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Exploring Sufi Practices on Social Media: Distortions and Complexities in Contemporary Pakistan

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Abstract
The engagement of Sufism on Pakistani social media has sparked many concerns over the inclusivity of religious manifestations and the interpretation of the Qur'an. This research seeks to examine the historical development and objectives of Sufism in order to analyze the impact of Sufi activities in the digital domain, specifically focusing on the emergence of religious aberrations. The research was carried out utilizing qualitative methodologies by examining ancient Sufi literature and subsequently comparing it with Sufi practices in the digital domain. The findings demonstrate that internet platforms have fundamentally transformed the availability and dissemination of Sufi teachings, allowing an unparalleled avenue for dialogue and cultural manifestation that was before unachievable. Nevertheless, there are deficiencies in their attitude to community, instructional methods, and the impact of technology on their individual activities. The concept of Digital Sufism demonstrates the integration of traditional practices into the online world, resulting in both opportunities and challenges in the modern day.
Keywords: Sufism in Pakistan; Online Sufism; Digital Religious Practices

Praktik Sufi di media sosial Pakistan telah menimbulkan beberapa masalah terkait keberagaman dalam ekspresi keagamaan dan pemahaman terhadap teks Al-Qur'an. Melalui penelusuran sejarah dan tujuan tasawuf, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat bagaimana praktik Sufi di ranah digital tersebut memunculkan distorsi keagamaan. Penelitian dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui studi literatur Sufi klasik dan kemudian membandingkannya dengan praktik sufi di ranah digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan platform online telah merevolusi aksesibilitas dan penyebaran ajaran Sufi, mendorong sebuah cara yang belum pernah terjadi sebelumnya untuk percakapan dan ekspresi budaya yang sebelumnya tidak mungkin tercapai. Namun, kesenjangan muncul dalam pendekatan mereka terhadap komunitas, teknik pengajaran, dan pengaruh teknologi terhadap praktik mereka masing-masing. Sufisme Digital mencontohkan asimilasi adat istiadat konvensional ke dalam ranah virtual, yang melahirkan prospek dan kompleksitas di era kontemporer.

A. INTRODUCTION

The practice of Sufism, the mystical tradition within Islam, has a long and fascinating history that spans centuries. However, in recent decades, a new trend has emerged: the rise of "digital Sufism." This pertains to the growing of prevalence and utilization of Sufi Islam in the digital and online realms, reflecting the adaptability and dynamism of Sufi traditions in the contemporary and interconnected world (Jonker & Versteeg, 2015; Howell, 2018). The rise of digital Sufism is influenced by various factors. These include the internet and digital platforms, which have made Sufi teachings and cultural heritage more accessible and widespread. Additionally, digital platforms have allowed Sufism to transcend traditional boundaries of geography and culture (Jonker & Versteeg, 2015; Kargin, 2020; Schielke & Debevec, 2012). Significantly, the rise of digital Sufism has brought about noteworthy transformations in Sufi practices and interpretations. These changes include a focus on personalized spiritual exploration and the development of individualized practices. Furthermore, eclectic and syncretic elements from various spiritual and religious traditions have been incorporated. There has also been a shift towards more horizontally organized Sufi communities that challenge traditional hierarchies. Moreover, Sufi teachings are now being disseminated to a wider and more diverse audience (Howell, 2018; Sedgwick, 2016; Schielke & Debevec, 2012; Jonker & Versteeg, 2015; Karamustafa, 2007). These changes have had a significant impact on the development of Sufi interpretations and practices, opening up new possibilities for understanding traditional Sufi teachings. As digital Sufism continues to evolve, it offers a perspective to comprehend the flexibility and vitality of Sufi practices. Exploring Islam in the modern, digital age.

