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Submission date: 09-Feb-2026 09:06AM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 2731894356

File name: JIP_2425-ART-PUB__439-460.pdf (364.06K)

Word count: 8184

Character count: 49798



Living Sufism: The Transformation of Dhikr Practices in Indonesian Majelis Taklim

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Received: June 29, 2025

Accepted: January 19, 2026

Published: January 30, 2026

Article Url: <https://journal.scadindependent.org/index.php/jipeuradeun/article/view/2425>

Abstract

While dhikr practices in majelis taklim have been widely examined, limited attention has been paid to how these practices acquire new meanings and social functions within the shifting contexts of contemporary Indonesian Muslim communities. This study examines dhikr not merely as a devotional ritual, but as a socially embedded practice through which Qur'anic engagement is transformed into ethical orientation and social relations. Using a descriptive-phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation across several majelis taklim affiliated with different Sufi tariqas in Palu, Indonesia. The analysis reveals four interrelated themes: variations in participants' understanding of dhikr from rote recitation to reflective awareness; strong aesthetic engagement through rhythm and melody that deepens emotional resonance; functional dimensions of dhikr that support religious learning, emotional regulation, and moral formation; and the emergence of faith-based social capital manifested in trust, reciprocity, and cooperative networks. Conceptually, the study advances the Dynamic Reception-Conversion Model (DRCM), which explains how dhikr operates as a process linking Qur'anic reception, social mediation, and socially productive outcomes. These findings contribute to Qur'anic reception studies and scholarship on "living Sufism" by demonstrating that dhikr functions as a dynamic mechanism of social transformation, offering implications for community cohesion and faith-sensitive approaches to education and social development.

Keywords: Dhikr Practices; Living Sufism; Majelis Taklim; Muslim Communities.



A. Introduction

The practice of *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) is not only a spiritual exercise but also a socially embedded activity that shapes communal life among Muslims. In many Muslim societies, particularly those influenced by Sufi traditions, *dhikr* functions as a site where religious devotion intersects with social interaction, moral formation, and community cohesion. Billah et al. (2024) show that *dhikr* practices foster interpersonal relationships and strengthen bonds within religious communities, indicating that remembrance of Allah operates beyond individual piety. Likewise, Karo-Karo, Zuhri, and Simamora (2024) emphasize that collective *dhikr* creates shared emotional experiences that sustain solidarity and mutual trust among participants. Within the Indonesian context, this social dimension is particularly evident in *majelis taklim*, where *dhikr* is embedded in collective religious learning. Azis et al. (2023), Hasyim (2021), and Rudi, Ok, and Arsyad (2023) demonstrate that *majelis taklim* historically function as spaces for transmitting religious knowledge, cultivating spiritual growth, and nurturing communal support.

Beyond its spiritual foundations, a growing body of scholarship highlights *dhikr* as a practice with broader psychosocial implications. Research has demonstrated its contribution to psychological well-being, emotional healing, and the strengthening of social cohesion within Muslim communities (Miichi, 2019; Mitha, 2019; Safrilsyah et al., 2024; Sholihah et al., 2024). At the same time, extensive scholarship on Sufi traditions has examined the theological foundations, ritual forms, and experiential dimensions of *dhikr*, offering detailed accounts of its mystical, historical, and doctrinal aspects (Al-Daghistani, 2022; Aždajić, 2020; Daniyarti et al., 2023; Hisamatsu, 2024; Knysh, 2019; Sedgwick, 2018).

More recent studies have shifted attention toward *dhikr* within communal and educational settings, specifically *majelis taklim*, demonstrating how these assemblies reinforce religiosity, promote social harmony, and support community integration (Arifin, 2023; Atamini & Sururi, 2025; Romdloni & Barizi, 2024). Parallel research further shows that *majelis taklim* plays a significant role in empowering women through religious education and skill-building, thereby expanding participation in family and social life (As'ad et al., 2018; Fadillah, 2023; Ridho et al., 2023). Other scholars emphasize the role of *majelis taklim* in facilitating the internalization of Sufi values and cultivating an ethical awareness oriented toward collective welfare (Mibtadin et al., 2021; Wasik & Jabir, 2023; Yazid & Islamy, 2023).

