

## Digital Sufism: Redefining Religious Communication through Tirakat, Ngalap barokah, and Manut Dalane Gusti

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**Abstract.** Digital Sufism represents the transformation of traditional Sufi practices into online spaces, reshaping religious communication in the era of hyperconnectivity. In the Javanese-Islamic context, key spiritual concepts such as tirakat (ascetic discipline), ngalap barokah (seeking blessings), and manut dalane Gusti (submission to God's will) acquire new forms through digital mediation. Online platforms host virtual dzikir, livestreamed rituals, and interactive guidance from Sufi masters, creating hybrid spiritual experiences that merge mysticism with technology. Tirakat, once an intensely private practice, becomes a shared journey through testimonies and digital communities, while ngalap barokah expands beyond physical proximity as followers engage in virtual ijazah and remote blessings. The principle of manut dalane Gusti manifests in adapting faith to digital rhythms, where divine guidance is interpreted through networked interactions. This study argues that digital Sufism does not dilute tradition but redefines spiritual authority, communal bonds, and the circulation of barokah, highlighting how Javanese Sufi values negotiate continuity and change within the digital public sphere.

**Keywords:** Digital Sufism; *Tirakat*; *Ngalap barokah*; *Manut Dalane Gusti*; Religious Communication

### 1. Introduction

The rise of digital technology has significantly reshaped the ways religious practices are communicated, shared, and experienced. In the Islamic world, and particularly within Sufi traditions, the integration of digital media has generated what scholars term Digital Sufism: the adaptation of mystical Islamic practices into online platforms and networked environments. This phenomenon is not merely about transferring traditional rituals into digital formats; it represents a redefinition of religious communication, spiritual authority, and communal bonds in a hyperconnected era [1, p. 118]. For Javanese Islam, where Sufism is deeply intertwined with local cultural and spiritual concepts, this transformation carries unique implications. Central to this context are three key practices and philosophies: *tirakat* (spiritual austerity and self-discipline), *ngalap barokah* (seeking divine blessings through saints or spiritual masters), and *manut dalane Gusti* (submission to the will of God). As these traditions move into digital spaces, they not only persist but are also reimagined, creating a hybrid spiritual landscape that merges ancestral mysticism with contemporary technology [2].

Javanese Islam has long been characterized by its syncretic integration of Islamic mysticism, local spiritual traditions, and cultural practices. Sufi tarekat (orders) played a critical role in the spread of Islam across Java, embedding concepts like tirakat and ngalap barokah into the fabric of religious life [3]. *Tirakat* refers to disciplined spiritual exercises, often involving fasting, meditation, solitude, and silence, aimed at cleansing the soul and strengthening one's relationship with God [4]. It is a form of inner jihad, emphasizing restraint and sacrifice. *Ngalap barokah*, on the other hand, centers on seeking blessings—often from saints, teachers (kyai), or sacred sites—believed to carry divine grace that flows through spiritual chains of transmission. Meanwhile, *manut dalane Gusti* encapsulates the essence of submission, aligning one's life with divine will and accepting God's decrees with humility [5].

Traditionally, these practices were transmitted through face-to-face interactions in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), tarekat gatherings, and communal rituals. Authority rested heavily on personal

relationships between teachers and disciples, where spiritual knowledge and *barokah* were conveyed through physical presence, ritual acts, and oral guidance [6, pp. 5–6]. However, the proliferation of digital platforms—social media, livestreamed sermons, online *majlis dzikir*, and messaging apps—has disrupted and simultaneously expanded these traditional modes of communication.

Digital Sufism marks a shift from localized, embodied practices to networked, mediated experiences. Online platforms create what anthropologists call “third spaces” of spirituality, where physical and virtual interactions overlap. In this context, *tirakat* can be shared through digital diaries, video blogs, or guided meditation sessions broadcast online. Spiritual masters provide instruction via WhatsApp groups or Zoom meetings, extending the reach of their teachings beyond geographical boundaries. Followers participate collectively in online *dzikir* or fasting challenges, creating new forms of communal engagement that blend personal discipline with digital connectivity [7].

