Implementation Of The Spiritual Values Of Ustaz Neezam Al Banjari In Community Life

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Abstract
This study examines how spiritual values articulated by Ustaz Neezam Al-Banjari are translated into lived social practices within a contemporary Malaysian community. While spirituality in Islam emphasizes the integration of devotion and social responsibility, its internalization does not automatically generate transformative social behavior. Using a qualitative case study design, this research explores how salawat-centered da'wah is internalized and embodied within Raudhah Muhibbin (Dewan Selawat Taman Mahabbah). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, involving fourteen informants selected purposively. The findings reveal five interconnected spiritual orientations: devotion through salawat, lived simplicity, inclusive ukhuwah, communicative adab, and social responsibility. Salawat functions as an affective mechanism shaping emotional regulation and moral awareness. Simplicity fosters relational legitimacy, while inclusive gatherings strengthen communal solidarity. Emphasis on adab moderates social interaction, and spiritual devotion is externalized through collective service initiatives. The study concludes that spiritual leadership becomes socially transformative when emotional internalization, relational trust, and embodied ethical practice converge within sustained communal engagement.

Keywords: Community, Da'wah, Salawat, Spiritual Values.

Introduction

Islam articulates a comprehensive moral vision in which spirituality is inseparable from social responsibility (Handayani & Retnani, 2022; Ruhullah & Ushama, 2025; Ahmad et al., 2023; Le Duc, 2023). However, in contemporary Muslim societies, the internalization of spiritual values does not automatically translate into socially transformative behavior. Religious expressions may remain symbolic or ritualistic, while their ethical and communal implications vary across contexts (Amsikan, 2025; Al-Razi, 2025; Fortner, 2023). This gap between spiritual teaching and social practice has become increasingly visible in modern settings characterized by rapid technological change, individualism, and shifting patterns of authority.

Within this landscape, the role of contemporary preachers (ustaz) extends beyond transmitting doctrinal knowledge. They function as interpreters of religious meaning, mediators of moral norms, and public figures whose influence operates both offline and online (Haq & Kwok, 2024; Battista, 2024; Zhang, 2025; Akhter et al., 2025). In many Muslim-majority societies, especially in Malaysia, the emergence of media-savvy preachers has reshaped the dynamics of religious authority. Spiritual influence is no longer confined to traditional institutions but circulates through digital platforms, religious gatherings, and community-based initiatives (Jacinto et al., 2023; Rahman & Mala, 2025; Yilmaz, 2025). This transformation raises an important academic question: how are spiritual values communicated by contemporary ustaz translated into concrete social practices within communities?

Existing studies on Malaysian preachers tend to focus on leadership models, educational contributions, or media strategies (Arsad et al., 2025; Abd Ghafar Don & Aini, 2025; Ramlan et al., 2024; Tahir et al., 2024). While these studies acknowledge the spiritual influence of religious figures, limited attention has been given to the process through which spiritual values are internalized and manifested in everyday community life (Hardy et al., 2019; Achadah et al., 2022; Karimullah et al., 2022; Jakandar et al., 2025). In particular, empirical research examining salawat-based da'wah and its translation into social behavior remains relatively scarce. Furthermore, scholarship has not sufficiently explored how contemporary preachers negotiate authority, spirituality, and community engagement simultaneously.

Ustaz Neezam Al-Banjari represents a significant case within this context. Known for his emphasis on salawat, moral refinement, and gentle preaching style, he has cultivated a spiritual movement centered around collective remembrance and love for the Prophet. Through initiatives such as Raudhah Muhibbin (Dewan Selawat Taman Mahabbah), he has created structured spiritual spaces that aim not only to strengthen devotion but also to foster communal solidarity. Yet, despite his influence, academic analysis of how his spiritual teachings are operationalized within community life remains limited.

This study therefore positions itself as a qualitative case study examining the implementation of spiritual values in a contemporary Malaysian context. Rather than merely describing sermons or doctrinal content, the research seeks to analyze how spiritual teachings are translated into social behavior, communal relationships, and everyday practices. It asks how spiritual values are constructed, negotiated, and embodied within the community, and how the authority of a preacher facilitates or constrains this process. By focusing on the intersection between spirituality and social practice, this research aims to contribute to broader discussions on spiritual leadership, religious authority, and community-based transformation in contemporary Islam. The study is guided by two central questions: what core spiritual values are articulated by Ustaz Neezam Al-Banjari, and how are these values implemented and manifested within community life? Through this lens, spirituality is examined not as abstract theology, but as lived social reality.