Despite these valuable contributions, existing scholarship remains fragmented in its analytical treatment of *dhikr*. Much of the literature approaches *dhikr* either as a spiritual ritual grounded in mystical devotion or as a social activity that fosters cohesion and empowerment, yet there are limited efforts to integrate these dimensions into a single explanatory framework. In particular, there is a lack of systematic analysis regarding how the Qur'anic verses recited during *dhikr* are received, interpreted, and translated into everyday meaning by *majelis taklim* participants, and how this process generates concrete social outcomes. The relationship between *dhikr* and tangible forms of social capital—such as trust, cooperation, solidarity, and collective economic engagement—remains under-theorized.

Consequently, the literature lacks a precise conceptual mechanism to explain how engagement with the Qur'an becomes socially generative and how ritual meaning is converted into durable social structures. Without such theorization, existing studies remain primarily descriptive, failing to account for the processes by which *dhikr* evolves from a devotional practice into a driver of social transformation. This gap represents more than an incremental omission; it is an urgent scholarly need, particularly in contexts where religion plays a central role in sustaining community resilience and civic life.

Responding to this gap, the present study examines transformations in *dhikr* practices within *majelis taklim* in Palu, Indonesia. It analyzes *dhikr* as both a form of Qur'anic engagement and a source of social capital through its reception, interpretation, and enactment in everyday religious and social life. Specifically, the study investigates how *majelis taklim* members understand and practice *dhikr*, how their engagement with Qur'anic verses shapes perceptions and lived experiences, and how *dhikr* contributes to the formation of social capital. Rather than treating these dimensions as parallel outcomes, the study advances a unified analytical perspective centered on a core mechanism that links devotional practice directly to social consequence.

At the theoretical level, this study contributes to Qur'anic reception scholarship by illuminating a dimension that has received limited attention in previous research: the role of *dhikr* as a mediating process linking Qur'anic interpretation to collective social outcomes. Building on this insight, the study develops the Dhikr Reception and Conversion Model (DRCM), which conceptualizes *dhikr* as a sequential process encompassing reception of Qur'anic texts, affective-moral internalization, and social conversion. Through this model, *dhikr* is redefined not merely as ritual performance or

individual piety, but as an analytically traceable process through which devotional engagement cultivates trust-based dispositions and cooperative orientations. By clarifying the relationship between ritual participation and social capital formation, DRCM offers a conceptually distinctive contribution that advances existing scholarship while focusing its explanatory scope on the social consequences of *dhikr* practice.

Drawing on this mechanism, the study further demonstrates how *majelis taklim* function as institutional settings that stabilize and sustain the reception-conversion process. These settings enable dispositions generated through *dhikr* to develop into collective ethical orientations and durable social cohesion, rather than remaining individualized or episodic. This contribution allows religious leaders and community stakeholders to conceptualize *dhikr* not as a generalized source of multiple benefits, but as a specific social mechanism through which trust, reciprocity, and collective responsibility are cultivated in a socially embedded manner. In doing so, the study offers a theoretically grounded and empirically informed contribution that strengthens the integration of Qur'anic studies, the sociology of religion, and social capital theory within the context of contemporary Muslim communal life.

B. Method

This study employed a descriptive-phenomenological research design, following Giorgi (2009), to document and analyze how participants experienced, interpreted, and enacted *dhikr* practices in their everyday religious lives. The research was conducted across 35 *majelis taklim* in Palu City, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, encompassing a range of Sufi orders, including the Rifa'iyyah, Syattariyah, and Maulawiyah. The multi-site approach enabled a systematic comparison of variations in ritual form, leadership style, and organizational practices observed during fieldwork conducted over six months, from January to June 2024.

Participants were selected based on their sustained engagement in *majelis taklim* activities and their ability to articulate personal experiences of *dhikr* practice. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to capture a variety of roles and levels of involvement, complemented by limited snowball sampling to identify additional information-rich participants. The final sample consisted of 35 participants, including *mursyid* (spiritual guides), senior members, newer attendees, and local residents familiar with *majelis taklim* activities. Inclusion criteria required participants to be adults aged 35–70 years, to have participated in *dhikr* activities for at least two years, and to be either affiliated with one of the main Sufi orders or a regular attendee of the *majelis taklim*.

Data collection combined in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews lasting 45-90 minutes were conducted in private or mutually agreed-upon settings, focusing on participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices related to dhikr. Participatory observation was carried out during dhikr gatherings to document ritual sequences, leadership roles, interaction patterns, and spatial arrangements. These data were supplemented by photographic documentation and an analysis of dhikr texts and organizational materials. Focus group discussions were conducted selectively in *majelis taklim* with stable attendance and active programs, involving six to eight participants per group to capture shared interpretations and collective dynamics.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework using a hybrid deductive-inductive approach. The analytic process began with the verbatim transcription of interviews and the systematic organization of observational notes and documents, followed by repeated reading for data familiarization. Initial coding focused on meaning units derived from participants' explicit descriptions of dhikr practices, perceptions, and experiences. To address the first research question, Rafiq's (2014) Qur'anic reception framework was operationalized as sensitizing analytic dimensions—hermeneutic, aesthetic, and functional—which were applied during the initial coding phase to guide attention without predetermining the themes. Through the iterative comparison and clustering of codes, three first-order themes were developed inductively.

