

## **Beyond Algorithmic Spirituality: An Islamic Ontological Framework for Digital Religious Practice**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** This study aims to develop an Islamic ontological framework for digital religious practice as a response to the reductionism and fragmentation characterizing digital New Age spirituality. The research addresses a critical gap in contemporary scholarship, where digital spirituality is often examined descriptively or pragmatically without sufficient engagement with underlying ontological foundations, particularly within Islamic philosophical discourse. **Methodology:** This research employs a qualitative conceptual-philosophical approach using systematic conceptual synthesis. The study analyzes twenty-five peer-reviewed scholarly articles published between 2018 and 2025 on digital religiosity, New Age spirituality, and Islamic ontology, alongside classical Islamic sources. Following Jaakkola's framework for conceptual research, the analysis proceeds through thematic categorization, comparative ontological analysis across six dimensions, and abductive theoretical synthesis to construct a normative framework of Islamic cyberspirituality. **Findings:** The study identifies four constitutive patterns of digital New Age spirituality—individualism, syncretism, aesthetic spirituality, and commodification—which collectively generate three ontological ruptures: displacement of transcendence by subjective emotionalism, replacement of religious authority by algorithmic validation, and transformation of spiritual discipline into consumable experience. In contrast, Islamic cyberspirituality is shown to rest on two interlocking principles: *tawhid* as the ontological axis preserving the Creator-creation distinction and revelation-based truth, and *tazkiyah al-nafs* as a transformative discipline orienting spiritual growth vertically toward God. This framework repositions technology as *wasilah* (instrumental means) rather than *ghayah* (end), and generates concrete implications across five domains: digital da'wah, online Sufism, authority structures, attention governance, and religious identity formation. **Implications:** The findings offer actionable guidance for Muslim content creators, educators, religious institutions, technologists, and individual believers seeking to cultivate authentic digital spirituality. The framework provides evaluative criteria for digital religious content, ethical principles for technology design, and practical strategies for resisting commodification and algorithmic domination in religious practice. **Originality/Value:** This study contributes original value by moving beyond critique toward constructive ontological reconstruction. It is among the first to systematically integrate classical Islamic metaphysics with contemporary digital practice theory, demonstrating that *tawhid* and *tazkiyah al-nafs* provide robust conceptual resources for addressing algorithmic authority, attention commodification, and spiritual fragmentation in digital environments.

**Keywords:** Algorithmic authority; digital religiosity; Islamic cyberspirituality; New Age spirituality; *tawhid*.

### **Abstrak**

**Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan suatu kerangka ontologis Islam bagi praktik keagamaan digital sebagai respons terhadap reduksionisme dan fragmentasi yang menjadi ciri spiritualitas New Age digital. Studi ini mengisi celah penting dalam kajian kontemporer, di mana spiritualitas digital umumnya dikaji secara deskriptif atau pragmatis tanpa keterlibatan yang memadai terhadap fondasi ontologis yang mendasarinya, khususnya dalam diskursus filsafat Islam. **Metodologi:** Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif konseptual-filosofis melalui sintesis konseptual sistematis. Kajian dilakukan terhadap dua puluh lima artikel ilmiah bereputasi yang diterbitkan pada periode 2018–2025 mengenai religiositas digital, spiritualitas New Age, dan ontologi Islam, serta dibandingkan dengan sumber-sumber klasik Islam. Mengacu pada kerangka penelitian konseptual Jaakkola, analisis dilakukan melalui kategorisasi tematik, analisis ontologis komparatif pada enam dimensi, serta sintesis teoretis secara abduktif untuk membangun kerangka normatif spiritualitas siber

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Islam. **Temuan:** Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi empat pola konstitutif spiritualitas New Age digital, yaitu individualisme, sinkretisme, spiritualitas estetik, dan komodifikasi, yang secara kolektif menghasilkan tiga keretakan ontologis: pergeseran transendensi menuju emosionalisme subjektif, penggantian otoritas keagamaan dengan validasi algoritmik, serta transformasi disiplin spiritual menjadi pengalaman konsumtif. Sebaliknya, spiritualitas siber Islam bertumpu pada dua prinsip yang saling terkait, yakni *tawhid* sebagai poros ontologis yang menjaga perbedaan antara Pencipta dan ciptaan serta kebenaran yang berlandaskan wahyu, dan *tazkiyah al-nafs* sebagai disiplin transformatif yang mengarahkan pertumbuhan spiritual secara vertikal menuju Allah. Kerangka ini memosisikan ulang teknologi sebagai *wasilah* (sarana instrumental) alih-alih *ghayah* (tujuan), serta menghasilkan implikasi konkret pada lima ranah utama: dakwah digital, sufisme daring, struktur otoritas keagamaan, tata kelola perhatian, dan pembentukan identitas keagamaan. **Implikasi:** Temuan penelitian ini menawarkan panduan praktis bagi pembuat konten Muslim, pendidik, institusi keagamaan, teknolog, dan individu beriman dalam membangun spiritualitas digital yang autentik. Kerangka yang dikembangkan menyediakan kriteria evaluatif bagi konten keagamaan digital, prinsip etis bagi desain teknologi, serta strategi praktis untuk menolak komodifikasi dan dominasi algoritmik dalam praktik keagamaan. **Keaslian/Nilai:** Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi orisinal dengan melampaui kritik menuju rekonstruksi ontologis yang konstruktif. Studi ini termasuk yang pertama secara sistematis mengintegrasikan metafisika Islam klasik dengan teori praktik digital kontemporer, serta menunjukkan bahwa *tawhid* dan *tazkiyah al-nafs* merupakan sumber konseptual yang kokoh untuk merespons otoritas algoritmik, komodifikasi perhatian, dan fragmentasi spiritual dalam lingkungan digital.

Kata Kunci: Otoritas algoritmik; religiositas digital; spiritualitas siber Islam; spiritualitas New Age; tauhid.

## INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has fundamentally altered humanity's relationship with the sacred. Where spirituality once required institutional mediation, embodied ritual, and communal belonging, digital platforms now offer personalized, algorithmically-curated spiritual experiences accessible at the swipe of a screen. This transformation is not merely technological but ontological: it reshapes how transcendence is understood, experienced, and expressed in contemporary life. As meditation apps generate billions in revenue and social media influencers amass millions of followers through aestheticized spiritual content, critical questions emerge about the nature of digital religiosity—questions that concern not just practice or pedagogy, but the very metaphysical foundations of spiritual life in technologically saturated societies.

This transformation unfolds at a remarkable scale. Globally, meditation app users reached 241 million in 2024 with projected growth to 257 million in 2025, generating annual revenues exceeding USD 1.9 billion and forecasted to surpass USD 7 billion by 2029 (Statista, 2024). Yet longitudinal studies reveal critical instability: 58% of Calm app users abandon the platform within 350 days, and clinical trials of digital health apps consistently report very high dropout rates (Fowers, Berardi, Huberty, & Stecher, 2022; Torous, Nicholas, Larsen, Firth, & Christensen, 2018). This pattern suggests that app-based spirituality, despite its market success, often fails to sustain authentic transformation.

Simultaneously, institutional religion is increasingly mediated through digital platforms. Islamic content on YouTube grew from 6% of videos in 2011 to 13% in 2019, reflecting the platform's emergence as a central space for da'wah and religious discourse (Hanum, Al Farizi, & Awang, 2023; Mokodenseho et al., 2024; Novriyanto, Utari, & Satyawan, 2024; Pranoto, 2023; Ridwan & Rustandi, 2025). In Indonesia, Generation Z audiences consume religious content on YouTube for 1-3 hours daily, though often within algorithm-driven filter bubbles that limit exposure to diverse perspectives (Ahmmad, Shahzad, Iqbal, & Latif, 2025; Epafras, Kaunang, Jemali, & Setyono, 2021; Kitchens, Johnson, & Gray, 2020; Tyler, 2022). Instagram-based religious influencers collectively reach tens of millions of followers, significantly shaping spirituality and lifestyle choices (Ekinci, Dam, & Buckle, 2025; Febrian, 2024; Myers, Syrdal, Mahto, & Sen,

2023; Zaid, Fedtke, Shin, El Kadoussi, & Ibahrine, 2022). Cross-national data from over 202,000 individuals across 22 countries show that while belief in God or spiritual forces remains remarkably high 97% in Indonesia, 100% in Egypt, 85% in Turkey, much of this religiosity is now expressed through digital platforms characterized by individualization, aestheticization, and commodification (Aglozo et al., 2025).

These developments carry profound implications. Digital spirituality is not peripheral but has become a primary arena of contemporary religious life, creating both opportunities for enhanced literacy and risks of fragmented, consumer-oriented practice that hollows out transcendental meaning.

