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Thematic Content Analysis Of Theological, Moral, And Spiritual Messages In The 7th Ngaji Tasawuf Session (2025) At Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract: *The proliferation of digital preaching raises concerns about the marginalization of contemplative religious traditions. This study addresses the research gap in analyses of how classical sufistic preaching is rearticulated for and through digital media. The study examines the da'wah delivered by KH. Moh. Zubri Zaini during the 7th Ngaji Tasawuf session (2025) at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, a program also broadcast live on the pesantren's YouTube channel. The purpose is to identify and classify the dominant theological, moral, and spiritual themes and to interpret their communicative functions in a mediated setting. Using qualitative content analysis, the study applies inductive coding and thematic categorization to the full transcript, triangulated with video recordings and relevant literature. Results show four interrelated thematic clusters; theological (tauhid and existential awareness), moral (niyyah, sincerity, and ethical prioritization), spiritual (dhikr, tafakkur, tazkiyah), and social (digital conduct and communal responsibility) which together constitute a coherent model of Sufistic preaching adapted to online formats. The paper proposes a preliminary framework of "digital Sufistic communication" that conceptualizes how pesantren ritual discourse is remediated for participatory digital publics. Implications include suggestions for (a) designing digital preaching frameworks that preserve contemplative depth, (b) pesantren pedagogy responsive to mediated audiences, and (c) future empirical testing of the proposed framework across other pesantren livestreams.*

Keywords: *Sufi da'wah; digital religious communication; pesantren studies; Sufism; qualitative content analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

The changing face of Islamic preaching in the digital era has had major implications for the way religious people understand and express Islamic teachings. (Miftahorrahman et al., 2024). Along with the increasing use of social media and online platforms such as YouTube, da'wah now comes in various forms (Ibnu Kasir & Awali, 2024). Starting from short lectures, spiritually motivated content, to populist religious debates. However, these digital da'wah flows often present religion in a superficial, rhetorical, and reactive form to actual issues, creating a condition of spiritual shallowness marked by fragmented knowledge, emotional sensationalism, and declining contemplative depth (Rani, 2023). This phenomenon raises an urgent need to re-examine how deeper spiritual traditions, especially those grounded in Sufism are articulated, mediated, and preserved in digital spaces.

This phenomenon creates a gap between informative da'wah, which is oriented towards the imparting of religious knowledge alone, and sufistic da'wah, which emphasizes the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), character building, and human inner experience in relation to God (Shofwan & Hariri, 2025; Yudi & Halwati, 2024). In this context, the tradition of *Ngaji Tasawuf* which is held at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, Paiton, Probolinggo, occupies an important and unique position. This activity is not only a forum for reading the classics, but also presents the practice of Sufistic da'wah communication that combines the dimensions of text, experience, and spiritual reflection in depth (Shalihah & Tohet, 2020). Yet, despite the growing interest in digital da'wah, scholarly work has not sufficiently addressed how pesantren-based Sufistic discourse functions epistemologically and communicatively when mediated through online platforms. This leaves an underexplored domain in Islamic communication studies (Lumbard, 2024).

Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is known as one of the major Islamic boarding schools in East Java that has succeeded in maintaining a balance between classical scientific traditions and openness to technological developments (Aisyah & Rofiah, 2022). Through its official YouTube channel, this pesantren routinely broadcasts various religious activities, including *Ngaji Tasawuf* which in the 7th edition was led directly by KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini, a charismatic scholar and Islamic education figure in East Java. The figure of KH. Zuhri Zaini is known for his gentle, narrative, and wisdom-filled approach (Hasanah et al., 2022). His discourse represents a living example of pesantren-rooted Sufistic communication, which stands in stark contrast to the fast-paced and emotionally charged style prevalent in today's digital preachers. This contrast provides a critical site for scholarly investigation (Ponpes Nurul Jadid, 2022; Shalihah & Tohet, 2020).

The 7th edition of *Ngaji Tasawuf* which is the focus of this research discusses the book *Risalah Adab al-Murid* by Sheikh al-Qusyairi, one of the important texts in the classical Sufism tradition. This book describes the spiritual stages of a disciple (*salik*) in taking the path to Allah, including the manners of *dhikr*, the meaning of repentance, and the importance of sincerity (Pitoni, 2021). In the recitation, KH. Zuhri contextualizes the text with modern life challenges, such as sincerity in a fast-paced world, the dangers of intellectual arrogance, and the importance of *dhikr* and *tafakkur*. These themes provide a

rich corpus of theological, moral, and spiritual messages whose internal logic and communicative function require systematic academic analysis (Mamat, 2023).

The activity was broadcast live through the Nurul Jadid University YouTube channel, allowing hundreds or even thousands of viewers from outside the pesantren to listen in real-time. The broadcast shows how the da'wah space of the pesantren is no longer limited to physical walls, but has penetrated the digital public space. However, the substance of KH. Zuhri remains classical and contemplative. This hybridity, where traditional Sufi knowledge transmitted through modern digital infrastructure creates a unique communicative configuration that has not been adequately theorized in existing literature (Lubis, 2023).