To address the second research question, Putnam's (2015) social capital theory was introduced in a subsequent analytic cycle, corresponding to the "defining and refining themes" phase. At this stage, the established reception-based themes were examined in relation to indicators of social capital, including social networks, trust relations, shared norms, and collective activities, resulting in the development of an additional theme concerning congregants' social experiences in dhikr contexts.

Analytic rigor was ensured through constant comparison across data sources; the triangulation of interviews, observations, documents, and FGDs; member checking with selected participants; peer debriefing; and the maintenance of an audit trail documenting coding decisions and theme development. Thick description was employed to support analytic transferability, without claims of statistical generalization. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the State Islamic University of Datokarama, Palu, Central Sulawesi. All participants provided written informed consent, and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings of the study based on interview transcripts, observational records, and documentary materials collected from 35 *Majelis taklim* in Palu City. The results are organized thematically to describe patterns in congregants' experiences of *dhikr* practices, focusing on: (1) understandings of *dhikr* recitations and ritual performance; (2) aesthetic and melodic aspects of *dhikr*; (3) perceived functional roles of *dhikr* within *majelis taklim*; and (4) reported impacts of *dhikr* on social life.

1. Results

a. Congregants' understandings of *dhikr* recitations and ritual performance

Observational data recorded that 35 *majelis taklim* were actively operating across Palu City during the fieldwork period, with *dhikr* practices that varied in form and sequence across gatherings. Based on observational records and documentary materials, *dhikr* recitations included four broad forms: *Ratib al-Haddad*, *Rifaiyyah dhikr*, *Syattariyyah dhikr*, and other collective *dhikr* practices, such as *istighathah*, *tahlil*, *salawat*, and the recitation of *Asmaul Husna*.

Ratib al-Haddad was observed in a small number of *majelis taklim*, while *Rifaiyyah* and *Syattariyyah dhikr* were practiced in assemblies associated with those respective traditions. In other *majelis taklim*, collective *dhikr* consisted of various combinations of commonly recited formulas. Interview data indicate a significant variation in congregants' reported understanding of these recitations and the ritual performance. For instance, a participant from *Majelis Taklim Nurul Khairaat* explained:

Initially, I attended the majelis taklim with the primary intention of fostering social ties with neighbors and other attendees. Consequently, I merely followed along in the dhikr recitations without fully understanding their meanings. However, after regularly attending Majelis Taklim Nurul Khairaat, I gradually became familiar with various forms of dhikr taught there, such as Ratib al-Haddad. (Interview with MF, March 21, 2024).

This account illustrates that participants often become familiar with *dhikr* texts over time through repeated participation, even if they initially engage with the recitations without a formal understanding of the Arabic meanings. An interview with a *murshid* leading *Ratib al-Haddad* sessions further documented these varying levels of comprehension:

I have observed that the community's understanding of dhikr recitations and practices remains diverse. Some individuals comprehend the meaning of each dhikr recitation, while others merely memorize them without understanding their significance. (Interview, UF, Majelis taklim Bumi Bahari Practitioner, January 22, 2024).

The *murshid* noted that some congregants reported understanding the meanings of the *dhikr* recitations, others recited the texts from memory without focusing on their semantic content. Observational notes from this *majelis* confirmed that participants followed a uniform sequence of recitations during the gathering. Similarly, in *majelis* practicing *Rifaiyyah dhikr*, observational records documented the use of a fixed liturgical sequence. A member of *Majelis Taklim Al-Hidayah* explained:

We perform dhikr based on a mutual agreement among the members of our majelis taklim. This dhikr is conducted monthly, and on special occasions, we observe it at other times as well. During the recitation, we practice the Rifaiyyah dhikr, although we do not fully comprehend its meaning. The dhikr begins with the basmalah (Bismillah), followed by the recitation of Surah Al-Fatihah, Ayat al-Kursi, the concluding verses of Surah Al-Baqarah, tahlil (La ilaha illallah wahdahu la sharika lahu), tasbih (Subhanallah), istighfar (seeking forgiveness), salawat upon the Prophet, supplications for protection from harm, and prayers for blessings and well-being. (Interview, NL, February 25, 2024).