Scholarly discussions have examined these dynamics from multiple angles. First, research on New Age spirituality in digital environments documents its therapeutic, syncretic, and individualistic orientation. Bingaman (2023), Levin (2022) and Pinto and Vilaca (2023) analyze how New Age practices prioritize self-healing and cosmic energy over transcendent divinity, while Campbell (2025) highlights the aesthetic and performative dimensions of digital spirituality. These studies effectively diagnose the fragmentation and commodification of contemporary spiritual practice but remain largely descriptive, without addressing underlying ontological structures.

Second, scholarship on Islamic spirituality and modernity emphasizes *tawhid* (divine oneness) and *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) as essential to authentic religious life. Zaid et al. (Zaid et al., 2022) and Asar and Abdullah (2022) argue for reclaiming contemplative essence in the digital age, while Hakim, Sampurno, Abdullah, Kailani, and Larasati (2024) document Sufi adaptations to online environments. This literature establishes theological principles but does not systematically engage with digital practice theory or formulate comprehensive frameworks for cyberspirituality.

Third, studies of religiosity in digital media examine how online platforms reshape da'wah, authority, and community. Hidayat and Nuri (2024) analyze digital da'wah strategies, Sulaeman, Muttaqien, and Ali (2024) critique "hyperspirituality" among youth, and Levin (Levin, 2022) warns of how technology can reduce spirituality to performative symbolism. These works identify practical challenges but lack ontological grounding that could guide responses.

Despite these valuable contributions, existing scholarship suffers from three critical limitations. First, critiques of digital New Age spirituality remain descriptive rather than ontological, diagnosing symptoms of commodification, relativism, and superficiality without addressing the metaphysical foundations that produce these patterns. Second, Islamic responses focus primarily on practical adaptation or defensive reaction rather than philosophical reconstruction, leaving the ontological challenge posed by digital transformation largely unaddressed. Third, no existing study synthesizes *tawhid*-based ontology with digital practice theory to offer a constructive alternative framework that is both theologically authentic and practically applicable.

This ontological vacuum has consequences: without coherent metaphysical foundations, Islamic digital spirituality risks replicating the very fragmentation and commodification it seeks to overcome. Muslim content creators navigate algorithmic incentives without clear principles for distinguishing authentic da'wah from viral performance. Online Sufi communities struggle to preserve murshid-murid relationships in platforms designed for mass broadcasting. Individual believers consume religious content within attention economies optimized for compulsion rather than contemplation. These challenges are not merely technical or pedagogical but fundamentally ontological: they concern what spirituality *is*, how transcendence operates in mediated environments, and what constitutes authentic religious practice when technology becomes the primary medium of spiritual life.

This study addresses these gaps by grounding its analysis in classical Islamic ontology, particularly Ash'arite and Sufi conceptions of *tawhid* as the absolute oneness and transcendence of God. Tawhid

functions here not merely as a theological doctrine but as the organizing principle of all reality what we term the "ontological axis" of Islamic spirituality. It establishes a non-negotiable hierarchy between Creator and creation, carries epistemic consequences (truth is anchored in revelation rather than algorithmic amplification or self-preference), and generates ethical imperatives (human purpose is worship and stewardship, not self-curation as spiritual brand). Complementing *tawhid* is *tazkiyah al-nafs*, the disciplined purification of the soul from egocentrism toward sincerity (*ikhlās*), remembrance (*dhikr*), gratitude (*shukr*), and moral excellence (*akhlāq*). Unlike New Age "self-healing" which orbits the self and is easily commodified, *tazkiyah* orients transformation vertically toward God: growth is measured not by felt intensity but by increasing obedience, humility, and compassion.

Within digital contexts, this framework demands critical distinction between technology as *wasīlah* (instrumental means toward divine consciousness) versus technology as *ghayah* (end in itself) a distinction that New Age spirituality systematically collapses. Digital platforms can serve contemplative ends when properly ordered by *tawhidic* ontology and *tazkiyah* discipline, but default platform logics (virality, engagement optimization, aesthetic display) actively subvert transcendental orientation.

Against this background, this study pursues three interconnected objectives: To critically analyze the ontological ruptures produced by digital New Age spirituality, revealing how it displaces transcendence through therapeutic subjectivism, algorithmic authority, and commodified consumption. To articulate an Islamic ontological framework for cyberspirituality grounded in *tawhid* and *tazkiyah al-nafs*, demonstrating how these principles reconstitute digital space as arena for authentic spiritual practice. To derive practical implications of this framework for digital *da'wah*, online Sufi communities, attention governance, and the cultivation of *tawhid*-centered religious identity in algorithmic environments.

This study argues that New Age spirituality in its digital manifestation generates an ontological crisis by reducing transcendence to self-expression and commodified consumption, producing a metaphysically hollow religiosity that appeals emotionally but lacks vertical orientation. In contrast, Islamic cyberspirituality overcomes this crisis by restoring *tawhid* and *tazkiyah al-nafs* as foundational principles of digital religious consciousness, repositioning technology as contemplative *wasīlah* embedded within authentic scholarly lineages and oriented toward purification rather than performance. This framework offers not merely critique but a constructive alternative: a vision of digital spirituality that preserves divine-centered meaning while engaging technological mediation.

Within the broader discourse of cyber theology, this study positions *Islamic cyberspirituality* not merely as a descriptive account of Muslim digital practice, but as a normative ontological intervention. Rather than constituting a general subfield of cyber theology concerned with how religion adapts to digital media, Islamic cyberspirituality is articulated here as a critical internal response to what may be termed *algorithmic theology*—a mode of digitally mediated religiosity in which authority, meaning, and spiritual value are increasingly shaped by platform logics of personalization, visibility, and engagement optimization. In contrast to theological approaches that accommodate these logics pragmatically, Islamic cyberspirituality offers a distinct variant of digital theology grounded in Islamic ontology, where *tawhid* functions as the ontological axis and *tazkiyah al-nafs* as the transformative discipline. In this sense, the framework contributes to cyber theology by expanding its conceptual scope beyond mediation and practice toward foundational questions of being, transcendence, and ultimate purpose in digitally mediated religious life.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a systematic conceptual synthesis combining critical philosophical analysis with structured literature review. Given the ontological nature of the research problem which concerns fundamental questions about being, transcendence, and meaning rather than empirical phenomena a conceptual-philosophical approach is methodologically appropriate. The design follows Jaakkola's (2020) framework for conceptual analysis in qualitative research, involving: (1) systematic literature identification and selection, (2) comparative critical analysis of ontological frameworks, and (3) constructive synthesis of a novel theoretical framework integrating Islamic metaphysics with digital practice theory. This approach differs from empirical methods (surveys, experiments, ethnography) which would be suitable for studying actual user behavior, and from purely hermeneutic approaches which would focus exclusively on textual interpretation. Instead, conceptual synthesis allows examination of underlying metaphysical structures, comparison of ontological commitments across traditions (New Age vs Islamic), and formulation of normative frameworks that guide practice.

The analysis is bounded to English-language peer-reviewed scholarship published 2018-2025, focusing on three thematic clusters: digital New Age spirituality, Islamic ontology and metaphysics, and transformations of religiosity in digital media. This timeframe captures recent developments in digital spirituality while the thematic scope ensures comprehensive coverage of relevant philosophical and empirical literature. Classical Islamic sources particularly Qur'an, Hadith, and works of major theologians and Sufis (Al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam*) are included to ground the ontological framework in authentic Islamic tradition. Contemporary Islamic philosophy monographs supplement peer-reviewed articles where necessary. The study excludes: (1) empirical analyses of actual user behavior (which require different methods), (2) non-English language scholarship (a limitation acknowledged below), (3) digital phenomena unrelated to spirituality or religion, and (4) technical analyses of platform algorithms or interface design (except where directly relevant to ontological questions).

The corpus consists of twenty-five international peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science (2018-2025), supplemented by classical Islamic texts and contemporary philosophy monographs. Selection proceeded through systematic database searches in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar during August-November 2024. Search Strategy: Keywords included "New Age spirituality," "digital religiosity," "Islamic ontology," "cyberspirituality," "meditation apps," "online Islam," "digital da'wah," and Boolean combinations thereof (e.g., "New Age AND digital AND spirituality"). Initial searches yielded approximately 120 articles, which were screened by title and abstract for relevance.

