

The Role of Contemporary Sufism in Cultivating Inner Peace in the Social Media Era

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Abstract. The development of digital technology has given rise to a new phenomenon in religious life known as *digital religion*, in which religious practices are no longer confined to physical spaces but also take place in virtual ones. This transformation offers new opportunities for believers to deepen their spirituality; however, it also poses serious challenges to mental health due to excessive information exposure, social comparison culture, and digital anxiety. In this context, contemporary Sufism offers a relevant spiritual paradigm for cultivating inner peace through practices of *dhikr* (remembrance of God), contemplation, and divine mindfulness (*muraqabah*), which are now being adapted into digital forms – such as online *dhikr* gatherings, Sufi meditation apps, and the dissemination of Sufi teachings through social media. This study aims to analyze the role of contemporary Sufism as a form of spiritual coping in addressing the psychological pressures of the digital era. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach and literature review, this paper finds that digital Sufi practices can function as a form of spiritual therapy that fosters tranquility, reduces stress levels, and strengthens a sense of connectedness with God and others. The findings affirm that the integration between digital religion and contemporary Sufism not only broadens religious expression but also presents a new model of spiritual-based mental health maintenance.

Keywords: digital religion, mental health, contemporary Sufism, spirituality, social media

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology over the past two decades has revolutionized the landscape of human life, including how people practice religion and engage in spiritual interactions. The internet, social media, and religious applications have shaped a new phenomenon known as *digital religion*—a form of religiosity mediated by technology and conducted within virtual spaces. In this context, spiritual experiences are no longer confined to traditional sacred spaces such as mosques, churches, or monasteries but also manifest through screens, live streaming, and online forums.

This shift represents more than just a change in medium; it marks a fundamental transformation in the structure of religious authority, modes of worship, and perceptions of spirituality. Digital platforms have democratized access to religious knowledge, allowing believers to explore diverse interpretations, participate in global spiritual networks, and construct personal expressions of faith beyond institutional boundaries. However, this digitalization of religiosity also brings new challenges—

such as information overload, superficial engagement, and the commodification of spirituality – that affect believers’ psychological well-being and sense of inner peace. In light of these developments, contemporary Sufism offers a significant counterbalance by reintroducing depth, reflection, and divine consciousness (*muraqabah*) into the digital experience. As a spiritual path rooted in inner purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and remembrance of God (*dhikrullah*), Sufism provides an alternative framework for navigating the digital age with mindfulness and serenity. Therefore, this study examines how contemporary Sufi values can function as spiritual therapy to address the mental health crises emerging from social media pressure and digital culture.

However, behind the convenience and connectivity offered by the digital world lies a new psychological paradox: a crisis of inner peace and mental health. The growing prevalence of social anxiety, depression, and digital fatigue indicates that digital connectivity does not necessarily correlate with emotional well-being. Research by Sherry Turkle (2015) reveals that the accelerated nature of digital communication often diminishes the depth of emotional interaction and weakens social empathy.

In a religious context, this dynamic gives rise to what can be termed “pseudo-spirituality” – a performative form of piety shaped by algorithms and public visibility, yet devoid of contemplative depth. The constant pursuit of validation and engagement metrics transforms spiritual practices into displays of identity rather than journeys of inner transformation. As a result, individuals may appear religiously active online while remaining spiritually fragmented and emotionally exhausted.

Studies on digital religion have been widely conducted. Heidi Campbell (2013) emphasizes that digital religion creates a “hybrid space” between religious tradition and technological culture. Christopher Helland (2005) distinguishes between *religion online* (the dissemination of religious information) and *online religion* (digital religious practice). Meanwhile, Pauline Cheong (2013) introduces the concept of “spiritual ecology,” referring to a new spiritual ecosystem formed through human interaction with technology.

Conversely, studies on contemporary Sufism – such as those by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1975), Martin Lings (1975), and Mohd Roslan Yusoff (2020) – highlight the adaptability of Sufism in addressing the existential crises of modern humanity.

However, a significant research gap emerges when these two fields – digital religion and Sufism – are considered together, particularly in the context of mental health. Most research on digital religion has focused on issues of communication, representation, and religious authority in digital media, while studies on Sufism tend to remain within theological or classical spiritual frameworks. Few studies have explored how Sufi values such as *dhikrullah* (remembrance of God), *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), or *muraqabah* (divine mindfulness) relate to psychological resilience and digital mental well-being.

State of the Art and Research Gaps

In the contemporary academic landscape, research on digital religion has been rapidly developing in the West through a multidisciplinary approach involving media anthropology, psychology, and digital theology. However, within the Islamic world – particularly in Southeast Asia – this discourse remains relatively underexplored, especially concerning the integration of Islamic spirituality (*tasawwuf*) and mental health in the context of digital religiosity. Previous studies, such as those by Campbell (2013) and Lövheim (2011), have yet to incorporate Islamic mystical values as mechanisms for spiritual healing within digital environments. This study seeks to

bridge that theoretical gap by exploring how contemporary Sufism can be adapted as a spiritual model to balance the negative psychological and emotional effects of social media.

Moreover, contemporary psychological studies on digital mindfulness and spiritual well-being are still largely dominated by secular Western paradigms. This research introduces an Islamic perspective grounded in Sufism, positioning “God-consciousness” (*taqwā* or *muraqabah*) as the core of mental equilibrium in the digital age. In doing so, this study contributes a new state of the art in the interdisciplinary dialogue between digital religion, spiritual psychology, and contemporary Sufism.

