



Digital Media Impact on Sufi Practices: Analyzing *Ijāza Wird Dhikr*

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Abstract: This article discusses the impact of digital media on Sufi practices, specifically in the context of conducting *ijāza* (authorization) for *wird dhikr* rituals through digital platforms. Traditionally, Sufi practices such as *the ijāza* involve direct teaching from teacher to student. However, with the rapid development of digital media, the *ijāza* process has undergone significant changes. This study adopts an eclectic approach, which combines digital ethnography to study online participant engagement and a comprehensive literature review to track and measure the transformation of *ijāza* through digital media. Data were gathered from various sources, including books, scholarly journals, and relevant digital content related to the research topic. The findings show that the evolution of digital media has transformed the implementation of *ijāza* for *wird dhikr* from direct (traditional) to indirect transmission through online media, and it is considered valid. Yet, *ijāza* is not merely dealing with the process of authorization but also the transmission of blessings and spiritual knowledge from the teacher to the student, which needs close engagement and relationships that can only be achieved with direct interaction.

Contribution: This article provides an understanding of the impact and validity of *ijāza* conducted through digital media compared to traditional methods yet considered valid.

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

Introduction

The transformative power of digital media platforms in the modern era has significantly reshaped various aspects of human life. It facilitates global communication, provides easy access to data resources, and is crucial in expanding social environments. Cyberspace, a key digital media component, acts as a virtual meeting place that opens up new avenues for knowledge serves as 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.

However, alongside these advancements, there are contrasting perceptions when these developments intersect with religious elements. There is a belief that such developments pose challenges to religion, such as the decline of religious institutional authority, and some even argue that they bring about an inability to control the circulation of messages. This also applies to Sufi ritual practices, which are influenced by the rapid growth of digital media platforms. While digital media has undoubtedly expanded the reach and influence of Sufi practices, it also raises concerns about their potential dilution or misinterpretation in the digital realm.¹

Contrary to the belief that the development of digital media platforms in the modern era might lead to a spiritual crisis, it has played a pivotal role in sparking a revival of religious enthusiasm. This is particularly evident in Sufism, which has seen a surge in interest and participation due to the accessibility and reach of digital media. Sufism, which strongly emphasizes religion as a remedy for alienation and the psychological need to seek the Creator and attain tranquility in His protection, has found a new, optimistic platform for expression and engagement in the digital age, inspiring and motivating a new generation of believers.²

Previously, Sufi ritual practice relied on direct teaching from a teacher to a disciple to enhance character and awareness of divinity to attain *ma'rifatullāh*

¹ 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>.

² 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>.

(knowing Allah). The teacher taught Sufi practices and granted authorization (*ijāza*) to the disciples as a sign of legitimacy to pass on the practice to others. However, digital media has ushered in a new era for Sufi practices, bringing challenges and exciting opportunities. Digital media has altered the implementation of *ijāza* in Sufi practices, allowing the *ijāza* process to 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.

This opens up possibilities for distance *ijāza* without needing physical presence between the teacher and the disciple. However, the influence of digital media on implementing *ijāza* in Sufi practices does not come without challenges. Although digital media allows for broader access and speeds up communication processes, there are questions regarding the impact and authenticity of *ijāza* granted through digital media. How does using digital media affect the implementation process of *ijāza* in Sufi practices, and how does the authenticity of *ijāza* granted through digital platforms compare to traditional *ijāza* in Sufi practice?

This study is urgently needed to understand the significant impact of the rapid development of digital media platforms on religious practices, particularly in the context of Sufi rituals and the implementation of *ijāza wird dhikr* (a traditional Sufi practice of reciting specific phrases or prayers rhythmically). The paradigm shift from direct interaction between teacher and disciple to digital media carries profound implications for religious practices' authenticity, integrity, and spiritual experience. The primary aim of this research is to analyze the direct impact of digital media use on the implementation process of *ijāza* in Sufi practices and to assess the authenticity of *ijāza* granted through digital platforms compared to traditional methods.

This article is organized into several sections. The first section discusses the concept of *ijāza* in the traditional approach, while the second section examines the process of *ijāza* through online digital media, including examples. The third section discusses the validation of *ijāza* through online digital media and the suitability of digital media as a medium for *ijāza*. The article also includes conclusions at the end of the discussion.

Literature Review

In recent decades, digital media platforms have grown tremendously. This has enabled global communication, easy access to data resources, and the availability of abundant and fast-moving information. This development has significantly impacted various aspects of human life, including individuals' or groups' social and spiritual behavior. Digital media not only offers solutions but also poses its own set of challenges. This phenomenon encourages the exploration of existing knowledge and the formulation of more precise views to support discussions on the role of digital media in social and spiritual practices.