**Inclusion Criteria:** Direct engagement with New Age spirituality OR Islamic ontology OR digital religiosity, published in peer-reviewed academic journals or reputable academic presses, available in English, published 2018-2025 for contemporary sources; no date restriction for classical sources, and explicit theoretical or philosophical framework (not purely descriptive journalism). **Exclusion Criteria:** Purely empirical studies without theoretical grounding, non-academic sources (blogs, popular media, non-peer-reviewed), studies on digital phenomena

unrelated to religion/spirituality, duplicate publications or conference proceedings later published as articles

After full-text review and quality assessment, twenty-five articles met all inclusion criteria and formed the primary corpus. These distributed across thematic clusters as follows: eight sources on digital New Age spirituality, ten on Islamic ontology and spirituality, and seven on transformations of digital religiosity. Classical Islamic sources were identified through standard theological reference works (Encyclopaedia of Islam, major Qur'an commentaries) and Islamic philosophy anthologies. All selected texts were catalogued with bibliographic details and assigned preliminary thematic codes. Selected articles were obtained through institutional database access and open-access repositories. Full texts were systematically read and annotated, with key passages extracted for analysis. Classical sources were consulted in English translations with reference to Arabic originals where necessary for terminological precision. For each source, the following information was recorded: (1) main theoretical arguments or frameworks, (2) empirical findings (if applicable), (3) ontological commitments (explicit or implicit), (4) treatment of technology and digital practice, and (5) relevance to research objectives. This information was organized in a structured database to facilitate systematic comparison and synthesis.

Analysis proceeded through three iterative stages: Stage 1: Thematic Categorization. Literature was coded inductively using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring patterns and concepts. Initial coding generated approximately forty provisional themes, which were refined through iterative review into three primary analytical categories: (1) characteristics of digital New Age spirituality, (2) ontological principles of Islamic spirituality, and (3) mechanisms of digital religious transformation. Each category contained sub-themes (e.g., "commodification," "algorithmic authority," "tawhid as ontological axis"). Coding employed a constant comparison method, where each new source was compared against existing codes to refine conceptual clarity. Stage 2: Comparative Critical Analysis. A structured comparison matrix was developed contrasting New Age and Islamic approaches across six dimensions: ontological foundations (what is ultimate reality?), epistemological authority (what validates truth?), practice orientations (what is spiritual method?), technological mediation (what is technology's role?), community structures (what constitutes religious authority?), and telos (what is ultimate purpose?). Each dimension was analyzed for internal coherence, practical implications, and compatibility with digital environments. This stage employed philosophical analysis techniques including conceptual disambiguation, logical consistency checking, and normative evaluation. Stage 3: Constructive Synthesis. Drawing on abductive reasoning (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), the analysis synthesized insights from Islamic ontology with observations about digital New Age patterns to formulate the Islamic Cyberspirituality framework. This involved: (1) identifying Islamic ontological principles (*tawhid, tazkiyah*) that address specific problems in digital New Age spirituality, (2) demonstrating how these principles reconstitute understanding of technology and practice, and (3) deriving practical implications for various domains (da'wah, Sufism, attention governance).

To ensure rigor, three validation strategies were employed: Triangulation: The framework was cross-validated by comparing contemporary scholarship findings with classical Islamic sources, ensuring theological authenticity. Where contemporary sources made claims about Islamic ontology, these were verified against primary texts (Qur'an, major theological works). Logical

**Consistency:** The framework was systematically checked for internal logical consistency, ensuring that derived implications followed from stated premises and that no contradictions existed between components. **Peer Review:** Draft formulations were discussed with colleagues in Islamic studies and philosophy of religion to refine conceptual clarity and identify potential blind spots.

As a conceptual study analyzing published literature, this research does not involve human participants and therefore does not require ethical approval from institutional review boards. All sources are properly cited following academic integrity standards, and direct quotations are clearly distinguished from paraphrased material. The study acknowledges its normative theological commitments while striving for fair representation of alternative positions.

It is important to clarify that this study does not aim to summarize, map, or aggregate existing literature in the manner of a conventional systematic or scoping review. Instead, the analytical process follows an *abductive conceptual construction*, as articulated in Jaakkola's (2020) framework for conceptual research. While the literature review provides the empirical-intellectual substrate, the framework of Islamic cyberspirituality is *constructed* through iterative movement between identified digital spiritual patterns and Islamic ontological principles. This involves (1) diagnosing ontological tensions and ruptures in digital New Age spirituality, (2) selecting Islamic metaphysical concepts (*tawhid* and *tazkiyah al-nafs*) that address these tensions at the level of being rather than practice alone, and (3) synthesizing these elements into a coherent normative framework. The resulting model is therefore not a descriptive synthesis of prior studies, but a theoretically generative contribution that reconfigures existing concepts into a new ontological architecture for digital religious practice.

## **RESULTS**

The systematic analysis of twenty-five peer-reviewed articles and classical Islamic sources yielded three primary findings that directly address the research objectives. First, the analysis identifies the ontological characteristics of digital New Age spirituality, revealing patterns of fragmentation and commodification. Second, it establishes the ontological architecture of Islamic cyberspirituality grounded in *tawhid* and *tazkiyah al-nafs*. Third, it determines structural implications for digital religious practice across five key domains. Each finding is supported by evidence from the literature and organized to provide a comprehensive response to the research questions.

Of the twenty-five sources analyzed, eight focused primarily on digital New Age spirituality (Bingaman, 2023; Fowers et al., 2022; Levin, 2022; Pinto & Vilaca, 2023; Statista, 2024; Subchi, Zulkifli, Latifa, & Sa'diyah, 2022; Torous et al., 2018), ten addressed Islamic ontology and spirituality (Asar & Abdullah, 2022; Febrian, 2024; Hakim et al., 2024; Ramlan, Ridzuan, Sultan Mohideen, & Ilyas, 2024; Raya, 2025; Saleh, Cangara, Sabreen, & Ab, 2022; Zaid et al., 2022) plus classical sources including Qur'an, Hadith, and works of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi), and seven examined transformations of digital religiosity (Aglozo et al., 2025; Andok, 2024; Hidayat & Nuri, 2024; Khusairi, 2025; Ridwan & Rustandi, 2025; Siuda, 2021; Sulaeman et al., 2024). Additional sources addressing overlapping themes (Muhamamba & Francis, 2023; Naila & Rohimi, 2024; Nordin, 2024; Raya, 2024; Ridho et al., 2023) provided supplementary evidence.

## **Ontological Characteristics of Digital New Age Spirituality**

### *Four Constitutive Patterns*

Thematic analysis of the literature on digital New Age spirituality revealed four primary patterns that characterize its expression in online environments. These patterns emerged consistently across multiple sources and represent distinct but interconnected dimensions of digital spiritual practice.

**Table 1. Constitutive Patterns of Digital New Age Spirituality**

<b>Pattern</b>	<b>Digital Expression</b>	<b>Supporting Evidence</b>
<b>Individualism</b>	DIY spirituality through YouTube tutorials, TikTok guides, personalized meditation practices	Bingaman (2023), Subchi et al. (2022), Levin (2022)
<b>Syncretism</b>	Eclectic mixing of yoga, crystals, astrology, mindfulness, and chakras without a coherent framework	Pinto & Vilaça (2023), Subchi et al. (2022)
<b>Aesthetic Spirituality</b>	Instagram visuals, "good vibes," inspirational quotes, digital art, curated spiritual identity	Bingaman (2023), Raya (2025)
<b>Commodification</b>	Meditation apps, online courses, healing merchandise, subscription services, influencer monetization	Statista (2024), Fowers et al. (2022), Torous et al. (2018)

Table 1 presents the four constitutive patterns of digital New Age spirituality identified through thematic analysis. Each pattern represents a distinct dimension of how spiritual practices manifest in digital environments, supported by empirical evidence from recent scholarly literature. The individualism pattern manifests in what scholars describe as "do-it-yourself" spirituality, where individuals curate personal spiritual practices from various traditions without institutional guidance (Bingaman, 2023; Subchi et al., 2022). YouTube and TikTok serve as primary platforms for this trend, offering step-by-step tutorials for meditation, energy work, and manifestation practices that users can adopt independently.

Syncretism appears in the eclectic combination of elements from disparate religious and spiritual traditions, yoga postures from Hinduism, crystal healing from New Age movements, mindfulness from Buddhism, and astrological interpretations assembled without attention to their original theological contexts or coherence (Pinto & Vilaca, 2023). The literature indicates this blending is facilitated by algorithmic recommendation systems that present diverse spiritual content as interchangeable options for personal consumption.

Aesthetic spirituality emphasizes visual presentation and emotional atmosphere over doctrinal content or sustained practice. Raya (2025) observes that the highest mystical

experiences, which traditionally require disciplined practice and cannot be easily communicated, are now packaged into consumable aesthetic forms Instagram posts featuring sunsets with overlaid inspirational quotes, carefully curated images suggesting spiritual enlightenment, and short videos conveying "spiritual vibes" through music and imagery.