This interview statement indicates that *Rifaiyyah dhikr* was conducted collectively at scheduled intervals, with participants reciting a fixed sequence of Qur'anic verses, praises, and supplications. Interview data, alongside observational records, confirm that a uniform sequence was strictly followed during the gatherings. Documentary materials and visual records further illustrate the liturgical order of *Rifaiyyah dhikr* used during these sessions, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The liturgical practice of Sayyid Ahmad al-Rifai

Figure 1 presents the sequence of Qur'anic recitations, praises to Allah, and supplications included in the *Rifaiyyah dhikr* practice. Interview data consistently included statements from participants who reported reciting these texts without a complete grasp of their semantic meanings. Furthermore, a participant from *Majelis Taklim Wiriidul Haq* offered a critical reflection on this trend:

Although this practice continues to be observed, the depth of knowledge regarding this dhikr tradition is rarely fully understood by the residents of Palu. This lack of comprehensive understanding has led to a somewhat weakened spiritual essence of the order compared to when this tradition was first practiced in the area. (Interview, Syams, April 25, 2024).

This interview account indicates that the participant continues to participate in *dhikr* practices despite having limited knowledge of their textual or historical background. In *majelis taklim* practicing *Syattariyyah dhikr*, interview data revealed differences in how congregants perceived and understood the ritual. A member of *Majelis Taklim Al-Amin* explained:

We recite the Syattariyyah dhikr every Friday night. Attendance tends to fluctuate; sometimes the gathering is large, while at other times there are fewer than 15 people. The members who attend consistently are primarily the elderly, as they were previously initiated into this order. The understanding of the dhikr varies significantly among congregants. Some view it as a path to attaining ma'rifatullah (gnosis), while others perceive it merely as a beneficial religious tradition without a deep understanding of its mystical aspects. (Interview, Gani, March 24, 2024).

Observational data confirmed that *Syattariyyah dhikr* sessions were conducted according to a regular schedule, though attendance numbers varied between gatherings. Interview records show that congregants described their engagement in diverse ways, ranging from specific spiritual aims to routine participation. Across the data, participants reported varying levels of familiarity with the meanings and procedures of *dhikr*. Furthermore, observational records noted that collective *dhikr* in each *majelis taklim* adhered to a fixed liturgical sequence during these gatherings.

b. The aesthetic and melodic aspects of dhikr

Observational and interview data highlight the significance of aesthetic and melodic features in *dhikr* performances. Participants frequently emphasized the importance of the leader's voice, the melodic mode, rhythm, and specific attire during collective *dhikr* sessions. A congregant from a *majelis* practicing *Rifaiyyah dhikr* shared:

The imam's voice is delightful. He leads the recitation fluently, employing the saba melodic mode. The dhikr commences with the basmalah, followed by Al-Fatihah, Ayat Kursi, tahlil, tasbih, istighfar, and salawat, all recited in a repetitive and orderly saba tone. Our melody is characterized by a gentle ambiance that progressively intensifies in tempo and solemnity as the ritual unfolds, creating a profound spiritual atmosphere. The dhikr is occasionally accompanied by the rhythmic clapping of five rebana (tambourine) players. This sound establishes a soothing yet invigorating environment, which remains engaging despite the extended duration of the session. During the ritual, there is also a specific dance where some congregants attempt to thrust sharp instruments toward their chests without sustaining injury. We wear uniforms of white or green as symbols of purity and respect for the teachings of the order. (Interview, Ali, March 26, 2024).

This interview account highlights the integration of melodic modes, rhythmic accompaniment, bodily movement, and specific attire during *Rifaiyyah dhikr*. Observational notes from the same *majelis* confirm that the *imam* employed a consistent melodic pattern, with *rebana* accompaniment and coordinated movements occurring during at specific stages of the gathering. In a different setting, a participant from a *majelis* practicing *Syattariyyah dhikr* observed:

The imam guides the congregation in reciting the dhikr of the Syattariyyah order. The recitation is melodious and gentle, employing the nahavand mode, which seems aimed at penetrating the heart, especially during the recitation of Lā ilāha illā Allāh. The congregants follow the imam's lead with deep attentiveness. (Interview, Imran, March 26, 2024).