For *ngalap barokah*, digitalization redefines proximity and access. Blessings, once sought through pilgrimage to saints’ graves or in-person meetings with a *kyai*, are now mediated through livestreams, recorded prayers, and virtual *ijazah* (authorization to perform certain spiritual practices). The sense of sacred transmission persists, but its medium shifts, raising questions about authenticity, presence, and the nature of spiritual power in digital form. Similarly, *manut dalane Gusti* acquires new dimensions as believers navigate divine submission in a landscape where religious content is algorithmically curated and spiritual guidance circulates through networked communities[2].

The migration of these practices into digital spaces does not simply replace tradition; instead, it creates a dynamic interplay between continuity and change. On one hand, digital tools allow for the preservation and expansion of Sufi teachings, ensuring accessibility for younger, tech-savvy generations. They also enable transnational connections, linking Javanese Sufi communities with global networks. On the other hand, the shift challenges traditional notions of spiritual authority and the role of embodied presence. If *barokah* is transmitted online, does it carry the same potency as in-person encounters? Can *tirakat* shared on Instagram retain its sincerity when performed in public digital view? These tensions reveal the complex negotiation between sacredness and technology in the contemporary religious sphere. [2], [7]

Religious communication, at its core, involves the transmission of meaning, authority, and experience. In Sufism, this has historically relied on affective and embodied forms of interaction—ritual chanting, shared silence, the physical presence of the teacher. Digital mediation alters these dynamics by introducing new channels and formats. Visual and auditory media replace physical co-presence; algorithms shape what content followers see; and networked audiences co-create the spiritual experience through likes, comments, and shares. This transformation does not necessarily dilute the sacred but reconfigures how it is perceived, accessed, and shared.

In the case of *tirakat*, the digital turn allows practitioners to document and share their journeys, fostering collective motivation and accountability. However, it also risks turning personal spiritual austerity into performative content. For *ngalap barokah*, online participation democratizes access to blessings but simultaneously decentralizes authority, as anyone can circulate prayers or claim spiritual lineage through digital channels. *Manut dalane Gusti* becomes a guiding principle in navigating this new landscape, emphasizing surrender to divine wisdom amidst technological change. The study of Digital Sufism and its relation to *tirakat*, *ngalap barokah*, and *manut dalane Gusti* contributes to broader debates in the anthropology and sociology of religion. It challenges binary distinctions between “authentic” offline religiosity and “mediated” online spirituality, showing that digital spaces can be as sacred and transformative as physical ones. It also highlights the agency of local religious traditions in adapting to global technological shifts, demonstrating that Javanese Sufism is not a static relic but a living, evolving practice.[1] Furthermore, this topic intersects with media studies by examining how digital platforms function as religious infrastructures. The affordances of social media—interactivity, immediacy, and virality—shape the ways Sufi teachings are disseminated and

experienced. This raises questions about the role of technology as an intermediary between the divine and the believer, and whether algorithms can inadvertently become part of spiritual mediation.

## 2. Finding and Discussion

### 2.1. Tirakat and the Crisis of Inner Silence

In the contemporary digital age, one of the most pervasive challenges to spiritual life is the erosion of inner silence. The constant influx of notifications, social media updates, and algorithm-driven content creates a state of perpetual mental noise. This “crisis of inner silence” is more than a lifestyle inconvenience; it is a profound spiritual tragedy that disconnects individuals from self-awareness and divine presence. Within Javanese Sufism, *tirakat*—a practice of spiritual austerity and disciplined withdrawal—offers a deeply rooted response to this condition. Traditionally, *tirakat* involves acts such as fasting, maintaining periods of solitude, practicing night vigils, and refraining from indulgence. These practices are aimed not only at self-purification but also at cultivating an inner space where divine wisdom can be heard [8].