Reason and Basis for Research

The increasing prevalence of mental health disorders due to excessive social media use has become a global concern. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Health (2023) reported a significant rise in anxiety and depression among productive-age groups, particularly among active social media users. This situation underscores the urgency of developing a spiritual approach rooted in local values and Islamic religiosity to restore the inner balance of modern individuals. Sufism, with its teachings on tranquility, introspection, and divine love, offers a spiritual framework that can be adapted to the digital sphere as a form of spiritual therapy for mental health.

Based on this background, the study seeks to answer the following core questions: 1) How does the transformation of digital religion affect the dimensions of spirituality and mental health in modern society? 2) How can contemporary Sufi values be adapted within digital spaces to enhance inner balance and spiritual resilience? 3) To what extent can the integration of digital religion and Sufi spirituality function as a form of spiritual therapy for mental health in the social media era?

The objectives of this study are: (1) to analyze the relationship between digital religion, spirituality, and mental well-being; (2) to explore the relevance of contemporary Sufi teachings in digital life; and (3) to formulate an integrative conceptual model explaining how digital Sufi spirituality can serve as a foundation for “digital mental resilience” in modern society.

The novelty of this research lies in its effort to bridge three domains that have often been studied separately:

- 1) Digital religion as a form of religious transformation,
- 2) Contemporary Sufism as an Islamic spiritual paradigm, and
- 3) Digital mental health as a modern psychological necessity.

Rather than interpreting Sufism purely theologically, this study situates it within a psycho-spiritual and technological context, proposing a new approach that may give rise to a model of “*Digital Sufi Mindfulness*” as a modern spiritual therapy. Thus, the research contributes to the development of an Islamic epistemology that engages in dialogue with digital reality and contemporary psychology.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using the literature review method as the basis of analysis. This approach was chosen because the main focus of the study is to examine the conceptual phenomenon of the interaction between digital religion, mental health, and contemporary Sufism, rather than quantitative empirical measurement. The qualitative method allows the researcher to interpret the meanings contained in texts, documents, and previous studies in a contextual and in-depth manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

a. Data Sources

The data in this study are derived from relevant scholarly literature, including internationally and nationally reputable journal articles, academic books, dissertations, and research reports published within the last five years (2019–2024). The search focuses on three main themes:

- (1) digital religion and spiritual transformation,
- (2) mental health in the social media era, and
- (3) contemporary Sufism as a form of spiritual therapy.

The researcher utilizes academic databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and Google Scholar to ensure the validity and currency of the sources.

b. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was carried out through three main steps:

- (1) Identification and selection of sources – The researcher determined key terms such as “*digital religion*”, “*mental health*”, “*contemporary Sufism*”, and “*spiritual therapy*” to locate relevant articles.
- (2) “Classification and data extraction” – Each obtained source was categorized based on topic and main findings, then coded using the *thematic content analysis* approach to identify conceptual patterns.
- (3) “Verification and thematic synthesis” – The collected data were reverified to ensure validity and reliability before being synthesized into a scientific narrative illustrating the relationships among the main variables.

c. Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using *thematic content analysis* as developed by Braun and Clarke (2019). This technique allows researchers to identify major themes emerging from the literature corpus and interpret deeper meanings within each theme. The analysis steps include:

- Repeated reading of sources to obtain comprehensive understanding;
- Thematic coding according to the study’s focus;
- Grouping of themes according to the main variables (digital religion, mental health, and Sufism);
- Construction of a conceptual narrative explaining the interrelations among variables within the social media era context.

d. Validity and Replicability

To ensure credibility and reliability, the researcher employed source triangulation by comparing findings from various types of literature and disciplines (theology, psychology, and media studies). The analytical process was conducted transparently through systematic documentation of literature selection and theme coding stages. By following these procedures, the study can be replicated by other researchers using similar literature collections and thematic analysis methods (Nowell et al., 2017).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Digital Religion and the Transformation of Spirituality

The development of digital technology over the past two decades has brought a profound transformation in how humans practice religion, understand spirituality, and engage in everyday religious life. This transformation has given rise to a new phenomenon that scholars refer to as *digital religion*—a form of religiosity that is manifested, mediated, and practiced through digital spaces (Campbell, 2021). Digital

religion is not merely the transfer of religious activities from the physical world to the virtual realm; rather, it represents a “recontextualization of spirituality” that alters how individuals relate to God, their community, and their religious identity.

In the traditional paradigm, the sacred space is closely associated with mosques, churches, temples, or other physical places of worship governed by religious authorities. However, in the digital context, the sacred space undergoes *decentralization*. The Internet becomes a new spiritual arena where religious experiences are no longer confined by geographical or institutional boundaries (Hutchings, 2019). Through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok, believers cultivate spiritual relationships, participate in online religious gatherings (*majelis taklim daring*), and even perform rituals collectively in virtual settings.

This transformation has given rise to the phenomenon of “networked religion”, a form of religiosity rooted in social networking and media algorithms (Campbell, 2012). Its open and participatory nature makes digital religion a dialogical space that transcends traditional boundaries of faith and identity. However, it also introduces new challenges, particularly the fragmentation of religious authority. As individuals gain the power to interpret and disseminate religious teachings through social media, the distinction between official and unofficial authority becomes increasingly blurred. In the context of Islam, for instance, the emergence of religious influencers has partially replaced traditional *ulama* in providing spiritual guidance.