Sufism, the mystical and esoteric dimension of Islam, has had a significant global influence, transcending geographical and cultural

boundaries. While the origins of Sufism can be traced back to the early days of Islam in the Middle East, the tradition has flourished and adapted to diverse contexts around the world (Baldick, 2012). Sufism has a significant influence worldwide, surpassing boundaries of geography and culture. Having originated in the Middle East, Sufism has spread its influence across the globe, particularly in Indonesia, which boasts the largest Muslim population. In this country, Sufi orders such as the Naqshbandi and Qadiriyya have had a profound impact on religious and cultural practices (Baldick, 2012; Howell, 2005). The contemporary digital era has ushered in new expressions of Sufism in Indonesia, mirroring the "Urban Sufism" trend elsewhere, as practitioners leverage digital platforms for dissemination and adaptation (Howell, 2018). Organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama have wholeheartedly embraced the power of social media and online platforms. They utilize these platforms to provide Sufi-inspired classes and create a sense of global connectivity among practitioners (Noordin & Risley, 2013). Nevertheless, experts warn about the possible drawbacks of digitalization, such as distorting the truth and exploiting for profit. They emphasize the importance of responsible management to preserve the authenticity of the tradition (Schmeding, 2021). In conclusion, Indonesian Sufism's embrace of digital media underscores its global resonance while posing challenges for its preservation and integrity in the modern age (Santoso, 2020).

In Pakistan, the convergence of Sufism and social media produces a fascinating and complicated dynamic that needs further inquiry. This study examines the vital link between these two domains to debunk common misunderstandings while critically assessing their alignment or divergence with Qur'anic teachings. As social media platforms progressively globalize Sufi practices, bringing them into homes all over the globe, it becomes more important to distinguish fundamental Sufi teachings from digital aberrations.

Previous research has examined online Sufi practices in Pakistan from various perspectives. For example, Saeed (2021) conducted a study focusing on the experiences and practices of contemporary Sufis in Pakistan, highlighting the spiritual and social components of modern Sufism. The author utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis to emphasize important topics such as the evolution of Sufi Islam in the aftermath of 9/11, the emergence of extremism among the Barelvi sect, and its influence on societal values. Anjum (2006) delved into the historical understanding of the relationship between Sufism and political power, providing insights into the implications of this relationship.

Woodward et al. (2013) contributed to the literature by demonstrating the gap between religious inclination (Salafi or Sufi) and violent tendencies, offering nuanced insights into religious extremism. Eisenlohr's (2012) work on "Media and Religious Diversity" explores the interplay between religion and media, highlighting three methods to understand religious representation in the media environment. Collectively, these publications enrich our understanding of the dynamic interplay between religion, politics, and spirituality in various contexts. Hussain (2022) discussed Shah Abdul Latif as an emancipatory figure in Sindhi society, arguing that his lifestyle and behavior as a renowned Sufi were influenced by the cultural and historical context. These findings underscore the importance of considering culture and historical context in the study of emerging Sufi figures.

Therefore, this research delves into the impact of social media on Sufi practices in Pakistan, particularly focusing on digital representations of Sufism and their alignment with the Qur'an and Hadith. It aims to determine how social media influences Sufi teachings, including both positive and negative effects. The study also seeks to define 'digital

mysticism' within the context of religious studies and digital media discourse. Through this investigation, the goal is to gain a deeper understanding of how Sufi activities have evolved in the digital era and their broader implications for religious discourse and understanding.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative methodology to understand members and systems better. The technique used in this study is a qualitative approach, which was selected due to its ability to provide a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the data. Qualitative research is a systematic approach to inquiry that seeks to comprehend complex phenomena within their authentic contexts (Ezzy, 2013). This encompasses gathering data through observation, primary data, secondary data, conceptual framework, and other non-quantitative approaches, followed by analyzing the collected data to discern underlying themes, patterns, and linkages. The data was gathered from various sources, including previous literature, social media platforms and speeches. Then the author used social media content analyses to mitigate the objectives of this study. The purpose of its use is to provide comprehensive and intricate information. Qualitative research offers a complete and profound comprehension of the social issues under investigation (Glaser, 1965). Including such a high degree of information may greatly assist scholars in developing more intricate and all-encompassing hypotheses about the subject matter. Qualitative methodologies can potentially serve as a potent instrument for investigating complicated social phenomena and fostering novel perspectives and comprehensions (Ritchie et al. 2003). Nevertheless, like any other research methodology, this strategy has inherent limits and problems that need researchers to carefully contemplate its strengths and drawbacks throughout the design and implementation of their investigations.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. *The Ideal Practice of Sufism and the Emergence of Digital Sufisme: Demands for Social Change and Adapting Sufi Practices*

Sufism is a mystical tradition within Islam that emphasizes the spiritual and inner aspects of the faith (Schimmel, 1975). The ideal practice of Sufism involves a deep personal connection with the divine, often through practices like meditation, *dhikr* (remembrance of God), and the cultivation of virtues like humility, compassion, and selflessness (Knysh, 2017). Sufi orders (*tariqas*) typically have a structured spiritual path, with guidance from a spiritual leader (*shaykh*) and a strong emphasis on the importance of the teacher-student relationship (Lewisohn, 1999). The goal of the ideal Sufi practice is the attainment of a state of spiritual union with the divine, often described as *fana* (annihilation of the self) and *baqa* (subsistence in the divine) (Chittick, 1989).