When viewed through the lens of Digital Sufism, *tirakat* acquires renewed significance. In a world dominated by digital noise, the intentional practice of silence becomes a radical act of resistance. Modern Sufi communities, particularly in Indonesia, have begun to reinterpret *tirakat* as a form of “digital asceticism.” This adaptation does not reject technology outright but integrates spiritual discipline into digital engagement. For example, online tarekat groups organize structured periods of “digital fasting,” where participants collectively commit to turning off devices or limiting online activity while engaging in traditional Sufi rituals such as *dzikir* (remembrance of God) and contemplative prayer. In this way, *tirakat* becomes both a withdrawal from and a mindful engagement with the digital world, transforming the very tools of distraction into instruments for spiritual focus.

The crisis of inner silence is not merely individual but collective. Communities increasingly find it difficult to cultivate shared moments of reflection, as digital culture promotes constant sharing and reaction over contemplation. *Tirakat*, when adapted into digital networks, addresses this collective dimension by creating shared spaces of quietude. Virtual retreats and online pesantren have emerged where participants are guided through synchronized periods of silence, fasting, and meditation, blending traditional Sufi pedagogy with digital infrastructure. Instead of diminishing the sanctity of *tirakat*, these initiatives expand its reach, enabling dispersed communities to experience spiritual austerity together despite physical separation [8].

A common critique of digitalized *tirakat* is the potential for performativity. When practitioners share their ascetic journeys online—through vlogs, posts, or digital journals—there is a risk that the discipline becomes a public performance rather than a private communion with God. However, Javanese Sufi teachers often counter this by emphasizing *niat* (intention) as the core of spiritual practice. The sincerity behind the act determines its value, not the medium through which it is shared. In some cases, public testimonies of *tirakat* serve as a source of inspiration, creating communal accountability and encouraging others to embark on their own journeys of inner silence. Thus, even when mediated, *tirakat* retains its essence as a path to spiritual stillness [9].

Beyond personal spirituality, *tirakat* in the digital era offers a societal remedy to the psychological strain caused by constant connectivity. Studies in digital religion note that overexposure to online content correlates with increased anxiety and a sense of spiritual loss. By incorporating practices of withdrawal, Digital Sufism reframes this modern tragedy not as an unavoidable consequence of technology but as an opportunity for spiritual realignment. The discipline of *tirakat* invites individuals to step back, listen inwardly, and rediscover divine presence amidst the digital *din*.

In Javanese cosmology, silence is not emptiness but fullness. It is the space where God’s voice becomes perceptible, where the heart becomes a vessel for divine guidance. The tragedy of inner silence, therefore, is not simply the absence of quiet but the loss of that sacred fullness. *Tirakat*

restores this dimension by teaching that silence is an active spiritual practice, not a passive void. When adapted into digital contexts, it becomes a method for sanctifying time and attention, reclaiming both from the constant pull of algorithms and notifications [10].

This approach also aligns with the broader Sufi understanding of *mujahadah* (spiritual struggle). In the past, *tirakat* involved resisting physical comfort; in the digital age, it involves resisting informational overload. Both are struggles against the ego and distractions that cloud divine remembrance. By framing digital abstinence as part of *tirakat*, Javanese Sufism provides a culturally resonant and spiritually rich response to modern technological excess [11].

Ultimately, *tirakat* addresses the crisis of inner silence by offering a path back to what Javanese Sufism considers the heart of religious life: *hening* (deep stillness). Digital Sufism does not treat technology as the enemy but as a field for practicing discipline and presence. Through intentional withdrawal and mindful engagement, *tirakat* transforms digital spaces into arenas of spiritual refinement. In doing so, it demonstrates how an ancient ascetic practice can meet one of the deepest tragedies of modern life: the inability to hear the divine in the midst of constant noise [12].

## 2.2. *Ngalap barokah* and the Tragedy of Spiritual Disconnection

One of the defining spiritual crises of modernity is the experience of profound disconnection. Hyper-individualism, urban migration, and digital fragmentation have distanced many from traditional religious communities and sacred sites. This condition, which can be called the “tragedy of spiritual disconnection,” leaves individuals longing for a sense of divine presence and communal belonging. Within Javanese Sufism, the practice of *ngalap barokah*—seeking divine blessings through saints, teachers (kyai), and sacred chains of transmission—offers a deeply rooted response to this condition. Traditionally, *ngalap barokah* is grounded in the belief that God’s grace flows through spiritual lineages and can be accessed through proximity to those endowed with *barokah*. Visiting saints’ graves, serving spiritual teachers, and participating in tarekat rituals were all ways to connect to this flow [11].

