



Building Urban Resilience through Mystical Discourse in Social Media: A Thematic Review of Sufi-oriented Public Messages During the Covid 19 Pandemic in Indonesia

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Abstract

In the last two decades, various Sufi-oriented social media accounts have been successful in seizing the interest of cosmopolitan Muslims in Indonesia through the Sufi approach as it puts forward the aspect of inner consciousness (dhauq) in one's most intimate relationship with his creator. Hence the Sufi-inspired prayers, dhikr, and poetry on social media platforms are getting popular. Observing this phenomenon, this paper studies the dynamics of Sufi-oriented public messages in popular Islamic social media accounts i.e., @ngajitasawuf, @filsafatrindu, @irjanasrullah, @suluksalik, and @tasawufunderground during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. This study employs a descriptive-analytic method with content analysis of Sufi-oriented social media posts from March 2020 to March 2021 as its study object. This research suggests that public messages of certainty (yaqin) and hope (raja') have appeared quite strongly since the covid19 outbreak with 19% and 18.6% occurrence respectively. The message of fear (khouf) on the contrary, appears the least at 2.5%. The highlight of hope and certainty over fear in these social media posts, the writer contends, acts as a positive intervention in the face of negative emotions internalization the pandemic has brought.

Keywords: Sufi literature, Cyber Sufism, Inner Resilience, Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

Introduction

Community well-being is essential in creating a resilient and sustainable society. Fast-paced rhythm and competitive city life may have been a long source of anxiety for urban dwellers and now as the Covid-19 pandemic shows no clear sign to end, this group has no choice but to cope with a more intense level of uncertainty. In the light of this growing concern, this study suggests, discussing the role of spirituality as a fortress of mental resilience in urban community settings becomes inevitable. This study originated from an observation of the increasingly popular mystical discourses in social media platforms during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. Sufism has been popular among the Indonesian urban middle class since the 1980s through various Sufi orders (*tarekat*)¹. Historical records revealed that prosperous traces of Sufism had been identified in Indonesian Muslim's religious practices when Islam entered the archipelago. Through the role of Sufi clerics known as *Wali Songo* (lit. the nine saints), Islam arrived as 'the friendly new faith' emphasizing the inner dimension of religiosity (*dzauq*) over formalism of outward ritual aspects. Through technological advancement and the birth of social media, the transmission of Sufistic messages these days is becoming more rapid, personal, and immediate. Previous studies on Sufi-oriented social media preaches during the Covid-19 pandemic have received enough discussions in several studies *i.e.*, Niam, MK & Hadi, R. T. (2021) investigated the internalization concept of Al- Ghazalian Sufism during the pandemic²; Fairozi & Ayu (2020) wrote about the digitization of cordial Islamic messages in the pandemic³; while Agusta & Laugu (2020) highlighted fresh religious information in response to the pandemic outbreak in Indonesia⁴. It was not without a reason that prayers, *dhikr*, poems, and other tranquility-themed posts on social media timelines today are gaining momentum.

Even though literature review on the percentage increase of Sufism-oriented contents in the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia is scarce, a number of research suggested

¹ Martin van Bruinessen & Julia Howell , *Urban Sufism* , (Bandung: Rajawali Pers, 2008), p . 376.

² Khusnun Niam & Rahmad Tri Hadi, Internalization of Al-Ghazali Sufism during the Covid - 19 Pandemic, *Tribakti: Journal of Islamic Thought*, Vol.32, No. 1 (2021), p . 151-168.

³ Ahmad Fairozi & Sulistya Ayu , Digitizing Da'wah; Efforts to Increase Competitiveness of Friendly Islam in the Era of the Pandemic , *Journal of Bimas* Vol. 13 , No. 2 (2020), p . 307-344.