Thus, the phenomenon of the 7th edition of *Ngaji Tasawuf* presents two layers of da'wah reality: first, as a practice of traditional spiritual communication between kiai and students in the pesantren environment; second, as a representation of sufistic da'wah in the digital space that bridges modern society with classical Islamic spiritual values (Rahmatulloh et al., 2025). Yet previous studies on digital da'wah tend to examine media effectiveness, celebrity preachers, or audience patterns, without interrogating how Sufi message structures operate when mediated digitally (Anifatul Jannah, 2019; Richtig & Maulana, 2022). This confirms the need for an analytical approach that captures both thematic depth and communicative transformation.

The concept of da'wah messages according to Hidayat, et al. (2024) includes three dimensions: cognitive (knowledge), affective (feeling), and conative (behavior). In the context of Sufism, these three dimensions are combined in what Fitri (2023) calls Sufistic communication, which is the process of conveying divine values through symbolic language, stories, and moral reflection. This kind of communication does not aim to influence rationally only, but to move the inner consciousness of the audience towards God (*ma'rifatullah*).

Meanwhile, Carey (2008) view communication as a ritual. The process of forming a common meaning in the community. This approach is relevant for reading pesantren recitations, where da'wah is not only the transfer of information but also the confirmation of shared values and spiritual identity. Together, these frameworks provide a strong foundation for examining not only what Sufi messages say, but how they function as shared meaning-making practices in digital contexts. An aspect still lacking empirical validation.

Studies of da'wah in the digital era generally focus on the effectiveness of the media, the pattern of message spread, or the characteristics of the audience (Akbar et al., 2023; Albana, 2022; Richtig & Maulana, 2022). These studies have reviewed many of the phenomenon of *celebrity ustaz* and instant da'wah on social media, but few have examined in depth the content of da'wah messages that come from the Sufistic tradition (Choirin et al., 2025). This leaves a clear gap in understanding how spiritual depth is articulated and preserved in digital religious communication.

In fact, activities such as *Ngaji Tasawuf* contain a distinctive da'wah treasure: not only conveying normative teachings, but also building spiritual and moral awareness that leads

pilgrims to reflect on their relationship with God (Fasya, 2022; Madjid, 2002). Thus, there is still a research gap between digital communication studies and Sufism-based da'wah studies.

This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the content of KH's da'wah message. Moh. Zuhri Zaini in the 7th edition of *Ngaji Tasawuf* activities. By examining the thematic structure, symbolic language, and communicative logic of the discourse, this study aims to provide empirical grounding for evaluating the robustness and contemporary relevance of Sufistic da'wah when adapted to digital platforms. A qualitative content analysis approach is used to read the text hermeneutically, interpreting the symbols and values that emerge from the transcript of the study (Geertz, 1960; Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2012).

Therefore, this study is aimed at finding answers to several common research questions which include: 1) Identifying and grouping the content of the message of KH da'wah. Zuhri Zaini in the study of Sufism, 2) Explaining the theological, moral, and spiritual values contained in it, and 3) Interpreting how the sufistic da'wah of pesantren can adapt and give new meaning in the digital space. Through these aims, the study offers conceptual validation of Sufistic communication as a viable framework for digital-era dakwah.

Through these fundamental questions, this research is expected to contribute conceptually to Islamic da'wah and communication studies by presenting a Sufistic perspective in message content analysis. The findings also offer a potential model for “digital Sufistic communication,” a conceptual lens that explains how traditional spiritual discourse can be meaningfully remediated online (Campbell, 2025). Practically, it guides pesantren in designing da'wah strategies rooted in spiritual depth yet adaptive to technology (Campbell, 2012).

Thus, this study stresses the importance of reviving da'wah that leads people to self-knowledge and God. By mapping the thematic architecture and communicative dynamics of Sufi messages, this study challenges assumptions about digital religious shallowness and demonstrates how pesantren-based spirituality may serve as an alternative paradigm in the contemporary religious media landscape.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the structure and meaning of Sufi da'wah messages delivered by KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini in the 7th edition of *Ngaji Tasawuf* at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. The unit of analysis is established at the outset as “thematic segments of da'wah messages,” defined as discrete portions of text including sentences, clusters of sentences, or narrative units that contain theological, moral, spiritual, or social meanings. Establishing the unit early ensures conceptual clarity and analytic consistency across the entire procedure.