As with many aspects of modern life, Sufism has also adapted to the digital age, and there are various ways in which Sufi practices and teachings are being transmitted and experienced in the digital realm (Howell, 2013). This can include online Sufi retreats, virtual study circles, social media platforms for Sufi communities, and even the use of digital tools (such as apps or online resources) for spiritual practices like dhikr or meditation (Bunt, 2009). However, it's important to note that the digital expression of Sufism may not always fully capture the depth and nuance of the traditional, in-person Sufi practice, which often relies heavily on the presence of a spiritual guide and the physical community (Sedgwick, 2016). There are debates within Sufi circles about the extent to which the digital realm can effectively facilitate the transformative and mystical aspects of the Sufi path, and the potential risks of dilution or misinterpretation (Scherer, 2013).

These emergences of digital Sufism are driven by certain demands for social change and a perceived need to adapt Sufi practices to the modern

digital context. Accessibility and inclusivity are key factors, as digital platforms have allowed Sufi teachings and communities to reach marginalized groups and individuals who may have been excluded from traditional Sufi orders due to geographic, cultural, or socioeconomic barriers (Jonker & Versteeg, 2015). The interactivity and participatory nature of digital spaces have also enabled Sufi seekers, especially women and youth, to take a more active role in their spiritual development and community-building, empowering them and challenging traditional hierarchies (Kargin, 2020; Schielke & Debevec, 2012). Additionally, the decentralized nature of the internet has facilitated more horizontal forms of Sufi organization and leadership, moving away from the traditional top-down structures of some Sufi orders. In terms of Sufi practices, digital Sufism tends to place greater emphasis on personal spiritual exploration and the crafting of individualized practices, rather than strictly adhering to the prescribed rituals and hierarchies of conventional Sufi orders (Howell, 2018). Digital Sufis often incorporate elements from other spiritual and religious traditions, as well as secular self-help and wellness practices, into their Sufi praxis, creating more syncretic and eclectic forms of Sufism (Sedgwick, 2016). The digital medium also allows for the development of new forms of Sufi rituals, *dhikr* (remembrance of God), and community-building that may differ from traditional in-person practices (Karamustafa, 2007). Overall, the emergence of digital Sufism reflects a desire to make Sufi practices more accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and experiences of contemporary spiritual seekers, while also challenging some of the more rigid structures and hierarchies associated with conventional Sufi orders.

The emergence of digital Sufism has led to several significant changes in Sufi practices and interpretations, including the possibility of new and evolving interpretations of conventional Sufi doctrines. One key difference is the emphasis on individualized spiritual exploration and the crafting of

personalized practices, rather than strict adherence to the prescribed rituals and hierarchies of traditional Sufi orders. Digital Sufis often engage in a more eclectic and syncretic approach, incorporating elements from various spiritual and religious traditions, as well as secular self-help and wellness practices, into their Sufi praxis, challenging the more rigidly defined boundaries of conventional Sufism (Sedgwick, 2016). The decentralized and interactive nature of digital spaces has also facilitated the emergence of more horizontally organized Sufi communities, where the traditional top-down structures and hierarchies of some Sufi orders are being challenged, opening up the possibility for new interpretations of Sufi leadership, authority, and community-building (Schielke & Debevec, 2012). Furthermore, the accessibility and reach of digital platforms have enabled the dissemination of Sufi teachings and practices to a wider and more diverse audience, including marginalized groups and individuals, contributing to the evolution of Sufi interpretations and practices (Jonker & Versteeg, 2015). These changes have led to a more individualized and experiential approach to Sufi spirituality, as well as the incorporation of elements from other traditions, resulting in new syncretic interpretations that challenge the more traditional and purist approaches of conventional Sufism (Howell, 2018; Karamustafa, 2007).

