

## Urban Sufism in West Java: Reclaiming Spiritual Identity through Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya Practices in the Digital Era

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### *Abstrak*

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis keterlibatan pemuda Muslim urban dalam praktik Tarekat Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya sebagai respons spiritual terhadap krisis identitas, dislokasi budaya, dan tekanan kehidupan digital kontemporer. Fokus utama diarahkan pada eksplorasi kontribusi praktik kolektif sufistik-seperti dzikir, suluk, dan pengajian kitab klasik-terhadap pemulihan spiritual dan rekonstruksi identitas religius di wilayah urban Jawa Barat. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis tematik atas pengalaman empirik para anggota komunitas tarekat. Tiga temuan utama diidentifikasi: (1) spiritualitas tradisional berkontribusi dalam memperkuat ketahanan psikologis dan memperdalam pencarian makna hidup; (2) tarekat berfungsi sebagai ruang sosial yang inklusif dan suportif secara emosional, yang memperkuat identitas kolektif lintas kelas sosial; dan (3) praktik sufistik menunjukkan peran sebagai perlawanan simbolik terhadap purifikasi ideologis melalui pendekatan reflektif, afektif, dan berbasis nilai lokal. Hasil penelitian ini mengindikasikan bahwa komunitas tarekat memiliki potensi sebagai agen kultural dan spiritual dalam pembentukan habitus keberagamaan moderat generasi muda. Keaslian penelitian terletak pada integrasi aspek tradisi, teknologi, dan transendensi dalam menjelaskan dinamika religiositas pemuda Muslim di era pascamodern, serta pada kontribusinya dalam menawarkan kerangka konseptual baru dalam kajian sufisme urban dan formasi identitas religius.

**Kata kunci:** Sufisme Urban; Religiositas Pemuda; Rekonstruksi Identitas; Spiritualitas Digital; Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya.

### ***Abstract***

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This study aims to analyse the engagement of urban Muslim youth in the practices of the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya Sufi order as a spiritual response to identity crises, cultural dislocation, and the pressures of contemporary digital life. The primary focus is directed towards exploring the contribution of collective Sufi practices-such as dhikr, suluk (spiritual retreat), and classical Islamic text study-to spiritual restoration and the reconstruction of religious identity in urban areas of West Java. A qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and thematic analysis of the empirical experiences of Sufi community members. Three key findings were identified: (1) traditional spirituality contributes to strengthening psychological resilience and deepening the search for existential meaning; (2) the Sufi order functions as an inclusive and emotionally supportive social space that reinforces collective identity across social classes; and (3) Sufi practices demonstrate a symbolic resistance to ideological purification through reflective, affective, and locally grounded approaches. The findings indicate that Sufi communities possess the potential to act as cultural and spiritual agents in shaping a moderate religious habitus among youth. The originality of this research lies in its integration of tradition, technology, and transcendence in explaining the dynamics of Muslim youth religiosity in the postmodern era, as well as its contribution to offering a new conceptual framework in the study of urban Sufism and the formation of religious identity.

**Keywords:** *Urban Sufism; Youth Religiosity; Identity Reconstruction; Digital Spirituality; Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya.*

## **Introduction**

In the contemporary dynamics of Indonesian Muslim society, particularly among urban youth, a notable resurgence of spirituality rooted in Sufi Islamic traditions has emerged. Amid the dominance of digital culture and the hegemony of fast-paced modern values, many young people are seeking alternative forms of spirituality that are deeper, more structured, and meaningful. This is evident in the growing engagement of younger generations with Sufi orders such as the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya, both in pesantren environments and urban communities. Practices such as communal dhikr, riyadhah, and suluk are increasingly becoming spaces for contemplation as well as social means for young people to rediscover the meaning of life, inner wholeness, and a religious identity that they perceive to be fragmented.