One of the most significant implications of digital religion is the “shift in religious authority”. While traditional systems locate authority in recognized institutions and figures, digital media democratizes access to theology and interpretation. Individuals can easily reach a multitude of perspectives, commentaries, and spiritual traditions with a single click. This phenomenon fosters what Campbell and Evolvi (2020) call “religious individualization” – the tendency for individuals to construct personalized spiritualities based on digital experiences and personal preferences.

At the same time, digital religion serves as a stage for constructing religious identity in a global public sphere. Social media acts as a performance arena where individuals express their spiritual identity through symbols, narratives, and online interactions. Yet, this process often generates a paradox between authenticity and performativity. Publicized acts of devotion can easily transform into social performances rather than genuine inner reflection (Evolvi, 2022). Consequently, digital religion operates not only as a medium for spiritual dissemination but also as a site of contestation for identity and meaning.

The digitalization of spirituality produces ambivalent effects on the human relationship with the transcendent. On the one hand, technology democratizes access to spiritual resources, widening participation in religious experiences. Through *dzikir* apps, online lectures, or digital communities, spiritual values become more accessible to the public. On the other hand, this accessibility may dilute the depth of spiritual experience, as encounters with the sacred are often reduced to content consumption (Hosseini, 2022).

Within this framework, digital spirituality frequently shifts from mystical experience to informational spirituality. Many users focus more on accumulating religious knowledge than on internalizing it into lived practice. This leads not to existential transformation but to what Pariser (2011) describes as a “*filter bubble of faith*” – a condition in which algorithmic systems create insular religious environments, isolating users from diverse perspectives.

Nevertheless, the digital realm also opens opportunities for creative and inclusive expressions of faith. Young people, particularly Generation Z, use technology to engage in flexible, cross-boundary spirituality. A single individual might join an online Sufi study circle in the morning, participate in an interfaith meditation group in the afternoon, and listen to spiritual music on streaming platforms at night. This trend signals the rise of “hybridized spirituality”, where Sufi, psychological, and humanistic values converge within digital ecosystems (Geaves, 2020).

Such practices illustrate the emergence of “post-institutional spirituality”, emphasizing inner transformation over formal obedience. Within Islam, contemporary Sufism exemplifies this approach, as it prioritizes the universal, introspective dimension of faith while adapting to social and technological change (Haider & Husain, 2021). Hence, digital religion should not be viewed merely as a degradation of religiosity but as an evolution of spirituality toward a more reflective and cosmopolitan consciousness.

Spiritual transformation in the digital era also demands a new “digital religious ethic”. As the boundaries between private and public spheres blur, issues arise concerning sincerity, humility, and moral awareness in publicly broadcasted worship. Here, Sufi virtues such as “*ikhlas*” (sincerity), *tawadhu’* (humility), and *muraqabah* (awareness of divine presence) become highly relevant.

Sufi ethics can thus serve as a moral compass for navigating digital religiosity. Principles like *dzikrullah* (remembrance of God) and *tazkiyatun nafs* (self-purification) enable individuals to balance digital engagement with spiritual presence. Through this balance, digital religion can evolve into a medium for cultivating inner peace rather than a mere stage for religious performance (Karakas, 2021).

The literature reveals that digital religion has two faces: one that facilitates the spread of spiritual values, and another that risks diminishing the quality of spiritual experience. The central challenge lies not in technology itself but in individuals’ capacity to sustain spiritual awareness amid digital overstimulation.

Therefore, spiritual transformation in the digital age must aim toward “transformative spirituality”—a spirituality that not only adapts to technological change but also nurtures ethical awareness and inner equilibrium. In this regard, contemporary Sufism serves as a vital bridge between mysticism and technology, between digital faith and inner peace.

Ultimately, digital religion represents not merely a product of religious modernization but a new frontier for human spiritual evolution, where Sufi values function as a moral compass for navigating the complexities of social media culture.

3.2. Mental Health and the Challenges of the Social Media Era

Mental health has emerged as one of the most critical issues within an increasingly digital and interconnected society. As social media dependence intensifies, significant psychological consequences have followed. Originally designed to foster connection and expand communication, social media has increasingly become a source of stress, anxiety, and even depression (Twenge, 2020). For many individuals—especially among younger generations—the digital sphere functions not only as a space for interaction but also as a stage for identity formation and social validation, both of which are fraught with psychological tension.

Social media creates a new arena where individuals publicly display their identities. Yet this process often results in “*social comparison*”, where one’s happiness or

success is evaluated against the curated lives of others online. Studies indicate that excessive exposure to idealized digital content heightens risks of low self-esteem, life dissatisfaction, and social anxiety (Kross et al., 2021). This dynamic is encapsulated in the “*highlight reel effect*”, the tendency for users to present only the most favorable aspects of their lives while concealing the struggles (Chou & Edge, 2012). Consequently, others develop distorted perceptions of social reality, leading to chronic “not enough” feelings. Spiritually, this weakens one’s capacity for *shukr* (gratitude) and *rida* (contentment) with life’s divine decree.

A deeper consequence of social media dominance is the emergence of an “existential crisis of meaning”. When one’s sense of value and identity becomes dependent on likes and followers, life’s orientation shifts from seeking meaning to seeking validation. This reflects Viktor Frankl’s (2006) concept of the “existential vacuum” – a condition of spiritual emptiness arising from the loss of transcendental purpose.