In contrast, Urban Sufism embodies a notable adaptation within the Sufi tradition, catering to the demands of modern urban life while maintaining the core tenets of Sufi spirituality. This movement emphasizes practices conducive to daily integration (Howell, 2018), ensuring accessibility for individuals with busy schedules. By streamlining traditional teachings and focusing on practical techniques, Urban Sufism remains relevant to contemporary audiences (Malik & Hinnells, 2006). Moreover, its emphasis on mental and emotional well-being resonates with the urban populace, offering solutions to the stresses of modern living (Rozehnal, 2018). Inclusivity and openness characterize Urban Sufi groups, contrasting with

the exclusivity of traditional orders (Howell, 2018). Thus, the growth of Urban Sufism reflects a broader trend of adapting spiritual traditions to meet the evolving needs of society, making Sufi wisdom more widely accessible (Malik & Hinnells, 2006).

2. *The Mystical Tradition of Sufism: Origins, Definitions, and Connections to the Quran and Hadith*

The concept of Sufism has been defined by various prominent Sufi scholars and thinkers throughout Islamic history, each offering unique perspectives on the essence and purpose of this mystical tradition. Rumi, the renowned Sufi poet, viewed Sufism as the "inner" or "esoteric" dimension of Islam, emphasizing the mystical and spiritual aspects of the religion, particularly the love and union with the divine (Chittick, 1983). Al-Ghazali, a renowned Islamic scholar and Sufi, defined Sufism as the "science of the states of the human heart" and the pursuit of moral and spiritual purification (Al-Ghazali, 1986). Ibn Arabi, a prolific Sufi thinker, conceptualized Sufism as the "knowledge of the oneness of being" and the realization of the unity of God and the cosmos (Chittick, 1989). Syed Ali Hujwiri, also known as Data Ganj Bakhsh, defined Sufism as the "unveiling of the mystery of the divine unity" and the attainment of nearness to God (Hujwiri, 1976). These diverse definitions highlight the multifaceted nature of Sufism, encompassing spiritual, mystical, and transformative aspects within the broader framework of Islamic tradition, reflecting the rich tapestry of Sufi thought and the varying perspectives of its esteemed scholars and thinkers. Sufism, regarded as the essence of the spiritual core of Islamic revelation, serves as a pathway to achieve spiritual enlightenment. The interior component of Islamic revelation is posited as a means to promote the attainment of Tawheed, which is the fundamental concept of the oneness of God. This text delineates Islam's three fundamental religious dispositions: Islam, Iman, and Ihsan. It traces their

evolution from the first acknowledgment of Sufism as a spiritual progression to the pinnacle of spiritual advancement. The present discourse emphasizes the connection between Sufism and Islam, emphasizing Sufism as the mystical and spiritual dimension of the Islamic religious tradition. This chapter highlights the indispensability of Sufism within the context of Islam, portraying it as a catalytic force that fosters personal growth and enables people to internalize and manifest the principles of Islamic doctrine. Similarly, Titus Burkhardt has broadened this perspective by including theology as a determining factor in evaluating authentic mysticism. Various definitions of Sufi instructors have been presented, each with a distinct spiritual viewpoint. These variances arise from the individual spiritual positions and the varying levels of comprehension of their respective audiences. To get a comprehensive understanding of Sufism, it is necessary to consider a diverse array of definitions, as each elucidates a distinct facet of this mystical tradition, contributing to a more profound grasp of its inherent essence (Lings, 1975).

Within the mystical and spiritual tradition of Islam. Sufism is regarded as the essence of the spiritual core of Islamic revelation, serving as a pathway to achieve spiritual enlightenment (Bilqies, 2014). It is portrayed as a holistic and essential component of Islam, offering people guidance on a deep spiritual expedition (Bilqies, 2014). Scholars have varying perspectives on the etymology and assimilation of the term "Sufi," with several Arabic and non-Arabic origins proposed (Bilqies, 2014). The term is often associated with the concept of purity, asceticism, and the renunciation of worldly pleasures (Begg, 1972).