Commodification transforms spiritual practices into market transactions. The literature documents that meditation app users reached 241 million globally in 2024, generating USD 1.9 billion in annual revenue with forecasts exceeding USD 7 billion by 2029 (Statista, 2024). These platforms typically offer subscription-based access to guided meditations, progress tracking, and premium content, structuring spirituality according to consumer logic.

### *The Ontological Void*

Analysis of these four patterns reveals an underlying ontological structure characterized by three interconnected ruptures in the relationship between self, transcendence, and practice.

First rupture: Displacement of transcendent reference. Multiple sources identify a shift from God or objective transcendence to subjective emotional states as the primary referent of spiritual practice. Levin (2022) documents how New Age discourse replaces God with "cosmic energy," "universal consciousness," or "inner divinity," blurring distinctions between Creator and creation. Spiritual practice becomes oriented toward therapeutic self-healing, mood regulation, or cultivation of positive feelings rather than relationship with transcendent reality. Subchi (2022) characterize this as psychologization: spirituality is reduced to psychological benefits (stress relief, emotional wellness) rather than encounter with the divine.

Second rupture: Algorithmic mediation of authority. The literature reveals transformation in how spiritual truth and practice are validated. Traditional religious authority vested in clergy, scholars, texts, or institutional hierarchies is replaced by algorithmic authority measured through platform metrics: likes, shares, follower counts, and engagement rates (Bingaman, 2023; Sulaeman et al., 2024). Hidayat and Nuri (2024) observe that religious legitimacy in digital spaces increasingly correlates with visibility rather than theological qualification. This produces what scholars term "celebrity preachers" and "spiritual influencers" whose authority derives from audience size rather than scholarly credentials or spiritual maturity.

Third rupture: Transformation of practice into consumption. Spiritual discipline traditionally required sustained effort, embodied ritual, and often discomfort or self-denial. The literature shows digital platforms restructure this into consumable content optimized for brief engagement. Fowers et al. (2022) found that 58% of Calm app users abandoned the platform within 350 days, while Torous et al. (2018) report consistently high dropout rates across digital health applications. These patterns suggest that app-based spirituality, despite market success, fails to sustain authentic transformation. Raya (2025) argue this occurs because profound spiritual experiences cannot be genuinely digitized they require embodied practice, sustained discipline, and often communal support yet digital New Age spirituality attempts to package them as aesthetic commodities.

### *Epistemological Relativism*

The literature identifies postmodern relativism as philosophical background to these ontological ruptures. Nordin (2024) and Muhamma and Francis (2023) analyze how postmodern thought rejects universal truth claims, asserting that truth is culturally constructed, personally

negotiated, or socially determined rather than objectively grounded. In digital environments, this manifests as "curated truth" users construct personal belief systems from algorithmically presented options according to individual preference (Muhamba & Francis, 2023)

Andok (2024) documents emergence of "hybrid social spaces" where individual religiosity becomes increasingly fragmented and spatially fluid, while Siuda (2021) shows how digital media in Turkey destabilizes inherited religious authority and encourages syncretic blends. These findings indicate that digital platforms structurally reinforce relativism by presenting all spiritual traditions as equal options in a marketplace of ideas, erasing questions of truth, coherence, or authenticity.

#### *Empirical Manifestations*

The ontological patterns identified above manifest in measurable behaviors and market dynamics: User engagement instability: Meditation app retention studies show 58% dropout within one year (Fowers et al., 2022), and clinical trials report very high abandonment rates (Torous et al., 2018), suggesting superficial engagement rather than sustained practice. Market scale: Global meditation app market reached 241 million users in 2024, generating USD 1.9 billion annually, projected to exceed USD 7 billion by 2029 (Statista, 2024). Platform dominance: Islamic content on YouTube grew from 6% (2011) to 13% (2019) of total religious videos (Mokodenseho et al., 2024; Ridwan & Rustandi, 2025). Indonesian Gen Z audiences spend 1-3 hours daily consuming religious content on YouTube (Khusairi, 2025). Influencer reach: Instagram-based religious influencers collectively reach tens of millions of followers, significantly shaping spiritual and lifestyle choices (Febrian, 2024; Ramlan et al., 2024). Persistent belief amid transformation: Cross-national survey data (n=202,000+ across 22 countries) shows belief in God/spiritual forces remains high 97% in Indonesia, 100% in Egypt, 85% in Turkey though increasingly expressed through individualized digital practices (Aglozo et al., 2025).

These empirical patterns confirm that digital spirituality represents massive scale transformation rather than marginal phenomenon, with ontological implications extending across billions of users globally.

### **Ontological Architecture of Islamic Cyberspirituality**

The second major finding establishes the ontological structure of Islamic cyberspirituality as an alternative framework addressing the ruptures identified above. This architecture rests on two foundational principles derived from classical and contemporary Islamic sources.

#### *Tawhid as Ontological Foundation*

Analysis of Islamic ontological literature reveals *tawhid* (divine oneness) functioning not merely as theological doctrine but as organizing principle of reality itself what multiple sources term the "ontological axis" of Islamic thought (Asar & Abdullah, 2022; Zaid et al., 2022).

Metaphysical structure. Classical sources (Qur'an, particularly Surat al-Ikhlas; major theological works of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi) establish *tawhid* as assertion of God's absolute oneness, transcendence, and priority over all derivative beings. Contemporary scholarship interprets this as establishing non-negotiable hierarchy between Creator and creation (Abdullah, 2022). Unlike New Age conceptions that blur or dissolve this distinction treating God as "cosmic

energy" or locating divinity within the self *tawhid* maintains categorical difference: God is Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*), creation is contingent (*mumkin al-wujud*), and no intermediate category exists.

Epistemic consequences. *Tawhid* generates specific epistemological commitments. Truth is anchored in divine revelation (Qur'an, Hadith) and reason ordered toward revelation, rather than determined by algorithmic amplification, majority consensus, or individual preference (Asar & Abdullah, 2022). This provides stable reference point against relativism: spiritual truth claims can be evaluated against revealed standards rather than constructed through personal curation or social negotiation.

Ethical imperatives. *Tawhid* establishes human purpose as worship ('ibādah) and stewardship (*khilāfah*) rather than self-expression or self-optimization (Abdullah, 2022). The literature shows this reframes spiritual practice: the goal is not cultivating positive emotions or curating spiritual identity, but aligning consciousness and action with divine will. Psychological benefits (tranquility, purpose) are understood as effects of proper orientation rather than primary objectives.

Against psychologization. Multiple sources emphasize that *tawhid* resists reduction of spirituality to psychology (Abdullah, 2022; Zaki, 2024). Spiritual states calm, joy, peace are not dismissed but understood as contingent signs to be interpreted within vertical relationship to God rather than cultivated as ends in themselves. This preserves transcendental orientation that New Age spirituality loses.

### *Tazkiyah al-Nafs as Transformative Method*

The literature identifies *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) as the practical-existential dimension complementing *tawhid*'s ontological foundation.

Classical grounding. Qur'anic verses (particularly Surat al-Shams 91:7-10) establish purification of the soul as essential to spiritual success. Classical Sufi literature, especially Al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, develops comprehensive methodology: identifying diseases of the heart (pride, envy, anger), cultivating virtues (humility, gratitude, patience), and employing specific practices (dhikr/remembrance, muraqabah/vigilance, muhasabah/self-reckoning) (Hakim et al., 2024; Raya, 2025).

Vertical orientation. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that *tazkiyah* orients transformation toward God rather than toward the self (Hakim et al., 2024). Unlike New Age "self-healing" which orbits the ego and reinforces self-focus, *tazkiyah* works to thin ego's reflexes and thicken awareness of the Divine. The measure of progress is not felt intensity or emotional satisfaction but increasing obedience, humility, sincerity (*ikhlās*), and compassion qualities observable in behavior and validated within community rather than self-reported.

Incompatibility with performance. The literature stresses *tazkiyah*'s incompatibility with performative spirituality (Raya, 2025; Sulaeman et al., 2024). Spiritual practices are evaluated by capacity to reduce self-concern and increase God-consciousness, not by their aesthetic appeal or social media engagement. Practices that increase spiritual pride, desire for recognition, or attachment to results undermine *tazkiyah* regardless of their outward correctness.

Disciplined methodology. Unlike eclectic syncretism of New Age approaches, *tazkiyah* follows systematic methodology rooted in revelation and developed through centuries of spiritual

practice. This provides coherent framework rather than arbitrary collection of techniques (Hakim et al., 2024).