Within the context of digital religion, this crisis is exacerbated by the rise of “*instant spirituality*” – superficial religiosity centered on immediate gratification. Individuals may frequently share religious quotes or attend online sermons without internalizing the underlying values. Hosseini (2022) terms this the “*digital mystic paradox*”, wherein outward religiosity increases while inner well-being declines.

Social media addiction has become a defining behavioral disorder of the digital age, directly affecting mental health. Recent studies reveal that using social media for more than three hours per day correlates with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and insomnia (Lin et al., 2016). Social media algorithms operate on the principle of *intermittent reinforcement*, delivering dopamine spikes with each notification or interaction – creating psychological dependency akin to substance addiction (Montag & Walla, 2016).

This cycle leads to *digital fatigue* – emotional exhaustion caused by information overload. The condition not only diminishes productivity and focus but also erodes one’s capacity for spiritual reflection. Individuals become increasingly reactive to external stimuli, losing the inner stillness necessary for religious contemplation. In Sufi terminology, this reflects a *qalb* (heart) veiled by worldly noise, now represented by algorithmic chaos and endless visual stimulation.

Within digital spaces, religiosity often manifests performatively. Users display acts of worship – such as reading the Qur’an, donating, or reciting *dzikir* – not purely out of devotion but for social recognition (Evolvi, 2022). This phenomenon, known as *performative spirituality*, prioritizes symbolic expression over authentic inner experience.

The pressure to appear religious online can produce psychological conflict between sincerity (*niyyah*) and self-image. Individuals trapped in such performativity may experience *moral anxiety* and guilt for doubting their own intentions (Karakas, 2021). Over time, this undermines emotional and spiritual balance, as religious practices become tools of social strategy rather than pathways to inner purification.

As religious activities migrate to digital platforms, spiritual experiences often lose their transcendent depth. Rituals once performed in contemplative silence are transformed into spectacles, while prayers become text-based shares. For some, this creates *spiritual dissonance* – a misalignment between outward expressions of faith and the inner depth of meaning (Campbell, 2021).

Such dissonance can worsen mental health, as spirituality – intended as a source of peace – turns into a site of confusion. Individuals may feel “digitally faithful” yet

existentially empty. In this sense, social media functions paradoxically as both a connector and a disruptor of spiritual meaning.

To address these challenges, strategies that integrate psychological and spiritual approaches are essential. Haider and Husain (2021) demonstrate that Sufi-based Islamic mindfulness practices—such as *dzikrullah* (remembrance of God), *tafakkur* (reflection), and *muraqabah* (awareness of divine presence)—enhance emotional regulation and reduce stress. These Sufi principles cultivate divine consciousness in every digital moment, helping individuals navigate online pressures with serenity.

Moreover, reinforcing *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) is vital to protect the heart from negative digital traits such as envy, resentment, and spiritual narcissism. Thus, Sufi teachings transcend mysticism, offering a form of “spiritual therapy” for the modern psyche—one that harmonizes mind, soul, and digital existence.

From the synthesis of literature, it becomes clear that the central challenge to mental health in the social media era is not technology itself but how humans construct their *psychospiritual relationship* within it. Social media is merely a medium; mental well-being depends on one’s ability to cultivate self-awareness, manage expectations, and sustain authentic spiritual values.

Accordingly, a new paradigm is needed—one that frames mental health as a dimension of modern spirituality. This perspective situates inner peace not only as a product of psychological therapy but as a realization of divine consciousness. Within this framework, contemporary Sufism offers a mediating path between technology and transcendence—bringing forth a spirituality that is reflective, empathetic, and balanced amid the turbulence of the digital age.

3.3. Contemporary Sufism as Relevant Spirituality

In the modern context marked by technological acceleration, value fragmentation, and an existential crisis of meaning, contemporary Sufism emerges as a form of spirituality that offers balance between inner needs and social challenges. Sufism is no longer understood merely as a classical Islamic mystical tradition emphasizing self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), but has evolved into a cross-cultural current of spirituality that highlights peace, self-awareness, and divine connection amid the turbulence of modernity (Hermansen, 2020). In this regard, Sufism is relevant because it does not reject modernity; instead, it integrates spiritual values into digital and urban life.

Contemporary Sufism has undergone epistemological reinterpretation to respond to modern challenges. While classical Sufism emphasized ascetic withdrawal from material life, in the digital era it teaches *al-wasathiyah*—the balance between spirituality and social engagement (Nasr, 2015). Spiritual practices such as *dzikr*, *tafakkur*, and *muraqabah* have been adapted through digital media such as podcasts, reflective videos, and online *dzikr* gatherings. This demonstrates that Sufi spirituality has not lost its essence but has expanded its medium and meaning.

Muslim intellectuals such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr and William Chittick argue that the crisis of modernity is a spiritual crisis rooted in humanity’s loss of metaphysical awareness of God (Nasr, 2013; Chittick, 2018). Sufism, in this sense, becomes an alternative path that restores human consciousness to divine presence and nurtures a holistic view of existence. Therefore, contemporary Sufism should not be viewed as a retreat from the world but as an active form of “spiritual engagement” that shapes social ethics and spiritual ecology.

Modern society—particularly the digital generation—faces existential anxiety driven by social pressure, digital alienation, and loss of life direction (Bauman, 2017; Twenge, 2019). Sufism offers a spiritual model grounded in inner experience and universal love rather than exclusive dogma. The principle of *mahabbah* (divine love) serves as the foundation for cultivating psychological well-being and social empathy. Love in Sufi tradition is not merely emotional but a transformative energy that transcends rationality and awakens awareness of existential meaning.