There are several studies on digital media and spirituality, such as the work of Wendi Bellar. In her article "Rituals: Prayer App Rituals, How Islamic Participants Engage With Technological and Religious Affordances in Muslim Pro,"³ Users prioritize orthodox practices or practices deemed correct according to religious guidelines rather than selecting various features to create their religious combinations. The article also discusses issues of authenticity and authority in religious ritual practices in digital spaces.

A critical literature review by Patrick Eisenlohr examines recent research on media practices in the context of religious diversity. Eisenlohr identifies three main approaches in this literature: media politics of diversity, religious diversity in the public sphere, and diversity of religious mediations. These approaches highlight the complexity surrounding the representation and interaction of religious diversity in media contexts, emphasizing the role of media technology in shaping discourses and religious practices. Eisenlohr argues that understanding these dynamics requires a perspective that recognizes the intrinsic connection between religion and media, addressing the challenges and implications of their intersection in contemporary socio-cultural life.⁴

In addition, there is the book "Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds," edited by Heidi Campbell (2013), which gathers chapters written by leading experts in the field, offering a comprehensive exploration of the intersection between religion and digital culture. Divided into three parts, the book covers various dimensions: Part 1, "Themes in the study of religion and new media," introduces key research topics and their developments

³ 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).

⁴ 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>.

alongside technological advancements. Part 2, "Thematic case studies," discusses specific examples from major world religions, illustrating how digital media influences religious practices. Part 3, "Reflections on studying religion and new media," addresses theoretical and methodological aspects crucial for investigating digital religion. Campbell's volume provides valuable insights for academics entering this field, highlighting the complex relationship between media technology and religious dynamics in contemporary society.⁵

In the article by Kristin M. Peterson titled "Pushing Boundaries and Blurring Categories in Digital Media and Religion Research," she calls for a more critical examination of how individuals create meaning in the digital age, focusing on the intersection of media and religion. She highlights recent research trends that challenge traditional boundaries between media spaces and definitions of religion, emphasizing the complexity and fluidity of identity and religious expression in the digital era. Peterson identifies gaps in existing research, particularly the need for more studies centered on international contexts and deeper analysis of how media technologies affect aesthetics, identity, and religious practices. She argues 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.⁶

From several studies on digital media and religion, specific studies on digital media and Sufi practices are still limited. This article will explore this, explicitly focusing on the impact of digital media on *ijāza* as a Sufi practice. It will also discuss the validity of *ijāza* when practiced online through available digital media platforms. Answering this question can help formulate a more precise view and support discussions on the role of digital media in Sufi practices and preserving the authenticity and continuity of Sufi traditions in the digital era.

Method

This research adopts an eclectic approach to analysis and aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of digital media on Sufi practices such as the *ijāza wird dhikr*. The primary focus involves identifying participants in digital media, analyzing digital content, and gathering data from relevant

⁵ Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion* (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429295683>.

⁶ Kristin M. Peterson, "Pushing Boundaries and Blurring Categories in Digital Media and Religion Research," *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 3 (13 March 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12769>.

digital archives, known as digital ethnography.⁷ This process includes engaging with online communities to discuss Sufi practices, identify key figures, and examine various forms of digital content, such as videos and related comments. Additionally, archival research methods are used to trace digital Sufi communities' evolution and practices.

Complementing digital ethnography is a literature review that provides a theoretical and contextual background. This involves collecting materials from books, scholarly journals, conference proceedings, and dissertations discussing Sufi practices and the role of digital media in religious contexts. Thematic analysis is conducted to identify key themes and patterns in the literature, comparing and contrasting various scholarly perspectives.⁸

The collected data undergoes several stages to ensure rigorous analysis. Initially, data editing organizes and refines raw data to ensure accuracy and relevance. Finally, findings are synthesized and presented structured, highlighting the impact of digital media on the dissemination and practice of *ijāza wurd dhikr*.

Given the sensitivity of religious practices, ethical considerations are crucial in this research. Participant consent and confidentiality in reporting findings are strictly maintained, along with respect for the cultural and spiritual significance of Sufi practices. By integrating digital ethnography with a comprehensive literature review, this study aims to deeply understand how digital media transforms Sufi practices, particularly *ijāza wurd dhikr*. The eclectic approach ensures that the analysis is broad and detailed, offering valuable insights into the intersection of tradition and modernity in the digital era.