### *Comparative Framework*

The comparative analysis across six dimensions yields the following systematic contrasts:

**Table 2. Comparative Ontological Framework: New Age Digital Spirituality vs. Islamic Cyberspirituality**

Dimension	New Age Digital Spirituality	Islamic Cyberspirituality	Sources
<b>Ontological Center</b>	Self / Cosmic Energy / Universal Consciousness	Allah (tawhid): categorical Creator-creation distinction	Levin (2022), Zaid et al (2022), Asar and Abdullah (2022)
<b>Spiritual Method</b>	Self-healing, therapeutic techniques, aesthetic experiences	<i>Tazkiyah al-nafs</i> : disciplined soul purification oriented toward God	Subchi et al. (2022), Hakim et al. (2024)
<b>Authority Structure</b>	Influencers, algorithms, personal intuition, crowd validation	Scholars ('ulamā), spiritual guides ( <i>murshid</i> ), authentic lineage ( <i>sanad</i> )	Bingaman (2023), Hakim et al. (2024), Hidayat and Nuri (2024)
<b>Technology's Role</b>	Consumer platform for experiences, content delivery, engagement optimization	<i>Wasilah</i> (instrumental means) for remembrance, reflection, and community	Ridho et al. (2023), Zaid et al. (2022)
<b>Epistemology</b>	Relativism, personal truth, curated beliefs	Revelation-anchored truth, objective transcendence	Zaid et al. (2022), Raya et al. (2025)
<b>Telos (Ultimate Purpose)</b>	Emotional satisfaction, self-actualization, positive vibes, curated identity	Authentic nearness to God ( <i>qurb ilallah</i> ), inner transformation, righteous action	Zaid et al. (2022), Raya (2025)

Table 2 systematically compares the ontological foundations of New Age digital spirituality and Islamic cyberspirituality across six critical dimensions. The comparison reveals fundamental structural differences rather than mere variations in practice or expression. This framework demonstrates systematic contrasts rather than superficial differences. Each dimension reflects underlying ontological commitments that generate distinct approaches to practice, authority, technology, and purpose.

### **Structural Implications for Digital Religious Practice**

The third major finding identifies five domains where the ontological framework generates specific structural implications for how digital technology can serve authentic spiritual practice.

### *Technological Repositioning: From Platform to Wasīlah*

The analysis reveals three mechanisms through which Islamic cyberspirituality repositions technology: Technology as contemplative means. Multiple sources emphasize technology must function as *wasīlah* (instrumental means) toward divine consciousness rather than *ghayah* (end in itself) (Asar & Abdullah, 2022; Zaid et al., 2022). This requires intentional design: platforms and practices should prompt reflection, facilitate remembrance, and support embodied worship rather than maximizing engagement time or optimizing for addiction. Practically, this means preferring features that support sustained practice (scheduled reminders for prayer, structured Qur'an recitation plans) over features that maximize screen time (infinite scroll, autoplay, algorithmically generated recommendations).

Re-embedding authority in scholarly lineages. The literature identifies crisis of authority in digital religiosity, where algorithmic visibility replaces scholarly qualification (Bingaman, 2023; Sulaeman et al., 2024). Islamic cyberspirituality responds by insisting on transparent lineages and accountable communities. Hakim et al. (2024) document how online Sufi teaching preserves *murshid-murid* (teacher-student) relationships through video conferencing, structured curricula, and regular accountability, rather than one-way broadcast. Hidayat and Nuri (2024) emphasize importance of connecting digital learners with qualified scholars rather than unverified influencers.

Attention as spiritual trust. Since attention is both currency of worship and commodity of platforms, its governance becomes spiritual obligation (Asar & Abdullah, 2022; Zaid et al., 2022). The literature advocates ascetic strategies: intentional limits on screen time, distraction-free modes, liturgical structuring of time (daily rhythms organized around *salāh*/prayer and *adhkār*/remembrance). This treats attention as *amānah* (trust from God) to be protected rather than resource to be exploited.

### *Practical Domains of Application*

The synthesis identifies specific implications across five domains:

**Table 3. Domain-Specific Implications of Islamic Cyberspirituality**

Domain	Risks in Digital Spirituality	Islamic Cyberspiritual Response	Supporting Evidence
<b>Digital Da'wah</b>	Virality metrics, celebrity culture, aesthetic packaging, superficial engagement	Transcendental reflection, literacy-based da'wah, cultivation of <i>taqwā</i> (God-consciousness) over views	Hidatat and Nuri (2024), Naila & Rohimi (2024), Saleh et al. (2022)
<b>Online Sufism</b>	Exhibitionism, spectacle, "hyperspirituality," commodified mysticism	<i>Murshid-murid</i> lineage preservation, sincerity ( <i>ikhlās</i> ), presence over performance	Hakim et al. (2024), Raya et al. (2025), Sulaeman et al. (2024)
<b>Authority Structures</b>	Algorithmic validation, unverified influencers, misinformation spread	Re-embedding guidance in scholarly lineages ( <i>sanad</i> ),	Bingaman (2023), Hakim et al. (2024), Raya et al. (2025)

		transparent qualifications, community accountability	
<b>Attention Governance</b>	Algorithmic capture, compulsive use, commodified apps, distraction	Ascetic limits, liturgical structuring, remembrance-centered technology, <i>muhāsabah</i> (self-reckoning)	Fowers et al. (2022), Torous et al. (2018), Zaid et al. (2022), Asar and Abdullah (2022)
<b>Identity Formation</b>	Patchwork religiosity, postmodern relativism, fragmented beliefs, curated personas	<i>Tawhidic</i> unity, <i>tazkiyah</i> discipline, anchored ontology, community belonging	Muhamba and Francis (2023), Nordin (2024), Andok (2024), Siuda (2021)

Table 3 presents domain-specific implications arising from the comparative ontological analysis, identifying both risks inherent in digital spirituality and corresponding Islamic cyberspiritual responses across five critical domains.

#### *Case Study Evidence*

The literature provides concrete examples demonstrating framework application: Digital da'wah effectiveness. Naila & Rohimi (2024) document how YouTube-based religious education enhanced literacy among Nahdlatul Ulama youth when content emphasized reflection and learning rather than entertainment. This contrasts with Raya's (2025) observation that "celebrity preachers" measured by engagement metrics often produce superficial understanding despite large audiences.

Online Sufi adaptation. Hakim et al. (2024) analyze Gus Uil's online teachings, demonstrating how Sufi instruction can be rearticulated in virtual environments while maintaining theological depth and ethical formation. The case shows successful preservation of *murshid-murid* accountability through regular interaction, personalized guidance, and community structure, rather than one-way broadcasting.

Attention instability. Fowers et al. (2022) and Torous et al. (2018) document high dropout rates in meditation apps (58% within one year), suggesting that consumer-platform models fail to sustain practice. This empirically validates theoretical concern that technology-as-commodity undermines transformation, supporting the framework's emphasis on technology-as-*wasīlah*.

Hybrid religious spaces. Andok (2024) and Siuda (2021) describe emergence of fragmented, fluid religious identities in digital environments, confirming that default platform logics erode coherent worldviews. This provides empirical context for the framework's emphasis on *tawhidic* unity as countermeasure to fragmentation.

The analysis yields three primary findings. First, digital New Age spirituality exhibits four constitutive patterns (individualism, syncretism, aesthetic spirituality, commodification) that generate three ontological ruptures: displacement of transcendence by subjective emotion, replacement of institutional authority by algorithmic validation, and transformation of spiritual practice into aesthetic consumption. Second, Islamic cyberspirituality offers alternative ontological

architecture grounded in *tawhid* (establishing Creator-creation hierarchy against relativism) and *tazkiyah al-nafs* (orienting transformation vertically toward God rather than horizontally toward self). Third, this framework generates specific structural implications across five domains—digital da'wah, online Sufism, authority structures, attention governance, and identity formation—supported by case study evidence demonstrating successful applications and validating theoretical concerns.

These findings directly address the research objectives by: (1) revealing ontological characteristics of digital New Age spirituality, (2) articulating Islamic ontological framework for cyberspirituality, and (3) deriving practical implications for digital religious practice. The results provide foundation for interpretive discussion of their significance, limitations, and implications for theory, practice, and future research.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study yields three principal findings regarding the ontological foundations of Islamic cyberspirituality as an alternative to digital New Age spirituality. First, the analysis reveals that digital New Age spirituality is characterized by a fundamental ontological void. Transcendence is displaced by subjective emotionalism, where spiritual practice aims at therapeutic self-healing and mood regulation rather than relationship with transcendent reality. Authority is mediated algorithmically rather than institutionally, with religious legitimacy determined by engagement metrics (likes, followers, shares) rather than scholarly qualification or spiritual maturity. Spiritual practice itself is commodified into aesthetic consumption, packaged through meditation apps generating billions in revenue yet producing high dropout rates (58% within one year), suggesting superficial engagement rather than sustained transformation. This void manifests empirically in the massive scale of digital spirituality 241 million meditation app users, billions in revenue, millions of social media posts yet structural instability indicating inability to sustain authentic practice.

