al-Dzakhāir, 2016), 468.

acceptance of authentic hadith. Al-Rāmahurmuzī highlighted the importance of clear and documented standards in the process of hadith transmission to ensure the authenticity and reliability of hadith transmission from one generation of hadith scholars to the next. These established standards of transmission form the legal basis for the use of *ijāza* as a validation tool in hadith studies.

The classical hadith scholars identified eight valid transmission methods: i) listening to the reading of a hadith by the teacher (*samāʿ*); ii) reading a book of hadith to the teacher (*qirāʿa, ʿarḍ*); iii) receiving a book of hadith from the teacher (*munāwala*); iv) asking the teacher to record a hadith (*kitāba*); v) granting a license to narrate a hadith (*ijāza*); vi) informing the student about the recording or transmission of a hadith (*iʿlām*); vii) inheriting a teacher's book of hadith (*waṣiyya*); viii) discovering a hadith book (*wijāda* or *wuqūf*).[17] The teacher granting permission is the *mujīz,* while the receiving student is called the *mustajīz*. *Ijāza* serves as evidence that the narrator has obtained permission from his teacher to transmit a particular hadith, thereby attesting to the direct relationship between the narrator and the source of the hadith.[18]

According to the Egyptian hadith scholar and historian Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (1428–1497) and the Kurdish-Egyptian hadith specialist of his time, Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī (1325–1403), there are nine types of *ijāza* in the transmission of hadith: i) referring to a specific person in a particular book or hadith, as indicated by an exact wording or a designated place in an index; ii) referring to a specific person in general, without explanation or specification of the hadith or book; iii) referring to the general public or unspecified individuals without specification of specific narrations; iv) referring to an unknown person; v) referring to an non-existent person; vi) involving hadiths that are not transmitted further by the teacher; vii) hanging *ijāza* granted to anyone willing to narrate a particular hadith; viii) referring to someone not qualified to receive it; ix) limited to certain narrations authorized by the teacher.[19]

In general, the method of *ijāza* employed in hadith studies is similar to the method employed in Sufism. In the context of the Sufi order, *ijāza* refers to a recognition granted by a teacher (*murshid*) to a qualified student (*murid*), conferring upon the latter the authority to teach and provide spiritual guidance. The Sufi *ijāza* comprises five components: i) message or testament from the teacher to the student; ii) the teacher's spiritual lineage tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad; iii) the date of issuance; iv) the

[17] ʻUthmān b. ʻAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ṣalāḥ Al-Shahrazūrī, *Maʻrifat Anwāʻ Ulūm Al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-Muʻāṣir, 1986), 157–78.

[18] ʼAbd al-Raḥīm b. al-Ḥusayn Al-ʼIrāqī, *Al-Taqyīd Wa Al-Īḍāḥ Sharḥ Muqaddimāt Ibn Ṣalāḥ* (Madina: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 516.

[19] Muḥammad b. ʻAbd al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī, *Fatḥ Al-Mughīth Bi-Sharḥ Alfīya Al-Ḥadīth*, ed. ʼAlī Ḥusayn, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktaba al-Sunna, 2003), 19; Al-ʼIrāqī, *Al-Taqyīd Wa Al-Īḍāḥ Sharḥ Muqaddimāt Ibn Ṣalāḥ*, 186.

teacher's signature; v) the teacher's seal or stamp. Through this *ijāza*, the student is formally recognized as having the authority and legitimacy to continue the teachings of the Sufi order (*ṭarīqa*).[20] Therefore, *ijāza* is not just a certificate but represents the student's recognition, appreciation, and responsibility in disseminating the Shaykh's teachings.[21]

The mechanism of *ijāza* within the Sufi order serves three functions:

1. Through it, the *murshid* recognizes that his student has earned sufficient knowledge and understanding to disseminate the teachings of the *ṭarīqa*.
2. It serves as proof of the suitability and legitimacy of a student to represent his *murshid* and his *ṭarīqa* and provide spiritual guidance to others. The Sufi order can control its standards and ensure its continuity.
3. It ensures the authenticity and integrity of the teachings disseminated in the *ṭarīqa's* name, thus serving as a continuing source of blessings handed down from master to student.