Results and Discussion

Mediatization on Religious Teachings and Practice

The Influence of Digital Media on Religion is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In the past decade, there has been a dramatic change in how individuals and communities interact with their beliefs through digital media. This affects the representation of religion in the public sphere and shapes how religion is interpreted and practiced amidst an increasingly digital society. One crucial aspect of the influence of digital media on religion is the change in the

⁷ Laurence Cox et al., eds., *Handbook of Research Methods and Applications for Social Movements* (Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004).

⁸ Lynda Baker, "Observation: A Complex Research Method," *Library Trends* 55, no. 1 (June 2006): 171–89, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2006.0045>.

representation of religious beliefs in the public sphere. Digital media allows new religious voices to be heard, either strengthening or questioning existing religious authorities. This is reflected in Knut Lundby's research, which describes how media not only disseminates or mediates religious messages but can alter religion itself in the long run. This is at the core of the theory of the mediatization of religion, which explains how media transform religious institutions through symbolic communication in the public sphere.⁹

The impact of digital media is also strongly felt in social actions and protests based on religion. An example is the Occupy Judaism movement, where religious practices and social actions interact digitally and physically. 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.¹⁰ 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 that can influence how religion is interpreted and practiced. Digital media enables broader interpretations and diversification in religious expressions, which may not always align with traditional doctrines or authorities.¹¹

Furthermore, mediatization changes how religious institutions communicate and interact with their followers. In the digital era, transparency and engagement have become crucial. Religious institutions must be more open and responsive to the needs and expectations of digitally connected followers. This can pose challenges in maintaining their authority and relevance, as followers may be more critical and have access to more diverse sources of information. The long-term effects of digital media on religion include changes in how people interact with their beliefs. The younger generation in the digital era tends to have a different approach to religion, often more individualistic and less tied to conventional religious traditions. This pushes religious institutions to

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ 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>.

¹¹ Lundby, "Public Religion in Mediatized Transformations."

adapt their communication and teaching methods to remain relevant and appealing to young believers.¹²

Additionally, digital media allows for disseminating and accessing various religious practices that may not be available locally. Followers can participate in online worship, engage in religious discussion forums, and access religious materials worldwide. This enriches individual religious experiences and expands understanding and tolerance among religions. However, there are 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 that traditionally play a significant role in religion. Therefore, religious communities must balance leveraging technology to expand their reach and maintain the core of religious practices that require direct human interaction.

Overall, digital media has significantly transformed the religious landscape in the modern world. From how religion is represented in the public sphere to how individuals practice their beliefs, its influence is extensive and profound. In addressing these challenges and opportunities, it is essential for religious institutions and followers to actively engage in ongoing dialogue about the role of religion in the digital era, ensuring that technology is used in ways that reinforce rather than diminish the spiritual and communal essence of religion.

***Ijāza* in the Traditional Approach**

The word "*ijāza*" originates from the Arabic language (أجاز-يجيز) and means "to permit" or "to authorize."¹³ Al-Nawawī, in his work titled *al-Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr li-Ma'rifati Sunan al-Baṣīr al-Nadhīr*, explains that initially, this verb referred to water used to irrigate fields or quench thirst.¹⁴ Additionally, there is an interesting explanation from al-Fayrūzabādī, in *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt*, who describes that this term means to give permission, license, or authorization.¹⁵ This term is often associated with *al-taḥammul wa al-adā' fī al-ḥadīth*, which is the process of transmission and acceptance of hadith by hadith scholars. A teacher gives *Ijāza* to their student as permission to narrate a particular hadith,

¹² Lundby.

¹³ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ihyā at-Turāts, 1970).

¹⁴ Abu Zakariya Yahya Ibn Syaraf Al-Nawawī, *Al-Taqrīb Wa Al-Taysīr Li-Ma'rifati Sunan Al-Baṣīr Al-Nadhīr* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Arabi, 1985).

¹⁵ Muhammad Bin Ya'qūb Al-Fayrūzabādī, *Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīt*, ed. M. Naim Al-Araqsusi, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risālah, 1993).

either orally or in writing. *Ijāza* serves as one of the essential criteria in assessing the authenticity of the chain of narrators and the transmission of hadith.¹⁶

The history of using *ijāza* in the field of hadith studies began with the efforts of hadith scholars to document the standards of *al-taḥammul wa al-adā' fī al-ḥadīth*. One of the figures who contributed to the development of these standards was al-Hasan bin 'Abd al-Rahman bin al-Khallad al-Ramahurmuzi in the 10th century, in his book titled *al-Muḥaddith al-Fāsil Baina al-Rāwi wa al-Wa'iy*.¹⁷ This book discusses the virtues of narrating hadiths, various *ṣiḡḡah* (formulas) used in *al-taḥammul wa al-adā' fī al-ḥadīth*, and the importance of *al-taḥammul wa al-adā' fī al-ḥadīth* in preserving the authenticity of hadiths. Al-Ramahurmuzi's contribution through his book emphasizes the need for clear and documented standards in the process of hadith transmission to ensure the authenticity and reliability of hadith transmission from one generation to the next, which becomes an essential foundation in the use of *ijāza* as a validation tool in the field of hadith studies.