⁴ Aras Satria Agusta & Nurdin Laugu. Fresh Religious Information Through Instagram Media in Responding to Covid-19 in Indonesia , *Library Journal* Vol. 11 , No. 2 (2020), p . 88-99.

that urban Sufism has become part of the cosmopolitan Muslim online spirituality⁵. One particular idea that has received the most attention and criticism is Julia Howell's opinion about the concept of urban Sufism as a social phenomenon in urban middle-class Indonesian society. In Howell's view, urban Sufism marks the emergence of spiritual religiosity that played an important part in the Islamic Revival among the Indonesian young generation and the urban middle class⁶. Many contended that this phenomenon is temporary, however, not only that urban Sufism flourished in the majority of Indonesian big cities, but various studies have also shown significant ties between the growth of mystical intensifications in religious practices and positive influence on its followers, particularly on mental health and wellbeing (Nizamie, et. al., 2013; Saliyo, 2018). Unfortunately, current knowledge on social media studies in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and Sufism, was scarcely done in a pandemic-resilience framework. This study seeks to fill the void in presenting such discussion through a thematic discourse analysis of five popular Sufi-oriented Instagram accounts i.e., @ngajitasawuf, @filsafatrindu, @irjanasrullah, @suluksalik, and @tasawufunderground. Study samples involved 558 pandemic-related public messages taken in the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia i.e., from March 2020 to March 2021. According to Widiawati (2020), content analysis is an approach used to examine the presence, meaning, and relationships in texts. Texts, in this case is Instagram captions, are broken down into thematic categories, coded, examined, and then interpreted using conceptual analysis⁷. Further, this study investigates how Sufistic messages serve as a protective factor in building urban society's inner resilience.

Spirituality and Formation of Inner Resilience in Urban Society

Any discussion on resilient society won't be complete without incorporating the concept of resilience initiated by Norman Garmezy and Ann Masten. At its core, resilience at both the individual and communal level can be understood as "... the process of successful adaptation

⁵ See Julia Howell. Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival. *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 60, No. 3 (August 2001), p . 701-729; Martin van Bruinessen & Julia Howell. *Urban Sufism*. (Bandung: Rajawali Pers, 2008) ; and Lutfi Makhasin . Urban Sufism, Media, and Religious Change in Indonesia. *Ijtima' Iyya: Journal of Journal of Muslim Society Research* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2016) , p . 23-36.

⁶ Ibid, p . 710.

⁷ Nani Widiawati. *Research Methodology: Islamic Communication and Broadcasting*. (Tasikmalaya: Edu Publisher, 2020), p . 268.

despite threatening circumstances” or “... the ability of an individual or a group of people to survive (or at least reach equilibrium) and overcome any unfavorable challenge”. This ability is often acquired cumulatively through the continuous adaptation process of overcoming difficult situations⁸. Positive correlation between religion and spirituality with (inner) resilience is not a new discourse in clinical psychology research. Smith et. al, for example, suggested that faith and spirituality are capable of cultivating positive emotions. This, in the long run, gives an impact on mental resilience by acting as a protective factor and source of strength as an individual is facing adversity or stressful conditions. Protective factors are conditions that buffer, interrupt, or prevent problems from occurring⁹. In this framework, religion and spirituality serve as foundations through which an individual crafts meaning and value in life experiences following unfavorable life events.

Protective factors, risk factors, and positive interventions are three important components in the concept of resilience that need to be carefully identified in this study. In the context of resilience during pandemic, negative emotions such as anxiety and stress due to the Covid-19 pandemic can be identified as a threat factor, while (access to) spiritual practice through religious studies and gatherings can be seen as a positive intervention, as several research suggested¹⁰. Experts on resilience studies often associate protective factors with innate *resilience traits*, family support, supportive communities, and many other aspects that play role in minimizing threat factors. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, the positive impact of Sufism-based spiritual healing methods on mental resilience has been observed in several case studies. Various studies have shown the strong role of protective factors such as religious communities¹¹ and families¹² in growing mental resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, for city dwellers where social ties are stripped down and even lost, such protective factors are often unavailable. Anonymity, impersonality, and heterogeneity of urban

⁸ Ann Masten & Norman Garmezy. Resilience and development: Contribution from the study of children who overcome adversity . *Development & Psychology*, No. 2 (1990), p . 425-444.

⁹ Bruce Smith, et al. Spirituality, Resilience, and Positive Emotions, in Lisa J. Miller (Ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p . 440.

¹⁰ See Ma'sum (2020), Nizamie, et. al., (2013) and Saliyo, (2018)

¹¹ Muhammad Ma'sum . Implementation of Sufi Healing in the New Normal Era of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Maintaining Homeostasis of the Community Body: An Analytical Study in Kayen Bandarkedungmulyo Village, Jombang, East Java. *Muróbbi: Journal of Educational Sciences* Vol. 4, No. 1 (2020), p . 103–120.

