RECONFIGURING SUFISM EDUCATION IN THE 21st CENTURY: Exploring Spiritual Crossroads among Millennials in Padang City

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Abstract: Sufism education has long been a cornerstone of Islamic spirituality, yet in the 21st century it faces new challenges from globalization, digitalization, and shifting youth religiosity. This study explores how Sufism education is transformed and rearticulated among millennials in Padang City, Indonesia, highlighting the interaction between traditional teachings and contemporary learning environments. Using qualitative methods, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of digital Sufi discourse. Findings reveal a hybrid model: traditional institutions such as *pesantren*, *majlis dzikr*, and university study circles remain central for transmitting texts, spiritual discipline, and mentorship, while digital platforms—social media, online lectures, and virtual study groups—expand access and engagement. Millennials reinterpret Sufi practices in psychological and self-developmental terms, framing *dzikr* as a tool for mindfulness, emotional regulation, and spiritual well-being. These results suggest that digital and traditional modes complement one another, offering flexible pathways for spiritual formation and shaping the evolving spiritual identities of urban Muslim youth.

Keywords: digital spirituality, millennials, spiritual identity, sufi orders, sufism education

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Introduction

In the 21st century, Islamic education—particularly Sufism education—has undergone profound transformations shaped by globalization, digitalization, and sociocultural change. Historically, Sufism has played a central role in Islamic spirituality by providing ethical guidance, spiritual discipline, and inner purification. [1] Classical Sufi pedagogy relied heavily on structured mentorship (*tarbiyah*) within Sufi orders (*tharîqah*)[2], where spiritual authority was transmitted through direct teacher–disciple relationships and sustained spiritual training.[3] However, the rapid expansion of digital technology, the globalization of religious discourse, and shifting generational values have significantly altered how religious knowledge is accessed, interpreted, and practiced. As a result, contemporary forms of Sufism education increasingly operate within hybrid environments that combine traditional pedagogical structures with digitally mediated modes of religious learning.

These changes are particularly visible among Muslim millennials, a generation whose religious experiences are deeply shaped by digital culture and individualized forms of spirituality. Unlike previous generations that relied primarily on institutional religious authorities, millennials often access religious knowledge through online lectures, social media platforms, and virtual learning communities. This transformation has contributed to the emergence of what scholars describe as "digital Sufism," in which classical teachings circulate through digital networks that transcend geographical and institutional boundaries.[4] While this development expands access to Sufi teachings and spiritual discourse, it also raises concerns about the simplification, commodification, and fragmentation of complex mystical traditions.[5] In many cases, Sufi concepts are reinterpreted through contemporary psychological, motivational, and self-help frameworks, reflecting broader trends of religious individualization and spiritual experimentation among urban Muslim youth.[6]

Within the broader field of Islamic education, these developments raise critical questions regarding the transformation of authority, pedagogy, and spiritual formation. Recent scholarship has begun to explore how Sufism is being rearticulated within interdisciplinary frameworks that connect spiritual practice with fields such as psychology, ethics, and leadership studies.[7] Such approaches aim to maintain the ethical and spiritual foundations of Sufi teachings while responding to contemporary intellectual and social challenges. Nevertheless, scholars also highlight the tensions produced by these adaptations. On the one hand, the integration of Sufi thought into modern educational discourse can revitalize its relevance in contemporary society. On the other hand, the diffusion of Sufi teachings through decentralized digital platforms may weaken traditional structures of spiritual authority and allow the emergence of pseudo-spiritual figures lacking classical training.[8]

Indonesia provides an important context for examining these transformations, given its long-standing integration of Sufism within Islamic education and social life. In many regions, Sufi traditions continue to shape religious practices, educational institutions, and communal forms of spirituality.[9] However, Indonesia is also experiencing rapid urbanization, technological expansion, and generational shifts in religious engagement. These changes have created new patterns of religious learning among millennials, who often navigate between inherited religious traditions and the fluid spiritual landscape of contemporary urban life.[10] Consequently, the study of Sufism education in Indonesia offers valuable insights into how classical Islamic intellectual traditions adapt to modern sociocultural environments.