Many groups of experts exist in the field of hadith transmission. Still, there are two main groups: the Iraqi group supported by the Abū Hanīfa school, known as *ahl al-ra'y*, because they tend to use rational reasoning and *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) in establishing Islamic law, and the *Ḥijāzi* group, which is widely followed by the Mālik school, residents of Qairawān, and Andalusia. The Iraqi group, followed by most scholars in the *Mashriq*, uses the method of hadith transmission as *naql al-ḥadīth wa riwāyatuhū* or *taḥāmmul wa akhdh al-riwāya*. They identify eight transmission methods with a hierarchy among them, where the higher the transmission method used, the more valid and accurate the received or conveyed hadith. These transmission methods include *samā'* (listening to the reading of hadith from a teacher), *qirā'a* (reading a book of hadith to the teacher), *'ard* or *munāwala* (receiving a book of hadith from the teacher), *kitāba* (asking the teacher to write a hadith), *ijāza* (granting a license to narrate a ḥadith), *i'lām* (informing the student about the writing or transmission of a hadith), *waṣiyya* (recommending the teacher's book of hadith

¹⁶ Mahmūd Thalhān, *Taisīr Musthalah Al-Hadīth* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1987).

¹⁷ Ibn Khallad Ar-Ramahurmuzi, *-Muḥaddith Al-Fāsil Baina Al-Rāwi Wa Al-Wā'iy* (Cairo: Dār al-Dzakhāir, 2016).

when they pass away or part in a journey), and *wijāda* or *wuqūf* (discovery of a book written by a hadith scholar).¹⁸

In discussing the methods of hadith transmission, the teacher who grants permission to their student is called *muǧīz* (the grantor of *ijāza*). In contrast, the student who receives the *ijāza* is called *mustajīz* (the recipient of the *ijāza*). *Ijāza* serves as evidence that the narrator has obtained permission from their teacher to transmit a specific hadith, thereby strengthening the direct relationship between the narrator and the source of the hadith, their teacher.¹⁹ According to al-Sakhawi and al-‘Iraqi, hadith transmission has nine types of *ijāza*. First, the *ijāza* refers to a specific person in a particular book or hadith through wording or a specific place in an index. According to hadith scholars, this type has the highest status in the sanad *ijāza*. Second, the *ijāza* to a particular person in general without explaining or specifying the hadith or book. Third, the *ijāza* to the general public or unspecified individuals without specifying which narrations are authorized. Fourth, the *ijāza* to an unknown person is divided into a specific unknown person and an unclear and unknown person. Fifth, the *ijāza* is for someone who does not exist. Sixth, the *ijāza* for hadiths was not transmitted by the teacher afterward. Seventh is the hanging *ijāza*, granting *ijāza* to anyone willing to narrate. Eighth, the *ijāza* is given to someone not qualified to receive it, such as a disbeliever, a sinner, or a child. Ninth, the *ijāza* is for narrations authorized by the teacher.²⁰

The method of *ijāza*, in the context of Hadith studies, has influenced and shares similarities with *ijāza* in the context of *Taṣawuf* (Sufism). In the context of *Taṣawuf*, *ijāza* refers to a recognition given by a teacher or *murshid* to their qualified student or *murid*, granting them the authority to teach and provide spiritual guidance, including the understanding and practices of *Taṣawuf*, to others. This *ijāza* consists of several essential components, such as the message or testament from the teacher to the student, the lineage or chain of the spiritual lineage reaching Prophet Muhammad, the date of issuance, the teacher's signature, and a specific seal or stamp of the teacher. Through this *ijāza*, the

¹⁸ ‘Uthmān bin ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Ṣalāḥ Al-Shahrazūrī, *Ma‘rifatu Anwāu‘ Ulūmi Al-Ḥadīths* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu‘āṣir, 1986).

¹⁹ ‘Abd al-Raḥīm bin al-Ḥusain Al-‘Iraqi, *Al-Taḳyīd Wa Al-Īḍāḥ Syarḥ Muqaddimāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981).