In this context, the formal granting of *ijāza* within Sufi *ṭarīqas* serves as a mechanism to prevent irresponsible individuals from making false claims and to prevent deviations. Therefore, it is not merely a physical token but also possesses a spiritual dimension. The *ijāza* signals that the *murshid* has known his student over a prolonged period and is satisfied with his progress and dedication, reflecting his trust and confidence in the latter's capabilities.[22]

Moreover, *ijāza* has developed widely in the Sufi tradition, ranging from authenticating certain devotional practices (*aʿmāl*) and *dhikr* litanies (*awrād*). The authorization document is either a general certificate (*ijāza ʿāmma*) or a special certificate (*ijāza khāṣṣa*), depending on the circumstances. A general certificate is usually awarded to all the members attending and completing a study circle. This is to provide blessings (*tabarruk*) and connect them to the spiritual and intellectual chains of the Shaykhs. The general certificate gives the holder permission to recite established *awrād* or supplications that do not require the strict supervision of a teacher. Thus, the students are connected to the chain of transmitters within the Sufi order and can benefit

[20] The *ṭarīqa* is the path towards Allah, overcoming various obstacles and progressing through various spiritual levels (*maqāmāt*). See 'Abd al-Razzāq Al-Kāshānī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt Al-Ṣūfiya* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1992), 85.

[21] Faudzinaim Badaruddin and Muhammad Khairi Mahyuddin, "The Authority of Chain of Transmission and Its Role in Sufism," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 20 (2021): 34–44, https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.20.2021.208.

[22] Nadir A. Nasidi, "A Contextual Analysis of Sacred Qādiriyyah Sufi Paintings in Kano, Nigeria," *Vestiges: Traces of Record* 6 (2020): 47–63, https://www.vestiges-journal.info/2020/nasidi_2020.html.

from the chain's blessings, even though they have not been selected for specific instruction.[23]

On the other hand, a special certificate (*ijāza khāṣṣa)* is only granted to selected individuals who have completed their spiritual education (*sulūk*). Upon achieving a certain spiritual level or mastery of a scientific discipline, they are awarded the *ijāza* in the form of a special ceremony involving private one-to-one instruction (*talqīn*) or oath of allegiance (*bayʿa*).[24] Upon receiving this formal recognition, the student becomes a *murshid* himself, who can instruct and guide others and form his own circle of students.[25]

Method

This article employs a qualitative digital ethnographic design to examine the practice of granting Sufi *ijāzas* online.[26] It examines the impact of digital media use on granting Sufi *ijāzas* through digital platforms and assesses their validity compared to traditional face-to-face instruction. The findings are limited to the representational and discursive aspects of *ijāza* practices and are not meant to be generalized; they also do not include the subjective experiences of participants. The primary data were collected through observing videos uploaded to the Sufi order's YouTube channel, conducting non-participatory online observation, and positioning digital content as ethnographic texts. The videos were selected purposively from the last five years with the criteria of a minimum of 1,000 views, showing the granting of *ijāza* in detail, identifying the *murshid* and his chain of transmission (*silsila*), detailing the way online users could apply for the *ijāza,* and the way they received and accepted it. The data were analyzed through data reduction, organization into a table, and drawing of conclusions. To test the validity of online *ijāza* transmission, a triangulation approach was employed by applying other disciplines or theories and consulting other online sources, such as individual opinions and user comments.[27] The main principles of hadith science were applied as a normative analytical framework; for example, when examining continuity

[23] Mohammad Masrur, "Melacak Pemikiran Tarekat Kyai Muslih Mranggen (1912-1981 M) Melalui Kitabnya : Yawaqit Al-Asani Fi Manaqib Al-Syeikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani," *At-Taqaddum* 6, no. 2 (2014): 265–315, https://doi.org/10.21580/at.v6i2.714.