Interview data indicate that participants were able to identify specific melodic modes used during *Syattariyyah dhikr*. Observational records further note that during collective recitation, congregants remained silent at key intervals, synchronizing their tempo and tone with the leader. Across the observed *majelis taklim*, both interview and observational data consistently document these aesthetic elements—vocal style, melodic mode, rhythm, movement, and attire— as central components of the collective *dhikr* experience. Participants identified these elements as essential to how *dhikr* is performed and experienced in communal settings.

c. The functional roles of dhikr and majelis taklim within the community

Interview data provide detailed accounts of how congregants integrate *dhikr* and *majelis taklim* activities into their everyday religious practices. Participants described the *majelis taklim* as a primary setting for religious instruction, typically occurring before the commencement of collective *dhikr*. One participant noted:

Every week, we attend the majelis taklim to deepen our religious knowledge before engaging in collective dhikr. The majelis helps us understand Islam systematically, covering the interpretation of the Quran and hadith, as well as the jurisprudence of worship and social transactions. By participating in these regular studies, I feel more confident in practicing Islamic teachings, as I receive clearer guidance from the ustaz guiding us. (Interview, Amir, March 26, 2024).

Interview data indicate that participants viewed the *majelis taklim* as a primary setting for religious instruction prior to collective *dhikr* sessions. Observational notes confirm that these teaching activities were typically led by an *ustaz* or a senior figure before the commencement of collective recitation. Participants reported that these sessions covered Qur'anic interpretation, hadith, and practical guidance for religious life. Another participant from a *majelis* affiliated with the *Syattariyyah* order highlighted the communal outreach aspect of these gatherings:

The majelis taklim is not merely a venue for listening to lectures; it also serves as a platform for outreach. We often discuss Islamic teachings and share experiences related to worship. Through this majelis, we frequently conduct activities within the community, such as mobile study sessions, youth discussions, and collective worship practices, ensuring that the knowledge we acquire can benefit others. (Interview, Amra, March 27, 2024).

Interview data indicate that some congregants viewed the *majelis taklim* as a space for communal dialogue and social engagement alongside its function as a center for religious study. Participants noted that their involvement extended to outreach efforts, such as mobile study circles and youth discussions. Furthermore, participants from *majelis* practicing *Rifaiyyah dhikr* shared reflections on the personal impact of their regular attendance. One participant observed:

Since attending the majelis taklim consistently, I have experienced an profound sense of inner peace. I do not only learn about the tenets of religion; we are also taught to strengthen our relationship with Allah through dhikr, prayers, and congregational worship. Through this process, I have learned to be more patient and sincere, and to uphold ethical conduct in my everyday life, both within my family and the broader society. (Interview, Karim, March 26, 2024).

These interview data suggest that participants experience heightened states of tranquility and discernible shifts their daily conduct following sustained participation in *majelis taklim* and *dhikr* activities. Participants consistently articulated themes of

patience, sincerity, and an increased commitment to moral behavior when describing the outcomes of their involvement in collective worship and learning.

d. The impact of dhikr on social life

Interview data document congregants' descriptions of social experiences linked to their regular participation in *dhikr* gatherings. In their accounts, participants identified shifts in social interaction, daily routines, emotional well-being, and even economic activities as a result of their involvement in the *majelis taklim*. A participant from a *majelis* practicing *Syattariyyah* *dhikr* noted:

In the past, I felt my social life was limited to interacting only with family and close neighbors. However, after joining the dhikr gathering, I now have a supportive community. We do not only engage in dhikr together; we also frequently organize social activities, such as helping the poor and sharing food. I feel blessed, not only spiritually but also in my relationships with others. (Interview, Deni, June 26, 2024).

Interview data indicate that participants experienced broader social interactions after joining *dhikr* gatherings. In other accounts, participants emphasized the importance of sustained contact with fellow congregants and their involvement in collective social activities alongside their spiritual practice. Another participant from a *majelis* affiliated with the *Rifa'iyyah* order shared a personal reflection on this transformation:

There was a time when I felt lost and didn't know what to do. However, after participating in the dhikr gathering, I experienced a significant change. Dhikr is not merely a ritual; it has become a spiritual motivation for me. Every time I face difficulties, I engage in dhikr and feel stronger. I have learned that inner peace does not come from wealth or the praise of others, but from remembering Allah in every situation. (Interview, Karim, July 26, 2024).