²⁰ Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Al-Sakhāwī, *Fathu Al-Mughīs Bi Syarhi Alfīyyah Al-Ḥadīths*, ed. Ali Husain, vol. 2 (Cairo: Maktabah al-Sunnah, 2003); Al-‘Iraqi, *Al-Taḳyīd Wa Al-Īḍāḥ Syarḥ Muqaddimāt*.

student is formally acknowledged as someone with the authority and legitimacy to continue the teachings of the *Ṭarīqa Sufi* (Sufi orders).²¹ *ijāza* is not merely a certificate but also represents the student's recognition, appreciation, and responsibility in disseminating the *Ṭarīqa Sufi*'s teachings to others.²²

The mechanism of *ijāza* within *ṭarīqa Sufi* serves three main functions:

1. *Ijāza* represents the recognition from a *murshid* regarding the qualification of their student to serve and further develop the teachings of their *ṭarīqa*. By receiving the *ijāza*, the student is acknowledged as someone with sufficient understanding and skills to carry on the teachings of the *ṭarīqa*.
2. *Ijāza* serves as proof of the authenticity and suitability of a student to become a representative of the *murshid* and their *ṭarīqa* in providing spiritual guidance to others. By possessing the *ijāza*, the student gains legitimacy to disseminate the teachings and practices of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* to others, thereby safeguarding the quality and continuity of the teachings.
3. *Ijāza* ensures the authenticity and integrity of the teachings and becomes a source of blessings in the practices a Sufi *ṭarīqa* teacher propagates. This *Ijāza* holds spiritual value and blesses the student who receives and implements it faithfully.

In this context, the formal granting of *ijāza* within Sufi *ṭarīqas* serves as a mechanism to prevent deviations and false claims of being a *murshid* by irresponsible individuals. Therefore, in Sufi *ṭarīqas*, *ijāza* is not merely a certificate or formal proof, but it also possesses a spiritual dimension and carries blessings. This *ijāza* represents the *murshid's* appreciation and recognition of a deserving student entrusted with the responsibility of spreading the teachings of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* to others.²³

²¹ The Tariqah is the path (al-Sirah) specifically designed for those who walk (al-Salikin) towards Allah, overcoming various obstacles and progressing through various spiritual levels (al-Maqamat) (Al-Qashani 1991).

²² Faudzinaim Badaruddin and Muhammad Khairi Mahyuddin, "The Authority of Chain of Transmission and Its Role in Sufism," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 2, no. 2 (2021): 34–44, <https://www.ukm.my/ijit/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Faudzinaim-IJIT-Vol-20-Dec-2021.pdf>.

²³ 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.

***Ijāza* through Digital Platforms**

There have been many transformations in religious life with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many innovations have been adopted to maintain the continuity of religious life during the pandemic and to stay connected with followers despite restrictions on religious gatherings. One of the main mechanisms is digital literacy, which involves using digital technology such as internet platforms, radio, television, and mobile phones to participate 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.²⁴

This phenomenon also affects the *ijāza* process in the context of Sufism, even leading to an increase in *ijāza* through digital platforms, especially in the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced people to adapt to various digital platforms. Many *Majlis Ta'lim*, where Sufi activities occur, have been closed due to lockdown regulations and strict health protocols. As a result, organizers have switched to conducting *Majlis Ta'lim* on a limited scale or even recording sessions and disseminating them online through various digital media. With the distribution of *Majlis Ta'lim* content, which includes the online *ijāza* process of Sufi practices, these gatherings reach the present congregants as usual and attract participants worldwide. Digital social media platforms that connect individuals and communities and transcend limitations have contributed to the increased number of participants in online *Majlis Ta'lim* compared to offline meetings.

Digital media platforms like YouTube have significantly transformed religious practices, especially in disseminating *Majlis Ta'lim* content. YouTube hosts various video clips and full-length videos presenting *Majlis Ta'lim* content, contributing to the growth and accessibility of these gatherings. For example, channels like "*Majlis Tadzkir Lombok*" feature videos depicting the *ijāza* process for *wird dhikr* by one of the descendants of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani. Initially conducted offline, where congregants received the recitation of *wird dhikr* followed by uttering "*Qabilnā al-Ijāza*" as a sign of acceptance, this process was

²⁴ Alexander P. Isiko, "Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA) Covid-19 and Its Impact on Religiosity," *Source: Journal for the Study of Religion* 35, no. 1 (2022): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27203192>; David S. Thornhill, "Best Leadership Practices of Senior Pastors in The Church of The Nazarene" (Olivet Nazarene University, Illinois, 2023), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.36627889>.

then recorded and disseminated online through the YouTube channel "*Majlis Tadzkir Lombok.*"