[24] Andrey Rosowsky, "Some Linguistic Implications of Transferring Rituals Online: The Case of Bay'ah or Allegiance Pledging in Sufism," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 8, no. 3 (2019): 382–407, https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-00803001.

[25] Masrur, "Melacak Pemikiran Tarekat Kyai Muslih Mranggen (1912-1981 M)."

[26] Peter Forberg and Kristen Schilt, "What Is Ethnographic about Digital Ethnography? A Sociological Perspective," *Frontiers in Sociology* 8 (2023), https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1156776.

[27] Aine M. Humble, "Technique Triangulation for Validation in Directed Content Analysis," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8, no. 3 (2009): 34–51, https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800305.

of transmission chain, credibility of narrators, and clarity of transmission. This approach served as an epistemological instrument for assessing the continuity and credibility of Sufi scholarly traditions in the digital age.

Results and Discussion

Mediatization of Religious Teachings and Practice

The influence of digital media on religious thought and practice is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Over the past decade, there has been a significant shift in the way in which individuals and communities engage with their beliefs through digital media. This affects the representation of religion in the public sphere and shapes how religion is interpreted and practiced online.[28] New online communities emerge and develop, while new voices can be heard and amplified, either affirming or challenging religious orthodoxy. This perspective is reflected in Knut Lundby's research describing how online media disseminate or mediate religious messages, thus altering public perceptions of the religion. The theory of the mediatization of religion explains how media transform religious institutions through symbolic communication in the public sphere.[29]

Further, the impact of digital media is felt in social actions and protests inspired by religion. An example is the Occupy Judaism movement, where religious practices and social actions interact digitally and physically to form a protest movement. This creates new potential for religion to play an active role in social and political issues in the public sphere, allowing religious practices to adapt to the demands of an era that prioritizes virtual interactions.[30] The process of mediatization often goes hand in hand with secularization, where religious institutions lose their influence over other institutions in society. This is demonstrated through research pointing to the complex interactions between religion and media, which can influence how religion is interpreted and practiced. Digital media enable broader interpretations and diversification in religious

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28 Cindy van Summeren, "Religion Online: The Shaping of Multidimensional Interpretations of Muslimhood on Maroc.Nl," *Communications* 32, no. 2 (2007): 273–95, https://doi.org/10.1515/COMMUN.2007.015.

29 Knut Lundby, "Public Religion in Mediatized Transformations," in *Institutional Change in the Public Sphere* (De Gruyter Open, 2017), 241–63, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110546330-013.

30 Ayala Fader and Owen Gottlieb, "Occupy Judaism: Religion, Digital Media, and the Public Sphere," *Anthropological Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (June 2015): 759–93, https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2015.0032; Miodrag Komarčević, Milovan Dimić, and Petar Čelik, "Challenges and Impacts of the Digital Transformation of Society in the Social Sphere," *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* 20, no. 1 (2017): 31–48, https://doi.org/10.5771/1435-2869-2017-1-31.

expressions, not necessarily aligning with traditional doctrines or authorities.[31]

Furthermore, mediatization changes how religious institutions communicate and interact with their followers. In the digital era, transparency and engagement are crucial; therefore, religious institutions must be more open and responsive to the needs and expectations of their digitally connected followers. This can pose challenges in maintaining their authority and relevance, as online followers tend to be more critical and can access a wider range of information sources. The long-term effects of digital media on religion include changes in how people interact with their beliefs. The younger generation tends to have a more individualistic approach to religion, which is less tied to conventional tradition. Therefore, religious institutions need to adapt their communication and teaching methods to remain relevant and appealing to the young generation.[32]