This study adopts qualitative content analysis as formulated by Schreier (2012) and Mayring (2014), which emphasizes systematic coding, categorization, and interpretive abstraction. Primary data consists solely of the full verbatim transcript of the 7th *Ngaji Tasawuf* session, transcribed from the original video recording made publicly available

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through the official YouTube channel of Nurul Jadid. Secondary data includes the video itself (used for contextual validation), description metadata from the YouTube upload, and supporting scholarly literature on Sufism, pesantren da'wah, and digital religious communication. The boundaries of the dataset are limited to the complete transcript of the 7th session and do not extend to other editions of *Ngaji Tasawuf*. This delimitation ensures focus and analytical depth, avoiding thematic drift or cross-session contamination.

The transcript was prepared through a multi-step process. *First*, the researcher downloaded the YouTube recording and produced a verbatim transcript that includes verbal expressions, narrative transitions, and relevant rhetorical cues. A transcription protocol was followed to ensure consistency: (1) all Arabic text was transliterated; (2) pauses or emphases relevant to meaning were retained; and (3) humorous, metaphorical, or anecdotal expressions were preserved because of their interpretive significance in Sufi da'wah. *Second*, the transcript was cleaned for analysis by removing repeated filler words and unrelated audience noise. Sampling was not conducted because the study employs complete-count analysis, using the entire transcript as the corpus. *Third*, textual segments were marked by identifying shifts in themes or subthemes. Segments were included only if they contained discernible da'wah meaning (e.g., exhortation, explanation of spiritual concepts, moral admonition, or theological framing).

This study applies inductive–deductive thematic content analysis, combining predefined codes with emergent categories from the data (Schreier, 2012). The initial coding frame was constructed using major themes from da'wah and Sufi communication theory; namely theological messages, moral messages, spiritual messages, and social messages. These serve as top-level categories, which were then refined inductively as subthemes emerged (e.g., *fana'*, *sincerity*, *arrogance of knowledge*, *digital manners*). The coding process proceeded in three stages:

1. Open coding, marking all meaning-bearing units.
2. Axial coding, grouping codes under the four major categories and refining category definitions.
3. Selective coding, synthesizing patterns and constructing interpretive connections between categories, especially regarding their relevance to digital da'wah.

Although qualitative content analysis does not require statistical inter-coder reliability, analytic credibility was strengthened through: (a) codebook refinement via iterative reading; (b) peer debriefing with two colleagues in Islamic communication studies; and (c) stability checks ensuring that repeated coding cycles produced consistent category assignments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was conducted between transcript, video, and literature on Sufistic communication. Audit trails were maintained, documenting coding decisions, category adjustments, and interpretive reflections (Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2012).

The researcher acknowledges a background in Islamic communication and pesantren studies, which may influence interpretive sensitivity toward spiritual themes. To manage this, the researcher explicitly bracketed personal assumptions during coding, consulted

external coders for peer checking, and used theoretical memos to separate interpretation from prior familiarity with pesantren culture. This reflexive vigilance enhances interpretive transparency and analytic rigor.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

An Overview of Religious Activities

The 7th edition of *Ngaji Tasawuf* is a routine forum of the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School which reviews the book *Risālah Adab al-Sulūk lil Murīd* by Habib Abdullah Bin Alwi al-Haddad. This study was led by KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini and broadcast live through the official YouTube channel of the boarding school, reaching a broad audience beyond students and local worshippers. The recitation format integrates the reading of Arabic texts, explanations of meaning, and contextual elaborations that link classical Sufistic teachings with modern realities. This hybrid mode of transmission illustrates how traditional pesantren da'wah is undergoing a digital recontextualization while preserving its contemplative depth (Zaid et al., 2022).

Figure 1. Thumbnail image of the Ngaji Tasawuf livestream edition 7 of the Nurul Jadid Boarding School.



The recorded session lasted approximately two hours with a characteristic discourse pattern: opening, textual recitation, conceptual clarification, moral reminders, and closing supplications. This structure reflects a layered communication style that is argumentative, narrative, and performative (Fairclough, 1995). For example, KH. Zuhri begins by anchoring human existence in theological awareness, stating: “*Mau tidak mau kita akan kembali kepada Allah*” (Transcript, p. 3), which signals the theological category and frames the entire session as a reminder of existential accountability.

Narrative moral lessons are woven into the discourse through relatable metaphors, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

“*Orang yang bersemangat tablilan tapi melalaikan salat wajib... itu seperti memakai jas dan dasi tanpa celana*” (Transcript, p. 9). This humorous analogy functions as a moral warning against performative religiosity, encouraging ethical prioritization in worship practices.

The performative dimension of spirituality emerges through invitation to inner action, such as his call to sustain devotional impulses:

“*Kalau ada dorongan beribadah, jangan ditunda — itu tamu yang harus dimuliakan.*” (Transcript, p. 12). This instruction represents the spiritual category. Highlighting *zikir*, *inabah*, and vigilance of the heart (*muraqabah*) as transformative practices.