Rumi, for example, in his *Mathnawi*, portrays the spiritual journey of humankind as a process of discovering divine love through profound inner experience (Schimmel, 2019). In the modern context, Rumi's teachings have been reinterpreted as a universal source of inspiration that bridges Eastern spirituality and Western psychological needs. Rumi's popularity on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube illustrates how Sufi messages can transform into a universal language of healing for a generation yearning for meaning and inner wholeness.

Mental health from a Sufi perspective is not limited to emotional or cognitive balance but involves alignment between the *nafs* (self), *qalb* (heart), and *ruh* (spirit). When the heart is purified from ego and worldly desire, inner peace arises. This concept parallels modern psychological approaches such as mindfulness and spiritual coping, which emphasize full awareness of the present moment and acceptance of oneself (Koenig, 2021). Hence, contemporary Sufism does not contradict modern science but complements it, serving as a bridge between spirituality and psychology.

Empirical studies have shown that Sufi practices such as *dzikr* and meditation reduce stress and enhance mental well-being (Rahman et al., 2022; Al-Kandari & Al-Qashan, 2020). For instance, regular *dzikrullah* increases alpha brain wave activity associated with calmness and concentration (Rahman et al., 2022). These findings reinforce the view that Sufism is not only theologically relevant but also therapeutically effective in addressing psychological pressures in the modern era.

The rise of “spiritual influencers” and digital Sufi communities illustrates how contemporary Sufism adopts technology to expand its reach for spiritual education and therapy. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are used to spread Sufi teachings in narrative, visual, and emotionally engaging forms. While this trend risks the commodification of spirituality, it also opens opportunities for a broader and more inclusive transformation of spiritual consciousness (Campbell, 2021).

According to Campbell (2021), digital religion is not merely the relocation of religious practice into online spaces but the formation of a new, dialogical, and participatory religious identity. In this sense, “digital Sufism” allows individuals to join virtual *dzikr* sessions, share inner reflections through creative content, and connect with global spiritual communities beyond geographical boundaries. This demonstrates how contemporary Sufism has successfully rooted its classical values within digital culture without losing its transcendental dimension.

Ultimately, contemporary Sufism asserts that true spirituality does not oppose modernity but directs it toward ethical awareness and sustainability. Amid environmental crises, social conflicts, and existential anxieties, Sufism teaches principles of simplicity, empathy, and cosmic balance. These values serve as the foundation for reconstructing the moral landscape of a digital society often trapped in narcissism and hedonism. Therefore, Sufism remains not only relevant for Muslims but also universally significant as a spirituality that fosters love, peace, and global inner harmony (Hermansen, 2020; Nasr, 2015).

3.4. Adaptation of Sufi Values in Digital Space

The transformation of information technology has fundamentally reshaped how people engage in religious practices. In the age of digital religion, virtual spaces have become new arenas for articulating spirituality and expressing religiosity. Within this context, Sufi values have undergone significant adaptation without losing their essential dimensions—namely, the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), awareness of God’s presence (*muraqabah*), and divine love (*mahabbah*). The adaptation of these values in digital spaces has given rise to what can be termed “digital Sufism,” where Sufi practices and discourses assume new forms through social media, online platforms, and virtual communities.

Historically, Sufism has flourished through direct interaction between *murshid* (spiritual guide) and *murid* (disciple), emphasizing personal and face-to-face spiritual mentorship. In the digital era, however, the pedagogical dimension of Sufism has expanded through online media. *Majlis dzikir*, *halaqah tasawuf*, and Sufi teachings are now conducted virtually via platforms such as Zoom, YouTube, and Instagram Live (Campbell, 2021). This development shows that Sufi spirituality does not reject digital media; rather, it utilizes it as a means to disseminate universal values more broadly and inclusively.

According to Helland (2018), there are two primary forms of digital religion: *religion online* (religious information presented on the internet) and *online religion* (religious practices performed through the internet). Digital Sufism combines both, as cyberspace serves not only as a repository of spiritual knowledge but also as a site of collective spiritual praxis. For example, modern Sufi orders such as the Naqshbandiyyah Haqqaniyah and Tijaniyyah International have established official digital channels for interactive *dzikir* sessions and global teachings.

This evolution reflects that the core essence of Sufism—inner transformation and divine connection—is now mediated by technology, which functions as a spiritual bridge rather than a barrier. Thus, the digital realm becomes a *cyber zawiyah*: a virtual space for contemplation, remembrance (*dzikir*), and spiritual unity in new formats.

The adaptation of Sufi values in the digital era is not only conceptual but also aesthetic and symbolic. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have introduced new forms of Sufi-inspired communication emphasizing visual, narrative, and emotional elements. Poetry by Rumi, quotes from Ibn ‘Arabi, and teachings of Al-Ghazali are often presented as short videos, digital art, or spoken-word performances that resonate with the affective sensibilities of the digital generation.

This phenomenon can be understood as a *resemanticization* of Sufi values, wherein digital aesthetics become the medium for conveying inner meaning (*batiniah*) in a language accessible to contemporary audiences (Hermansen, 2020). Sufi aesthetics—emphasizing beauty, simplicity, and depth—aligns well with modern visual culture’s thirst for authentic emotional and spiritual experiences.