Interview data capture the participant's account of utilizing *dhikr* as a coping mechanism during moments of personal difficulty. In other narratives, congregants recounted engaging in *dhikr* when encountering professional or personal challenges, referring to heightened feelings of calmness and resilience in those situations. A participant from a *majelis* associated with *Ratib al-Haddad* practices noted:

Before I started regularly practicing dhikr, I often felt listless and lacked enthusiasm for my work. However, after making dhikr a habit before starting my daily activities, I find myself more focused and motivated. Dhikr calms my heart, allowing me to work with greater sincerity and responsibility. I also feel more patient when dealing with work pressure and have learned to appreciate my time more. (Interview, Ahmad, March 26, 2024).

Interview data indicate that participants link their daily work routines to the regular practice of *dhikr*. In their accounts, congregants identified qualities such as focus, patience, and improved time management when describing their professional activities in relation to *dhikr*. Other interview narratives confirmed the consistent use of *dhikr* as a preparatory ritual before beginning daily tasks. Furthermore, participants described how *dhikr* gatherings served as a focal point for collective activities during moments of social conflict, emotional distress, or economic interaction. As one participant observed: *"When conflicts arise among residents, religious leaders often hold dhikr gatherings to unify hearts. Many find themselves more patient and able to control their emotions after participating in dhikr"*. (Interview, Amrin, March 23, 2024).

Another participant reported, *"After regularly participating in dhikr, I feel calmer and less anxious when facing life's pressures"* (Interview, Ahmad, January 26, 2024). A participant involved in small-scale trade further illustrated the economic dimension of these gatherings: *"Many congregants have become regular customers. They say they prefer buying from fellow congregants because we know and trust each other"*. (Interview, Tamrin, February 25, 2024).

These interview data reveal how congregants link *dhikr* gatherings to emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and economic exchange. In their accounts, participants identified *dhikr* sessions as catalysts for mutual assistance, shared emotional support, and sustained communal interactions. Across the various *Majelis taklim* studied, participants consistently cited social interaction, emotional resilience during personal or communal crises, and participation in collective economic activities as defining outcomes of their engagement with *dhikr* practices.

2. Discussion

The present study demonstrates that *dhikr* practices within *majelis taklim* in Palu operate not merely as ritual performances but as an organized and dynamic mode of Qur'anic reception that connects sacred texts with lived ethics and social relations. By examining *dhikr* through the Dynamic Reception–Conversion Model (DRCM), the findings provide an integrated explanation of how engagement with Qur'anic verses unfolds through sequential yet interrelated processes of reception, mediation, and conversion, culminating in tangible social outcomes. This analytical framing advances existing scholarship by moving beyond descriptive accounts of ritual practice, offering instead a process-oriented understanding of how Qur'anic engagement becomes socially generative.

At the level of reception, the findings reveal that *dhikr* constitutes an initial space of encounter in which participants collectively engage with Qur'anic texts through recitation, rhythmic repetition, and embodied participation. Consistent with Qur'anic reception theory (Rafiq, 2021; Ma'u et al., 2025), this engagement does not prioritize cognitive comprehension or formal exegesis as the sole locus of meaning. Instead, Qur'anic meaning is received through a simultaneous intertwining of functional, aesthetic, and hermeneutic dimensions (Baidowi & Ma'rufah, 2025; Kartono et al., 2024).

This finding refines existing reception studies by demonstrating that meaning emerges through ritual experience rather than linear interpretive sequences. In contrast to approaches that emphasize textual mastery, the Palu case shows that reception is inherently relational and affective, shaped by collective performance and shared devotional rhythms.

Functionally, participants utilize *dhikr* as a religious resource for coping with uncertainty, emotional strain, and everyday challenges. This resonates with research on religious coping that highlights the role of spiritual practices in sustaining psychological resilience (Akbayram & Keten, 2024; Nashori et al., 2017). However, the present study extends this literature by demonstrating that functional reception is not merely an individualized strategy but a collectively produced experience. Within the *majelis taklim*, emotional reassurance and moral orientation emerge through synchronized ritual participation, indicating that functional reception is socially embedded rather than privately negotiated.

Aesthetically, rhythmic chanting and melodic repetition cultivate emotional alignment and reinforce participants' attachment to *dhikr*. This supports scholarship on Islamic soundscapes, which emphasizes the role of sonic and rhythmic elements in shaping religious experience (Hirschkind, 2006; Rasmussen, 2010; Kaltsum & Amin, 2024). Within DRCM, aesthetic reception functions as an affective mediator that sustains Qur'anic engagement over time, ensuring continuity and durability of devotional participation. Hermeneutically, Qur'anic values such as *ṣabr*, *tawakkul*, and *ikhhlāṣ* are internalized through repeated practice rather than formal instruction, supporting a praxis-oriented understanding of religious meaning (Kupari, 2020; Wijaya et al., 2025; Anggono et al., 2025). Together, these findings reconceptualize reception as a dynamic, embodied, and collective process.