The shift from physical *majlis* to livestreamed ritual amplifies this performative spirituality, as viewers are encouraged to participate in real time through comments like “*Allahumma ameen*,” or by following the supplications from afar. This supports Carey’s (2008) ritual model of communication, where shared religious language maintains communal bonds despite spatial separation (Carey, 1989). The YouTube interface thus becomes a “cyber-*ḥamiyah*,” a mediated space enabling collective remembrance of God.

Moreover, the digital medium introduces an additional interpretive layer to Sufistic da’wah. By broadcasting the sermon online, spiritual authority is no longer confined within pesantren walls but extends outward to diverse and geographically dispersed audiences, enabling broader participation in pesantren-based spiritual learning. At the same time, livestreams and recordings create a permanent archive of spiritual discourse, allowing viewers to revisit, pause, and reflect on teachings repeatedly according to their own contemplative rhythms. In this way, da’wah becomes searchable, shareable, and more deeply integrated into everyday digital practices, inviting individuals who may never physically enter a pesantren to still meaningfully encounter and engage with its spiritual culture. This recontextualization aligns with Sufi symbolic communication (Haris Hakam et al., 2025), where the *majlis* is not merely informational but a transformative encounter here, facilitated by media technology (Mardonov et al., 2025).

Categories of Da’wah Messages

1. Theological Message: Awareness of the Divinity and the Duty of Worship

KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini emphasizes that the spiritual journey of a believer (*sulūk ilallah*) begins with existential awareness of God as the ultimate destination of human life:

“*Inevitably, we will return to Allah.*” (Transcript, p. 3). This message is framed to reawaken an ontological consciousness of servanthood, a reminder that faith (*īmān*) must manifest through worship and ethical submission (*taḥḥid ‘amali*). KH. Zuhri reinforces this by encouraging responsiveness toward spiritual impulses:

“*When you feel the urge to worship, do not delay -- that is a guest you must honor.*” (Transcript, p. 12). Through analogies relatable to everyday experience, KH. Zuhri constructs persuasive theological contrasts designed to correct distorted religious priorities (Mulyana, 2019). For instance, he critiques ritual enthusiasm that lacks foundational obedience:

“*Those who are excited about taḥlilan while neglecting obligatory prayers -- they are like someone wearing a suit and tie but no pants.*” (Transcript, p. 9)

This humorous comparison acts as theological rhetoric that exposes performative faith and affirms that worship finds meaning only when rooted in sincere devotion to God. The preacher then draws from Qur’anic narratives such as Pharaoh’s arrogance

to illustrate how the human heart may become ‘mahjūb’ (veiled) from divine guidance when overtaken by pride and ego (Jasvi, 2021).

This approach aligns with Al-Ghazali’s framework in *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, wherein worship is not merely juridical compliance but a process of ethical-spiritual purification leading to *ma’rifatullāh* (gnosis of God) (Al-Gazhali, 1982). KH. Zuhri thus combines textual authority, rational explanation, and symbolic storytelling to cultivate an embodied understanding of *tawḥīd* (Fasya, 2022).

As the sermon is broadcast via YouTube, the theological message acquires expanded communicative functions. It operates simultaneously as a collective remembrance (ritual participation) and also public discourse of spiritual knowledge (Stansmore, 2021).

Drawing from Carey’s (1989) ritual communication model, the livestream creates a shared sacred moment between offline attendees and dispersed digital viewers, forming a mediated *ummah* that participates in synchronized *zikr* and prayer. This demonstrates that sacrality is not diminished but reconstituted through digital mediation.

Additionally, the archival and interactive affordances of YouTube significantly reshape how audiences receive and engage with Sufistic teachings (Mardonov et al., 2025). In the livestream environment, expressions in the live chat such as “*Allabumma ameen*” foster a sense of *communitas*, demonstrating moments of real-time spiritual attunement among dispersed viewers. After the broadcast ends, the replay and sharing features allow audiences to return to specific moments for deeper reflection, which extends the temporal reach of theological guidance far beyond its initial delivery. Through this ongoing circulation, private acts of devotion become publicly visible and socially situated, transforming individual worship into a networked spiritual practice embedded within wider online religious communities (Campbell, 2012).

Through Campbell’s (2012, 2025) perspective on digital religion, the Ngaji Tasawuf sermon embodies a hybrid form of transmedia Sufi communication, where devotional values travel beyond *pesantren* walls and circulate as accessible, searchable pathways to God-consciousness.

Thus, theological da’wah in Ngaji Tasawuf does not merely transmit doctrine. It restructures spiritual experience within a digitally connected community, revealing how *pesantren*-based Sufism adapts meaningfully to contemporary media ecosystems.

2. Moral Message: Discipline, Sincerity, and Keeping Intentions

The moral dimension of KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini’s sermon is evident in his emphatic call to avoid procrastination in worship, maintain sincerity, and guard against *riya’*; acts that externally appear pious but internally seek human validation. He warns that “*satanic whispers often come packaged in religious practices*,” illustrating how moral corruption may disguise itself within seemingly virtuous actions (Lessy et al., 2024).