Spiritual Values as Lived Ethical Orientation

Spiritual values in Islam cannot be reduced to ritual observance alone; they constitute an ethical orientation that shapes both inner consciousness and outward behavior (Ruhullah & Ushama, 2025; Al-Razi, 2025; Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025). From a sociological perspective, spirituality operates as a moral framework that informs identity, meaning-making, and collective norms. In Islamic thought, the integration of faith (iman), piety (taqwa), and moral conduct (akhlaq) reflects a holistic understanding in which devotion to God is inseparable from responsibility toward others. Rather than conceptualizing spirituality as a purely individual experience, this study adopts a relational understanding. Spiritual values manifest in two interconnected dimensions: vertical devotion and horizontal social engagement. The purification of the soul (tazkiyah al-nafs) becomes meaningful when it generates compassion, justice, solidarity, and ethical accountability in social interactions. Thus, spiritual values are not only internal beliefs but embodied practices that shape community life.

Religious Authority and Spiritual Leadership

The role of an ustaz in contemporary society may be analyzed through the lens of religious authority and spiritual leadership (Ichwan et al., 2024). Religious authority is not solely derived from formal scholarly credentials but is socially constructed through recognition, trust, charisma, and communicative competence. In modern contexts, authority is negotiated across multiple arenas, including mosques, community organizations, and digital platforms. Spiritual leadership emphasizes the capacity of a religious figure to inspire moral transformation through example, emotional connection, and symbolic meaning. The effectiveness of such leadership depends on authenticity, consistency between message and behavior, and the ability to address lived realities. When spiritual leaders embody the values they preach, their influence extends beyond cognitive instruction to affective and behavioral domains. This study therefore interprets the role of Ustaz Neezam not merely as a transmitter of teachings but as a spiritual leader whose authority is relationally constructed. His emphasis on salawat may be understood as a strategy of cultivating emotional attachment to prophetic ethics, thereby fostering moral internalization rather than external compliance.

Community Life and the Social Embodiment of Spirituality

Community life in Islam is grounded in the principle of social cohesion and moral responsibility. However, contemporary social realities often reflect fragmentation, weakening solidarity, and the rise of individualized religiosity. The translation of spiritual values into communal ethics is therefore neither automatic nor guaranteed (Alshehri et al., 2021). From a community transformation perspective, the internalization of spiritual values contributes to social capital, trust networks, and cooperative norms. Religious gatherings, collective remembrance, and shared rituals may serve as sites of social bonding and moral reinforcement. Yet, such processes require mediation through leadership, communication, and institutional structures. In this framework, the implementation of spiritual values is understood as a process involving articulation (how values are expressed), internalization (how individuals interpret them), and embodiment (how they are practiced in social relations). This theoretical lens allows the study to examine not only what spiritual values are taught, but how they become socially operative within community life.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative case study design aimed at examining how the spiritual values articulated by Ustaz Neezam Al-Banjari are implemented and embodied in community life. A qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to explore lived experiences, interpretative meanings, and social processes rather than measure variables quantitatively (Frechette et al., 2020; Kostere & Kostere, 2021). The case study design enables an in-depth examination of a specific religious figure within a particular socio-cultural setting, allowing the researcher to analyze the interaction between spiritual discourse and social practice in its natural context (Purcell-Gates, 2020).

The research was conducted at Raudhah Muhibbin (Dewan Selawat Taman Mahabbah) and surrounding community settings in Malaysia where Ustaz Neezam's activities are regularly held. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on clear inclusion criteria: active participation in spiritual gatherings for at least one year, direct interaction with Ustaz Neezam's teachings, and willingness to reflect on

changes in personal and social behavior influenced by the da'wah. Fourteen informants were involved in the study, consisting of three senior organizers of Raudhah Muhibbin, four regular adult congregants, three youth participants, two female congregants actively involved in religious activities, and two community leaders. Snowball sampling was subsequently employed to identify additional participants recommended by initial informants who were considered to possess relevant insight. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, indicated by the recurrence of similar narratives and the absence of substantially new thematic information.

Primary data were obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews and moderate participant observation, while secondary data included institutional documents, program archives, social media content, and published materials related to Ustaz Neezam's activities. Interviews were conducted using an interview guide structured around the research questions but allowing flexibility for probing emerging themes. Each interview lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve participants' expressions and nuances. Moderate participant observation was carried out over a three-month period, during which the researcher attended spiritual gatherings, salawat recitations, lectures, and informal community interactions. The researcher adopted an observer-as-participant role, engaging socially without intervening in the activities being observed. Field notes were systematically documented after each session to capture interactional dynamics, emotional atmosphere, and patterns of participation.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman but was operationalized through a rigorous coding process (Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024). After transcription, data were subjected to open coding to identify meaning units related to spiritual articulation, internalization, behavioral transformation, and community impact. These initial codes were then grouped through axial coding to establish conceptual categories and relationships between themes. Selective coding was subsequently conducted to integrate categories into overarching thematic constructs representing the implementation of spiritual values. A structured coding matrix was developed to ensure transparency and consistency in analytical decisions. Analytical memos were written throughout the process to record interpretative reflections and emerging theoretical linkages. Manual coding was employed using systematic data matrices to maintain traceability between raw data and thematic conclusions.