The second stage of DRCM highlights mediation as a crucial mechanism through which Qur'anic reception becomes socially meaningful and enduring. Drawing on the lived religion perspective, which posits that religious meaning emerges through routine practices embedded in specific social contexts (Ammerman, 2016), the study shows that *dhikr* in Palu is mediated through structured social arrangements. Regular schedules, ritual leadership, and collective rhythms stabilize devotional engagement and allow meanings generated through *dhikr* to be negotiated, transmitted, and sustained. This finding refines Sufi studies that have traditionally emphasized the inward and contemplative dimensions of mystical practice (Howell, 2001). In line with research on urban Sufism in Indonesia (Miichi, 2019), the study demonstrates that social organization is not external to mystical practice but is constitutive of how religious meaning itself is produced. Within DRCM, mediation explains how Qur'anic engagement becomes collectively shareable rather than ephemeral, transforming individual experiences into socially recognized orientations.

The third stage of DRCM concerns conversion, referring to the translation of mediated Qur'anic meanings into ethical orientations and relational practices. The findings indicate that values internalized through *dhikr*—including patience, sincerity, self-restraint, and trust—shape how participants navigate social relationships, respond to conflict, and engage in collective life (Zenrif et al., 2024). Importantly, conversion is shown to be neither automatic nor instantaneous; it unfolds through sustained ritual repetition and ongoing social interaction. This process-oriented understanding challenges accounts that treat ethical transformation as a direct outcome of belief or doctrinal instruction. Instead, the study demonstrates that conversion is gradual and relational, emerging through disciplined participation in communal ritual settings.

The fourth stage of DRCM concerns converted outcomes, particularly the formation of faith-based social capital. Consistent with social capital theory (Putnam, 2015), the findings show that *dhikr* generates trust, norms of reciprocity, and cooperative networks within the *majelis taklim*. These gatherings function as spaces for informal support, conflict mediation, and small-scale economic exchange, illustrating how religious practice contributes to social cohesion.

However, the study also reveals differentiated outcomes. Participants with broader social networks and higher mobility are better positioned to convert religious participation into organizational or economic advantages. Conversely, more vulnerable members primarily gain emotional resilience and moral support. This aligns with

critical perspectives that highlight how social capital can reproduce existing inequalities rather than uniformly benefiting all participants (Kim et al., 2024; Anggono et al., 2025). Within the DRCM, this finding underscores that conversion processes are embedded within unequal relations of power and access, complicating normative assumptions regarding the uniformly positive effects of religious participation.

Theoretically, the application of the DRCM advances Qur'anic reception and living Sufism scholarship by shifting the analytical focus from what *dhikr* means to how *dhikr* operates as a social mechanism embedded in lived religious practice. By framing *dhikr* as an active process rather than a static symbol, this study aligns with broader developments in Qur'anic studies that emphasize the dynamic interaction between text, interpretation, and social reality. Recent scholarship has highlighted how Qur'anic engagement in contemporary Muslim societies increasingly functions as a site of authority negotiation, ethical reasoning, and contextual meaning-making rather than mere exegetical reproduction (Kaltsum & Amin, 2024; Wijaya et al., 2025). Within this trajectory, the DRCM extends Qur'anic reception studies by offering an analytical lens that captures the performative and relational dimensions of *dhikr*, demonstrating how ritualized Qur'anic practices mediate moral orientation, collective discipline, and social cohesion in concrete settings.

The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing *dhikr* as a sequential and analytically traceable process that links ritual engagement to observable social outcomes. Rather than treating *dhikr* solely as devotional performance or as an informal social activity, the DRCM integrates both dimensions into a coherent mechanism-based framework that explains how Qur'anic practice becomes socially productive. This approach resonates with interdisciplinary discussions on local wisdom, cultural transmission, and the social reproduction of values, where religious practices are understood as carriers of ethical norms and communal resilience (Kartono et al., 2024). Moreover, by foregrounding mechanism over description, the model addresses a persistent limitation in prior studies of lived Islam, which often document practices without explaining how they generate broader social effects, including norm regulation, boundary negotiation, and moral continuity across diverse and sometimes contested social contexts (Ma'u et al., 2025). As such, the DRCM contributes a theoretically robust explanation of how Qur'anic rituals function as engines of social meaning and collective order, enriching both living Qur'an and contemporary Sufism scholarship.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study demonstrates global relevance by positioning the Palu case as a theory-generating, rather than a culturally exceptional, context. In contrast to perspectives that frame Sufi practice as inward-looking or context-specific, the findings reconceptualize it as a form of faith-based social infrastructure. This framing is particularly relevant in Global South contexts characterized by limited institutional capacity, where religious gatherings often play a central role in sustaining social cohesion and mutual support (Anggono et al., 2025). By offering a transferable analytical model, the DRCM provides a framework for examining Islamic ritual practices across diverse cultural settings without reducing them to localized phenomena. In this sense, the study contributes to broader debates on religion, social capital, and community resilience at a global level, particularly in relation to how religious ethics and practices intersect with contemporary social justice and welfare concerns (Wijaya et al., 2025).