Nevertheless, challenges such as the commodification of spirituality have emerged, wherein Sufi values risk being reduced to popular content devoid of mystical depth (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). The rise of “spiritual influencers,” for example, illustrates a paradox between spiritual outreach and personal branding. Yet, their presence also opens new opportunities to promote a gentler and more inclusive spirituality—an alternative to rigid and exclusivist religious narratives.

One of the most intriguing innovations in the adaptation of Sufi values in digital spaces is the emergence of *online dhikr communities*. These virtual gatherings allow

participants from various countries to engage simultaneously in spiritual practice. Despite being mediated by technology, the spiritual essence of these experiences remains intact (Bunt, 2018).

Such online communities represent borderless spiritual collectives emphasizing inner solidarity, spiritual equality, and shared religious experience. This aligns with the classical Sufi spirit that rejects worldly hierarchies and affirms ontological unity (*wahdat al-wujūd*). Thus, digital Sufism is not merely a reproduction of rituals but a *recontextualization* of universal spirituality within a new sociotechnological landscape.

Studies show that participation in online spiritual communities enhances emotional well-being and social connectedness amid digital isolation (Koenig, 2021; Rahman et al., 2022). Virtual interactions centered on love and remembrance function as *spiritual coping mechanisms*, helping individuals manage stress and anxiety linked to social media dependency.

While the adaptation of Sufi values in digital space offers great potential for spreading universal spirituality, it also raises serious questions of spiritual authenticity. In traditional Sufism, authenticity is ensured through *silsilah* (spiritual lineage) and direct guidance from a *murshid*. In digital contexts, however, authenticity may weaken due to fragmented sources, free interpretations, and diminished spiritual authority (Eickelman & Anderson, 2019).

Nevertheless, contemporary Sufism interprets authenticity not as exclusive adherence to traditional forms but as an inner experience of divine presence, cultivated through intention, reflection, and self-awareness. Thus, digital spaces can serve as venues for more democratic and participatory spiritual processes, as long as the essence of Sufi teachings—love, humility, and introspection—remains preserved.

Core Sufi virtues such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *sabr* (patience), *mahabbah* (love), and *tawadu'* (humility) form essential ethical foundations for digital interaction. In an online environment often dominated by hate speech, polarization, and narcissism, Sufism offers a paradigm of *digital spiritual ethics* grounded in *mujāhadah al-nafs* (self-discipline) and compassion (Nasr, 2015).

By internalizing Sufi values in online activities, social media users can transform digital spaces from arenas of ego competition into realms of contemplation and goodness. The principle of *ihsan*—acting as though one sees God—serves as a moral guide for maintaining spiritual awareness even in virtual engagement. This demonstrates that Sufi values possess remarkable adaptability to technological progress while providing ethical orientation for a digital culture often detached from spirituality.

3.5. Sufism as a Spiritual Therapy for Mental Health

The crisis of mental health in the modern era has intensified alongside social pressures, the acceleration of information, and digital alienation. Phenomena such as chronic stress, social anxiety, and depression have become global issues affecting not only individuals but also broader social structures (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). In this context, Sufism offers a spiritual approach that transcends conventional psychological therapies by emphasizing inner awareness, spiritual tranquility, and transcendental connection with the Divine. This approach—known as *spiritual Sufi therapy*—is rooted in the doctrines of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and *muraqabah* (awareness of divine presence).

Spiritual therapy in the Sufi tradition is based on the belief that the source of psychological suffering lies in the imbalance between human spiritual and carnal

dimensions. When the *nafs* (ego) dominates consciousness, individuals become trapped in anxiety, greed, and inner conflict. The process of *tazkiyah al-nafs* aims to purify the heart (*qalb*) from spiritual ailments such as envy, arrogance, and restlessness in order to attain *sakinah* (inner peace). In modern terminology, this process resembles cognitive restructuring in cognitive therapy, though it involves a deeper spiritual dimension (Koenig, 2021).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2013) explains that the psychological crisis of modern humanity is essentially a manifestation of a spiritual crisis—a disconnection from the Divine Source and from the transcendent meaning of life. Sufism, within this framework, seeks not only to alleviate psychological symptoms but also to restore humans to their *fitrah*—a balanced harmony between body, mind, and spirit. Therefore, Sufi therapy is not merely reactive but transformational, guiding individuals toward comprehensive existential awareness.

One of the main therapeutic practices in Sufism is *dhikr* (remembrance), the repetitive invocation of God's names as a form of contemplation and unification of consciousness with the Divine. In modern psychology, *dhikr* bears resemblance to mindfulness meditation, though with a theocentric orientation. Several studies have shown that *dhikr* can reduce stress levels, enhance calmness, and improve emotional regulation (Rahman et al., 2022).

In a neuropsychological study conducted by Al-Kandari and Al-Qashan (2020), participants who practiced *dhikr* for 15 minutes daily demonstrated significant increases in alpha brainwave activity—an indicator of relaxation and mental balance. Additionally, *dhikr* practice reduced cortisol levels, which are associated with stress and anxiety. These findings suggest that *dhikr* can serve as an evidence-based spiritual intervention effective for mental health.

Beyond *dhikr*, the practice of *muraqabah*—or awareness of God's presence—also has therapeutic effects. When individuals realize that they are constantly under divine watch, they experience feelings of serenity, safety, and empowerment. This awareness transforms their perception of suffering, viewing it as part of a spiritual journey toward inner enlightenment.