In the digital era, the practice of *ngalap barokah* faces both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in the fact that traditional models rely on physical proximity—being in the presence of a saint or teacher, touching sacred objects, or visiting holy sites. Digital mediation appears to disrupt this chain by replacing embodied interaction with screens and networks. However, Digital Sufism in Indonesia has demonstrated that *barokah* is not bound to physical presence but to intention and spiritual connection. Online *dzikir* sessions, livestreamed prayers, and virtual *ijazah* (authorization to recite or practice) have become new channels for transmitting blessing. The sacred chain is reimagined as extending through digital spaces, suggesting that divine grace transcends material boundaries when the heart remains open [13].

This adaptation directly addresses the tragedy of disconnection by transforming digital networks into spiritual bridges. Livestreamed *dzikir* sessions often involve thousands of participants simultaneously chanting God’s names, creating a shared spiritual field despite geographical separation. In these moments, the screen becomes a portal to community and divine presence, challenging the assumption that sacred transmission requires physical co-presence. *Ngalap barokah* in digital form thus offers an antidote to the sense of isolation that plagues modern spiritual life. Beyond personal disconnection, *ngalap barokah* also responds to a broader cultural tragedy: the loss of intergenerational spiritual continuity. As younger generations move away from traditional pesantren and tarekat structures, there is a risk that the flow of *barokah* may weaken. Digital Sufism counters this by making blessings accessible through platforms that resonate with youth culture. Instagram accounts of kyai, YouTube sermons, and WhatsApp groups carrying spiritual advice become new vessels for *barokah*. In this way, the practice ensures that sacred transmission adapts to contemporary communication patterns without losing its essence [11], [13].



A related modern tragedy is the commodification of spirituality in digital environments. The market-driven nature of online platforms often turns religious content into consumable products, diluting the depth of spiritual experience. Here, *ngalap barokah* serves as a corrective. The act of sincerely seeking blessing reframes religious engagement from consumption to relationship. Rather than passively scrolling through spiritual content, the seeker actively enters into a sacred dynamic of humility and receptivity. Many Indonesian Sufi teachers emphasize this distinction, reminding followers that *barokah* is not a product to be purchased or downloaded but a divine gift accessed through devotion and service [12], [14].

In Javanese metaphysics, *barokah* is not merely a blessing but a living current of divine grace that sustains both individual and communal life. The tragedy of disconnection is thus more than loneliness; it is the severing of this life-giving current. Digital *ngalap barokah* restores the flow by demonstrating that spiritual connection is not dependent on physical space but on spiritual intention. Stories of healing, answered prayers, and transformation shared in online Sufi groups testify to the potency of *barokah* transmitted through digital channels [15].

At the same time, Digital Sufism is careful to maintain the ethical framework surrounding *ngalap barokah*. Traditional practices emphasized humility, service, and respect for the spiritual chain. Online adaptations preserve these values by encouraging followers to approach digital blessings with the same reverence they would in physical spaces. For example, many virtual *ijazah* sessions include instructions for ritual purification, intention-setting, and maintaining *adab* (etiquette) during digital interaction, reinforcing that technology does not nullify the sacred protocols. Another dimension where *ngalap barokah* addresses spiritual disconnection is its role in rebuilding communal bonds. Modern digital life often fragments religious communities into isolated individuals engaging with content alone. Virtual Sufi gatherings, however, turn digital platforms into collective spaces of devotion. Participants frequently describe a palpable sense of unity during synchronized online *dzikir*, reflecting the Sufi belief that hearts connected in remembrance are spiritually bound regardless of distance. This communal experience of *barokah* pushes back against the individualism of digital culture, re-centering collective piety as a source of strength [11], [13].