Sufism is defined as a theological philosophy rooted in the Islamic tradition, characterized by a profound reverence for heavenly reality (Lings, 1975). It is viewed as the pursuit of comprehending the enigmatic aspects of the experiences and practices of adherents within the Islamic faith (Lings, 1975). Sufis consider the Quran as the principal and

fundamental source of guidance, exploring divine poetry to understand the essence of religion and the journey toward spiritual enlightenment (Bilqies, 2014). They also adhere to the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad as documented in the Hadith, while prioritizing the internal and spiritual aspects of Islam (Bilqies, 2014).

While Sufism largely follows the Quran and Hadith, it emphasizes the inner, mystical experience of God and uses techniques and ideas not precisely stated in Islamic texts (Bilqies, 2014). Sufism is more flexible with legal specifics, focusing on the spiritual and empirical aspects of Islam (Bilqies, 2014). Overall, the document provides a comprehensive understanding of Sufism, its origins, definitions, and its relationship with the foundational teachings of Islam as found in the Quran and Hadith.

3. *Digital Era's Impact on Sufism*

One positive aspect of social media is the increased worldwide connection among Sufi groups. Global Sufism followers and practitioners may now easily connect, exchange, and debate. Sufism has been interpreted and critiqued globally on social media, which may lead to controversy and conflict among adherents. Positively, social media enables academics, instructors, and practitioners to disseminate teachings, lectures, and books internationally. Sufism is more understood globally due to its diffusion. However, knowledge is easily shared, and Sufi teachings might be misconstrued or omitted. Social media has enabled interested Sufis to connect, exchange experiences, and seek assistance from experienced practitioners. It has built spiritual support and discourse areas online.

Saeed, M., Naeem, M., & Yousaf, U. (2021) mentioned Sufi pottery on social media, especially on Facebook, his study of poet Khawaja Ghulam Fareed and his analysis of his works, like natural beauty, romance, and deep knowledge. We see that, according to this article, most people are interested in his video through social media platforms. But still, there are

further challenges, such as virtual communities, which may lack the depth and sincerity of traditional Sufi face-to-face connections. The internet availability of Sufi instructors and leaders' spiritual advice and counseling may have a positive influence by making their knowledge more available to a larger audience. Online Sufi teachers may be hard to verify since the internet can blur the borders between genuine spiritual instruction and dubious practices. Impact on Sufi music and social media boosts Sufi music, poetry, and art promotion. *Qawwali*, a Sufi musical form, may reach a worldwide audience and showcase Sufism's culture and spirituality. Social media's commercialization and secularization of Sufi art might dilute its spirituality and cause abuse. The positive impact of social media is that it dispels Sufism myths and promotes interfaith cooperation. This shows the sound effects of Sufi communities on society.

Social media has become a significant force in shaping the landscape of Sufism. As Saeed et al. (2021) note in their study on the poet Khawaja Ghulam Fareed, social media platforms like Facebook can amplify the reach of Sufi aesthetics and literature. This highlights the positive aspects of social media's influence, fostering a more interconnected global Sufi community. Groups worldwide can now easily connect, exchange ideas, and engage in debate (Saeed et al., 2021). This fosters a vibrant intellectual exchange and facilitates the dissemination of knowledge. Academics, instructors, and practitioners can utilize these platforms to share teachings, lectures, and publications with a global audience, enhancing understanding of Sufism (Saeed et al., 2021).

However, alongside these benefits lie some challenges. The ease with which information is shared on social media can lead to misconstrued or incomplete representations of Sufi teachings (Saeed et al., 2021). Moreover, the digital world can blur the lines between genuine spiritual instruction and dubious practices, making it difficult to verify the authenticity of online Sufi teachers (Saeed et al., 2021). While online communities offer

opportunities for spiritual support and discourse, they may lack the depth and emotional connection of traditional face-to-face interactions in Sufism (Saeed et al., 2021). Furthermore, social media's inherently commercial nature and focus on secular trends could potentially dilute the spiritual essence of Sufi art forms (Saeed et al., 2021).