Figure 1. Depicts a video of the process of *ijāza* (authorization) for reciting the *wird dhikr* (remembrance of God) of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jaelani in a religious gathering or grand preaching event conducted by one of his descendants. The video was recorded and distributed online through Majlis Tadzkir Lombok's YouTube channel.²⁵ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFK3wvsnknk>

The dissemination of such videos has made *ijāza* accessible to the public, offering several advantages compared to offline processes. Firstly, it can be accessed anytime and anywhere, allowing individuals to remotely participate in the *ijāza* process. Secondly, the recorded *ijāza* process can be reviewed after the event, providing opportunities for reflection and reinforcement of learning. Thirdly, it saves costs and resources associated with organizing physical gatherings, making it a more cost-effective option. Lastly, it provides direct *ijāza* from leading Sufi experts, enhancing the credibility and authenticity of the process.

However, despite these advantages, there are limitations to the *ijāza* process through digital platforms. One significant drawback is the lack of personal dimension and physical presence. In traditional offline settings, the *ijāza*

²⁵ Majlis Tadzkir Lombok, "Ijazah Wirid from Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani!!! Langsung Dari Cucu Beliau," YouTube Video, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFK3wvsnknk>.

process involves direct interaction between teacher and student, forming deeper relationships and understanding. This interpersonal dynamic may be lost in the digital environment, potentially affecting the quality of the learning experience. Furthermore, ensuring the authenticity and integrity of teachings in the digital *ijāza* process can be challenging. Unlike offline settings where teachings are delivered directly, digital platforms may lack mechanisms to verify the credentials and expertise of instructors. There is a risk of misinformation or misunderstanding of teachings, leading to misinterpretations among participants.

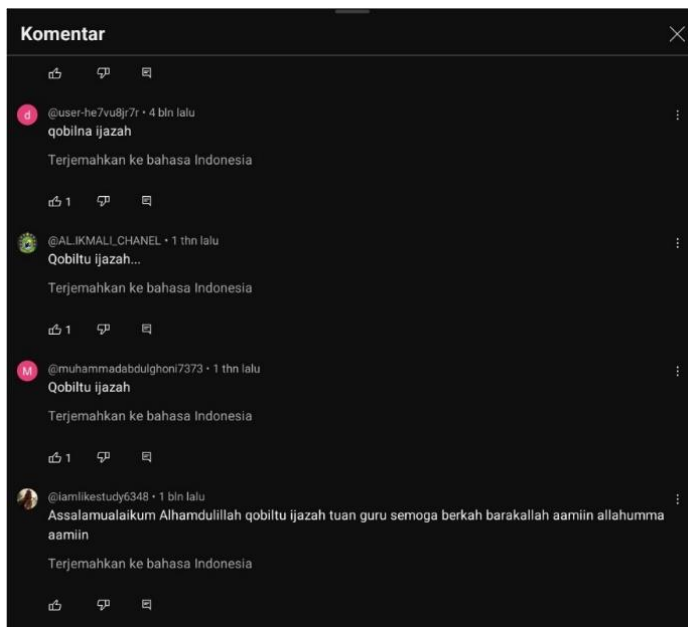


Figure 2. The congregation responds "*qobilnaa al-Ijāza*" in the video's comment section of the *ijāza* for *wird dhikr* as a sign that they have accepted the authorization. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFK3wvsnknk>

Additionally, the absence of direct interaction between teacher and student limits opportunities for clarification and guidance. In offline settings, students can seek clarification or ask questions directly to the teacher, facilitating a deeper understanding of the subject matter. However, in the digital environment, communication may be limited to comments or messages, which may not always be timely or effective in addressing concerns. Nevertheless, congregants participating in the *ijāza* process through digital media still express "*qobilnā al-Ijāza*" in the comment section as a sign of receiving the conveyed *ijāza* through the video. This indicates that despite the limitations of digital platforms, they still play a significant role in facilitating religious education and the

dissemination of spiritual practices, especially in situations of limited physical gatherings, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, digital media platforms have revolutionized disseminating and accessing religious practices. While digital *ijāza* processes offer some advantages in terms of accessibility and convenience, they also pose challenges related to interpersonal dynamics, authenticity, and interaction. Thus, it is essential to find a balance between harnessing the benefits of digital technology and maintaining the authenticity and integrity of religious teachings in the digital era.