This phenomenon can also be interpreted as a response to rising existential anxiety, psychological pressure, and crises of religious identity, all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Global and regional studies have indicated that spirituality has functioned as a significant coping mechanism for adolescent mental health during the pandemic (Hastuti and Septariana 2025; Lakshmi, Oinam, and Gazalaxmi Devi 2023; Rias et al. 2020). Young individuals who were previously religiously inactive have begun to show new involvement in spiritual practices as part of their efforts towards healing and meaning-making. Research has also demonstrated a positive correlation between spirituality, mental well-being, and character development (Ahmed 2009; Musa 2015).

The emergence of this phenomenon is inseparable from the influence of digital culture. On one hand, social media has become a new arena for negotiating religious identity (Nisa 2022; Zaid et al. 2022); on the other, it has fostered the fragmentation of meaning and spiritual disorientation. Sufi orders offer an authentic, community-based religious experience that is grounded in transcendent depth—one that resists reduction by algorithms or digital consumption. Urban Sufism, as observed in Yogyakarta, has even manifested as a form of resistance to rigid religious formalism and Salafist purification, which are often perceived as spiritually dry (Sodik and Sujibto 2023).

The engagement of youth in Sufi orders—particularly the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya—may thus be interpreted as a form of reclaiming spirituality: a conscious effort among young people to reconstruct their religious identity through collective experience, spiritual discipline, and rootedness in the Nusantara Islamic tradition. This marks the emergence of a new trend in contemporary Islamic studies: the revitalisation of traditional spirituality by the digital generation.

Research on youth religiosity and spiritual involvement has developed significantly, especially in response to the challenges of the digital era and identity transformation. Previous literature may be categorised into three main approaches. First, digital religious expression and identity formation have become central themes. Scholars such as Zaid et al. (2022), Husein & Slama (2018), and Lengauer (2018) highlight how Muslim youth utilise social media to display personal piety—through online tilawah, digital pengajian, and Islamic content on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. This phenomenon, known as “digital piety,” constructs a space for religious expression that is not always reliant on clerical authority or conventional places of worship (Valibeigi 2018; Zaid et al. 2022). However, this approach tends to be individualistic and rarely addresses the communal dynamics of

spirituality found in Sufi orders (Rosowsky 2019; Salam-Salmaoui, Hassan, and Salam 2025).

Second, studies on urban Sufism and youth participation in Sufi orders suggest a transformation in spiritual culture. Research by Howell (2008), Sodik & Sujibto (2023), and YUSDANI et al. (2019) reveals a shift in Sufi practices from pesantren-based to urban public spaces such as cafés, youth communities, and online platforms. Zamhari (2013) and Sharify-Funk et al. (2017) discuss how Sufi orders have innovated by building networks of popular culture-based da'wah. Rahmatullah et al. (2024) even demonstrate how some young Sufis express their spirituality through political activism, blending political piety with Islamic spiritual values. However, these studies often remain descriptive or sociological, without exploring how communal spiritual experiences contribute to stable religious identity formation amidst existential crises and digital pressures.

Third, literature linking spiritual practice to psychological resilience and mental well-being is fairly extensive. Studies by Musa (2015), Ahmed (2009), and Dwidiyanti et al. (2022) indicate that practices such as dhikr, prayer, and Islamic meditation positively impact stress reduction and religious personality formation. Krok et al. (2023) and Magan et al. (2024) further suggest that participation in collective rituals enhances resilience, especially among vulnerable groups like adolescents or refugees. Sufi practices such as suluk and riyadhah have also been shown to have therapeutic effects (Bakri, Wahyudi, and Andriyani 2025; Jais et al. 2024). However, these studies tend to treat religious experience as a personal process and have not explored the potential of Sufi communities as collective meaning-making agents that provide connectedness, emotional stability, and intergenerational spiritual support.

This study seeks to explore in depth how the involvement of urban Muslim youth in the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya order in West Java contributes to the reconstruction of religious identity and spiritual recovery in the context of digital cultural pressure and contemporary existential crisis. Specifically, the study aims to address a gap in the literature concerning the relationship between collective Sufi spirituality and the formation of youth religious identity in the postmodern context. Building on the limitations of previous research that tends to focus on individual religiosity through digital media (digital piety) and rarely touches on communal spirituality (Rosowsky 2019; Zaid et al. 2022), this study examines how collective dhikr, riyadhah, and suluk practices serve as social-transcendental spaces that mediate the search for meaning, emotional stability, and a sense of connectedness among Muslim youth. Furthermore, the study explores how such communities function as arenas for forming a moderate, adaptive, and contextual religious

habitus, one that resists ideological purification and exclusivism while providing emotional and spiritual support for young people navigating the psycho-social challenges of the digital age.