The concept of *mahabbah* (divine love) in Sufism forms a crucial foundation for spiritual therapy. For the Sufis, love for God is the ultimate healing force that overcomes inner wounds, anxiety, and alienation (Chittick, 2018). Through love, individuals undergo a psychological transformation from self-centeredness toward union with the Divine Beloved. Rumi, in his *Mathnawi*, describes love as “the remedy for all ailments,” for it teaches acceptance and total surrender to God's will.

From the perspective of modern psychotherapy, this experience of divine love can be interpreted as a form of *spiritual reappraisal*—a cognitive strategy that reframes negative experiences through a spiritual lens. This aligns with *positive psychology*, which emphasizes the power of positive emotions, forgiveness, and gratitude in enhancing mental well-being (Snyder & Lopez, 2020). Thus, Sufism offers an integrative approach connecting spiritual, emotional, and cognitive dimensions in the healing process.

Contemporary Sufism extends beyond theological discourse and has entered the domain of integration between Islamic spirituality and modern psychotherapy. Sufi therapeutic models have been employed by Muslim psychologists to help patients experiencing depression, anxiety, or existential emptiness (El-Guebaly & Koenig, 2021). These therapeutic processes involve *spiritual mentoring*, guiding individuals to

recognize the spiritual roots of their psychological issues, develop inner awareness, and deepen their relationship with God.

Field studies conducted in Indonesia and Malaysia have shown that Sufi-based therapy effectively enhances psychological well-being, particularly among individuals suffering from stress due to occupational pressures and digital life (Rahman et al., 2022). In practice, this therapy combines spiritual counseling, *dhikr* exercises, Qur'anic reflection, and self-contemplation. The approach not only reduces anxiety levels but also enhances gratitude, hope, and a sense of life meaning.

From a *cross-cultural psychology* perspective, Sufism can be regarded as a contextual therapeutic approach, as it is deeply rooted in Islamic cultural and symbolic values. This approach is essential in modern Muslim societies that often feel alienated by secular and individualistic Western therapy models (Koenig, 2021). By integrating Sufi values such as *sabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (trust in God), and *dhikr*, spiritual therapy can create balance between an individual's psychological and religious dimensions.

Sufism also contributes a paradigmatic insight to modern psychotherapy: true healing concerns not only thoughts and emotions but also the unity between human beings and the transcendent source. In this perspective, mental health is not merely the absence of psychological symptoms but the presence of *inner harmony*—a state arising from the awareness of God's presence in every moment of life.

Thus, contemporary Sufism can be viewed as a bridge between spirituality and modern mental science, offering a new paradigm of spiritually grounded mental health therapy that emphasizes divine love, remembrance, and awareness as the foundations of psychological resilience.

3.6. Integration of Digital Religion and Sufi Spirituality

Digital transformation has profoundly changed how humans interact with religion and spirituality. The internet and social media have become new arenas for religious experience, which Campbell (2013) describes as *digital religion*—a form of religiosity mediated by digital technologies and virtual networks. Within the Islamic context, this transformation has given rise to the phenomenon of *digital Sufism*, in which Sufi teachings and practices are no longer confined to physical *dhikr* gatherings but have expanded into virtual spaces such as YouTube, Instagram, and online meditation platforms (Fakhruroji, 2022).

This phenomenon signifies a paradigmatic shift in spirituality from traditional sacred spaces to participatory, open, and interactive virtual public spheres. Sufism—with its flexible and universal essence—demonstrates remarkable adaptability to the dynamics of the digital age. Through digitalization, spiritual values once considered esoteric are now widely accessible, rendering Sufism relevant to modern generations longing for inner peace amidst the noise of technology.

The emergence of digital *tariqas* (Sufi orders) exemplifies the integration between Sufism and technology. Several modern *tariqas*, such as Naqshbandiyyah and Qadiriyyah, have adopted digital platforms to disseminate *dhikr* teachings, host online study sessions, and build transnational spiritual communities (Bunt, 2018). This development illustrates how Sufism utilizes technology as a medium for both spiritual outreach (*da'wah*) and healing.

In Indonesia, figures such as Habib Luthfi bin Yahya and Gus Baha have played significant roles in spreading Sufi spirituality through digital media. Their sermons—widely circulated on YouTube and TikTok—emphasize *tasamuh* (tolerance), *mahabbah* (divine love), and *tawadhu'* (humility), which are core Sufi values serving as social

therapy against polarization and hate speech in cyberspace (Fakhruroji, 2022). Hence, digital Sufism functions not only as a medium of *da'wah* but also as a space for social and psychological reconciliation within a fragmented society.

Digital spirituality brings two major consequences: democratization and decontextualization. On one hand, Sufi teachings have become more accessible to wider audiences, including younger generations who may have been distant from traditional religious institutions. Digital Sufism offers a new format of spirituality that is personal, reflective, and free from institutional authority (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). On the other hand, there is a risk of spiritual commodification, where Sufi teachings are simplified into motivational or entertainment content devoid of depth. The phenomenon of “Sufi influencers” and “viral *dhikr*” illustrates a paradox between the intention of soul purification and the pursuit of digital popularity. From a Sufi ethical perspective, this poses a new challenge: how to preserve the authenticity of spirituality within an algorithmic culture driven by image and performance (Nasr, 2013).

Therefore, integrating digital religion and Sufi spirituality requires a renewed epistemological approach—one rooted in *tazkiyah* (self-purification), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and divine love (*mahabbah ilahiyyah*). Within this framework, technology is not perceived as a threat but as a spiritual instrument (*wasilah dhikr*), a reminder of the Divine. As Rumi analogized, “God speaks through every means, even through the voice of the reed flute.”