Validity of *Ijāza* through Digital Media

The online issuance of that *ijāza* for *wird dhikr* through digital media can be considered valid based on the concept of *ijāza* in the field of hadith studies. In the context of the discussion on *al-taḥammul wa al-adā' fi al-ḥadīth*, *ijāza* holds a middle position. *Ijāza* is considered to have a status of authenticity and validity in the transmission of hadiths, making it an essential method for those seeking a reliable chain of narration without necessarily adhering to the strict standards imposed by hadith scholars. This is in line with what was explained by Ḥijāzī scholars, that all methods of transmitting and conveying hadiths, including the method of *ijāza*, have the same status and validity and are equivalent to other methods.²⁶

The method of *ijāza* is acceptable to communities far from knowledge centers, especially with digital communication tools that are not limited by space and time. It also aligns with technological and knowledge advancements in the present era. 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 fact, in terms of the continuity of the chain of transmission, the recitation, and the conveyance of hadiths, the method of *ijāza* through social media is almost identical to the teacher verbally reciting or writing the narration in the *samā'* method, which is considered the highest method after the *qirā'ah* method, as explained by Imam al-Suyūṭī in his book *Tadīb Al-Rāwī Fī Sharh*

²⁶ Al-Sakhāwī, *Fathu Al-Mughīṣ Bi Syarhi Alfiyyah Al-Hadīṣ*, 2:263.

Taqīb al-Nawāwī.²⁷ A complete *ijāza* with detailed data demonstrates a strong transmission of narrations in terms of *ithbat al-naql* (establishing the authenticity of the transmission). In this *ijāza*, status, validity, and narrations are determined by the detailed description of the narration or book like the *ijāza*.²⁸

In the context of *ijāza* for *wird dhikr* through digital media, it can be classified into several types of *ijāza*. Participants who receive *ijāza* through online digital media are considered equivalent to those who attend in person and have the status of a second to seventh-level *ijāza*, namely, *ijāza* to a specific person in general without explaining or specifying the hadith or book, *ijāza* to the general public or unspecified individuals without specifying authorized narrations, *ijāza* to an unknown person, which is divided into a specific unknown person and an unclear and unknown person, *ijāza* for someone who does not exist, *ijāza* for hadiths not transmitted by the teacher afterward, and hanging *ijāza*, which grants *ijāza* to anyone willing to narrate. However, suppose online participants are not considered equal. In that case, they fall into the category of *ijāza* from a teacher to an unknown person or from a teacher to a non-existent person. The majority of scholars still accept both of these types of *ijāza*. Therefore, based on the data of *ijāza* in the field of hadith studies, *ijāza* for *wird dhikr* through digital media can be considered valid if it fulfills the complete requirements and undergoes the appropriate verification process.²⁹

The Suitability of Digital Media as a Medium for *Ijāza* and Its Impact on Sufi Practices

Digital media as a platform for conducting online *ijāza* has gained widespread acceptance due to its significant advantages. One of the main benefits is increased accessibility, allowing individuals from various locations to participate in the learning program without being restricted by geographical barriers. This is especially beneficial for those living in remote areas or with limited access to traditional educational institutions. The second advantage of using digital media is the flexibility of time. Online platforms enable participants to schedule their learning sessions, which can be highly advantageous for those with busy schedules or who need to balance work and family commitments with

²⁷ Jalāluddīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Tadribu Al-Rāwī Fī Syarḥi Taqībi Al-Nawāwī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutubi al-Islāmiy, 1996).

²⁸ Al-Sakhāwī, *Fathu Al-Mughīḥ Bi Syarhi Alfīyyah Al-Hadīṣ*, 2:209.

²⁹ Al-Sakhāwī, *Fathu Al-Mughīḥ Bi Syarhi Alfīyyah Al-Hadīṣ*, Al-‘Iraqi, *Al-Taqyīd Wa Al-Idāh Syarḥ Muqaddimāt*.

their educational needs. This flexibility allows individuals to receive *ijāza* at the most convenient time, whether in the morning, evening, or weekend, thereby enhancing their potential for success in completing the *ijāza*.

Additionally, digital media provides the advantage of consistent content delivery. By utilizing recorded videos, subtitle presentations, or written materials, every participant is granted access to the same information they can repeatedly review. This ensures that all participants have an equal opportunity to receive *ijāza* from the presented content and understand the discussed *ijāza*. Consistency in content delivery also allows for increased quality control of the provided *ijāza*, as experts can review and refine materials before being presented to participants.

The use of digital media in conducting *ijāza wird dhikr* in Sufi practice also has significant impacts. One of these is the broader and faster dissemination of knowledge and practices of *wird dhikr*. Through digital platforms, Sufis can instantly share and spread their teachings to students worldwide. This not only enriches the spiritual experience of the participants but also helps preserve and sustain Sufi traditions in the face of modern challenges.