The study is grounded in the argument that youth engagement in Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya practices in West Java constitutes a process of meaning-making and religious identity formation in the face of spiritual crisis and cultural pressure. Practices such as communal dhikr, suluk, and riyadhah serve not only as religious rituals but also as channels for spiritual and social restoration, fostering connectedness, traditional continuity, and emotional equilibrium amid the growing individualism and fragmentation of digital religiosity. Conceptually, engagement in Sufi communities offers a transformative space for young people to reconstruct their religious habitus through embodied, emotional, and intergenerational spiritual experience. In this context, the Sufi order not only functions as a preserver of Islamic tradition but also as a cultural field adaptive to social change. Thus, this study positions Sufi practice as a creative youth response to identity dislocation in the digital era, and as a revitalisation of moderate, inclusive, and contextual Nusantara Islamic spirituality.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **1. Revitalisation of Traditional Spirituality among Youth**

Fieldwork findings indicate that the involvement of young people in the practices of the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya Sufi order in urban areas of West Java reflects a form of spiritual resistance to the fast-paced, instant, and individualistic nature of digital culture. Youth from diverse social backgrounds—students, young professionals, and former delinquents—actively participate in regular spiritual practices such as Lazimah, Wazhifah, and Hailalah under the guidance of a murshid. Activities such as tawajjuhan, suluk, and the study of Sufi texts serve as collective media to develop religious awareness, restore personal identity, and strengthen affective dimensions in daily life.

Their engagement extends to spiritually-oriented discussion communities such as Komuji (Komunitas Pemikiran Kreatif Inklusif Indonesia), which integrates spirituality with contemporary issues including art, politics, and economics. These findings align with Sodik and Sujibto (2023), who argue that urban Sufism is not anti-modernist but rather adaptive and reflective of social realities. In this regard, Sufi practice functions not merely as a space for worship, but as an arena for

reconstructing religious identity amidst the fragmentation of meaning brought about by digital disruption (Bakri, Wahyudi, and Andriyani 2025).

In-depth interviews revealed that collective dhikr practices generate inner peace and intergenerational solidarity. AF (23), a university student, shared:

*"Initially, I joined because a friend invited me. But after participating in dhikr and suluk several times, I felt I had rediscovered a sense of true inner calm that had long been missing."*

Participant observation during a night dhikr session at Al-Fatah Mosque revealed a quiet and contemplative atmosphere, where around 30 young saliks sat in a circle, chanting *La ilaha illa Allah*, interspersed with emotional expressions of tears and embraces. This embodied and collective spiritual experience was found to strengthen psychological stability and resilience, as confirmed by Smith et al. (2013) in their study on adolescent spiritual well-being.

The motivations behind youth involvement in the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya Sufi order in urban West Java reflect complex and multidimensional spiritual needs. Based on interviews and participant observations, these motivations can be classified into three categories, each grounded in distinct psychosocial and spiritual dimensions. First, the Objective Motive-referring to the quest for a deeper and more holistic sense of meaning. Many youths reported disillusionment with modern materialistic and competitive life narratives, seeking instead transcendental experiences to fill existential voids. This aligns with Liamzon and Banzon-Librojo (2025), who found that youth spiritual exploration often arises from the need to formulate a stable identity through authentic religious experiences. Second, the Emergency Motive-associated with psychological pressure from urban living and digital distraction. Here, Sufi practice serves as a coping mechanism for stress, alienation, burnout, and emotional disorder. Dhikr and wirid offer therapeutic spiritual tools that enhance self-regulation and psychological resilience, as supported by studies by Krok et al. (2023) and Munsoor & Munsoor (2017). Third, the Organic Motive-emerging from experiences of identity crisis or destructive life patterns, including addiction, violence, or social alienation. For several informants, joining the Sufi community marked a turning point, with suluk, religious study, and spiritual guidance from the murshid seen as a path to inner transformation and religious reformation. These findings resonate with Nica (2020), who noted that individuals undergoing personal crises tend to reconstruct identity through involvement in spiritual communities that provide collective meaning and emotional safety.