Additionally, online platforms enable the dissemination and access to various religious practices that may not be available locally. This means that followers can participate in online worship services, engage in religious discussion forums, and access a wide range of religious materials from outside their own religious community. This enriches individual religious experiences and expands understanding and tolerance among religions. However, there are also concerns that digital interactions may lead to less authentic or overly fragmented religious experiences. Dependence on digital media for religious interaction may diminish the importance of physical communities and rituals. Therefore, religious communities must balance leveraging technology to expand their reach and maintain the core of religious practices that require direct human interaction.[33]

Overall, digital media have significantly transformed the religious landscape of today, ranging from the way religion is represented in the public sphere to the way individuals practice their beliefs. In short, its influence is far-reaching and profound. To address the challenges and opportunities of religious online communities and activities, religious institutions and their followers should engage in the ongoing dialogue about the role of religion in the digital era, so that technology can be used in ways that reinforce rather than diminish the spiritual and communal essence of religion.

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31 Lundby, "Public Religion in Mediatized Transformations."

32 Lundby; Mesut Idriz, "Educational Tradition of Ijāzah in Islamic History with Reference to Persian Milieu," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 2 (2022): 179–95, https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.122.13.

33 Connie Hill-Smith, "Cyberpilgrimage: The (Virtual) Reality of Online Pilgrimage Experience," *Religion Compass* 5, no. 6 (2011): 236–46, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2011.00277.x.

Granting *Ijāzas* through Digital Platforms

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has changed many aspects of public life, including religion. Religious institutions responded to the enforced restrictions by offering online services to their congregations, thus maintaining religious practices and staying connected with their followers. Through digital literacy as the primary mechanism, digital technologies can be utilized effectively to engage in religious activities. Although these innovations face challenges such as access to devices and adapting to new technology, digital literacy has increased participation in religious activities. However, its effectiveness is still debated and cannot completely replace traditional forms of religious expression.[34]

This phenomenon also affects the *ijāza* process in the context of Sufi practices, leading to an increase in authorizations issued through digital platforms, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, Sufi religious forums (*majlis taʿlīm*) were temporarily closed due to lockdown regulations and public health protocols, so the organizers decided to scale down their activities and upload recorded sessions on digital platforms. Usually, the *majlis taʿlīm* content also includes a specific online *ijāza* process for Sufi practices. Today, the physical *ijāza* gatherings are conducted as usual but also attract many online participants from all parts of the world. Digital social media platforms can connect individuals and communities from all across the globe, thus allowing great numbers of participants to attend a religious event online.[35]

Digital media platforms like YouTube have transformed religious practices, particularly in the dissemination of religious content like *majlis taʿlīm*. For example, the channel "Majlis Tadzkir Lombok" features videos depicting the granting of *ijāzas* for *wird* by one of the descendants of Sheikh ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī in the person of Sheikh Sayyid Ibrāhīm bin Amīn Rūḥī al- Jīlānī. Initially conducted offline, the *mujīz* says, "I give you the authorization for the general litany with this *ijāza* (certificate). Do you accept?" (*Ajaztukum bi-l-wird al-ʿāmm, Bi-hādhihi al-ijāza. Qabiltum*?) The congregants responded by saying, "We accept the authorization" (*Qabilnā al-ijāza*) to signal their acceptance. The recorded video was then uploaded on the YouTube channel "Majlis Tadzkir Lombok." The online audience articulated their acceptance

[34] Alexander P. Isiko, "Covid-19 and Its Impact on Religiosity: Reflections on Religious Life and Practice in Uganda," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 35, no. 1 (2022): 1–32, https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3027/2022/v35n1a2.

[35] Moch Riza Fahmi, "Ritual Online: Praktik Keberagamaan Warga Indonesia Pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19," *Jurnal Alwatzikhoebillah* 9, no. 2 (2023): 494–502, https://doi.org/10.37567/alwatzikhoebillah.v9i2.2181.

of the *ijāza* in the form of written comments.[36]

Figure 1: Granting an *ijāza* for *wird* during an online session (left) and online audience's responses in the comments section (right).

Several *ijāzas* for *dhikr* litanies available online are listed in the table below.