To articulate his critique of misplaced religious enthusiasm, he uses a vivid analogy: “*A person who is enthusiastic about tablilan but neglects obligatory prayer is like someone wearing a suit and tie without pants.*” (Transcript, p. 9). This analogy represents the method of *tadhkirah*

bil-amtsāl (ethical warning through parables) a pedagogical strategy widely embedded in pesantren tradition (Dhofier, 2019). It functions to sharpen *tartīb al-amwālīyāt* (ethical prioritization), ensuring that obligatory acts hold higher moral urgency than optional rituals.

KH. Zuhri's sermon also stresses *tazkiyatun nafs* (spiritual self-purification) as the basis of moral development, encouraging students to engage in *riyāḍah nafsāniyyah* (disciplining the ego) to protect their hearts from pride and negligence. This aligns with contemporary Islamic moral psychology, in which sincerity (*ikhlaṣ*) serves as the primary internal regulator of ethical conduct (Zakia et al., 2024).

Beyond the level of personal ethics, KH. Zuhri also emphasizes a broader framework of social morality. In his view, genuine worship must manifest in responsible relational conduct, prompting individuals to seek forgiveness whenever they cause harm to others and, when misdeeds occur in public spaces, to repair those relationships openly so that accountability is visible and restoring trust becomes a communal effort. He further underscores the importance of protecting human dignity, encouraging believers to refrain from humiliating others and instead uphold mutual respect as an expression of faith in everyday interactions. Thus, spiritual devotion is not complete unless it transforms social behavior, ensuring that piety enriches the lives of both the self and the wider community (Fauziyah et al., 2024).

These teachings reflect *akhlāq al-karīmah* (noble character) ethics that integrate spiritual responsibility with social accountability.

Within the digital environment, moral guidance acquires amplified visibility and new operational dynamics. Because the sermon is both livestreamed and permanently archived, ethical teachings are no longer confined to the immediate audience but become publicly observable acts of moral instruction, reinforcing shared standards of behavior within a broader community (Andriani, 2023). This online presence also establishes a developing framework of digital ethics, encouraging believers to act responsibly in virtual interactions and remain conscious of their conduct across mediated spaces (Campbell, 2025). Moreover, the visibility of online engagement creates a form of mediated accountability, where mistakes committed in public digital arenas may necessitate equally public gestures of reconciliation, thus embedding ethical responsibility into the fabric of networked religiosity (Zaid et al., 2022).

Drawing from theories of mediated morality and online religiosity (Campbell, 2025), the shift to livestreamed da'wah fosters moral surveillance and participatory virtue, as the audience actively reacts, reflects, and sometimes shares the teachings within wider digital networks.

The YouTube live chat becomes a space of mutual ethical reinforcement, where users respond with affirmations such as “*Astaghfirullah*” or “*Jazakallah Khair*,” making morality a collective and interactive performance rather than a private reflection. This demonstrates that pesantren moral communication evolves into a form of networked accountability, where ethics extend into everyday online interaction (Hepni, 2022).

Thus, the moral da'wah of Ngaji Tasawuf not only shapes the inner character of its audience but also reconfigures ethical norms within digital religious ecosystems, encouraging virtuous behavior that is both personally embodied and socially mediated.

3. Spiritual Message: Zikir, Tafakur, and Takarub

Spiritual messages form the central axis of KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini's da'wah in Ngaji Tasawuf. He emphasizes a triadic formula of Sufi spiritual discipline; *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *tafakkur* (contemplative reflection), and *inābah* (returning oneself to God through repentance) (Al-Gazhali, 1982).

He frequently reminds the audience to safeguard spiritual impulses as divine gifts:

"When there is a push to worship, seize it — because that is Allah inviting you closer." (Transcript, p. 12). According to KH. Zuhri, *dhikr* connects the servant to the reality of divine presence, while *tafakkur* deepens awareness of God's signs within creation. He warns audiences not to become "mahjūb"

"The heart becomes veiled when arrogance and negligence take the lead." (Transcript, p. 14)

This articulation demonstrates a Sufistic dialectic between remembrance and self-vigilance, where spiritual work (*riyāḍah al-rūḥ*) purifies the heart from egoic obfuscation. It aligns with the foundational teachings of al-Haddad, who views *dhikr* as the doorway to *ma'rifah* and *tafakkur* as its deepening process (Cholili et al., 2024).

Furthermore, *inābah* is framed as the culmination of spiritual consciousness:

"Returning to Allah is not only in the afterlife, but every moment your heart wakes up." (Transcript, p. 18)

Thus, KH. Zuhri positions worship not merely as ritual compliance but as a dynamic spiritual return that continuously restores proximity to God (*taqarrub ilallāh*) (Al-Gazhali, 1982).

Digital mediation transforms these Sufi principles into networked spiritual practice. Through livestream broadcasting, the sermon functions as a cyber-*ḥawḍiyah*, a virtual space of collective *dhikr*, synchronized presence, and shared emotion, despite physical separation (AS & Rustandi, 2022; Rustandi, 2020).