¹² Abdurrahman Kasdi & Saifudin . The resilience of Muslim Families in the Pandemic Era: Indonesian Millennial Muslim Community's Response Against COVID-19. *Journal Research* Vol 17, No. (2020), p . 81-94.

society has created social distances separating people from one another¹³ and even an individual with himself. As a result, the city becomes a place of external conformity, source of anxiety, and battlefield of materialistic competition. All of these, Jamaluddin (2017) suggests, lead to the formation of a stress-prone society with the following negative characteristics: 1) atomized; 2) indifferent and insensitive; 3) materialistic; 4) short-term-pleasure oriented¹⁴. In situations where protective factors are minimal or non-existent, vulnerable individuals will tend to respond to their psycho-spiritual nature¹⁵. This response often comes in the form of different creative efforts to minimize risk factors such as stress and anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the history of the first wave Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, we observed a trend of an increasing interest in psycho-spirituality practices through prayers, *dhikr*, and *sholawat* on various social media platforms. The following graphic explains the increase of the keywords "dhikr" and "sholawat" in Google search engines during 2020 with the highest peak in March as news about the COVID-19 pandemic spread worldwide.



¹³ Adon Nasrallah Jamaludin . *Urban Sociology: Understanding Urban Society and Its Problems*. (Bandung: Setia Pustaka , 2017), p . 341.

¹⁴ Ibid, p . 64-65.

¹⁵ Fajarallah, Maklad, Helal, Nusoy-Demir, Conn & Awaad. *Coping with Pandemics: Psychological and Spiritual Lessons from Islamic History* . (Texas: Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, 4 2021) accessed from: <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/rania-awaad/coping-with-pandemics-psychological-and-spiritual-lessons-from-islamic-history> on February 9, 2021

Picture. 1 Web browsing trend with "sholawat" and "dhikr" keywords in the period 01/02/2020 to 01/06/2020

The Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) implemented by the local governments of Indonesia forced busy urbanites to carry out all kinds of activities within the vicinity of their own homes. This sudden shift of lifestyle was frustrating for some, but a blessing in disguise for others. The latter captured the moment as an opportunity to perform social seclusion (*uzlah*) and be in solitude (*khalwat*), two Sufi practices recommended by Imam Al-Ghazali for those wanting to arrive at the gate of inner enlightenment. Finding an intimate point with God through the path of solitude is nothing new in Muslim history. Prophet Ibrahim AS. found his Lord while praying in the silence of the cave. Prophet Yunus AS also repents and prays to Allah alone deep under three layers of darkness: the night, the ocean, and inside a whale's belly. When Prophet Muhammad SAW reached 40 years old, solitude becomes dear to his spiritual life. A cave in Mount Hira', where he received his revelation from Allah, was his safe place to withdraw from the world, contemplate life, and perform long vigils and prayers. The momentum of seclusion or *uzlah* is also present in the enlightening spiritual journey of Abu Hasan al Asyari and Imam al Ghazali. The solitary behavior of these prophets and pious people would be a call for a reexamination of our present life, our connection with God, and His decree.

In general, social seclusion or *uzlah* could be interpreted as a mechanism to withdraw into seclusion from all the worldly hustle to get closer to God and refrain from religious disobedience. In the Sufi tradition, *Uzlah* is often accompanied by various acts of remembrance and self-reflection. Islamic psychotherapist Hamdani Adz-dzakiey (2015) shared a similar view with Imam Al-Ghazali suggesting that *uzlah* is a fundamental part of the self-purification process in prophetic psychotherapy¹⁶. This concept is derived from empirical and prophetic-based experience with a Sufistic method of self-purification (*takhalli*), self-understanding (*tahalli*), and

¹⁶ Given the strong Sufistic approach in its practices, some also refer the term as sufistic psychotherapy



self-development (*tajalli*)¹⁷. These stages aim to free and cleanse the heart from worldly attachment. In the Sufistic perspective, attachment to the world is the root of disappointment, anxiety, and sadness. To be free from these restraints, humans must be able to purify and guard their hearts so as not to get carried away in worldly obsession. In a 2019 experiential case study, Arifin & Rhojachin (2019) explore the relevance between *uzlah* practice in *pesantren* with positive mentality and spirituality such as developing contentment to a given situation (*qana'ah*) and appreciation to modest lifestyle (*zuhud*)¹⁸. As rewarding as it may seem, the benefits of *uzlah* don't come unintentionally. Forced seclusion in the context of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) must pair with an intentional-conscious urge to take this momentum as a resource for meaning-making in facing the pandemic. Our discussion in the next subsection asserts that cyber-Sufism thriving across social media platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic can serve as a positive intervention in the meaning-making process of urban society in the moment of the pandemic outbreak. In this regard, the lack of protective factors *i.e.*, communal ties and family support could be filled with a positive Sufi-oriented public message in a manner which is familiar and accessible at the fingertips.