Padang City in West Sumatra represents a particularly compelling site for examining these dynamics. As a major urban center with strong Islamic and Minangkabau cultural traditions, Padang historically maintained close connections with Sufi networks, *pesantren* institutions, and religious scholars who played influential roles in shaping Islamic spirituality in the region. At the same time, the city has undergone rapid social and technological change, marked by expanding higher education institutions, digital connectivity, and increased exposure to global religious discourses. This intersection between a deeply rooted Islamic intellectual heritage and the transformative forces of modernization creates a distinctive environment in which traditional Sufi pedagogies coexist with emerging digital forms of spiritual engagement.[11]

For millennials in Padang, this environment generates a unique religious landscape in which spiritual identity is negotiated through both inherited communal traditions and digitally mediated religious experiences. Young Muslims increasingly participate in diverse forms of spiritual learning, ranging from classical Sufi gatherings and *pesantren*-based study circles to online lectures, virtual *dzikr* communities, and social media-based spiritual discussions. These developments suggest that Sufism education in Padang is not simply declining or being replaced by modern influences; rather, it is undergoing a process of reinterpretation and rearticulation that reflects broader transformations in contemporary Islamic education.

Despite growing scholarly attention to digital religion and the transformation of Islamic education, limited research has examined how these processes unfold within specific local contexts where strong Islamic traditions interact with rapid modernization. In particular, little empirical attention has been given to how millennials in cities such as Padang negotiate the relationship between traditional Sufi mentorship and individualized digital spirituality. Understanding this interaction is important not only for documenting changes in religious practice but also for analyzing the evolving forms of spiritual authority, educational transmission, and identity formation within contemporary Muslim societies.

This study addresses this gap by examining how Sufism education is being rearticulated among millennials in Padang City. By analyzing the interaction between traditional Sufi institutions and digitally mediated forms of spiritual learning, the study seeks to illuminate the changing dynamics of religious authority, pedagogical practice, and spiritual identity in urban Indonesia. In doing so, this research contributes to ongoing scholarly debates within the fields of Islamic education, Sufism studies, and digital religion by demonstrating how classical spiritual traditions adapt to contemporary socio-digital environments while continuing to shape the moral and spiritual lives of younger Muslim generations.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative phenomenological case study design to explore the transformation and rearticulation of Sufism education among millennials in Padang City. The phenomenological approach aims to capture the lived experiences and subjective perceptions of young Muslims in their engagement with Sufi teachings, while the case study design provides contextual insight into how these experiences are shaped within specific educational settings, including *pesantren*, university-based Sufi study groups, informal learning circles, and digital platforms.[12] The primary unit of analysis consists of millennials aged 20–35 who actively participate in various forms of Sufism education, as well as the educational practices through which Sufi teachings are transmitted and experienced.

Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The study involved approximately thirty participants consisting of three groups: twenty millennials engaged in Sufi learning activities, seven religious figures (including *'ulamâ'*, *mursyid*, and educators) who provide perspectives on pedagogical developments, and three digital actors who manage or facilitate online Sufi learning platforms. This sampling strategy enabled the study to capture diverse perspectives from both traditional institutional settings and emerging digital environments.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Interviews explored participants' motivations, learning experiences, and perceptions of contemporary Sufism education. Participant observation was conducted in several contexts, including *dzikr* gatherings, *majlis ta'lîm*, and online Sufi learning sessions. Field notes were recorded to document interactions, teaching practices, and forms of spiritual engagement observed during these activities.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, which involves familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying broader themes, reviewing and refining themes, and producing interpretive findings. Through this process, recurring themes such as digital adaptation, pedagogical transformation, spiritual individualization, and the negotiation between tradition and modernity were identified.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, several qualitative validation strategies were employed. *First*, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from different participant groups (millennials, religious leaders, and digital facilitators) as well as from multiple data sources, including interviews and observations. *Second*, member checking was conducted by sharing key interpretations with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's understanding of their experiences. *Third*, prolonged engagement and reflexive field notes helped the researcher maintain contextual sensitivity and minimize interpretive bias during data collection and analysis.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided voluntary consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of pseudonyms in all reports. Additionally, cultural and spiritual sensitivity was maintained by obtaining permission from local religious leaders before conducting observations in Sufi gatherings, recognizing the sacred nature of these spaces.