FZ (25), a freelance worker, stated:

*“Since joining this Sufi order, I feel more structured and emotionally stable. I’m not as easily angered or stressed, even when work becomes chaotic. I’ve learned how to guard my heart better.”*

These insights affirm the literature that Sufi practices provide emotional structure and collective meaning-making for youth (Louw & van Niekerk, 2024). The following table summarises motivations and experienced transformations based on field informants:

**Table 1. Classification of Motivations and Spiritual Transformations**

<b>Informant Category</b>	<b>Motivation for Joining</b>	<b>Experienced Transformation</b>
University Student	Curiosity, invited by peers	Inner calm, enhanced academic motivation
Freelance Worker	Urban stress, professional pressure	Emotional stability, improved patience
Former Addict	Escape from destructive lifestyle	Active in social-religious activities, “reborn”

Thus, the revitalisation of traditional spirituality through Sufi practice not only shapes personal religious experiences but also functions as a collective meaning-making instrument capable of addressing identity dislocation and crises of meaning among youth in the digital era. This aligns with studies by Bakri et al. (2025) and Peterson (2008), which highlight the critical role of communal spiritual practices in fostering sustainable religious identity and mental health.

Youth participation in the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya order reflects their need to rediscover meaningful life purpose amidst urban pressures and the flood of digitalisation. Practices such as dhikr and suluk transcend ritual obligations, becoming therapeutic spaces for healing and the reconstruction of religious identity. This is consistent with findings by Bakri et al. (2025) and Krok et al. (2023), who affirm that collective spiritual experiences can enhance psychological resilience and redirect young individuals’ life paths. These motivations fall into three categories: objective (the pursuit of meaning and inner peace), emergency (a response to mental strain from urban competition and digital fragmentation) (Zaid et al. 2022), and organic (the need for transformation after destructive life experiences) (Musa 2015; Romanova, Chernichkin, and Morozova 2021).

From the collected data, several patterns indicate key trends in the revitalisation of youth spirituality. First, there is a shift from symbolic religiosity to functional spirituality, where Sufi practice is no longer seen



merely as cultural heritage, but as a personal necessity for emotional and existential recalibration. Second, youth involvement exhibits communal and cross-class tendencies, creating egalitarian collective spaces for spiritual strengthening. Third, practices such as dhikr and suluk demonstrate significant therapeutic effects, reinforcing the consistency between ritual engagement and emotional stability. Fourth, there emerges an integrative pattern linking traditional spirituality with contemporary discourse—such as economy, art, and ecology—manifested in forums like Komuji, demonstrating that Sufi orders can adapt to digital ecosystems and modern issues.

These findings suggest that youth engagement in the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya order is not a passive retreat from modernity, but rather an active reconstruction of a spirituality relevant to contemporary dynamics. The Sufi order proves effective as a medium for identity transformation, offering emotional stability, inner peace, and critical reflection on urban pressures and digital disorientation. In this context, Sufi communities act as collective meaning-making agents, integrating Islamic tradition with the spiritual needs of today's youth. Academically, these findings extend our understanding of communal spirituality as an adaptive strategy for religious identity formation among the digital generation. Practically, they highlight the importance of supporting inclusive and contextual spiritual spaces as part of policies aimed at enhancing mental health, religious moderation, and the empowerment of Muslim youth in the postmodern era.

## **2. The Sufi Order as a Social Space and Collective Identity**

Field findings indicate that the practice of the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya Sufi Order in urban areas of West Java functions not only as a site of spiritual worship but also as a social space uniting young people from diverse backgrounds—students, informal workers, and even former delinquents. At the zawiyahs observed in Bandung and Cimahi, routine activities such as collective dhikr, weekly *riyāḍah* (spiritual exercises), and classical Islamic study circles serve as points of encounter that foster emotional and spiritual solidarity among members. This space nurtures egalitarian social relations, where individuals feel unconditionally accepted and receive psychosocial support often absent in fragmented and competitive everyday interactions.