Cyber Sufism and Coping Mechanisms in Pandemic Spirituality Framework

Given the contrasting nature of the often-silent Sufi path and busy urban life, the interest of Indonesian urbanites in Sufi-oriented social media contents certainly deserves further study. In 2022, Simon Kemp of the DataReportal released the Digital 2022 report on Indonesia¹⁹. Data show that Indonesia stood at 73.7% or approximately 204.7 million active internet users, 57% of which reside in urban cities, at the start of 2022. As for social media users, there were 191.4 million social media users in Indonesia, or equivalent to 68.9 percent of the total population. This high information and communication technology consumption undoubtedly contributed to influencing the urban middle-class pattern in understanding fresh information, including Sufism.

¹⁷ Hamdani Bakran Adz-Dzakiey. *Islamic Counseling and Psychotherapy*. (Yogyakarta: Al Manar, 2015), p. 259-260.

¹⁸ Zaenal Arifin & Mayashofa Rhojachin. 'Uzlah Practice to Enhance Santri's Mentality and Spirituality. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*. Vol 5 No. 2 (2019). DOI: 10.15575/jpi.v5i2.5793

¹⁹ Simon Kemp. *Digital 2022: Indonesia Report* (February 2022) via <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-indonesia>

Urban society's turn to Sufism during the pandemic may come subconsciously, but it is never accidental. Looking back at the historical development of Sufism in the country, the urbanite's reluctance to Sufism, which proved their familiarity with the early Sufistic concept, is influenced by their reluctance towards assumptions that 1) commitment between Sufi teachers or *murshids* and students-members is demanding, and 2) rituals of assigned sets of invocations (*wirid*) and lengthy recitations of prayers are too burdensome for those with busy schedule²⁰. This assumption is not entirely true. Since the 1990s, urban Sufi orders or *tarekat* have begun to transform to offer non-binding routine activities such as communal prophetic recitations, remembrance, prayers, to Sufistic seminars. This shift for flexibility allows adjustment in the once rigid body of Sufi orders in many Indonesian big cities. Not only *tarekat* is now successful in accommodating the busy urban life patterns but physical assemblies also that accommodate Sufi movements started to reach a wider audience as it went cyber.

Luthfi Makhasin describes the transformative role of the internet in Sufi literature dissemination in Indonesia since the late 1990s. Although it only gained success in 2005, this effort had a significant impact on the increasing recognition of Sufism in urban communities²¹. Now, Sufi-themed blogs and social media platforms are run by admin(s) responsible for translating, advertising, organizing giveaways or events, and uploading Sufistic literature to various online platforms. The content presented is often themed on advice or wisdom of a murshid, virtues of Sufi practice, or tradition of heart purification. Several social media accounts such as @tasawwufunderground, @caferumijakarta, and @sajaksufi target young people by presenting a relatable message of love and human servitude through popular Sufi poems and quotes. As the pandemic outbreak entered Indonesia in the mid-2020s, the social media accounts of Sufi-oriented *majlis* began to intensify live broadcasts through a variety of social media platforms. Other Islamic organizations are taking the same strategy.

In 2013, Kelley and Pransky conducted research on inner resilience from a psychological point of view. Both agree to see inner resilience as a potential innate factor shared by all human beings to survive difficult situations. A resilient soul manifests from within in a form of a calm

²⁰ Julia Howell. Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival. *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 60, No. 3 (August 2001), p . 718.