Results and Discussion

Persistence and Adaptive Reconfiguration of Traditional Sufi Education

The empirical findings indicate that Sufi education in Padang City does not merely survive within a modern urban context; rather, it undergoes a process of adaptive reconfiguration that allows it to remain institutionally and spiritually relevant among contemporary Muslim youth.[13] Instead of demonstrating institutional decline, the data suggest that Sufi pedagogical structures—particularly those embedded within *pesantren*, university study circles, and local *majlis dzikr*[14]—continue to function as authoritative sites of spiritual formation. However, their persistence should not be interpreted as static continuity. Rather, it reflects what may be understood as a dynamic negotiation between inherited epistemic authority and shifting socio-cultural expectations.[15]

A central element sustaining this continuity is the enduring authority of the murshid. Interviews consistently emphasize the importance of *shuḥbah* (companionship with the spiritual guide), which remains perceived as indispensable for the transmission of experiential knowledge (*ma'rifah*) and ethical cultivation. From a Sufi epistemological perspective, knowledge is not solely cognitive but transformative, requiring embodied relationality between teacher and disciple. This relational model challenges dominant assumptions within contemporary educational paradigms, where knowledge transmission is often mediated through impersonal digital platforms. The persistence of the *mursyid*–disciple relationship therefore illustrates a broader tension between technologically mediated learning and the Sufi insistence on embodied spiritual authority.

However, the empirical data reveal that Sufi educators do not respond to this tension through rejection of modern influences. Instead, they strategically reinterpret classical

teachings to address contemporary existential concerns experienced by millennials. Observations of study sessions in Padang *pesantren* illustrate how classical Sufi texts—particularly works associated with al-Ghazâlî and Ibn 'Athâ'illâh—are framed within discussions of mental health, consumer culture, and ethical responsibility. This pedagogical approach demonstrates a process of hermeneutical recontextualization, whereby classical concepts such as *zuhd* and *tawakkul* are translated into contemporary ethical discourses.

Such reinterpretation reflects a broader pattern within Sufi intellectual history in which spiritual teachings are repeatedly reformulated to address new historical contexts. Rather than representing doctrinal dilution, this process indicates the adaptive capacity of Sufism as a living intellectual tradition. The reinterpretation of *zuhd* as resistance to consumerism, for example, repositions a classical ascetic concept within contemporary debates on ecological ethics and sustainable lifestyles. Similarly, discussions of *tawakkul* framed around psychological resilience demonstrate how Sufi teachings are mobilized to address the emotional uncertainties of modern urban life.

Digital integration represents another dimension of this adaptive process. Many Sufi institutions in Padang City now utilize communication technologies such as WhatsApp groups, recorded lectures, and online seminars to extend the reach of their teachings.[16] This shift can be interpreted within broader scholarship on digital religion, which suggests that religious communities increasingly operate within hybrid online–offline environments. The findings here support this perspective but also complicate it. While digital platforms expand accessibility, participants repeatedly emphasize that the experiential intensity of collective *dzikr* cannot be replicated in virtual spaces.[17]

This ambivalence indicates that technological adoption within Sufi education operates according to a complementary rather than substitutional logic.[18] Digital tools are employed pragmatically to facilitate access and communication, yet they do not replace the embodied communal practices that constitute the core of Sufi spiritual formation.[19] Consequently, the emerging model of Sufi education in Padang City can be characterized as hybrid pedagogy: a framework in which digital mediation extends institutional reach while preserving the centrality of face-to-face spiritual mentorship.[20]

From a sociological perspective, this hybridization reflects the broader search among urban Muslim youth for integrative frameworks capable of addressing both spiritual and psychological dimensions of life. Rather than perceiving tradition as incompatible with modernity, Sufi institutions in Padang reinterpret tradition as a resource for navigating contemporary uncertainties.[21] In this sense, the persistence of Sufi education should not be understood simply as cultural survival, but as evidence of the tradition's capacity for intellectual and pedagogical renewal within rapidly changing social environments.

Hybridization of Spiritual Identity among Muslim Millennials

The findings also reveal significant transformations in the ways millennials construct their spiritual identities. Rather than adhering to rigid institutional boundaries, young Muslims in Padang City demonstrate flexible patterns of engagement with Sufi traditions that combine inherited religious practices with digital forms of spiritual exploration. This pattern suggests that contemporary Sufi engagement among millennials operates within what may be conceptualized as a hybrid spiritual ecology.