One *sālik* (spiritual seeker), YZ (28 years old), stated in an interview:

*“Outside, I feel inferior and alone. But here, it feels like family. We pray for one another, strengthen one another. I feel accepted without having to pretend to be someone else.”*



This statement affirms that the ṭarīqah community cultivates a strong and inclusive sense of belonging. These findings align with Sethi et al. (2021), who observed that spiritual communities provide authentic participatory spaces for youth, enhancing relational skills and social cohesion in supportive environments.

Researchers also noted the use of distinctive symbols and terminologies—such as specific attire during riyāḍah, the concept of sulūk, and personal relationships with the murshid—that reinforce the construction of collective identity. This identity is not exclusivist but rather flexible and adaptive to socio-cultural dynamics. In the digital era, the ṭarīqah also employs platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram to disseminate dhikr schedules, study materials, and daily spiritual messages, forming a digital Sufi ecosystem that maintains transcendental depth. This phenomenon affirms the ṭarīqah as a counter-public community capable of engaging with digital spaces without compromising its spiritual core (Sodik and Sujibto 2023; Zaid et al. 2022).

Data visualisation is presented through interview excerpts and a classification of social interaction forms. A student, AF (23 years old), expressed:

*“In the Sufi order, I feel like I can be myself. I don’t need to wear a mask. Everyone here listens and encourages—even when I’m at my lowest.”*

Meanwhile, a former addict now active in religious outreach said:

*“I used to have no one. But since joining sulūk, I’ve found a place to come home to. I can talk, learn, and not be judged. I feel saved—literally.”*

These quotations demonstrate that spiritual experience within the ṭarīqah is inseparable from supportive social relationships. The internalisation of Sufi values occurs not only through doctrinal instruction but also through collective encounters, emotional togetherness, and repeated ritual practices. Thus, the construction of young people’s religious identity unfolds through communal mediation that intertwines transcendence with social solidarity.

**Table 2. Forms of Social Interaction within the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya Community**

<b>Dimension of Interaction</b>	<b>Social-Spiritual Function</b>
Collective Dhikr	Strengthens spiritual and emotional connection within shared rituals.
Weekly Riyāḍah	Trains collective discipline and deepens interpersonal bonds.
Classical Sufi Study Circles	Facilitates reflective dialogue and traditional understanding of Sufism.

Psychosocial Support	Builds a network of care and emotional safety among members.
Digital Community Communication	Maintains ongoing connection via spiritual messages and scheduling.

Field observations reveal that the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya Order serves not only as a site of spiritual worship but also as a social network that gathers youth from diverse social strata into inclusive participatory spaces. Activities such as collective dhikr, riyāḍah, and the study of Sufi texts facilitate social cohesion, identity formation, and continuous emotional support. The community provides a safe space that bridges the gaps of social alienation and psychological pressure typical of urban and digital life. Researchers also observed that online communication via WhatsApp and Telegram has enhanced connectivity among members while exemplifying the adaptability of Sufi communities to technological developments (Sodik and Sujibto 2023; Zaid et al. 2022).

Overall, Sufi practice offers a holistic social and spiritual experience. Young participants feel embraced without concealing their identity wounds. They strengthen each other through intensive interactions framed by collective ritual practice. Emotional support and the formation of a traditional Islamic habitus occur simultaneously through encounters with the murshid and the internalisation of Sufi values. This indicates that the Sufi order not only addresses spiritual needs but also the human need for community and meaning in daily life (James, Fine, and Turner 2015; Sethi et al. 2021; L. Smith, Webber, and DeFrain 2013).