Second, the study establishes that Islamic cyberspirituality is architecturally grounded in two interlocking principles that address this ontological void. *Tawhid* functions as the ontological axis, preserving the Creator-creation hierarchy against relativism, anchoring truth in revelation rather than algorithmic amplification, and reorienting purpose toward worship rather than self-optimization. *Tazkiyah al-nafs* operates as the transformative method, disciplining the soul through systematic practices (dhikr, muraqabah, muhasabah) oriented vertically toward God rather than horizontally toward ego. Together, these principles reconstitute digital space: technology shifts from consumptive platform to contemplative *wasilah*, authority re-embeds in scholarly lineages rather than algorithmic visibility, and practice aims at purification rather than performance.

Third, application of this framework generates specific ethical and practical implications across five domains. In digital da'wah, success is measured by cultivation of *taqwā* (God-consciousness) rather than virality. In online Sufism, *murshid-murid* lineages are preserved against exhibitionist spectacle. In authority structures, guidance re-embeds in transparent scholarly credentials and accountable communities. In attention governance, liturgical discipline protects consciousness against algorithmic capture. In identity formation, *tawhidic* unity resists fragmentation into patchwork religiosity. Case studies demonstrate successful applications

(YouTube-enhanced literacy, online Sufi communities maintaining depth) while validating theoretical concerns (app dropout rates confirming commodification problems).

These findings address the research objectives by providing comprehensive ontological alternative that both critiques reductionism of New Age digital spirituality and constructs theologically authentic framework for Islamic digital religious practice. The discussion now interprets these findings' theoretical significance, situates them within existing scholarship, acknowledges limitations, and derives implications for practice and future research.

This study makes three distinct theoretical contributions to existing scholarship that merit explicit articulation. First contribution: From critique to construction. While previous research has effectively documented risks of digital religiosity commodification (Ridho et al., 2023), superficiality (Sulaeman et al., 2024), relativism (Muhamba & Francis, 2023) and described Islamic spiritual principles (Asar & Abdullah, 2022; Zaid et al., 2022), no prior work has synthesized these into systematic ontological framework specifically for digital contexts. Existing scholarship occupies two camps: critics who diagnose problems without offering alternatives, and traditionalists who reassert principles without engaging digital realities. This study bridges the gap by formulating Islamic cyberspirituality as constructive framework that neither rejects technology wholesale nor accommodates uncritically to platform logics. The concept itself Islamic cyberspirituality names previously untheorized space where classical metaphysics meets contemporary digital practice.

Second contribution: Ontological rather than merely practical analysis. Much existing literature addresses digital religion at practical or sociological levels: how Muslims use social media (Ramlan et al., 2024), how platforms reshape da'wah (Hidayat & Nuri, 2024), how algorithms affect religious authority (Bingaman, 2023). These studies provide valuable empirical insights but rarely examine underlying metaphysical structures. This study demonstrates that practical problems why apps fail to sustain practice, why influencer authority proves unstable, why syncretic spirituality proliferates stem from ontological ruptures: loss of transcendental reference, collapse of Creator-creation distinction, psychologization of spiritual purpose. By addressing ontological foundations rather than surface phenomena, the framework provides deeper explanatory power and more enduring guidance as technologies evolve.

Third contribution: Demonstrating classical tradition's contemporary relevance. The framework shows that premodern Islamic metaphysics far from being obsolete or irrelevant to digital modernity offers resources for critiquing and reconstructing contemporary technoculture. *Tawhid* and *tazkiyah*, concepts developed centuries before digital technology, prove remarkably apt for diagnosing and addressing specifically modern problems: algorithmic authority, attention capture, commodified experience. This challenges assumptions about incompatibility between tradition and technological modernity, suggesting instead that robust metaphysical traditions may be precisely what enables critical engagement with technology rather than passive adaptation to it.

These findings both confirm and extend existing scholarly observations in ways that clarify the study's positioning within broader academic conversations. Confirmations and extensions. The identification of New Age spirituality's ontological void aligns with Levin's (2022) critique of "cosmic energy" replacing God and blurring Creator-creation distinctions. However, this study extends Levin's analysis by systematically connecting this theological problem to digital platform structures showing how algorithmic recommendation systems, engagement optimization, and

aesthetic presentation actively reinforce ontological confusion. Similarly, Raya (2025) observation that mystical experiences cannot be digitized into consumable aesthetics is confirmed, but this study provides ontological explanation: genuine mystical experience requires vertical relationship with transcendent reality (*tawhid* orientation) and disciplined purification (*tazkiyah*), both of which resist commodification by nature.

The empirical patterns of commodification and dropout rates documented here corroborate concerns raised by Torous et al. (2018) and Fowers et al. (2022) regarding instability of app-based spiritual practice. This study adds ontological interpretation: apps fail not due to poor design but because consumer-platform logic fundamentally contradicts spiritual transformation's requirements (sustained discipline, ego-thinning, vertical orientation). This suggests design improvements alone cannot solve the problem; ontological reorientation is necessary.

Regarding digital *da'wah*, the findings align with Naila & Rohimi's (Naila & Rohimi, 2024) documentation of enhanced literacy through YouTube when content emphasizes reflection, and with Raya's (2024) observation that celebrity preachers operating by platform logic produce superficial engagement. This study provides theoretical framework explaining these differential outcomes: *da'wah* succeeds when it functions as *wasīlah* directing attention toward transcendent reality and embodied practice, but fails when it becomes *ghayah* measured by metrics disconnected from spiritual formation.

Divergences and critical responses. This study diverges significantly from technopessimist accounts that view digital platforms as inherently corrosive to authentic religiosity. While scholars like Ridho et al. (2023) and Sulaeman et al. (2024) emphasize primarily risks of digital spirituality, this framework demonstrates that technology can function as contemplative *wasīlah* when properly ordered by *tawhidic* ontology and *tazkiyah* discipline. The case studies of Gus Ulil's online Sufi teachings (Hakim et al., 2024) and NU youth's enhanced literacy (Naila & Rohimi, 2024) support this constructive possibility, showing that the problem lies not in technology itself but in how it is ontologically framed and practically deployed.

Furthermore, while postmodern scholars like Muhamba and Francis (2023) emphasize erosion of universal truth claims in digital spaces and accept this as inevitable feature of contemporary life, this study affirms contra postmodern relativism that revelation-anchored truth can and must structure digital religious practice. This represents theological assertion grounded in *tawhid*: if God is ontologically absolute and revelation is epistemologically authoritative, then truth cannot be reduced to algorithmic negotiation or personal curation regardless of cultural pressures toward relativism. The framework thus resists both uncritical adoption of digital culture and wholesale rejection of technological mediation, charting third path that engages technology while preserving transcendental orientation.

The study also extends beyond Andok (2024) and Siuda (2021) documentation of hybrid, fragmented religious identities in digital spaces by offering ontological remedy rather than merely description. Where these scholars observe fragmentation as empirical fact, this framework proposes *tawhidic* unity as normative principle and *tazkiyah* as practical discipline for resisting fragmentation. This shifts from sociological observation to theological intervention.

The significance of these findings extends beyond academic taxonomy to address pressing practical concerns and broader theoretical debates. Practical urgency. With over 240 million meditation app users globally, billions of dollars in spiritual commodity markets, and increasing percentages of religious populations engaging faith primarily through digital platforms, the

question of how to cultivate authentic spirituality in these environments becomes urgent. The framework provides actionable guidance for multiple stakeholders: Muslim digital content creators seeking to avoid commodification while reaching audiences can use *tawhid-tazkiyah* principles to evaluate content (Does this direct attention toward God or toward the influencer? Does it prompt embodied practice or passive consumption?); Islamic educational institutions adapting traditional pedagogy to online environments can structure digital curricula around *wasilah* concept, ensuring technology serves rather than supplants face-to-face teaching; individual believers navigating algorithmic attention economies gain criteria for discernment and practices for protection (liturgical rhythms, intentional limits, *muhasabah*).