Digital media also enables the creation of virtual communities that support each other in the practice of *wird dhikr*. Participants can share experiences, exchange knowledge, and provide mutual motivation through online discussion forums or social media groups. This fosters a strong sense of togetherness and support despite being geographically separated. These virtual communities can also function as networks to help each other maintain the spirit and consistency in practicing dhikr.

However, using digital media in conducting *ijāza* also presents particular challenges, especially regarding maintaining the integrity and validity of the *ijāza*. To ensure the authenticity of the *ijāza*, proper verification procedures must be followed. This includes verifying the *ijāza*'s authenticity, providing the qualifications of the *ijāza* grantors, and meeting established standards described in discussions about *ijāza* in the science of hadith. Enforcing strict standards is crucial to maintaining the credibility of *ijāza* implementation and ensuring that the *ijāza* issued to participants is valid and widely recognized.

Considering these advantages and challenges, digital media offers a practical and flexible platform for conducting online *Ijāza*. However, its success heavily depends on the organizers' commitment to maintaining high standards of Sufism and ensuring a rich and meaningful learning experience for all

participants. This requires ongoing investment in technology resources and training for implementers. This investment includes developing high-quality content, training teachers and facilitators in using digital technology, and maintaining adequate technological infrastructure to support the smooth and effective implementation of the *ijāza* program. Thus, the use of digital media in conducting *Ijāza wird dhikr* can have a significant positive impact on enriching and expanding Sufi practices in the modern era.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the impact of digital media on Sufism practices, mainly by analyzing changes in the process of granting *ijāza* for recitation and remembrance rituals. These changes reflect a transition from traditional methodologies relying on physical presence and direct interaction between teacher and student towards the application of digital technology, enabling the practice of *ijāza* to be conducted online. In the context of Sufism, an *ijāza* is not merely an authorization but also a transmission of blessings and spiritual knowledge from teacher to student. This tradition necessitates closeness and depth of relationship, often only achievable through direct meetings. However, this research found that with all its advancements and limitations, digital media can adapt several essential aspects of the traditional *ijāza* process into a digital format.

There are several advantages to utilizing Digital Media in the *ijāza* Process, such as Accessibility and Flexibility. Digital media allows *ijāza* access to individuals in remote locations or with limitations to meet teachers directly. Digital platforms like webinars, social media, and instant messaging applications facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and spiritual practices without being bound by geographical or time constraints. The *ijāza* Process through Digital Media also offers advantages in Documentation and Verification. Digitization allows for more systematic data recording and storage, verifying *ijāza*'s authenticity. Furthermore, digital media accelerates the dissemination process of *ijāza*. Information and Sufi practices can reach more participants in a shorter time, which is beneficial in spreading Sufi teachings to the younger generation and the wider community.

Despite the advantages of digital media in implementing *ijāza*, it also has its drawbacks. One primary concern is the reduced direct interaction between teacher and student. In Sufism, personal interaction often reinforces spiritual transmission and deep understanding of teachings. Digital media, although

efficient, frequently cannot fully replace the nuances and depth provided by face-to-face meetings. Additionally, although digital media provides an effective platform for documentation and verification, there are still concerns about the authenticity of the practices taught and the *ijāza* granted. The risk of misinformation dissemination and inauthentic practices increases without direct supervision from qualified teachers. Dependence on digital technology also raises new issues, including accessibility problems for those less proficient in technology or with limited access to digital infrastructure. Data security and privacy concerns are also significant considerations when using digital platforms for religious activities.

Several recommendations can be implemented to address these challenges and maximize the potential of digital media in Sufi practices, such as the Development of Standards and Protocols. Strict standards for digital *ijāza* practices need to be developed and implemented to ensure that all processes are conducted according to the terms and conditions applicable in Sufism and hadith sciences. Training and certification also provide training for organizers on effectively using digital technology in teaching and granting *ijāza* and certification to verify their qualifications in digital practice. Also, integrating traditional and digital methods, striking a balance between digital media and face-to-face meetings, for example, through periodic face-to-face sessions supplemented with digital support materials to deepen spiritual understanding and experience.

In conclusion, digital media has brought about significant transformation in the practice of *ijāza* in Sufism, offering many advantages but also facing significant challenges. With the right approach and deep understanding of the essence of Sufi practices, digital media can be successfully integrated to support the sustainability and authenticity of Sufi traditions in the modern era. Further research and ongoing discussions will help formulate effective strategies for this integration, ensuring that the spiritual values of Sufism are preserved in an increasingly digital world.

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