One of the most notable developments is the reinterpretation of Sufi practices through psychological and self-development frameworks. Interview participants frequently describe *dzikr* as a means of emotional regulation and *murâqabah* as comparable to mindfulness practices widely discussed in global wellness discourses. While this shift might initially appear to reduce Sufi spirituality to therapeutic technique, a closer analysis indicates a more complex process of conceptual translation. Millennials are not abandoning metaphysical understandings of Sufi practices; rather, they articulate them through contemporary psychological vocabulary that resonates with their lived experiences.

This linguistic transformation illustrates how religious traditions adapt to new cultural idioms while retaining underlying spiritual meanings.[22] Within the context of urban Indonesian society—where mental health concerns, work pressures, and social mobility shape everyday life—the reinterpretation of Sufi rituals as psychological resources allows classical practices to remain relevant to modern existential concerns.[23]

Another significant finding concerns patterns of affiliation with Sufi networks. Unlike older generations who often maintained exclusive allegiance to a single *tharîqah*, millennials demonstrate fluid participation across multiple spiritual communities. Some participants report attending local Naqsyabandî gatherings while simultaneously following Syattâriyah teachings through digital platforms or engaging with international Sufi scholars online. This multi-layered engagement reflects broader processes of religious deterritorialization associated with globalization and digital media.

However, the Padang case suggests that deterritorialization does not necessarily produce disembedded spirituality. Despite their exposure to transnational Sufi discourses, millennials continue to emphasize the importance of silsilah (spiritual lineage) and the authority of recognized *mursyid*. This indicates that digital expansion does not eliminate traditional authority structures but instead reshapes how individuals interact with them. Authority becomes distributed across multiple channels while still anchored in recognized lineages.

This phenomenon challenges binary assumptions that frame digital religion either as a democratizing force that undermines traditional authority or as a superficial form of spirituality. The evidence from Padang City suggests a more nuanced reality in which digital platforms function as spaces of exploratory engagement rather than replacements for institutional structures. Millennials navigate multiple teachings through online resources while simultaneously seeking validation from established spiritual authorities.

Such patterns also complicate prevailing theories of religious individualization in Southeast Asia. While urban youth often pursue personalized spiritual journeys, the findings here demonstrate that individual agency does not necessarily imply detachment from communal structures.[24] Instead, millennials construct relational forms of spiritual individualism in which personal exploration occurs within networks of mentors, peers, and institutions.[25]

Nevertheless, this evolving form of spiritual identity also raises critical questions. The flexibility to move between different Sufi networks may encourage pluralistic engagement, but it may also produce shallow affiliations if not accompanied by sustained practice and mentorship.[26] Furthermore, the increasing use of psychological language to describe Sufi rituals risks reframing spiritual transformation primarily in terms of personal well-being rather than transcendental realization.

Yet these developments should not be interpreted simply as signs of dilution. They may instead represent adaptive strategies through which younger generations translate inherited spiritual traditions into frameworks that resonate with contemporary life. In this sense, the evolving spiritual identity of millennials in Padang City reflects neither the erosion nor the simple preservation of Sufism, but its ongoing reinterpretation within a digitally mediated and globally interconnected environment.

Reconfiguring Sufism Education in the Digital Age: Authority, Pedagogy, and Millennial Spirituality

The findings of this study reveal that the transformation of Sufism education in Padang City cannot be understood simply as a process of decline or preservation. Instead, it reflects a complex reconfiguration shaped by digitalization, generational shifts, and the evolving dynamics of religious authority in contemporary Muslim societies.[27] The empirical evidence indicates that Sufi institutions and millennial practitioners are actively negotiating the relationship between inherited spiritual traditions and the epistemic conditions of modern digital culture. This negotiation produces new pedagogical forms, hybrid spiritual identities, and pluralized structures of authority.[28]

One of the most significant transformations concerns the reconfiguration of religious authority in the digital environment. The proliferation of online platforms—such as WhatsApp groups, Telegram channels, YouTube lectures, and short-form social media content—has expanded access to Sufi teachings beyond the physical boundaries of *pesantren* and *majlis dzikr*. However, this expansion simultaneously alters the mechanisms through which authority is constructed and recognized.[29] Classical Sufi pedagogy has historically relied on embodied mentorship (*syuhbah*) and verifiable chains of transmission (*silsilah*) that guarantee the authenticity of spiritual knowledge. In digital spaces, by contrast, authority increasingly emerges through visibility, popularity, and communicative style.[30]