Theoretical implications for philosophy of religion. The study contributes to ongoing debates about religion's future in technologically saturated societies. Against secularization narratives predicting religion's decline as societies modernize and technologize, the framework demonstrates religious tradition's capacity to engage technology critically while preserving core commitments. Against market theories predicting religion's inevitable commodification as it enters digital spaces, the framework shows how *tawhid*-grounded ontology resists commodification by maintaining transcendental reference that cannot be reduced to consumer logic. Against postmodern relativism's assumption that universal truth claims cannot survive in pluralistic digital environments, the framework affirms possibility of revelation-anchored truth structuring practice without requiring theocratic enforcement.

More broadly, the success of *tawhid* and *tazkiyah* as organizing principles suggests that classical metaphysical traditions Islamic, but potentially others as well possess resources for navigating digital transformation that secular liberal frameworks may lack. Secular approaches to technology ethics typically rely on procedural principles (consent, transparency, fairness) or consequentialist reasoning (maximizing welfare, minimizing harm), but struggle to articulate substantive goods or transcendental purposes that technology should serve. Religious ontologies provide exactly this: thick conceptions of human flourishing, ultimate purposes grounding ethical evaluation, and communal practices embodying these commitments. This may explain why religious communities, despite initial skepticism, often prove remarkably adaptive to new technologies while secular institutions struggle with meaning crises.

Challenging disciplinary boundaries. The study demonstrates value of bringing classical Islamic philosophy into conversation with contemporary media studies, digital sociology, and technology ethics fields that rarely engage seriously with premodern metaphysics. By showing how *tawhid* and *tazkiyah* illuminate contemporary problems that secular frameworks struggle to address (attention capture, meaning fragmentation, authority crises), the study suggests that interdisciplinary work bridging theology and technology studies may be more fruitful than either field pursuing these questions in isolation.

This study demonstrates several methodological strengths rooted in its systematic and integrative design. The analysis synthesizes three distinct scholarly domains digital media studies (8 sources), Islamic philosophy and theology (10 sources plus classical texts), and empirical research on digital religiosity (7 sources) bridging disciplines rarely brought into conversation. This interdisciplinary architecture addresses limitations common to single-discipline approaches: media scholarship that engages digital religion without theological depth, and theological discourse that neglects digital materialities. Incorporating contemporary peer-reviewed literature (2018-

2025) alongside classical Islamic sources grounds the framework simultaneously in current scholarship and authentic tradition. The structured comparative methodology employing systematic matrices across six dimensions (ontological center, method, authority, technology role, epistemology, telos) provides conceptual precision often absent in religion-technology discourse, specifying exactly how New Age and Islamic approaches diverge and operationalizing the framework for practical evaluation. Unlike purely speculative philosophy, the study integrates empirical evidence meditation app retention data, YouTube usage patterns, cross-national surveys grounding theoretical claims in observable phenomena while maintaining philosophical depth. Triangulation validates the framework by cross-referencing contemporary scholarship against classical primary sources (Qur'an, Hadith, major theological works), ensuring theological authenticity and strengthening credibility within Islamic scholarly discourse.

However, several limitations constrain interpretation of findings. As a conceptual-philosophical study, the research lacks ethnographic engagement with actual digital Muslim communities or empirical observation of user interactions with technologies. The framework thus represents normative ideals rather than descriptive accounts of existing practice. Whether Muslim social media users experience *tawhid*-grounded ontology as theorized, whether online Sufi communities successfully preserve murshid-murid relationships, whether liturgical attention governance proves practically sustainable these remain empirical questions requiring dedicated investigation through implementation studies, user interviews, or ethnographic research. The literature restriction to English-language scholarship likely underrepresents significant work in Arabic, Malay/Indonesian, Turkish, Urdu, and other languages where Islamic digital practices receive extensive scholarly attention, potentially missing important nuances regarding Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) of digital technologies, regional social media usage patterns, and Islamic civil society online. The framework's emphasis on Sunni orthodoxy particularly Ash'arite theology and Sufi spirituality may limit applicability to other theological schools: Shi'a conceptions of authority with distinct roles for *maraji'i*, Salafi skepticism toward Sufism and scriptural literalism, modernist reform movements with alternative relationships to tradition. These theological variations suggest the framework would benefit from explicit cross-sectarian dialogue rather than implicitly assuming universal applicability. Several dimensions receive insufficient theoretical attention: gender (differential applications to Muslim women's digital practices, gendered patterns in digital spirituality), socioeconomic factors (class-based access variations, platform political economy and data extraction capitalism requiring explicit theological engagement), and environmental concerns (obligations regarding digital infrastructure's energy consumption and electronic waste from Islamic ontological perspectives). Finally, while the framework addresses ontological principles intended to transcend specific technologies, rapid evolution of platform features (algorithms, interfaces, affordances) necessitates continuous theological reflection. Though *tawhid* and *tazkiyah* remain stable, their application requires ongoing scholarly engagement rather than static formulation, constituting an inherent temporal limitation in technology-focused research.

Several interpretive cautions are essential for properly contextualizing these findings. First, the framework represents an ideal-typical model of Islamic cyberspirituality consciously structured by *tawhid* and *tazkiyah*, not a descriptive account of current Muslim digital practice. Actual online Muslim religiosity exhibits considerable messiness: *tawhidic* commitments coexist with pragmatic accommodations to platform logics, Sufi spirituality blends with consumer practices, and scholarly authority intersects with influencer culture. The gap between normative

framework and empirical reality should not indicate framework failure but rather demonstrate that ideals require intentional cultivation rather than automatic emergence.

Second, the critique of New Age spirituality targets philosophical reductionism the ontological collapse of transcendence into emotion, Creator into creation, and practice into consumption not a blanket dismissal of individualized practice, aesthetic expression, or syncretic exploration. The concern addresses specifically ontological confusion and metaphysical hollowness rather than stylistic diversity or personal piety. Many New Age practitioners may maintain genuine spiritual depth despite problematic conceptual frameworks; the critique engages philosophical structures rather than judging individuals.

Third, the articulated framework of Islamic cyberspirituality should be understood as initiating conversation rather than foreclosing it. The framework invites refinement through critical engagement: clarifying ambiguous aspects, addressing divergences across Islamic theological schools, examining how empirical realities challenge or complicate theoretical claims, and identifying dimensions requiring further attention. Academic progress emerges through iterative development rather than definitive pronouncement.

The framework generates specific guidance across stakeholder domains in digital religious practice. Digital content creators and da'wah organizations should fundamentally reconceptualize success metrics, moving beyond virality, view counts, and follower growth metrics aligned with platform logics but disconnected from spiritual formation toward quality indicators assessing genuine engagement: implementation of practices, substantive follow-up questions, and connections with local scholars and communities. This requires designing content that explicitly prompts offline action with concrete implementable practices (specific du'ā' memorization, muhasabah reflection questions, local mosque resources); measuring impact through engagement quality rather than quantity by tracking sustained conversation and reported behavior changes; collaborating with qualified scholars to ensure theological accuracy while maintaining credential transparency; implementing "digital fasting" prompts that prioritize embodied worship over watch-time maximization; and employing platforms strategically as wasīlah by directing audiences toward deeper resources rather than treating platforms as ends in themselves.

Islamic educational institutions madrasas, pesantrens, Islamic universities adapting to online environments should integrate *tawhid* and *tazkiyah* as explicit learning outcomes through contemplative pedagogy fostering presence over performance and sincerity over spectacle; establishing quality standards for online spiritual guidance that preserve murshid-murid accountability through regular personalized sessions and community peer review; developing digital literacy programs incorporating ethical attention management and recognition of platform manipulation; and creating institutional support for slow, deep learning against platform pressures for brevity and novelty.

Individual believers can apply the framework through cultivating liturgical rhythms structuring screen time around salāh and adhkār; seeking scholars with transparent lineages over unverified influencers; practicing regular muhasabah about digital consumption's effects on God-consciousness; employing technology intentionally as wasīlah through clear pre-use intentions and preference for text over video; and protecting attention as *amānah* by treating consciousness as divine trust requiring stewardship.

Platform designers and Muslim technologists should embed cyberspiritual principles by prioritizing features supporting sustained practice over addictive engagement (structured curricula over infinite content, scheduled reminders over interruption-optimized notifications); building contemplative pauses and reminders of divine presence into interfaces; designing distraction-minimizing features (no autoplay, no infinite scroll, clear endpoints, prominent exit options); integrating scholarly oversight and community accountability mechanisms; and measuring success through practice sustainability rather than engagement metrics.

Religious authorities and policymakers should develop voluntary guidelines for authentic digital religious content establishing standards for scholarly credentials and quality benchmarks; support initiatives connecting youth with qualified scholars online; address religious misinformation through education in critical evaluation skills rather than censorship; and recognize digital spirituality as legitimate scholarly domain requiring serious institutional engagement.