Furthermore, data analysis reveals four key patterns: (1) the formation of strong emotional bonds within dhikr and riyāḍah gatherings; (2) the strengthening of social cohesion through the murshid's role as both spiritual and moral anchor; (3) the community's openness to diverse social backgrounds; and (4) the integration of technology into spiritual life, sustaining relational continuity (Barron and Martin 2016; Sodik and Sujibto 2023). Collectively, these patterns create a resilient, socially contextualised network of solidarity across classes and generations.

These findings reinforce the understanding that the ṭarīqah community can serve as an effective arena for reconstructing the religious identity of urban youth, particularly in a postmodern context marked by fragmentation and psychosocial stress. Sufi practices within such communities not only instil spirituality but also function as social navigation tools, spaces of self-acceptance, and dynamic platforms for collective identity formation. Thus, this study contributes critical insights to discourses on the interrelation between traditional religious communities, youth identity transformation,

and social resilience in the digital age (Charbonneau 2007; Louw and van Niekerk 2024; L. Smith, Webber, and DeFrain 2013).

### **3. Resistance to Cultural Dislocation and Ideological Purification**

Field findings indicate that the practice of the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya Sufi order among urban youth in West Java functions not only as a means of personal spiritual development but also as a symbolic space of resistance against ideological purification that negates local Islamic traditions. Most informants—who previously engaged in formal, scripturalist religious experiences—reported tensions between rigid Islamic narratives and their spiritual needs, which were more reflective, affective, and culturally rooted.

One informant, MA (26 years old), formerly active in a scripturalist da'wah group, stated:

*"I was taught that everything was bid'ah. If there was no dalil, it was haram. But over time, I felt empty. In the tarekat, I was invited to feel Islam, not just memorise it."*

This statement reflects a shift from a normative-textual approach to an embodied Sufi experience, where spirituality is not solely rational-theological but internalised through daily practices that foster self-awareness and emotional connection with traditional Islamic values. As noted by Sodik and Sujibto (2023), urban youth engagement in tarekat communities often arises in response to disillusionment with formal religiosity severed from cultural roots. This is corroborated by Kashyap and Lewis (2013), who found that Islam increasingly serves as a personal identity anchor for young Muslims, even as religious practices become more individualised and selective.

Participant observation in a study circle and dhikr session at Zawiyah Hidayatullah in Bandung revealed that the community serves as a more open and contextual space for religious dialogue. One participant remarked:

*"We don't need to be anti-modern to remain santri. It's this tradition that helps keep us sane in today's world."*

This comment illustrates how the tarekat forms a resilient yet flexible cultural bastion against identity and cultural dislocation in the digital era. Youth no longer perceive traditional religious practices as burdensome legacies but rather as symbolic capital for reconstructing an authentic and adaptive spiritual identity (Louw & van Niekerk, 2024; Smith et al., 2013). This finding aligns with Diaz (2011), who observed that Qadiriyya rituals in the European diaspora contributed to the reconstruction of local Muslim youth identity.

Additional narratives reinforce the tarekat's role as a space of identity transformation:

MA (26), former campus da'wah activist: *"I used to be active in textual Islamic circles. But eventually, I felt spiritually dry. In this tarekat, I don't just understand the scriptures-I feel the meaning. There is love, not just law."*

ZF (22), university student: *"The first time I joined a kitab kuning study session, it felt like coming home. It's not nostalgia-it's about reconnecting with my roots."*

WN (24), santri and content creator: *"Now I also produce da'wah content, but I blend it with tarekat traditions. People say my da'wah feels different-softer, they say."*

These narratives highlight that the tarekat is not merely a space for spiritual reflection, but also a site of symbolic resistance to Islamic discourses that sever ties with tradition. This resonates with Peterson (2008) and Bekkaoui et al. (2011), who emphasise the role of Sufism in crafting moderate, non-confrontational cultural alternatives to ideological purification. Piraino (2021) likewise observes that neo-Sufi networks in European spiritual festivals foster similar forms of transnational cultural solidarity.