This dynamic aligns closely with Campbell's (2025) idea of networked religion, in which religious life becomes distributed across multiple layers of community. In the context of *Ngaji Tasawuf*, those physically present at the pesantren and those participating online collectively form a single ritual body, united through shared expressions of faith. Digital affordances also extend the preacher's authority, enabling spiritual guidance to circulate far beyond its original geographic boundaries. In addition, the availability of archived videos grants these religious practices a persistent presence, allowing the teachings to be repeatedly accessed, revisited, and reflected upon long after the livestream ends (Andriani, 2023).

Complementing this perspective, Helland's (2005) distinction further clarifies the ritual function of the broadcast. The livestream operates as "online religion," where

viewers actively engage in worship through mediated participation. During moments of supplication or praise, participants affirm their devotion by typing invocations such as “Ameen,” “Allahu Akbar,” or even using heart emojis, digital performances that convey a real sense of presence within the shared ritual space (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Through these interactions, belief is not only communicated but enacted collectively, revealing how digital mediation sustains the emotional and spiritual dimensions of communal worship. Spiritual encounters are thus re-embodied through mediated gestures, where clicking, commenting, and sharing become forms of ritual affirmation and emotional engagement (Richtig & Maulana, 2022).

In this context, digital da’wah does not diminish the Sufi spiritual journey -- it relocates it into a hybrid space where presence, remembrance, and return to God are enacted simultaneously through embodied and mediated actions.

Sufistic Da’wah in the Digital Space

The broadcasting of Ngaji Tasawuf through YouTube demonstrates the evolving adaptation of Sufistic da’wah to digital communication ecologies, where classical pesantren orality blends with mediated interaction. Although KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini maintains the oral, improvisational, and contemplative character of traditional pesantren teaching, the digital platform introduces new symbolic channels including real-time comments, emoji responses, and pinned textual reminders to support communal meaning-making.

Audience engagement provides concrete evidence of participatory-reflective dynamics. For example, during moments of theological or spiritual emphasis, viewers respond with invocations like:

“Allahumma ameen,” “MasyaAllah,” or heart emoji (Live chat, 00:47:13) which performatively affirm the message and signal networked piety.

When KH. Zuhri states, *“Don’t wait for health to worship, because death never waits.”* (Transcript, p. 22) viewers comment in repentance and self-reflection, such as: *“Astaghfirullah, I always delay prayers 🙏”* (Chat, 00:53:49)

This illustrates Al-Ghazali’s tripartite integration—*taḥḥid* → *akhlāq* → *taṣawwuf*—manifesting in digital ritual practice, where internal transformation is witnessed and co-experienced by others online (Al-Gazhali, 1982).

Figure 2. Footage of the Ngaji Tasawuf session taught by KH Zuhri Zaini with the transcript feature activated.



Building from Campbell's (2025) concept of networked religion, spiritual participation extends across attributes as presented in the table below.

Table 1. Campbell's networked religion manifestation in *Ngaji Tasawuf* Nurul Jadid.

Attribute (Campbell's Networked Religion)	Manifestation in <i>Ngaji Tasawuf</i>
Networked Community	Hybrid worshippers: offline santri + online viewers engaging synchronously
Storied Identity	Viewers narrate personal repentance in chat
Shifting Authority	KH. Zuhri's charisma is platform-amplified via algorithmic reach
Multisite Reality	The pesantren becomes digitally present across households globally
Transmediation	Clip sharing, timestamps, quotes circulating beyond the livestream

Helland's (2005) framework also helps illuminate the ritual functions of digital da'wah in this context. During the livestream, viewers participate directly in acts of worship such as typing invocations, joining supplications, and synchronizing emotional expressions with the onsite congregation. Such engagement represents a form of "online religion," where ritual performance occurs through mediated presence. At the same time, the archived videos enable a different kind of religious experience: individuals return to the recordings for study, contemplation, or repeated spiritual reinforcement. This reflective practice functions as "religion online," allowing viewers to learn and internalize teachings at their own pace (Miftahorrahman et al., 2024). Thus, *Ngaji Tasawuf* simultaneously supports active communal devotion and personal spiritual formation, demonstrating how digital platforms accommodate diverse modes of religious participation.

These affordances reposition presence not as merely physical, but experientially co-constructed (Lombard & Ditton, 1997), enabling spirituality to persist, travel, and expand beyond singular time-space boundaries. YouTube effectively transforms Sufi teachings into a form of publicly accessible spirituality infused with collective emotional resonance. Within the comment column, participants assemble in what can be described as a *digital haud*, a virtual spiritual gathering where worshippers articulate their hopes, confess ethical struggles, and reveal inner vulnerability. Statements such as "Pray for me, I am struggling spiritually," or "I will start my prayers on time again," demonstrate how audiences translate theological messages into personal resolve. Meanwhile, confessions like "I cried listening to this reminder" reveal how sufistic teachings continue to touch the affective core of religious

life, even when mediated through a screen. Through these exchanges, da'wah becomes more than the transmission of doctrinal propositions; it evolves into a shared spiritual journey negotiated collectively in real time.