Table 1: Online *Ijāzas* for *Awrād*

Type of *Wird*	Authorizing Representative	Procedure	Function
Ijāza Wird Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī[37]	Shaykh Sayyid Ibrāhīm b. Amīn Rūḥī al-Jīlānī (transmission chain from father to Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī	Reciting *Tahlīl, Istighfār, and Ṣalawāt* 100 times after Fajr and Maghrib prayers	To purify the heart, so that the offered prayers are accepted by God
Ijāza Wird al-Musabbaʿāt al-ʿAshri al-Qādirīya [The Ten Sevenfold Prayers][38]	KH. Abdul Hanan Maksum Kwagean, Kediri, as stated in *Kitāb Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn* [The Revival of the Religious Sciences]	Reciting QS. al-Fātiḥa, QS. al-Nās, QS. al-Falaq, QS. al-Ikhlās, QS. al-Kāfirūn, Āyat al-Kursī, Tasbīḥ, Ṣalawāt, Istighfār, Duʿā (7	To achieve God's forgiveness of sins, easy sustenance, and happiness both in this world and the hereafter

[36] Majlis Tadzkir Lombok, "Ijazah Wirid from Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani!!! Langsung Dari Cucu Beliau," Youtube, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFK3wvsnknk.

[37] Majlis Tadzkir Lombok.

[38] Santri Alfutuhy, "Ijazah Wirid Nabi Khidir, Musaba'atil Asyri Alkhodiriyah Kh. Abdul Hanan Maksum Kwagean," Youtube, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ba_xkxmfd6a.

	by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī	times after Fajr and ʿAṣr prayers)	
IjāzaWird Ḥabīb Tawfīq al-Siqāf[39] (Al-Rābiṭa al-ʿAlawīya)	Al-Ḥabīb Tawfīq al-Siqāf (Assegaf) (transmitted from his grandfather, Al-Ḥabīb Jaʿfar bin Syaikhon Assegaf Pasuruan)	Reciting Ilāhī Nas'aluka bi-l-Ism al-Aʿẓam; Yā Dha-l-Jalāli wa-l-Ikrām (7 times); Yā Qawīyyu yā Matīn, Ikfī Sharr al-Ẓālimīn (3 times); Iṣlāḥ Allāh Umūr al-Muslimīn, Ṣarāf Allāh Sharr al-Muʿdhīn, Yā ʿAlīyyu Yā Kabīr, Yā ʿAlīmu Yā Qadīr, Yā Samīʿu Yā Baṣīr, Yā Laṭīfu Yā Khabīr Yā Allāh (after Maghrib and 'Ishā' prayers)	Protecting from harm intended by fellow humans
Ijāza Wird for Opening the Doors of Sustenance[40]	Al-Ḥabīb Quraysh Baharun	Reciting Yā Fattāḥ, Yā Razzāq, Yā Kāfī, Yā Mughnī (16 times after Fajr and Maghrib prayers)	Removing blockages preventing *rizq* from reaching the believer
Ijāza Wird Seribu Malaikat [Thousand Angels][41]	K.H. Husein Ilyas Mojokerto	Reciting Rabbanā Mā Khalaqta Hādha Bāṭilan, Subḥānaka Waqinā ʿAdhāb al-Nār (after Maghrib, facing the West, out in the open)	Benefit indirectly from the blessings of the worshipping angels

The dissemination of such videos has made general *ijāzas* for Sufi *dhikr* litanies accessible to the interested public, offering several advantages to the traditional face-to-face practice. First, online *ijāza* programs can be accessed remotely and at any time and from any location, thus offering more flexibility and convenience. Second, the recorded *ijāza* session can be reviewed and rewatched after the actual event, thus

[39] Sunsal Media, "Ijazah Wirid Dari Habib Taufiq Assegaf," Youtube, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQVLvjCnjEQ.

[40] Madrasah Rasulullah SAW, "Ijazah Wirid Pembuka Pintu RezekiAlhabib Quraisy Baharun," Youtube, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaNrcAL1tsE.