²¹ Lutfi Makhasin. Urban Sufism, Media and Religious Change in Indonesia. *Ijtima' Iyya: Journal of Journal of Muslim Society Research* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2016) , p . 2 9.

state of mind and awareness of positive emotions e.g., patience, positive thinking, self-efficacy, etc. Naturally, these positive attributes will automatically surface whenever the mind is quite clear but is often buried and overridden by negative thoughts such as excessive anxiety or obsession²². Kelley and Pransky (2013) emphasize that everyone can access and operate from their inner resilience state because this is their natural state. What needs to be addressed here is to aid people who cannot, with necessary positive intervention so access to their natural state is enabled. If an individual realizes that they can access their innate capacity for resilience by living their quiet mind until it becomes a lifestyle, this approach surely is a promising method for urban anxiety and stress. In Indonesia, the fusion of Sufism and psychotherapy took a popular turn under the practice of Sufistic Psychotherapy. Sufism as a psychological approach was offered in many State Institutes of Islamic Studies (IAIN) in Indonesia. IAIN Tulungagung, for example, states that one of the missions of their Tasawwuf Department is "... to produce scholars who can provide solutions to mental problems with psychological and Sufistic approaches"²³. At the international level, Sufistic psychology is known to be the genius legacy of Al-Ghazali. The basic idea of Al-Ghazalian psychotherapy lies in one's ability to control oneself, through a rigorous process of positive mental training and elimination of contemptible behavior. When done properly, this could lead to a state of mindfulness and purification of one's soul from various negative effects of human psychological imbalance in responding to preexisting hope and expectations with reality²⁴. To this day, Al-Ghazali's most phenomenal work, *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*, remains a primary reference in various scientific discussions worldwide. In a study by Thompson (2011); Grabbe (2012); and Jha (2019) on mindfulness training in the face of unfavorable crisis, the ability to manage an affirmative mental state is linked positively to an individual's mental resilience, especially on reducing stress levels during the difficult times²⁵. In

²² Thomas Kelly & Jack Pransky. Principles for Realizing Resilience: A New View of Trauma and Inner Resilience . *Journal of Traumatic Stress Disorders & Treatment* Vol. 2 , No. 1 (2013) , p . 2.

²³ Website of the Psychotherapy Tasawwuf Department of IAIN Tulungagung <http://fuad.iain-tulungagung.ac.id/jurusan/tasawuf-psychotherapy> accessed on Sunday, April 19, 2020.

²⁴ Abdullah Hadziq . Implications of Science for Virtuous Behavior: Analysis of Al-Ghazali's Sufistic Psychology. *theology* Vol 16 , No. 2 (2005).

²⁵ Thompson, et. al. Conceptualizing mindfulness and acceptance as components of psychological resilience to trauma. *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* Vol. 12, No. 4 (2011), p . 220-235; Grabbe, et. al. Spirituality Development for Homeless Youth: A Mindfulness Meditation Feasibility Pilot. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* Vol. 21, No. 2 (2012), p . 925-937; and Amishi Jha, et. al. Does Mindfulness Training Help Working Memory "Work" Better ? *Current Opinion in Psychology* Vol. 28 (2019), p . 273-278.

the context where pandemic was perceived as a risk factor, the same result was proposed by Yuan (2021) in a mindfulness training experiment during the Covid-19 pandemic. Yuan concluded that careful management of negative emotions such as anxiety in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the mental resilience of an affected ²⁶. Our literature review has so far suggested that a positive mental state *e.g.*, calmness, clarity of mind, and mindfulness can be achieved through training and bringing into presence any form of positive intervention. But how do Sufi-oriented messages act as a positive intervention in this never-ending pandemic? This paper proposes that Sufi-oriented public messages can act as necessary resources for positive intervention by focusing on the positive meaning-making process as urbanites are anxiously coping with the pandemics.

The positive role of various Sufistic works of literature such as prayer, poetry, and songs for Muslims in facing a pandemic has long been recorded in Islamic history. Fajarallah (2021) stated that Sufi literature about God's mercy and the spirit of optimism was widely used by Muslim religious leaders to deal with grief, loss, fear, and anxiety²⁷. Şeyyad Ḥamzah (d. circa 749 H), a well-known Sufi from Turkey from the 14th century wrote a poem reflecting his views as a Muslim in dealing with the plague: *“O Muslim, as if this [plague] is a sign of the end of time/ if this is the Doomsday, what a sign this is/ ... /What is death, it is the eternal judgment/What is a plague, it is the decree of the heavens!”* Masruq ibn al-Adjda (d. 62 H) one of the eight great giants in the development of Sufism, wrote a poem: *“I see the plague as an opportunity to disconnect from all other than my Lord”*. When the Tho'un plague hit Syria in 749 H, Ibn Al-Wardi (d.749 H), a renowned philosopher from the Mamluk dynasty, wrote in a similar tone: *“Unlike others, I do not fear the pandemic, for it affords me two possible outcomes, each better than the other. If I die, then I find rest away from the contagions [of this world]. If I live, I get to witness [more of the world] through the healing of my ears and eyes!”*. Living in constant fear and uncertainty can be mentally draining and overwhelming. Although putting the current pandemic is the absolute power of Allah, focusing to reach a calm mental state by examining the