To illustrate the patterns emerging in the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya's resistance to ideological purification and cultural dislocation, the following thematic classification is provided:

**Table 3. Aspect Form of Expression Symbolic Meaning**

Aspect	Form of Expression	Symbolic Meaning
Critique of purification	Rejection of bid'ah labels and severance from tradition	Repositioning religious interpretation to favour local, sanad-based traditions (Fanani and Iswanto 2023; Sander 2019)
Identity reconstruction	Engagement in dhikr, suluk, and classical Islamic learning	Recovery of internalised and contextual local spirituality (Diaz 2011; Sodik and Sujibto 2023)
Cultural resistance	Integrating tarekat traditions into contemporary media	Religious innovation grounded in values and lived experience, not formalism (Arifin 2012; Jamal et al. 2022)

Alternative community	A safe space for ex-scripturalists, former delinquents, and the spiritually disoriented	A reconciliatory space for identity reconstruction in a modern context (James, Fine, and Turner 2015; Zaid et al. 2022)
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This visualisation affirms that the tarekat functions as a Sufi counter-public-a symbolic arena that not only resists puritanical hegemony but also cultivates a cultural alternative integrating spiritual values with contemporary socio-cultural realities (Charbonneau 2007; Francisco and Kearney 2016). Dhikr and suluk practices constitute forms of embodied resistance to modern fragmentation, while simultaneously offering collective and resilient identity regeneration.

Overall, youth engagement with the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya is not merely a form of private religiosity but a strategic search for a spiritual space aligned with their cultural identity. Many informants previously felt alienated by rigid and literalist Islamic models that prioritised memorisation and jurisprudence over compassion and emotional resonance. Through dhikr, kitab studies, and suluk, they have found a welcoming community that facilitates spiritual healing and the reconstruction of meaningful lives (Bekkaoui, Larémont, and Rddad 2011; Sethi et al. 2021).

Four engagement patterns emerged from the field data, characterising the tarekat as a symbolic site of resistance to ideological purification:

1. A shift from normative-textual religiosity to a more reflective, affective, and contextual spiritual experience.
2. Sufi practices as pathways for reconstructing religious identities rooted in local cultural values.
3. The tarekat community as a safe space for youth facing spiritual or identity dislocation.
4. The rise of digital Sufi da'wah as a non-confrontational resistance strategy suited to contemporary media ecosystems (Arifin 2012; Diaz 2011; Piraino 2021).

Theoretically, these findings suggest that communal spirituality in tarekat can be conceptualised as an active cultural agency responding to identity crises and social fragmentation in postmodernity. Sufi practices emerge not only as religious expressions but as crucial instruments for forming resilient, inclusive, and culturally anchored religious identities. Practically, orders like Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya create dialogical spaces between tradition and modernity, serving as social models that integrate spirituality, technology, and communal cohesion (Sounaye and Lucchese 2021; Webb 2011; Zaid et al. 2022).

#### **4. Discussion: The Tarekat as a Space for Religious and Cultural Transformation among Youth**

This study investigates the engagement of urban youth in the practices of the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya Sufi order as a response to religious identity crises, cultural dislocation, and the pressures of contemporary digital life. The findings reveal that the tarekat serves not merely as a medium for strengthening individual spirituality but also functions as an inclusive, adaptive, and transformative socio-communal space. Three principal findings emerge: first, the revitalisation of traditional spirituality through Sufi practices has proven effective in enhancing psychological resilience and deepening the search for meaning; second, tarekat communities foster emotional solidarity and collective identity across social classes; and third, participation in the tarekat acts as a symbolic resistance to ideological purification through reflective, affective, and value-based approaches. These findings affirm the role of the tarekat as both a cultural and spiritual agency relevant to shaping the religious habitus of Muslim youth in the postmodern era.

Youth engagement in the tarekat arises from the need for spiritual spaces that mediate the tension between digital modernity and the continuity of tradition. Sufi practices such as dhikr, suluk, and the study of classical Islamic texts offer not only embodied and collective transcendental experiences but also balance the affective and cognitive dimensions of religious life (Peterson 2008; Sodik and Sujibto 2023). The tension between rigid scripturalist narratives and the need for relational spirituality positions the tarekat as a meaningful alternative for the younger generation. In a digital ecosystem that tends to encourage religious individualisation and identity fragmentation, tarekat communities offer ritual structure, personal spiritual guidance, and a collective atmosphere that fosters a strong sense of belonging (Sethi et al. 2021; B. J. Smith 2013).