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, several validation strategies were implemented. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing narratives from organizers, adult congregants, youth participants, female congregants, and community leaders. Method triangulation was achieved by cross-checking interview data with observational findings and documentary evidence, including digital media content. Member checking was carried out by sharing preliminary thematic interpretations with selected informants to confirm accuracy and resonance with their lived experiences. Peer debriefing with academic colleagues was also conducted to review coding procedures and thematic consistency. An audit trail documenting research decisions, coding stages, and analytical revisions was maintained to ensure dependability and confirmability.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided voluntary informed consent prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality

and anonymity, and pseudonyms were used in reporting findings. Digital recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. The study adhered to ethical principles of respect, non-maleficence, and transparency.

Reflexivity was continuously practiced during the research process. The researcher acknowledges his academic background in Islamic studies and familiarity with spiritual discourse, which may influence interpretative perspectives. To minimize bias, reflective journaling was maintained to critically examine assumptions and ensure that interpretations were grounded in participants' narratives rather than personal theological orientation. Through these methodological procedures, the study seeks to produce a context-sensitive, analytically rigorous, and ethically grounded account of how spiritual values articulated by Ustaz Neezam Al-Banjari are implemented within community life.

Results and Discussion
Contextual Positioning of Ustaz Neezam Al-Banjari

Rather than presenting biographical details as mere background information, the data indicate that Ustaz Neezam's educational formation, genealogical affiliation, and institutional involvement function as sources of perceived legitimacy within the community. Informants frequently referred to his scholarly training and lineage when explaining their trust in his religious authority.

One senior participant stated: "People listen to him because they know he studied properly and has a clear chain of knowledge. That gives confidence." (Male, 55)

This suggests that religious authority in this context is constructed through a combination of traditional scholarly legitimacy and contemporary accessibility. However, the findings show that sustained influence does not rely solely on credentials, but on relational consistency between message and conduct. Authority is therefore reproduced through interaction rather than inherited status alone. His leadership within Raudhah Muhibbin operates as an institutional anchor for spiritual activities, providing structured yet accessible religious space. Social media presence further expands the reach of this authority, though digital engagement serves more as reinforcement than substitution for embodied interaction (Henry, 2024).

Core Spiritual Values and Their Social Translation

The analysis reveals that the spiritual values articulated in Ustaz Neezam's da'wah are not transmitted as isolated doctrinal elements. Instead, they form an interconnected framework in which devotion, humility, solidarity, communicative ethics, and social engagement gradually shape community behavior. Five dominant thematic domains emerged: devotion through salawat, lived simplicity, inclusive brotherhood, communicative adab, and socially embodied responsibility.

Devotion Through Salawat: From Ritual Recitation to Emotional Regulation

The central finding concerns the transformation of salawat from a ritual practice into an affective mechanism that shapes moral reflexes. Participants consistently described emotional shifts rather than purely cognitive understanding.

A participant explained: "At first, I attended because of the atmosphere. But over time, I noticed that when I become angry, I automatically recite salawat. It helps me control myself." (Male, 28)

This indicates gradual internalization. The repetitive devotional rhythm functions as emotional conditioning, fostering patience and restraint. Another informant added: "He always connects salawat to the Prophet's character. So it's not just recitation, but imitation." (Female, 34)

The findings suggest that salawat operates as affective moral formation. Emotional attachment precedes behavioral adjustment. Rather than emphasizing fear-based moral

instruction, the da'wah frames devotion as love-driven ethical modeling. Digital dissemination strengthens continuity (Lee, 2025). Short videos serve as reminders, but the core transformation remains rooted in collective embodied experience. However, not all participants experienced immediate change; some reported initial skepticism before deeper appreciation developed. This indicates that internalization is negotiated and processual.

Simplicity as Relational Legitimacy

Simplicity emerged as a relational strategy that reduces symbolic distance between preacher and audience. Observational data show absence of performative grandeur in gatherings. Participants repeatedly described feeling comfortable rather than intimidated.