This development reflects broader dynamics identified in studies of digital religion, where authority is no longer monopolized by institutional actors but negotiated within networked publics.[31] As scholars of Indonesian Islam have shown, the digital sphere enables the emergence of new religious actors who may not possess traditional scholarly credentials but acquire influence through rhetorical accessibility and media fluency.[32] The findings in Padang City confirm this pattern. Millennials often encounter Sufi teachings through short inspirational posts or online lectures that condense complex metaphysical concepts into easily consumable messages.[33] While such formats increase accessibility, they also risk fragmenting the intellectual and experiential depth that traditionally characterizes Sufi pedagogy.

Yet the empirical data suggest that digitalization does not simply erode traditional authority. Instead, it generates a pluralization of authority structures. Traditional *mursyid* continue to play a central role in institutional settings, particularly within *pesantren* and local *dzikr* circles, where embodied mentorship remains indispensable for spiritual discipline.[34] At the same time, digital media create alternative channels through which younger audiences explore Sufi ideas. The coexistence of these two modes—traditional mentorship and digital dissemination—illustrates what may be described as a hybrid authority system in which legitimacy is negotiated across both institutional and networked spaces.[35]

This hybridization also shapes the ways Sufi teachings are articulated to contemporary audiences. The study demonstrates that educators increasingly translate classical Sufi concepts into conceptual frameworks familiar to modern millennials. Practices such as *dzikr*, *murâqabah*, and *mujâhadah* are frequently interpreted through psychological and self-developmental vocabularies such as mindfulness, emotional resilience, and self-awareness. Rather than representing a superficial accommodation to modern trends, this translation can be understood through Thalâl Asad's concept of the discursive tradition, in which religious practices are continuously reinterpreted in response to changing historical conditions while maintaining continuity with authoritative sources.[36]

From this perspective, the pedagogical strategies observed in Padang City represent a form of interpretive mediation between classical spiritual epistemology and contemporary cultural language. By employing dual vocabularies—traditional Sufi terminology alongside modern psychological discourse—educators attempt to bridge generational and epistemic divides.[37] This approach reflects a broader pattern visible in global Sufi movements, where spiritual practices are frequently framed in terms of mental well-being, ethical self-cultivation, and social responsibility. Such framing allows Sufism to remain intelligible within modern contexts while preserving its core emphasis on ethical transformation and spiritual discipline.

At the same time, this process raises important theoretical questions about the limits of translation between religious and secular frameworks. When Sufi practices are interpreted primarily through therapeutic categories, there is a risk that their metaphysical

dimensions may be overshadowed by instrumental concerns related to self-improvement or psychological well-being.[38] Classical Sufi scholarship emphasizes that spiritual practice ultimately aims at transcendence and divine proximity, not merely emotional regulation. The challenge for contemporary Sufi educators, therefore, lies in maintaining doctrinal depth while engaging audiences whose interpretive frameworks are shaped by modern psychological discourse.[39]

Beyond pedagogical adaptation, the study also highlights how Sufi ethics are increasingly connected to broader socio-ethical concerns. In several educational settings in Padang City, concepts such as *zuhd* and *ihsân* are interpreted not simply as personal virtues but as ethical orientations relevant to contemporary social issues, including consumer culture, environmental responsibility, and economic justice. This expansion of ethical discourse reflects a wider tendency within modern Sufism to integrate spirituality with public moral engagement.[40] Rather than remaining confined to inward piety, Sufi teachings are mobilized as resources for addressing social and ecological challenges in contemporary society.

Nevertheless, the transformation of Sufism education also reveals several structural challenges. One prominent issue concerns the fragmentation of religious knowledge in digital environments. The circulation of short quotations, motivational videos, and brief sermons encourages what may be described as selective or episodic engagement with spiritual teachings. While such formats expand accessibility, they may also undermine the sustained intellectual and disciplinary commitment traditionally required in Sufi learning. Classical Sufi education emphasizes gradual spiritual training under the supervision of a guide, a process difficult to replicate within fragmented digital interactions.[41]

A second challenge relates to the destabilization of authority structures. The emergence of popular "Sufi influencers" illustrates how spiritual legitimacy can become detached from established systems of scholarly training and lineage transmission.[42] Although millennials often find these figures appealing due to their accessible style and emotional resonance, educators interviewed in this study express concern that the absence of institutional accountability may lead to superficial or distorted interpretations of Sufi teachings.[43] This phenomenon reflects broader debates within global Islam about the shifting nature of authority in an era of digital communication and transnational religious exchange.