[41] Rohso_TV, "Ijazah Wirid Seribu Malaikat_KH. Husein Ilyas Mojokerto," Youtube, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSStKu2fdDE.

providing an opportunity for reflection and internalization. Third, online programs are more cost-effective and require less resources than physical gatherings. Also, it provides the attendees with a general *ijāza* from leading Sufi masters with high credibility and professionalism.

However, the process of granting *ijāzas* through digital platforms also has its limitations. One significant drawback is the lack of personal dimension and physical presence. In traditional offline settings, the *ijāza* process involves direct interaction between the teacher and student, fostering a deeper relationship, immersion, and awareness. This interpersonal dynamic cannot be experienced online, thus affecting the quality of the learning experience. Also, the integrity and authenticity of the *awrād* cannot always be guaranteed; therefore, it is the responsibility of the online users to ensure that the *wird* text is authentic and the *ijāza* authority is legitimate. However, the digital platforms may lack mechanisms to verify instructors' credentials and expertise.

Additionally, the absence of direct interaction between teacher and student limits opportunities for clarification and guidance. In offline settings, students can ask their teacher directly, facilitating a deeper understanding of the subject matter; however, online communication is usually limited to short comments or messages, which may be insufficient. Notwithstanding these limitations, the program attendees seem to be content with writing the standard formula "*Qabilnā al-ijāza*" [We have accepted the *ijāza*) in the comment section to signal their participation and consent. Therefore, online *ijāza* programs can play a significant role in facilitating religious education and disseminating spiritual practices, particularly in situations where physical gatherings are limited, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Undoubtedly, digital media platforms have revolutionized the dissemination and accessibility of religious practices. Online *ijāza* programs offer some advantages in terms of accessibility and convenience; however, they pose challenges related to interpersonal dynamics, authenticity, and interaction. Therefore, a balance must be struck between harnessing the benefits of digital technology and maintaining the authenticity and integrity of religious teachings and practices.

Validity of *Ijāzas* through Digital Media

The practice of granting online *ijāzas* for *dhikr* litanies is valid when applying the *ijāza* rules established in hadith studies. In the context of disseminating and transmitting hadith, the *ijāza* given by a teacher to his student is considered authentic and valid, thus establishing a reliable chain of narration. According to the Ḥijāzī school of hadith science, all methods of transmitting and conveying hadiths, including ijāza, have the same status and validity and are equivalent to other methods.[42]

[42] Al-Sakhāwī, *Fatḥ Al-Mughīth Bi-Sharḥ Alfiya Al-Ḥadīth*, 2:263.

The method of *ijāza* is particularly suitable for communities located at the periphery, who are living far away from religious institutions and knowledge centers. Shifting from traditional to online authorization patterns also aligns with the shift from traditional to modern education methods. Hadiths transmitted through *ijāza* via digital media by hadith organizers have already been documented in books, edited by hadith experts, and can be verified through printed and digital data, as well as other sources. Therefore, the status of *ijāza* through digital media in hadith studies does not pose any issues regarding writing, sources, chains of narration, and the relationship between the teacher and the student.

In terms of the continuity of the chain of transmission, recitation, and conveyance of hadiths, the method of online *ijāzas* is similar to the traditional method of *samāʿ* following *qirāʿa*, as outlined by the classical hadith scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī (1445–1505).[43] A complete *ijāza* record can be used to establish the authenticity of the transmission (*ithbāt al-naql*) and determine the status and validity of the narration.[44]

Several types of *ijāza* for *dhikr* litanies through digital media can be identified. Participants who receive online *ijāzas* are not unlike those who attend such a session in person, receiving a second to seventh-level *ijāza*. A general *ijāza* can be issued to a specific individual without specifying a particular hadith or book, but it can also be issued to an unspecified individual. Similarly, such an authorization can also be given to an unknown person, to a non-existent person, and for hadiths not transmitted by the teacher. There is also the case of a 'hanging *ijāza*' issued to anyone willing to narrate it.