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that *dhikr* operates as a dynamic process involving Qur'anic reception, social mediation, and the conversion of meaning into ethical orientations and social relations. By employing the DRCM, this study provides an integrated analytical framework for understanding how Qur'anic practices become lived, socially productive, and ethically meaningful. This synthesis advances scholarly knowledge by bridging Qur'anic studies, the sociology of religion, and social capital theory, offering a conceptually rigorous account of how ritual practice functions within contemporary Muslim communal life.

Despite these contributions, several limitations warrant consideration. First, the findings are derived from an in-depth qualitative case study of *majelis taklim* in Palu, Indonesia; while analytically generative, this focus limits empirical generalization across diverse Muslim contexts. Second, the analysis foregrounds the experiential, affective, and relational dimensions of *dhikr*, while paying limited attention to the broader institutional, political, or historical structures that may also shape ritual practice and religious organization. Third, by focusing on collective, face-to-face ritual settings, the study does not fully capture the individualized or digitally mediated forms of *dhikr* that are increasingly prominent in contemporary Muslim societies. These limitations delineate the analytical boundaries of the DRCM and provide a logical foundation for future research to test, refine, and extend the model across different geographical regions, ritual modalities, and socio-institutional configurations.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes by demonstrating that *dhikr* practices in *majelis taklim* in Palu function as a dynamic mechanism through which Qur'anic engagement is socially mediated and ethically converted into enduring forms of communal life. Rather than operating merely as devotional rituals or symbolic expressions of piety, *dhikr* emerges as a process that links ritual participation with lived ethics and socially productive relations. Through the Dynamic Reception–Conversion Model (DRCM), the study synthesizes its findings by showing how Qur'anic reception unfolds through interconnected stages of reception, mediation, and conversion. This explains how religious meaning moves beyond ritual performance to become embedded in everyday social interaction.

The contribution of this research lies in its reconceptualization of *dhikr* as a processual link between sacred text, ethical orientation, and social structure. By shifting the analytical focus from what *dhikr* signifies to how it functions, the study advances Qur'anic reception studies and scholarship on living Sufism beyond descriptive, inward-looking accounts. The DRCM provides a coherent and analytically traceable framework that positions ritual practice as a form of faith-based social infrastructure, a concept particularly salient in contexts where formal institutional support is limited. Empirically, the study demonstrates that *dhikr* generates religion-based social capital in differentiated ways. While collective ritual participation cultivates trust, reciprocity, and moral orientation, these outcomes are unevenly distributed and shaped by participants' social positioning and access to broader networks. This finding refines existing understandings of religious social capital by showing that the ethical and social benefits derived from ritual practice are contingent rather than automatic.

By operationalizing the DRCM through lived religious practices, the research offers a replicable analytical approach for examining how Qur'anic engagement becomes socially productive across diverse contexts. Beyond the Indonesian setting, the Palu case functions as a theory-generating example that underscores the broader relevance of ritual practices in sustaining social cohesion and ethical life in contemporary Muslim societies.

At the same time, the scope of these contributions is shaped by several acknowledged limitations. The focus on a single urban context constrains empirical generalization, while the emphasis on collective, face-to-face rituals limits insight into the individualized or digitally mediated forms of *dhikr*. Moreover, broader political,

institutional, and historical dynamics that influence religious organizations were not examined in depth. Future research is therefore encouraged to test and refine the DRCM across different regions, extend its application to online and hybrid ritual settings, and integrate institutional analysis to better how power relations shape processes of religious conversion and social outcome formation.

Taken together, this study offers a focused and theoretically grounded contribution by demonstrating that *dhikr* functions as a dynamic mechanism through which Qur'anic engagement is socially mediated, ethically converted, and transformed into enduring patterns of communal life.

3 Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial or non-financial interests that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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