Furthermore, *ngalap barokah* in digital form provides comfort in times of global crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when access to mosques and sacred sites was restricted, Indonesian Sufi orders expanded online rituals, enabling followers to continue seeking blessings. These practices alleviated the sense of spiritual isolation that accompanied physical distancing measures. The success of these initiatives demonstrated that digital *ngalap barokah* is not a temporary substitute but a viable extension of traditional practice into modern life. Theologically, the digital adaptation of *ngalap barokah* underscores a key Sufi teaching: God's grace is limitless and not confined to material forms. While physical presence carries spiritual significance, the ultimate source of *barokah* is divine, and divine mercy can flow through any medium. This perspective reframes technology not as a barrier but as a tool in God's hands, capable of carrying blessing when used with intention and reverence [14], [15].

Ultimately, the practice of *ngalap barokah* within Digital Sufism transforms the tragedy of spiritual disconnection into an opportunity for renewal. By extending sacred transmission into digital spaces, it bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, community and isolation, the seen and the unseen. It reminds believers that connection to the divine and to each other is not bound by walls or wires but by the heart's orientation towards God.

### 2.3. *Manut Dalane Gusti* and the Tragedy of Control

In the digital age, one of the most profound spiritual struggles is the illusion and eventual loss of control. Modern technology cultivates a sense that life can be fully managed: data-driven predictions, algorithmic personalization, and instant access to information create the impression that uncertainty can be eliminated. However, the reality of human life—marked by unpredictability, suffering, and

change—inevitably shatters this illusion. This confrontation produces what can be called the “tragedy of control,” where the desire for certainty meets the reality of divine mystery. Within Javanese Sufism, the principle of *manut dalane Gusti*—literally “following the path of God”—offers a deep spiritual remedy in Javanese Sufism sense. Refer to its very aim for emphasizes radical submission to divine will, trusting that every event unfolds under God’s wisdom, even when it defies human understanding.[16].

Traditionally, *manut dalane Gusti* is cultivated through Sufi practices of remembrance (*dzikir*), contemplation, and acceptance of both joy and suffering as divine decrees. It is not passive resignation but active alignment of the heart with God’s path. In Javanese culture, this principle is often expressed through proverbs and rituals that teach patience (*sabar*) and surrender (*ikhlas*). The practice forms a counterbalance to human tendencies to grasp for control, offering peace through trust in divine orchestration [17].

In the digital context, this principle becomes especially relevant. Online platforms amplify the illusion of control by giving users the ability to curate their lives, filter realities, and receive instant responses. Yet they also amplify anxiety when unpredictable events—pandemics, personal loss, economic crises—expose the limits of human agency. Digital Sufism addresses this tragedy by bringing *manut dalane Gusti* into networked spaces, teaching surrender amidst hyperconnectivity. Indonesian Sufi teachers often use livestreamed sermons and social media to remind followers that while technology offers tools, ultimate outcomes rest in God’s hands [18].

A striking example is how online Sufi communities responded during the COVID-19 pandemic. As fear and uncertainty spread globally, Javanese Sufi networks held virtual *dzikir* sessions focusing on *manut dalane Gusti*, framing the crisis as a divine test and a call to deeper trust. Participants reported that the collective remembrance, even mediated by screens, brought profound comfort and reduced anxiety. This illustrates how Digital Sufism can transform digital platforms into sanctuaries of surrender, countering the tragedy of control with collective faith. Beyond crisis moments, *manut dalane Gusti* in digital form addresses everyday anxieties exacerbated by technology: career instability, social comparison on social media, and the constant pressure to optimize life. Online Sufi guidance encourages believers to balance effort with surrender, working diligently while releasing outcomes to God. This teaching challenges the digital culture of relentless self-management, offering an alternative grounded in divine trust rather than algorithmic certainty [19].

An important aspect of this adaptation is its communal dimension. In traditional settings, *manut dalane Gusti* is reinforced through shared rituals and teacher-disciple relationships. Digital Sufism recreates this through virtual pesantren, WhatsApp groups, and livestreamed *majelis*. These platforms allow followers to share personal struggles and receive guidance, transforming the solitary act of surrender into a collective spiritual posture. This communal reinforcement is crucial in countering the individualism of digital culture, reminding believers that submission to God’s path is both personal and communal. Theologically, integrating *manut dalane Gusti* into digital spaces underscores a core Sufi insight: technology does not diminish divine sovereignty. No matter how advanced algorithms become, they remain subordinate to God’s will. By teaching this within digital environments, Sufi teachers subtly reframe technology not as a rival to divine power but as another arena where surrender can be practiced. This perspective helps believers navigate the tension between using digital tools and maintaining spiritual humility [17].