²⁶ Yue Yuan. Mindfulness training on the resilience of adolescents under the COVID-19 Epidemic: A latent growth curve analysis. *Personality and Individual Differences* Vol.172 (2021), p . 7.

²⁷ Fajarallah, Maklad, Helal, Nusoy-Demir, Conn & Awaad. *Coping with Pandemics: Psychological and Spiritual Lessons from Islamic History* . (Texas: Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, 4 2021) accessed from: <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/rania-awaad/coping-with-pandemics-psychological-and-spiritual-lessons-from-islamic-history> retrieved on February 9, 2021

wisdom and experiences of the previous pandemic-resilient Muslims will enable us to see the importance of having a comforting point of reference in coping and adjusting to the present tribulations.

Analysis of Sufi-oriented Public Messages during the Covid-19 Pandemic

In *Coping with Pandemics: Psychological and Spiritual Lessons from Islamic History* Fajarallah et.al. (2021) conducted a literature study of the long history of previous Muslim spiritual experiences in responding to pandemics and summarized seven positive characteristics of a Muslim that can help deal with situations full of uncertainty such as pandemics. These characteristics are trust (*tawakkul*), patience (*sabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), certainty (*yaqin*), hopefulness (*raja'*), fear of the displeasure of God (*khauf*), and piety (*taqwa*)²⁸. We review thematic contents of five Sufi-oriented Instagram accounts and examine the public messages conveyed regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. These five accounts are @ngajitasawuf (100K followers), @filsafatrindu (108K followers), @irjanasrullah (27K followers), @suluksalik (67.2K followers), and @tasawufunderground (74.6K followers). The method used in selecting the sample is *purposive sampling* where the sample is determined based on predetermined criteria i.e., popular Sufi-oriented Instagram account responsive to the pandemic with active content publication activities. The unit of analysis in this study was limited to pandemic-related public messages on social media platforms taken from March 2020 (as Covid-19 first entered Indonesia) to March 2021.

In general, throughout the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic i.e., March 2020 - March 2021, the two most prominent themes found in the aforementioned Sufi-oriented accounts is the message of *raja'* or hope (19%) and *yaqin* or certainty (18.6%); while the message of *khauf* or fear received the lowest exposure with a percentage of 2.5%. Believing in Allah's protection is a human trait of faith. Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized that certainty in the power of Allah is the foundation of human submission, so it is natural that the message of trusting in God's plan or *tawakkul* is also quite prominent, which is 17.7%.

²⁸ Ibid.

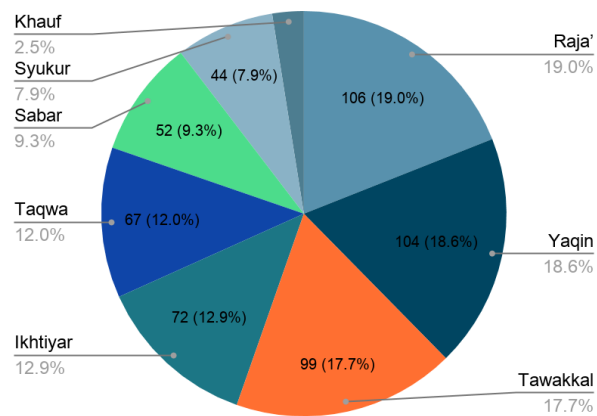


Chart 1. Thematic Public Message on Sufi Oriented Social Media Accounts during the First Wave of Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia (March 2020 - March 2021)

The message of *yaqin* or certainty is conveyed quite strongly by most Sufi-oriented social media accounts. Account @tasawufunderground, for example, posted "Facing Trials the Sufi Way" on 6 April 2020. Extracting from the book *At-Tanwir fi Isqaath at-Tadbir* by Shaikh Ibn Atha'llah, the account draws an analogy between going through the pandemic and receiving a gift:

Allah SWT will suffice, help, assist, face, resolve and protect you. Remember that Allah's grace will help you face the test. Because a gift of God should remind you of the Giver in a way that you are more prepared to accept His rulings and decrees. Just as He has ordained for you something that you like, you must also be patient with something that He likes. Rest assured that your awareness of the goodness of God's decree will make you strong to face His destiny (<https://www.instagram.com/p/B-o1qZtFZKw/>)

Yaqin in Sufi terminology is often interpreted as a strong and unshakeable belief about the truth of knowledge as it is witnessed by the soul and felt by all of human existence²⁹. *Yaqin*

²⁹ Muhammad Hashim. *Dialogue Between Sufism and Psychology: A Study of Abraham Maslow's Humanistic Psychological Thought*. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2002), p . 54.



holds such an important position in Islamic teaching that Sufism experts argue it is the kingdom of the heart and the one key to understanding God. Imam Abu Hasan As Syadzili (d. 1258 AD) mentions that an individual is said to be in a state of *ain yaqin* when he could set aside and forgot his present condition even when he is afflicted with difficulties (Imam Syadzili, 2008: 111). Further, he adds, a Muslim with *yaqin* in his heart fears nothing as he's a firm believer that nothing happens on earth except with the permission of Allah SWT.

Our next finding reveals that the concept of *Yaqin* stands closely with *raja'* or hope for the love, mercy, and protection of Allah SWT. Upholding a mental attitude of optimism for the grace of God prevents humans from excessive anxiety. The main cause of anxiety disorders, according to Grupe & Nitschke, (2013), is excessive anxiety and hopelessness in facing the uncertainty of future challenges³⁰. Despair is essentially standing on contrary to Sufi ethics which teaches individuals to be patient and always have a good opinion on God's decisions knowing that no forms of afflictions are coming without the ordain of God. In the period where economic activities were forced to stop during the Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) in many big cities in Indonesia, the main concern was none other than the nationwide economic decline. In response to this public fear, account @ngajitasawuf on 22 April 2020, delivered a strong message of *raja'* or hope in a post entitled: "A Message for You Who are In Despair because of the Covid-19 Pandemic":

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim. One of the wisdom in this pandemic covid-19 is for us to think and rely on the creator for the cause, not on the cause itself. If all this time we believe that our work is sufficient for our needs, now we witness that even people who lost their job got their needs fulfilled by Allah ... If we are to compare, which one is greater? His wrath or his mercy? It is all written so accept and remain hopeful for His help is verily near (https://www.instagram.com/p/B_RGyHcl-Ib/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

³⁰ Daniel Grupe & Jack Nitschke. Uncertainty and Anticipation in Anxiety: An Integrated Neurobiological and Psychological Perspective . *Nature Reviews. Neuroscience* Vol. 14 , No. 7 (2013) , p . 48 8.

In the modern psychology perspective, apart from hopelessness, uncertainty is another most common cause of anxiety rooted in an individual's inability to anticipate risk and threats³¹. At this point, strengthening a hopeful state in the all-powerful nature of God can serve as a positive therapy in dealing with the various onslaughts that plague an anxious soul. In this regard, Turkish Sufi Badiuzzaman Said Nursi stated that individuals are essentially experiential beings that can go through thousands of different kinds of pain, difficulty, pleasure, and ecstasy yet as a creature he is weak and subject to breaking down. He is also fragile as he is surrounded by countless enemies, both the visible and the invisible. Despite this unfavorable condition, only by relying on the Supreme ruler, will he find unyielding patronage through which he can take refuge from all danger and enemies. A hopeful Muslim will also find a safe resource to rest all his needs and expectations³². Therefore, instead of feeling anxious and hopeless, having a positive mental attitude through the confidence of *raja'* enables humans to be grateful and even take lessons from trials because he believes that the test comes from Allah SWT. This beautiful message of *raja'* was posted on the account @irjanasrullah on 21 May 2020, by summarizing Imam Ibn al-Jauzi's advice:

[Always] think that the calamities that we experience will pass. They came like a guest who stopped only for a while. What should we do when we are having guests come over? Of course, we care for and pay attention to everything they needed. Likewise, when calamity stops in our lives, we take a look at what we should do about it. Actions are to be controlled, complaints are avoided, piety and trust should never be abandoned. If an afflicted individual focuses his attention to strive to do that, he will soon be able to see the "morning dawn" rise beautifully in his life. The night of disaster will quickly pass, and he will be praised for his endurance through the darkness. As soon as the "sun of reward" has arisen, he has finally rested at the throne of peace and serenity. (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CAbEMotLQOB/>)

Sufistic spiritual psychology teaches Muslims the best method of therapy in dealing with problems that are beyond our control so that we are not drowned deeper and fall into a deep pit

³¹ Ibid.