4. *Misrepresentation of 'Sufi' Online*

The term "Sufi" is sometimes misused or misrepresented on online platforms, leading to various misunderstandings and potentially undermining the authentic spiritual essence of Sufism. Some examples of misrepresentation include commercial exploitation on social media and retail outlets. "Sufi" is sometimes used to market products, services, or events with little connection to actual Sufi practices. This may include using Sufi symbols, music, or images for commercial gain, thereby commoditizing Sufism. In addition, in new age appropriation in some online spaces, the term "Sufi" has been lumped into the new age or esoteric movements, in which people derive Sufi terms and practices from their cultural and religious contexts. This appropriation can result in a superficial and inaccurate representation of Sufi spirituality. We found a video on YouTube of (BBC News 2014) in which we clearly saw that some people are entering the Palace of Sufis graves and doing irrelevant things like dancing to music, mixing males and women together, and doing sajdah in front of people. These are not the truly Sufis that we know; these are the people misusing the name of Sufism.

There is best example of Haq Khateeb that Pakistani investigative journalist Iqrar ul Hassan, known for tackling social issues and exposing frauds on his show "Sar-e-Aam" (Publicly) according to ARY News, targeted Haq Khateeb, a spiritual figure notorious for his "healing" methods. Haq Khateeb claimed mystical abilities, blowing on people and supposedly removing objects like nails and needles from their bodies. Iqrar

ul Hassan suspected trickery and set up a sting operation. He went undercover, visiting Haq Khateeb's shrine and secretly filming the entire "treatment" process.

Later, on "Sar-e-Aam," Iqrar ul Hassan exposed the alleged deception. The hidden camera footage revealed Haq Khateeb's accomplices planting the objects before the "healing" session, dismantling the illusion of his mystical powers. Haq Khateeb predictably denied any wrongdoing, insisting his abilities were genuine and questioning the footage's validity.

The exposé sparked public outrage and debate. Haq Khateeb's reputation was severely damaged, while Iqrar ul Hassan was praised for exposing the alleged fraud. This incident exemplifies the crucial role investigative journalism plays in holding potentially deceptive figures accountable.

Additionally, there is one another video that we clearly saw that some people came to a person and shake hand after shaking hand to that person they get electrocuted, and they get busy in the remembrance of Allah. Such a way we do not find in any of the predecessors. These people are like this. It is a way that we do not find in any Sufi saint. Satanic Sufi Ritual in Pakistan. (2010). Online platforms may promote self-proclaimed "Sufi teachers" or "spiritual guides" who do not have authentic credentials and may offer practices not rooted in traditional Sufi teachings. This can mislead those seeking trustworthy spiritual guidance and possibly expose them to rules that conflict with authentic Sufi traditions. sensationalization in the media: Some online media outlets may sensationalize Sufi practices, presenting them in a distorted or exaggerated way to attract attention. It can perpetuate stereotypes or misconceptions about Sufism, undermining the shade and intellectual nature of genuine Sufi traditions. In political or communal manipulation, the term "Sufi" is sometimes used to promote specific agendas. In these instances, the rich diversity within Sufism is oversimplified, and the time can be misused to emphasize a particular

narrative while ignoring the historical and cultural complexities of Sufi traditions.

The brevity of posts on social media platforms and the rapid spread of information can lead to oversimplification and misrepresentation of Sufi concepts. Complex spiritual thoughts can be condensed into sound bites, possibly distorting their true meaning. These examples highlight the importance of critical awareness when encountering the term "mystic" online. Distinguishing between authentic representations of Sufism and instances of misuse or misrepresentation is crucial to maintaining the integrity of this rich spiritual tradition. Like any religious or spiritual practice, a nuanced understanding of Sufism requires looking beyond superficial online images.

Misinterpreting Sufism online can lead to various harmful consequences and misunderstandings. First, individuals may become victims of financial exploitation as fraudulent actors manipulate the Sufi name to attract followers and gain wealth through practices such as pada puja. This economic loss is exacerbated by the relative anonymity of online platforms, making it difficult to hold perpetrators accountable. Second, misrepresentation can distort authentic Sufi teachings, leading to a shallow and superficial understanding of this rich spiritual tradition. This can foster misconceptions about the true essence of Sufism, affecting both newcomers and seekers of genuine spiritual guidance. Third, the commercialization of Sufi practices may compromise the sanctity of traditional rituals and ceremonies, possibly diminishing their spiritual significance. Fourth, the global reach of online platforms allows misrepresentations to spread rapidly, perpetuate stereotypes, and contribute to a skewed public perception of Sufism. Finally, exploitation of seekers' genuine desire for spiritual connection can lead to emotional and psychological harm as they engage in misleading practices or fall victim to manipulative individuals. Addressing these potential pitfalls requires a concerted effort to promote

awareness, critical understanding, and ethical standards in online representations of Sufism.