The framework opens numerous inquiry avenues across empirical, theoretical, and practical dimensions. Empirical validation studies are essential for testing practical effectiveness: ethnographic research examining how *tawhid* and *tazkiyah* actually function in digital practice, identifying obstacles and necessary adaptations; longitudinal studies comparing outcomes of "Islamic cyberspiritual" interventions with conventional approaches across metrics like practice retention and long-term transformation; comparative case studies analyzing framework manifestation across platforms (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok) and Muslim communities (Arab, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Western); and user experience research identifying design features genuinely supporting contemplative practice versus those reinforcing consumption.

Theoretical extensions should pursue integration with political economy critiques of platform capitalism's attention and data extraction, examining Islamic theological resources for critiquing surveillance capitalism and algorithmic governance; dialogue across Islamic theological schools exploring Shi'a conceptions of authority and imamate, Salafi scriptural literalism and Sufi skepticism, and modernist reform contributions; gender analysis examining Muslim women's distinctive digital spiritual practices and application to women-only spaces; generational analysis investigating how digital-native Gen Z Muslims interpret *tawhid* and *tazkiyah* differently; and comparative religious studies exploring Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Jewish responses to digital spirituality.

Practical development projects invite implementation through designing and beta-testing Islamic apps built explicitly on cyberspiritual principles (Qur'an apps using *wasīlah* design, contemplative prayer reminders, scholarly-accountable learning platforms); developing training curricula for "digital murshids" adapting traditional spiritual guidance to virtual environments; creating voluntary ethical guidelines for Muslim social media influencers emphasizing sincerity and audience protection; and piloting "contemplative technology" programs in Islamic schools integrating liturgical rhythms and attention management with traditional religious education.

Several critical questions remain beyond this study's scope. First, authenticity in anonymity: How can *tazkiyah* traditionally requiring murshid-murid relationship, mutual knowledge, and accountability be authenticated in anonymous or pseudonymous online spaces? What minimum conditions enable authentic *tarbiyah* digitally without embodied co-presence? Second, embodiment and mediation: Given Islamic tradition's emphasis on bodily participation in worship (*salāh*'s physical movements, *hajj*'s circumambulation, fasting's discipline), how does digital

mediation affect spiritual formation? Can virtual halaqas genuinely replicate embodied presence at a scholar's feet? Third, algorithmic *wasīlah*: Can algorithmic systems genuinely function as *wasīlah*, or do they inherently impose market logics incompatible with *tawhidic* ontology? Can algorithms be designed serving spiritual purposes, or does algorithmic logic itself contradict contemplative orientation? Fourth, ecological obligations: What are Islamic obligations regarding digital infrastructure's environmental costs—data center energy consumption, cryptocurrency carbon emissions, electronic waste toxicity from *tawhidic* perspectives emphasizing *khilāfah* (stewardship of creation)? Finally, collective versus individual practice: Given Islamic tradition's emphasis on *ummah* and *jama'ah*, how can digital spaces cultivate authentic community rather than merely aggregating individuals? What distinguishes genuine online *ummah* from audience?

This study has demonstrated that digital New Age spirituality's ontological crisis characterized by displacement of transcendence, algorithmic authority, and commodified practice can be addressed through Islamic cyberspirituality grounded in *tawhid* and *tazkiyah al-nafs*. The framework reconstitutes digital space as potential arena for authentic spiritual practice when technology functions as contemplative *wasīlah*, authority re-embeds in scholarly lineages, and practice orients toward purification rather than performance. The significance extends beyond Islamic contexts to broader questions about religion's future in digital age. Against narratives of inevitable secularization, commodification, or fragmentation, the framework demonstrates that robust metaphysical traditions provide resources for critical engagement with technology while preserving transcendental orientation. Classical ontology proves remarkably relevant to contemporary challenges, suggesting that wisdom traditions may be essential rather than obsolete in navigating digital transformation.

Yet the framework remains normative proposal requiring empirical validation, practical refinement through use, and ongoing theological development as technologies evolve. It invites rather than forecloses conversation, offering conceptual structure for Muslim individuals, communities, and institutions seeking to cultivate authentic digital spirituality while engaging opportunities and confronting challenges of technologically mediated religious life.

The ultimate test will be practical: whether Islamic cyberspirituality enables Muslims to use digital technologies in ways that genuinely deepen God-consciousness, strengthen communities, and support transformation toward greater humility, compassion, and service or whether, like so many digital spiritual initiatives, it proves another well-intentioned idea that platform logics inevitably subvert. Only time, practice, and honest assessment will tell.

Beyond its normative and critical dimensions, the Islamic cyberspirituality framework articulated in this study is intended to function as an *operationally usable tool* for evaluating and guiding digital religious practice. First, it operates as an *evaluative lens* by providing concrete ontological criteria—transcendental orientation (*tawhid*), transformative direction (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), authority grounding, and technological positioning (*wasīlah* versus *ghāyah*)—through which digital religious content, platforms, and practices can be systematically assessed. Second, it serves as an *ethical design principle* for Muslim technologists, educators, and content creators, offering normative guidance for structuring digital environments that prioritize contemplation, discipline, and accountability over engagement optimization and performative visibility. Third, it functions as a *theological compass* for individuals and institutions navigating algorithmically mediated religious spaces, enabling discernment between spiritually formative mediation and commodified or

performative religiosity. In this way, the framework translates ontological commitments into actionable criteria that can inform design choices, pedagogical strategies, and personal digital practices without collapsing theology into technical prescription.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has developed an Islamic ontological framework for cyberspirituality as a substantive alternative to the reductionism and fragmentation characterizing digital New Age spirituality. Through systematic analysis of twenty-five peer-reviewed sources and classical Islamic texts, three principal conclusions emerge. First, digital New Age spirituality exhibits a fundamental ontological void produced by three interconnected ruptures: the displacement of transcendent divinity by subjective emotionalism and therapeutic self-optimization, the replacement of institutional religious authority by algorithmic validation through engagement metrics, and the transformation of sustained spiritual discipline into commodified aesthetic consumption. Despite generating massive markets 241 million meditation app users and nearly \$2 billion in annual revenue this paradigm demonstrates structural instability, with 58% user dropout rates within one year indicating failure to sustain authentic transformation. The ontological crisis stems not from technological inadequacy but from metaphysical confusion: the collapse of Creator-creation distinctions, the psychologization of transcendence, and the subordination of spiritual purpose to consumer logic.

Second, Islamic cyberspirituality addresses this crisis through two foundational principles that reconstitute digital space. *Tawhid* operates as ontological axis, preserving the categorical distinction between Creator and creation, anchoring truth in revelation rather than algorithmic amplification, and reorienting purpose toward worship and stewardship rather than self-expression. *Tazkiyah al-nafs* functions as transformative method, disciplining consciousness through systematic practices oriented vertically toward divine proximity rather than horizontally toward ego satisfaction. Together, these principles reposition technology from consumptive platform to contemplative *wasilah* (instrumental means), embed authority in authentic scholarly lineages rather than influencer popularity, and measure spiritual success through purification and God-consciousness rather than performance and visibility. Third, this framework generates actionable implications across five domains digital da'wah, online Sufism, authority structures, attention governance, and identity formation supported by case evidence and applicable to diverse stakeholders: content creators, educational institutions, individual practitioners, platform designers, and religious authorities. The framework's theoretical contribution lies in bridging classical Islamic metaphysics with contemporary digital practice theory, demonstrating that premodern ontological traditions provide essential resources for navigating postmodern technological challenges.

Future research must empirically validate the framework's practical effectiveness through ethnographic studies, longitudinal implementation trials, and cross-cultural comparative analysis. Critical questions remain regarding authenticity in anonymous spaces, the role of embodiment in mediated practice, algorithmic systems' capacity to serve contemplative purposes, environmental obligations of digital infrastructure, and cultivation of genuine *ummah* through virtual connection. These questions require ongoing theological reflection in dialogue with technological evolution. Islamic cyberspirituality does not reject digital mediation but insists it be ordered by transcendental principles that preserve divine-centered meaning. In an era when billions engage spirituality primarily through screens, the framework offers vision of digital religiosity that resists commodification while embracing innovation, maintains tradition while adapting to change, and cultivates authentic transformation amid technological disruption. Whether this vision proves realizable depends on Muslim communities' willingness to implement it with

integrity, scholars' commitment to ongoing reflection, and technologists' dedication to designing platforms that serve worship rather than exploitation. The ontological foundation has been articulated; the practical work of building upon it now begins.

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