The findings of this study further indicate that KH. Zuhri Zaini's discourse embodies a balanced paradigm of Sufi communication: theology awakens moral conscience, conscience shapes ethical conduct, and ethical behavior ultimately guides individuals toward closeness with God (Mardonov et al., 2025). This continuum aligns with Al-Ghazali's model of spiritual transformation, in which cognition, emotion, and practice are tightly interwoven (Al-Gazhali, 1982). When mediated through digital platforms, this process gains intensified immediacy: theological reflection expressed by the preacher is rapidly moralized and spiritualized through visible audience engagement and communal responses. In this way, YouTube functions not merely as a distribution channel, but as a dynamic environment in which sufistic da'wah actively reshapes and elevates the spiritual agency of its dispersed participants (Fasya, 2022).

As such, da'wah shifts from being authoritative-didactic to participatory-reflective:

KH. Zuhri becomes not only a teacher but also a facilitator of inward conversation, encouraging viewers to experience faith, not just understand it.

Structure and Pattern of Da'wah Message

The analysis of the transcript from the 7th edition of *Ngaji Tasawuf* indicates that KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini adopts a structured and symbolically layered da'wah communication pattern. The sermon progresses from cognitive instruction (reading and explaining classical texts) to affective engagement (moral reminders conveyed with humor and relatable metaphors), and finally to conative persuasion (calls to repentance, prayer, and change in behavior). This stepwise movement aligns with Rani's (2023) affective-conative communication model and reflects the traditional *halaqah* structure in pesantren pedagogy.

To further clarify the thematic organization, the following table presents the results of qualitative coding supported by direct excerpts from the transcript:

Table 2. Categorization and Meaning of the Da'wah Message of KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini in *Ngaji Tasawuf* 7th Edition

Category	Example of KH's Speech. Zuhri Zaini (Transcript)	The Theoretical Meaning of Da'wah	Major Values	Sufistic
Theological	"Inevitably, we will return to Allah."	Da'wah monotheism that emphasizes human existential awareness of God.	Ma'rifatullah, mortal consciousness, absolute dependence on Allah.	
Moral	"People who are diligent in tahlilan but neglect to pray	Moral criticism of the imbalance between ritual and	Sincerity, responsibility.	self-

	like wearing a suit without pants."	core obligations; Priority Teaching (Tartibul Awwaliyat).		
Spiritual	"Zikir is the guardian of the encouragement of worship, so that the heart does not become mahjub."	Da'wah purification of the mind through the practice of dhikr and tafakur.	Tazkiyah muraqabah, dzikrullah.	al-nafs,
Social	"If you have ever mistreated people through social media, apologize there too."	Social ethics in contemporary da'wah: responsibility in the digital space.	Adab al-mu'asarah, social piety.	

The data show that KH. Zuhri Zaini consistently guides his audience through a multilayered process of meaning-making. His statement, "*We are nothing without Allah... so guard your worship before your ego guards you,*" illustrates how he transitions from theological cognition to affective self-reflection, and finally toward conative motivation for action. This progression encourages listeners to not only understand divine truths but also internalize them emotionally and translate them into concrete behavioral change (Carey, 2008).

KH. Zuhri strategically employs pauses prior to delivering core messages, allowing his words to linger and resonate, while his sudden humorous metaphors re-engage attention and deepen the emotional texture of the sermon. These rhetorical strategies foster a learning environment where insight, reflection, and spiritual resolve develop collectively among both onsite and online audiences (Nabila et al., 2024).

Ultimately, the categories of theological, moral, spiritual, and social teachings merge into a cohesive sufistic communication framework rooted in the Al-Ghazalian paradigm. Theology nurtures consciousness of divine purpose; morality structures behavior through sincerity and humility; and spirituality refines the heart toward God. Within this continuum, social ethics naturally arise as the outward expression of an inwardly purified soul, demonstrating that ethical responsibility is not separate from worship but is its lived consequence.

In the YouTube livestream of *Ngaji Tasawuf*, audience participation becomes integral to the sermonic structure. When KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini delivers theological reminders—such as the certainty of human return to God—viewers openly express remorse and recognition through messages like "*Astagfirullah, I often forget this* 🙏" posted in the live chat. This response signals cognitive engagement, where belief and awareness are mentally reaffirmed. As the sermon transitions into moral critique articulated through humor and metaphors, the audience reacts with laughter emojis and confessions such as "*This hit me so*

hard,” indicating affective involvement driven by emotional resonance and personal identification. Finally, when KH. Zuhri invites repentance and renewed commitment to prayer or dhikr, viewers respond with declarations of change such as “*I promise to pray on time starting tonight*,” reflecting conative engagement, a readiness to act upon the guidance delivered.