However, it can also be argued that online participants do not have the same status as individual students selected by a teacher. They can be considered to fall into the category of the fourth *ijāza*, as explained by al-Sakhāwī and al-ʿIrāqī, where the authorization is given by a teacher to an unknown or a non-existent person.[45] Arguably, in the context of the Sufi order, this is limited to the third function of *ijāza*, which is to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the practice as a source of blessing with significant spiritual value.

The caretaker of Pesantren Tegalrejo, K.H. Yusuf Chudlori (Gus Yusuf), explained:

> Online *ijāza* is permitted when the authorizing teacher is certain about its scientific pedigree [*sanad*]. Social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp are like books; they are just media. The most important thing is that

[43] Jalāluddīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb Al-Rāwī Fī Sharḥ Taqrīb Al-Nawāwī*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīya, 1996), 461.

[44] Al-Sakhāwī, *Fatḥ Al-Mughīth Bi-Sharḥ Alfīya Al-Ḥadīth*, 2:209.

[45] Al-Sakhāwī, 2:212; Al-'Irāqī, *Al-Taqyīd Wa Al-Īḍāḥ Sharḥ Muqaddimāt Ibn Ṣalāḥ*, 190.

> the content can be accounted for. The importance of the *sanad* was emphasized by Sheikh Ibnu Mubarak, who said it is part of the religion. If there is no *sanad*, then everyone could make all kinds of claims about the religion, without any accountability.[46]

Similarly, Buya Yahya argued that online *ijāzas* are valid for those unable to attend such sessions in person, so that they have a continuous chain of transmission (*sanad*). This is also the case when a scholar writes a book containing specific *awrād* to be recited by the reader and shared with others. However, an *ijāza* conferred directly by the teacher to the student has more value.[47] Here, Buya Arrazy Hasyim confirmed that the online *ijāza* is only a general authorization (*ijāza ʿāmma*)[48] due to the lack of a rigorous training and selection process. Its main purpose is to bestow blessings and connect the participants to the spiritual chain of transmission. However, the recipients are not authorized to transfer this *ijāza* to others.

Suitability of Digital Media and Their Impact on Sufi Practices

Digital media have gained widespread acceptance as a platform for conferring online *ijāzas*. Among its primary benefits is increased accessibility and flexibility. Online platforms enable participants to schedule their learning sessions at their convenience, thereby enhancing their potential for success in completing the *ijāza*.

Further, digital media provide consistent content delivery. By utilizing recorded videos, subtitle presentations, or written materials, all participants are granted access to the same information they can review at their leisure. This ensures that all participants have an equal opportunity to complete the requirements for the intended *ijāza*. Consistency in content delivery also enables increased quality control of the program, as experts can continuously review and refine the learning materials.[49]

The use of digital media in offering *ijāzas* for *dhikr* litanies also means that the Sufi order's teachings and practices can be quickly disseminated to a global audience. This not only enriches the spiritual experience of the participants but also helps preserve and sustain Sufi traditions in the face of modern challenges.[50] Digital media also enables

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46 A. Syamsul Arifin, "Dapat Ijazah Amalan Dari Medsos, Bolehkah Diamalkan?," NU Online, 2024, https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/dapat-ijazah-amalan-dari-medsos-bolehkah-diamalkan-NQIr8.

47 Buya Yahya, "Ijazah Online, Bisakah? Buya Yahya Menjawab," Youtube, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NCOZDe8m68.

48 Cafe Rumi Jakarta, "Bolehkah Mengambil Ijazah Dzikir Di Youtube? - Buya Dr. Arrazy Hasyim, Ma," Youtube, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FW4JG5uLGGM.

49 Hidayat, "Transforming Sufism into Digital Media"; Piraino, "Between Real and Virtual Communities: Sufism in Western Societies and the Naqshbandi Haqqani Case."