³² Badiuzzaman Said Nursi. *Al-Kalimat volume 1*. (Jakarta: Anatolia Prenada Media Group , 2011), p. 211.

of destruction. To quote Jalaluddin Rahmat, "... if an individual faces something he cannot change, all he needs to do is adjust his reaction to the situation and change his perception of what is happening"³³. There must be an understanding in him that behind this seemingly imperfect world lies God's will that is more perfect than his. Observing the survival mechanism in the Sufi style of disruption as described above, we find it appropriate to consider the positive impact of Sufistic themes such as *raja'*, *yaqin* dan *tawakkal* in the building of the *inner resilience* of the Indonesian urban community.

Furthermore, our findings revealed: 1) abstract theosophical messages concepts such as Divine love and cosmic consciousness, has been one of the strongest characteristics of Sufi-oriented accounts long before the pandemic; and 2) content analysis result of our study objects revealed that practical messages about mental, spiritual and physical exercise are the strongest public message delivered during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in Indonesia followed by the public message of mystic values internalization with the percentage of 39.3% and 16.6%, respectively.

Public Message Related to Covid-19 by Category							Total
Public							
	Mental, Spiritual & Physical Endeavor	Internalization of Values	Service of Mystic Announcements (PSA)	Wisdom of Events	Emotional Expression	Balance	
# of posts	26	11	10	9	6	4	66
Percentage	39.393939	16.666667	15.151515	13.636364	9.090909	6.060606	100%

Table 1. Recapitulation of Messages Related to the Covid-19 Pandemic on Five Popular Sufi-oriented Social Media Accounts (March 2020-March 2021)

³³ Jalaluddin Grace. *The Way of Grace Knocks on God's Door*. (Jakarta: PT Elex Media , 2002), p. 135.

The message of physical endeavors against Covid-19 is often delivered in the form of invitations to comply with health protocols and the prohibition from leaving homes during the social restrictions, the message of spiritual endeavor is more of prayers and practical advice from *mursyids*, while mental efforts are delivered in a more educational manner such as sharing the strength and history of previous Muslim stories in facing a pandemic from the popular book *Badzlul Ma'un fi Fadhl al-Tha'un* by al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalan (as seen in a post by account @filsafatrindu on 2 September 2020) or pandemic-related webinar. Our discussion so far reached a point where we can now argue that a good increase in social media traffic and high penetration of the internet during the pandemic is a suitable momentum to make the most of Sufi-oriented social media platforms in conveying beneficial public messages. Interestingly enough, even though the general public perceives Sufism discourses to be revolving around abstract practices such as divine love, self-identity search, or the philosophy cosmic consciousness, and thus making these messages difficult to be understood independently, the percentage of practical messages on mental, spiritual, and physical endeavors in the sample appears quite high.

Suggestions and Conclusions

In general, during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic i.e., March 2020 - March 2021, the most prominent theme found across the five Sufi-oriented accounts is the emphasis on the message of *raja'* or hope (19%) and *yaqin* or certainty (18.6%) while the message of fear or *khauf* received the lowest exposure with a percentage of 2.5%. Furthermore, our findings revealed: 1) abstract theosophical messages concepts such as Divine love and cosmic consciousness, has been one of the strongest characteristics of Sufi-oriented accounts long before the pandemic; and 2) content analysis result of our study objects revealed that practical messages about mental, spiritual and physical exercise are the strongest public message delivered during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in Indonesia followed by the public message of mystic values internalization with the percentage of 39.3% and 16.6%, respectively. The results of this study indicate that Sufistic-oriented social media accounts during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the message of hope and certainty over fear as an alternative of meeting the needs for positive spiritual intervention in the midst of adjusting to lifestyle changes during the social restriction and anxiety in facing the uncertainty of the pandemic. Finally, whether there is any goal and



motivation in the shift of Sufi-oriented social media content from philosophical to practical Sufism, requires further study.

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