This principle also addresses a subtler modern tragedy: the existential fatigue of constant choice. Digital culture overwhelms individuals with options—what to consume, believe, or become—creating decision anxiety. *Manut dalane Gusti* offers relief by grounding identity and purpose in divine guidance rather than endless self-curation. When internalized, it shifts the focus from “What path should I create?” to “How can I align with the path God is unfolding?” This shift provides not only spiritual peace but also psychological resilience in the face of overwhelming possibilities. Critics sometimes argue that emphasizing divine surrender in digital spaces risks encouraging passivity.

However, Javanese Sufism distinguishes between surrender and stagnation. *Manut dalane Gusti* is paired with *ikhtiar* (active striving), teaching that while humans act, they do so with awareness that ultimate results belong to God. Digital Sufism reinforces this balance, often using online content to encourage both responsible engagement with technology and deep trust in divine will. This balance offers a nuanced response to the tragedy of control: neither rejecting effort nor idolizing autonomy, but integrating both under divine guidance.

In Javanese metaphysical thought, accepting God's path is not merely coping with uncertainty but participating in a larger spiritual narrative. Every event, including disruption and loss, is a thread in the divine tapestry. The tragedy of control, then, becomes an invitation to shift from anxiety to awe. Digital Sufism leverages online storytelling, testimonies, and shared experiences to cultivate this perspective. Followers often share moments where surrender led to unexpected blessings, reinforcing the communal memory of divine wisdom overriding human plans [11]. Ultimately, *manut dalane Gusti* within Digital Sufism transforms the digital sphere from a space of control to a space of surrender. It teaches believers to navigate technology with humility, recognizing both its utility and its limits. In doing so, it offers a spiritual solution to one of the deepest modern tragedies: the restless desire to master life in a world that remains, at its core, in God's hands. By bringing this Javanese Sufi principle into digital religious communication, communities find a way to reconcile tradition with modernity, anxiety with faith, and human striving with divine trust.

### 3. Conclusion

The integration of *tirakat*, *ngalap barokah*, and *manut dalane Gusti* within Digital Sufism illustrates how Javanese mystical traditions adapt to modern spiritual crises. *Tirakat* responds to the loss of inner silence by transforming ascetic discipline into "digital fasting," creating sacred pauses in a world dominated by noise. *Ngalap barokah* addresses spiritual disconnection by using online platforms to transmit divine blessing, demonstrating that barokah transcends physical space when intention is sincere. *Manut dalane Gusti* offers peace in the face of the tragedy of control, guiding believers to surrender to divine will amidst hyper-curated, anxiety-driven digital environments. Together, these practices show that technology, rather than eroding spirituality, can serve as a vessel for maintaining sacred depth in contemporary life.

Despite these insights, empirical research is needed to understand the lived experiences of Digital Sufism. Ethnographic studies could explore how online *tirakat* shapes spiritual discipline and psychological well-being over time. Comparative research between physical and virtual *ngalap barokah* rituals would clarify perceptions of authenticity and the communal dimensions of digital blessing. Investigating the psychological impact of *manut dalane Gusti* teachings in digital settings could reveal their role in reducing anxiety and fostering resilience during crises.

Further inquiry into algorithmic mediation is also vital: how social media platforms shape the visibility of Sufi content and influence authority within digital religious communities. Research on younger generations' engagement would assess whether digital adaptations strengthen or dilute intergenerational spiritual continuity. Lastly, studying how these practices circulate globally online could illuminate how local Javanese traditions negotiate identity in transnational Digital Sufism networks. Such research would move beyond theory, offering grounded insights into how ancient mystical practices are being redefined in the digital era and how they can continue to provide spiritual healing in an age of fragmentation and hyperconnectivity.

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