Whereas previous studies such as Smith et al. (2013), Krok et al. (2023), and Bakri et al. (2025) have emphasised the positive impact of Sufi practices on individual psychological resilience and spiritual wellbeing, this study broadens the scope by highlighting the significance of the collective dimension and the community's role as a transformative agent. It also strengthens the arguments of Charbonneau (2007) and Francisco & Kearney (2016), who view Sufism as a symbolic and affective counter-public in response to the homogenisation of Islamic identity. However, this research presents a novel contribution by illustrating how tarekat practices are being digitally transformed and strategically utilised by young people to construct a religious identity that is flexible, contextual, and grounded in sanad-based tradition.

Socially, the study demonstrates that tarekat practices contribute to the recovery from identity crises, strengthen psychosocial resilience, and provide an egalitarian dialogue space for members from diverse social backgrounds. Historically, the findings indicate that the spiritual heritage of Nusantara Islam is being revitalised not by the older generation but by urban youth in search of meaning through spiritual stillness and continuity of tradition. Ideologically, tarekat communities act as sites of cultural resistance to exclusive scripturalism and simultaneously serve as social laboratories for the development of a more empathetic, relational, and inclusive religiosity (Arifin 2012; Charbonneau 2007; Diaz 2011).

Nonetheless, a critical reflection on the findings reveals potential dysfunctions that warrant attention. First, excessive romanticisation of traditional practices may obscure internal inequalities within tarekat structures, such as overly hierarchical authority relations or resistance to reform on contemporary issues like gender equality. Second, if community expansion is not accompanied by deepening spiritual substance, there is a risk of degeneration into merely symbolic communities devoid of transformative capacity. Third, the use of digital media within the tarekat presents ambiguity between the expansion of da'wah and the challenge of maintaining spiritual authenticity (Fanani and Iswanto 2023; Zaid et al. 2022).

Based on these findings, policy actions are recommended that recognise and strengthen the role of tarekat communities as agents of spiritual recovery and the formation of moderate religious identities. Government and religious organisations should integrate Sufi approaches into programmes for religious moderation, mental health, and youth character education. Supporting Sufi digital literacy, community leadership training, and the development of Islamic curricula rooted in Sufi values constitute concrete steps towards expanding inclusive and resilient alternative spiritual spaces. Such measures also represent cultural strategies for addressing the ongoing crisis of spirituality and religious identity among urban youth in the postmodern era.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that the engagement of urban youth in the practices of the Qadiriyya-Naqshbandiyya Sufi order constitutes an active response to the crisis of religious identity, cultural dislocation, and the pressures of digital life. The key findings indicate that Sufi practices not only enhance individual spiritual resilience but also shape inclusive, reflective, and transformative social spaces. Through participation in dhikr, suluk, and the study of classical



Islamic texts, young people are able to reconstruct life's meaning, negotiate Islamic identity in a contextualised manner, and find emotionally and spiritually supportive communities.

The scholarly contribution of this research lies in its integrative approach to traditional spirituality and the challenges of the digital era. It extends the discourse on Sufism by positioning the tarekat as a socio-cultural agent in the formation of the religious habitus of the younger generation. This approach combines Sufi perspectives, identity theory, and digital community dynamics, offering a new framework for understanding the role of collective spirituality in shaping a resilient, rooted, and adaptive religiosity. The study also introduces the concept of the tarekat as a counter-public-an alternative space that provides symbolic resistance to ideological purification and the fragmentation of meaning.

Nevertheless, this research acknowledges certain limitations. Its geographical focus on urban areas in West Java does not reflect the diversity of tarekat practices across other regions of Indonesia. Moreover, the involvement of informants predominantly from a single tarekat community may affect the variety of perspectives represented. Future research is therefore recommended to explore inter-tarekat and inter-regional dynamics, and to examine the roles of gender, economic background, and politics in shaping the spiritual experiences of Muslim youth in greater depth.

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