Thus, the study indicates that Sufism education continues to encounter ideological contestation from reformist currents that question the legitimacy of certain mystical practices. Although Padang has historically maintained strong *tharîqah* traditions, exposure to global reformist discourses through digital media has introduced new theological debates among younger Muslims. These debates illustrate the broader religious pluralization occurring within Indonesian Islam, where competing interpretations of orthodoxy and spirituality coexist within an increasingly interconnected public sphere.[44]

Despite these challenges, the evidence suggests that Sufism education in Padang City possesses significant adaptive capacity. Rather than rejecting technological change, many institutions have begun experimenting with hybrid pedagogical models that combine digital dissemination with embodied spiritual practices.[45] Online lectures, recorded teachings, and digital discussion groups expand the reach of Sufi education,[46] while face-to-face *dzikr* gatherings and mentorship preserve the experiential dimension of spiritual training. This hybrid model appears particularly well suited to the learning habits of digitally native millennials while maintaining continuity with the relational structure of classical Sufi pedagogy.[47]

The implications of these findings extend beyond the local context of Padang City. They contribute to broader scholarly debates on the transformation of Islamic spirituality in the digital age. The study suggests that contemporary Sufism should not be interpreted through simplistic binaries such as tradition versus modernity or authenticity versus innovation. Instead, Sufi traditions demonstrate a remarkable capacity for reinterpretation and institutional adaptation.[48] The central question is therefore not whether Sufism can survive digital modernity, but how its pedagogical and epistemological frameworks continue to evolve within changing technological and cultural environments.

In this sense, the transformation of Sufism education in Padang City illustrates the enduring vitality of Islamic spiritual traditions. By negotiating between classical authority structures and contemporary modes of communication, Sufi educators and practitioners actively reshape the forms through which spiritual knowledge is transmitted and experienced. This ongoing process of reinterpretation confirms that Sufism remains a dynamic and evolving tradition capable of addressing the moral, psychological, and existential challenges faced by Muslim youth in the twenty-first century.

Challenges and Prospects for Sufism Education

The resilience of Sufism education in Padang should not obscure the significant challenges it faces in a rapidly changing social and technological environment. Three interrelated issues emerge most clearly.

First, the fragmentation of knowledge in digital contexts undermines the depth and coherence of learning. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and YouTube circulate Sufi content in fragmented, easily consumable formats—quotes, short videos, or motivational slogans. While these widen access, they also encourage what one educator described as "sampling without digestion": selective consumption that bypasses the sustained discipline traditionally required in Sufi pedagogy. This pattern echoes long-standing concerns in Sufi thought regarding the necessity of experiential depth, as emphasized by Chittick and Nasr,[49] who stress that Sufism cannot be reduced to mere information but requires lived practice. The critique also aligns with broader studies of digital religion[50] and the caution of scholars like Ernst,[51] who note that the popularization of Sufi discourse often risks diluting its intellectual and spiritual rigor.

Second, digitalization destabilizes authority structures. The rise of "Sufi influencers" demonstrates how spiritual legitimacy can be decoupled from traditional chains of transmission (*silsilah*). Millennials often find these figures appealing for their accessibility and relatable style, yet educators in Padang expressed concern about the loss of accountability and spiritual supervision. Authority, once grounded in embodied mentorship (*shuḥbah*), is increasingly contested in digital arenas where charisma often outweighs scholarly depth. This dynamic resonates with Brown's discussion on the transmission of *Ḥadîts,*[52] where legitimacy is tied to *isnâd*, and with Knysh's[53] reminder that Sufism has historically relied on verifiable chains of transmission to safeguard authenticity. In this sense, what we see in Padang mirrors Roy's argument about globalized Islam, where authority is increasingly negotiated outside of traditional institutions.[54]

Third, Sufism education encounters ideological resistance from reformist groups that dismiss Sufi practices as un-Islamic innovations. In Padang, this opposition is not as pronounced as in some other Indonesian cities due to the historical strength of *tharîqah*-based institutions. Nonetheless, interviews reveal that younger Muslims exposed to Salafi-influenced discourse online often approach Sufism with skepticism. This tension recalls Smith's[55] observation that mystical traditions are often marginalized within legalistic or reformist paradigms, as well as Chodkiewicz's emphasis on Ibn 'Arabî's defense of the inseparability between law and spirituality in Islam.[56] The ideological contestation thus illustrates not only the changing landscape of religious authority but also the epistemological challenges of sustaining Sufi legitimacy in a globalized religious marketplace.