"He speaks in a way that feels close. Not complicated. Not showing superiority." (Female, 39)

Simplicity here functions as ethical proximity. Authority is maintained without hierarchical exaggeration. Informants emphasized that this accessibility encourages voluntary engagement, particularly among youth.

One young participant reflected: "Religion feels easier to approach here. Not heavy." (Male, 21)

This suggests that simplicity reduces resistance often associated with formal religious authority. Rather than institutional dominance, influence is sustained through humility and communicative clarity (Nielsen & Marrone, 2018).

Inclusive Brotherhood as Social Infrastructure

The Raudhah Muhibbin gatherings operate as inclusive social environments. Participants from diverse age groups and backgrounds attend without visible stratification.

"No one feels judged here. Whether you're young or older, everyone sits together." (Female, 26)

Inclusivity is enacted spatially and relationally. Brotherhood (ukhuwah) becomes visible through seating arrangements, interaction patterns, and shared devotional rhythm. Digital interaction reflects similar norms. Informants described comment sections characterized by supportive language rather than polemical exchange.

However, minor resistance was acknowledged. A community organizer noted: "Some people questioned the strong focus on salawat at first, but after observing consistency, doubts decreased."

This indicates that cohesion is maintained through dialogue rather than automatic consensus (Faiz, 2025). Brotherhood here functions as social infrastructure built through repeated interaction.

Moral Adab as Behavioral Discipline

Moral refinement, particularly in speech, emerged as a tangible behavioral outcome. Participants reported becoming more cautious in communication.

"After attending regularly, I became more careful with my words, especially online." (Male, 30)

Another participant stated: "He reminds us that defending religion harshly damages its beauty." (Female, 42)

This suggests that moral adab functions as communicative regulation. The emphasis on gentleness moderates reactive tendencies in digital and domestic contexts. In an environment often characterized by confrontational religious discourse, this approach introduces restraint (Widian et al., 2023). The implementation of adab is also visible in the organization of gatherings, where orderliness and mutual respect are maintained without rigid enforcement. Discipline is internal rather than externally imposed.

Social Responsibility as Spiritual Externalization

The translation of devotion into social responsibility constitutes the most visible external outcome. Participants described feeling compelled to align ritual practice with social contribution.

"He always says loving the Prophet means being useful to people." (Female, 33)

Observation confirms structured charitable initiatives linked to gatherings. Congregants actively participate in fundraising and mutual assistance.

One participant reflected: "Before joining, I focused on personal worship. Now I feel responsible for helping others."

This indicates spiritual externalization: devotion moves outward into service. However, the scale of impact remains community-centered. Broader societal transformation requires further study.

Table 1. Thematic Synthesis

Spiritual Orientation	Mechanism of Internalization	Social Manifestation
Salawat	Emotional repetition and modeling	Patience, emotional regulation
Simplicity	Relational accessibility	Increased trust, voluntary engagement
Ukhuwah	Inclusive gathering structure	Strengthened solidarity
Moral Adab	Discursive reminders and example	Reduced confrontational behavior
Social Responsibility	Linking devotion with service	Active community support

The findings demonstrate that spiritual values become socially operative through layered processes. Devotional repetition shapes emotional disposition. Relational humility sustains legitimacy. Inclusive space fosters solidarity. Communicative discipline moderates interaction. Service embodies devotion. Implementation is incremental, relational, and context-bound. Authority operates affectively rather than coercively. Internalization varies among participants, suggesting that transformation depends on sustained engagement rather than singular exposure. Importantly, the study does not claim universal applicability. The observed pattern is specific to the socio-religious ecosystem of Raudhah Muhibbin and the leadership style of Ustaz Neezam. Nonetheless, the findings contribute to understanding how contemporary spiritual leadership translates devotional practice into embodied social behavior.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the implementation of spiritual values in the da'wah of Ustaz Neezam Al-Banjari operates through relational and affective processes rather than doctrinal transmission alone. The findings show that salawat functions as an emotional-moral anchor that gradually shapes patience and self-regulation. Saimplicity sustains relational legitimacy, reducing symbolic distance between preacher and congregation. Inclusive gathering structures foster ukhuwah as lived social solidarity, while emphasis on moral adab moderates communicative behavior in both offline and digital contexts. Spiritual responsibility is ultimately externalized through collective acts of service, translating devotion into social engagement. These processes illustrate how religious authority is constructed through consistency, humility, and embodied example rather than institutional dominance. Although context-specific to Raudhah Muhibbin, the study contributes to broader discussions on spiritual leadership and community transformation by demonstrating that spirituality becomes socially transformative when emotional internalization, relational trust, and ethical practice converge in sustained communal interaction.

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