These participatory cues embody Carey’s ritual communication theory, demonstrating that the sermon constructs a shared symbolic world uniting onsite congregants, remote viewers, and asynchronous replay audiences through synchronized spiritual experience (Carey, 1989). The ritual does not end at the pesantren hall; instead, it extends and persists across time and space through digital mediation.

This dynamic aligns closely with Campbell’s (2012) concept of networked religion, which highlights how digital affordances shape contemporary faith practices. In this context, Ngaji Tasawuf fosters distributed communal presence, where believers pray and remember God together despite physical separation. It also produces ritual co-experience, with collective utterances of “*Āmīn*” and shared emotional expressions forming a virtual sacred assembly. The archived livestream further enables recurrent spiritual participation, creating a pathway for ongoing reflection and renewed devotion (Campbell, 2025).

As a result, Sufistic da’wah shifts from a one-way instructional mode into a participatory-reflective ritual facilitated by both sermon structure and digital engagement.

KH. Zuhri thus becomes not only a preacher but also a facilitator of inner transformation, guiding viewers into a contemplative space where faith is felt, shared, and enacted. Meanwhile, YouTube functions as a ritual mediation apparatus that sustains the pedagogical essence of pesantren spirituality while enabling its reach and impact to grow beyond local boundaries.

Importantly, this model of digital da’wah stands in contrast to the populist, sensationalist approach that dominates much of contemporary religious content online. Ngaji Tasawuf offers a counter-narrative, a spiritually grounded, intellectually engaged, and emotionally nuanced practice of Islamic communication that re-centers sincerity, contemplation, and collective self-awareness. It represents a digital revival of deep and transformative da’wah, maintaining its spiritual integrity while embracing the expanded possibilities of digital media (Mardonov et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study employed a qualitative content analysis to reveal the layered structure of KH. Moh. Zuhri Zaini’s sermon in the 7th edition of *Ngaji Tasawuf*, based on *Risālah Adab al-Suluk lil-Murid* by Habib Abdullah al-Haddad, broadcast live through the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School YouTube channel. The findings show that KH. Zuhri’s da’wah messages are organized into four interconnected categories; theological, moral, spiritual, and social, forming a coherent Sufistic communication framework oriented toward *tahdzīb al-nafs* (self-purification) and *iṣlāḥ al-mujtama’* (social transformation).

The theological dimension revives human existential awareness of God. The moral dimension encourages sincerity and ethical vigilance. The spiritual dimension emphasizes a triadic discipline of *dhikr–tafakkur–inābah*. The social dimension extends piety into responsible interaction, including in digital public spheres.

Taken together, these four components offer a unified Sufistic da'wah model that simultaneously shapes belief, behavior, emotion, and communal ethics.

Theoretically, this study advances the discourse on digital religion and pesantren da'wah in several ways. *First*, it introduces a refined conceptualization of “cyber-*ḥawḍ*” not merely as livestreamed ritual space but as a networked arena of mediated presence where viewers co-construct spiritual meaning through synchronous participation and interactive engagement. *Second*, it contributes to Sufi communication studies by demonstrating how traditional Al-Ghazalian da'wah structures are being reconfigured into a participatory–reflective model supported by platform affordances such as live chat, emotional signaling, and archived accessibility. *Third*, it challenges assumptions that digital media dilutes pesantren spirituality, showing instead how digital mediation can preserve and even amplify contemplative depth, communal affect, and ritual continuity.

This research confirms that pesantren possess adaptive communicative resilience, maintaining the epistemic and experiential core of Sufism while engaging audiences beyond geographical constraints. KH. Zuhri Zaini emerges not only as a preacher but as a facilitator of inner transformation, with YouTube functioning as a ritual mediation technology that extends the devotional environment into a broader public arena where spiritual knowledge becomes accessible, searchable, and shareable.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations. It focuses on a single preacher and one edition of Ngaji Tasawuf, potentially narrowing the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on transcript-based analysis limits attention to multimodal cues such as vocal tone, camera framing, or audience expressions that may further enhance ritual meaning.

Future research may employ comparative studies across multiple preachers or pesantren, audience reception analysis to explore how viewers internalize digital Sufi teachings, or multimodal digital ethnography to capture the embodied nuances of online ritual participation. These trajectories would help confirm the conceptual validity of mediated Sufi communication and broaden understanding of pesantren authority in digital ecologies.

In conclusion, *Ngaji Tasawuf* at Nurul Jadid exemplifies transformative spiritual communication in the digital era, where da'wah becomes a process of collective introspection, healing, and nearness to God, transcending the boundaries of space and time. Its message remains faithful to the essence of Sufism: that knowing God begins with knowing the self, and purifying the self beautifies the world.

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