Despite these challenges, the Padang case also illustrates important prospects. The future of Sufism education in Indonesia should not be framed as a binary choice between tradition and digital innovation but as their synthesis. Field evidence shows that hybrid models are already taking shape. *Pesantren* and *majlis dzikr* integrate online resources—streamed lectures, recorded sessions, and digital reading groups—while retaining embodied practices such as *dzikr* gatherings and face-to-face mentorship. This hybridization preserves the experiential depth of Sufism while meeting the learning habits of digitally native millennials. Studies such as Sharify-Funk, Dickson, and Xavier highlight how contemporary Sufism thrives precisely through its ability to adapt across multiple domains of piety, politics, and popular culture,[57] while Goleman and Nurbakhsh demonstrate how practices of meditation and *dzikr* continue to show transformative effects on the mind and body, even in modern contexts.[58]

Critically, however, the sustainability of this model depends on institutional intervention. Without scholarly curation and ethical guidelines, digital spaces risk being dominated by unqualified voices. Establishing frameworks for spiritual accountability—such as *mursyid*-supervised online study groups or certification for digital preachers—could safeguard authenticity while harnessing the pedagogical potential of technology. Such initiatives would not only secure the integrity of Sufism education in Padang but also serve as a model for other urban Muslim contexts grappling with similar dynamics.

In this sense, the key prospect lies in reimagining Sufi pedagogy as a hybrid tradition—anchored in mentorship and ritual discipline but flexible enough to engage with the realities of digital modernity. This synthesis highlights the adaptive capacity of Sufism, affirming its relevance in addressing both the spiritual aspirations and the epistemological challenges faced by contemporary Muslim youth.

Conclusion

This study highlights several interconnected propositions regarding the transformation of Sufism education in contemporary Muslim societies. *First*, the findings demonstrate that digitalization does not necessarily displace traditional Sufi learning but instead generates a hybrid model of spiritual transmission in which embodied mentorship (*shuhbah*) and digital mediation coexist. In the context of Padang City, millennials navigate both institutional Sufi spaces and online platforms, producing a pluralized structure of religious authority rather than a simple shift from traditional to digital forms of learning.

Second, the study shows that the sustainability of Sufism education depends on its capacity for interpretive adaptation. The translation of classical Sufi concepts—such as *dzikr*, *murâqabah*, and *mujâhadah*—into contemporary vocabularies of mindfulness, emotional resilience, and ethical self-cultivation represents a pedagogical strategy through which Sufi traditions remain intelligible within modern epistemic frameworks. This process illustrates how Sufism operates as a dynamic discursive tradition that continuously rearticulates its teachings in response to changing cultural and generational contexts.

Third, the research indicates that digital environments contribute to the pluralization and contestation of religious authority. While traditional murshid maintain legitimacy through lineage and embodied mentorship, digital media enable the emergence of new religious actors whose influence is shaped by visibility and communicative accessibility. This transformation suggests that contemporary Sufism is increasingly negotiated across both institutional and networked publics.

These propositions carry several broader implications. For practitioners and educators, the findings underscore the need to develop hybrid pedagogical models that integrate digital dissemination with disciplined spiritual training in order to preserve both accessibility and doctrinal depth. For scholars of Islamic education, the study demonstrates that the transformation of Sufism should be understood not through binaries of tradition versus modernity, but through processes of adaptation, translation, and institutional negotiation within changing technological environments.

Future research may extend this analysis through comparative studies across different Indonesian urban contexts and through longitudinal approaches examining how sustained digital engagement shapes the depth and continuity of Sufi practice among younger generations. Such investigations would further illuminate the evolving role of Sufism education as a source of spiritual formation and ethical orientation in the digital age.

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