50 Rubaidi, "The New Pseudo-Sufi Order of the Majelis Shalawat among Urban Muslims in East Java," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 14, no. 2 (2020): 431–456, https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2020.14.2.431-456.

the creation of virtual communities that support each other in maintaining *wird* recitation practices. Further, participants can share experiences, exchange knowledge, and provide mutual motivation through online discussion forums and social media groups, which fosters a strong sense of community. These virtual communities can also serve as support networks.[51]

However, the use of digital media in offering *ijāzas* also presents additional challenges, such as maintaining their integrity and validity. To ensure the authenticity of the *ijāza*, proper verification procedures must be followed. This includes verifying the authenticity of the *ijāza*, confirming the qualifications of the issuing authority, and meeting the established transmission standards. Enforcing strict standards is crucial to maintaining the credibility of *ijāza* implementation and ensuring that the issued *ijāza* is valid and widely recognized.

Finally, considering these advantages and challenges, digital media offer a practical and flexible platform for conducting online *ijāza*. However, its success heavily depends on the organizers' commitment to maintaining professional standards and ensuring a rich and meaningful learning experience. This requires ongoing investment in technology resources and training for implementers to develop high-quality content, train teachers and facilitators in the use of digital technology, and maintain adequate technological infrastructure to support the smooth and effective implementation of the *ijāza* program. Undoubtedly, the use of digital media in conferring online *ijāzas* for *dhikr* litanies can have a significant positive impact on modern Sufi practices.[52]

Conclusion

This article examined the advantages and disadvantages of digital media on Sufism practices, primarily focusing on the process of granting *ijāzas* for dhikr litanies. The observed changes reflect a transition from the traditional face-to-face interactions between teacher and student towards collective participation online. In the Sufi context, an *ijāza* is an authorization to implement a particular practice as well as a transmission of blessings and spiritual knowledge, requiring a certain degree of familiarity and closeness between teacher and student, which cannot be achieved online. Despite its advancements and limitations, digital media can effectively adapt several essential aspects of the traditional *ijāza* process into the digital format.

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51 Armyn Hasibuan, Ismail Fahmi Arrauf Nasution, and Mowafg Masuwd, "Tarekat in the Digital Age: Transforming Spirituality for the Age of Technology," *Religia* 27, no. 1 (April 27, 2024): 13–30, https://doi.org/10.28918/religia.v27i1.2306.

52 Quan Gao et al., "Lived Religion in a Digital Age: Technology, Affect and the Pervasive Space-Times of 'New' Religious Praxis," *Social & Cultural Geography* 25, no. 1 (2024): 29–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2022.2121979.

The use of digital media in the *ijāza* process improves accessibility and flexibility and facilitates the easy dissemination of knowledge and practices to a global audience, which can broaden the reach of the Sufi orders, especially among younger audiences. However, digital media diminishes direct interaction between teachers and students, thus limiting its capability of spiritual transformation. Concerns also exist about authenticity, misinformation, and unregulated *ijāza* practices due to limited oversight. Additionally, dependence on digital technology raises issues related to digital inequality, technological literacy, and data security and privacy within religious settings.

Several recommendations can be implemented to address these challenges and maximize the potential of digital media in Sufi practices, such as developing standards and protocols. Strict standards for digital *ijāza* practices need to be developed and implemented to ensure that all processes are conducted in accordance with the terms and conditions applicable to Sufism and the hadith sciences. Training and certification also provide organizers with the skills to effectively utilize digital technology in teaching and issuing certification, thereby verifying their qualifications in digital practice. Additionally, integrating traditional and digital methods, such as striking a balance between digital media and face-to-face meetings, can be achieved through periodic physical sessions supplemented with digital support materials to deepen spiritual understanding and enhance the experience. However, this article only examined the transmission and legitimacy of online *ijāzas* for *dhikr* litanies without addressing students' subjective experiences. Future study could explore this aspect more comprehensively through a hybrid ethnographic approach.

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