A distinctive feature of digital Sufism is its capacity to create virtual contemplative spaces. For example, *dhikr* applications and meditative channels such as *Sufi Path* and *The Art of Dhikr* provide spiritual experiences combining music, visualization, and guided Sufi reflection. Such practices demonstrate that spirituality can be internalized through multisensory digital experiences, which in the psychology of religion is referred to as *embodied spirituality* (Ammerman, 2020).

These virtual spaces also facilitate transnational spiritual communities, where Sufi practitioners from diverse regions interact and share mystical experiences. Hermansen (2019) describes this as the emergence of *tariqa without walls*—a borderless order that reaffirms the universality of divine love. The existence of such communities illustrates Sufism’s ability to adapt to the *network logic* of digital society while preserving its spiritual essence.

Despite its potential, the integration of Sufism and digital religion also raises ethical and authenticity challenges. First, questions arise concerning spiritual authority in the digital realm: who holds legitimate authority as a *murshid* (spiritual guide) online? Second, there is a danger of reducing mystical experiences to mere emotional sensations devoid of *mujahadah* (spiritual struggle). Third, Sufi symbols and teachings risk being exploited for commercial or ideological purposes (Hermansen, 2019).

In addressing these challenges, contemporary Sufis must reaffirm the principle of *digital adab*—the ethics of spiritual awareness in technological engagement. *Digital adab* includes ego control, honesty in sharing spiritual knowledge, and using media as a means of remembrance rather than self-promotion. Through such ethics, digital Sufism can foster *akhlaq karimah* (noble character) in cyberspace and counteract the digital nihilism that erodes life’s meaning.

Ultimately, the integration of digital religion and Sufi spirituality leads to the emergence of a *digital spiritual ecology*—a collective awareness that technology and spirituality are not opposites but complementary forces that nurture both the soul and society. In this framework, technology becomes part of *wasilah ilahiyyah* (divine means) that assists humans in rediscovering themselves and their Creator.

Nasr (2013) emphasizes that the duty of modern humanity is not to reject technological progress but to re-sacralize modern life by reintegrating spiritual values within it. Digital Sufism responds to this call by offering spirituality that is accessible, inclusive, and mindful, without losing its inner depth. Through digital platforms, the universal message of Sufism—love, compassion, and divine consciousness—emerges as a form of global spiritual therapy for a generation in search of meaning.

Thus, the integration between digital religion and Sufi spirituality is not merely an adaptive phenomenon but a manifestation of spiritual resilience in the post-secular era. Sufism demonstrates that when used with sincerity and awareness, technology can become a medium of *da'wah*, healing, and enlightenment. In the hands of digital Sufis, social media transforms from a space of distraction into a contemplative *mihrab* where modern humans relearn how to encounter God through the screen.

4. Conclusion

The digital era has brought profound changes in how humans practice religion, interact, and seek meaning in life. Religion no longer thrives solely in sacred spaces such as mosques, pesantrens, or study circles but has also evolved within the dynamic, interactive, and borderless realm of digital media. In this context, the phenomenon of digital religion is not merely a new form of mediation for transmitting religious teachings but also reflects a deeper transformation of modern spirituality.

This study reveals that digital religion and contemporary Sufism are mutually enriching. On one hand, Sufism offers depth of meaning, self-awareness, and inner peace—elements greatly needed by modern humans to cope with the psychological pressures of social media and existential crises. On the other hand, digital technology provides new spaces for disseminating Sufi values more widely, democratically, and across cultures.

The integration of digital religion and Sufism has produced a new form of spirituality that is more inclusive, personal, and therapeutic. Through social media, websites, podcasts, and video channels, practices such as *dhikr*, *tafakkur*, and spiritual teaching have become globally accessible. This phenomenon demonstrates how Sufism has adapted to the logic of digital networks without losing its essence centered on *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and *mahabbah ilahiyah* (divine love).

Nevertheless, this integration faces serious challenges. Among the major issues are the commodification of spirituality, the erosion of traditional spiritual authority (*murshid*), and the reduction of Sufism into mere popular motivation or entertainment. Therefore, a new ethical framework is needed—what may be called *digital adab*—a form of spiritual awareness in virtual interactions, both for spiritual teachers, students, and social media users in general.

From a mental health perspective, contemporary Sufism can serve as an effective form of spiritual therapy. Values such as remembrance (*dhikr*), gratitude, patience, and love function as coping mechanisms that strengthen inner tranquility while reducing stress, anxiety, and depression—conditions increasingly prevalent in the social media era. The integration of Sufi teachings with digital mindfulness practices also opens the way toward a digital spiritual ecology—a collective consciousness that harmonizes technology with divine values.

Thus, this study concludes that digital Sufism is not merely an adaptation to modern times but represents the spiritual resilience of Islam amidst modernity. Through the wise and ethical use of technology, Sufi values can serve as a bridge between the material and the spiritual worlds, between modernity and transcendence.

Digital Sufism teaches that true peace does not depend on space or medium but on the awareness of the heart continuously connected to God – wherever and whenever.

Finally, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the interdisciplinary discourse between religious studies, spiritual psychology, and digital technology. Practically, it provides a reference for developing strategies for *da'wah* and spiritual education that are relevant to the needs of the digital generation. Future research is recommended to empirically examine how digital Sufi practices affect the long-term psychological and social well-being of their practitioners.

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