5. *Misrepresented 'Sufi' Acts*

While it may be challenging to find particular case studies or examples documenting misrepresented Sufism practices, there are just few videos that I mentioned early that they are misusing Sufism through various matter. (Satanic Sufi Ritual in Pakistan. (2010), (BBC News 2014) this can be attributed to the intricate and geographically specific character of such occurrences. Nonetheless, there have been recorded incidences and patterns that depict a misrepresentation of Sufism—the phenomenon of commercialization in the context of Sufi music and ceremonies. To broaden their audience, organizers may promote a commercial event or performance as a "Sufi experience," despite the performers lacking genuine comprehension of Sufi mysticism. The prioritization of entertainment and financial gain, as opposed to the profound spiritual aspects inherent in Sufi traditions, has the potential to result in the misinterpretation and weakening of the authentic essence of Sufism.

The utilization of Sufi symbols for commercial purposes, illustrationof certain enterprises or individuals may exploit Sufi symbols, such as the depiction of whirling dervishes or unique calligraphic designs, on merchandise with the intention of financial gain. Commercializing can potentially diminish religious signs, transforming them into mere commodities. This may offend individuals who hold these symbols in deep spiritual reverence—the exploitation of followers by online "Sufi" gurus. Individuals purporting to be Sufi teachers or spiritual advisers may proffer online courses or services accompanied by assurances of attaining spiritual enlightenment. Nevertheless, the primary driving force behind their actions is likely monetary profit since their followers may willingly compensate them for advice lacking genuineness or genuine spiritual enlightenment.

Incorporating Sufi practices into the New Age or eclectic spiritual movements without a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and religious context is an example of the adaptation observed in the contemporary era. The act of appropriation has the potential to yield a portrayal of Sufism that is both shallow and twisted, lacking a connection to its historical origins. Social media influencers are engaging in the misrepresentation of Sufi principles. Social media influencers can disseminate content condoning intricate Sufi principles into contemporary, easily digestible messages to garner approval and engagement. Although this approach may garner interest, it risks oversimplifying and distorting the fundamental tenets of Sufism.

The instances mentioned earlier underscore the various manifestations in which Sufism may be inaccurately portrayed, frequently motivated by commercial or individual interests. Individuals must approach internet depictions of Sufism with discernment, endeavoring to ascertain authenticity and comprehending the intricate cultural and spiritual milieu within which the tradition exists.

6. *Authentic Digital Sufism*

Although the virtual realm is susceptible to distortion, specific platforms and datasets exist that actively foster genuine Sufi teachings. The use of discernment and thorough investigation are crucial while interacting with internet materials about Sufism. The official websites of Sufi orders can be accessed for information and resources about the respective orders. Numerous well-established Sufi organizations have official websites that disseminate teachings, writings, and pertinent information about their spiritual practices. These websites can serve as credible sources of information regarding genuine Sufi teachings. Santoso, I, R (2020) mentioned that Sufi following works for purifying the souls and influences honesty and trustworthiness. Through this, Sufis should have to work on

authentic digital Sufism, so people should know the truth of truly Sufism in the digital era.

Educational platforms encompass many academic institutions and recognized organizations focusing on Islamic studies and spirituality. These platforms provide online courses and materials that delve into the genuine principles and teachings of Sufism. These sites frequently offer content that is meticulously researched and academically rigorous. Renowned scholars of Sufism, possessing extensive knowledge of Islamic spirituality and the traditions of Sufism, can disseminate their views through various means such as lectures, written works, and internet platforms. Verifying the credentials and background of these academics can contribute to the assurance of the integrity of their teachings.

Online platforms that showcase traditional Sufi music performed by proficient and genuine performers have the potential to provide an authentic encounter with the spiritual and cultural dimensions of Sufism. Please search for channels that prioritize preserving and safeguarding the authenticity and cultural heritage of Sufi music traditions. The utilization of documentaries and interviews can offer significant insights into the genuine practices and concepts of Sufism through the involvement of esteemed Sufi practitioners, researchers, or spiritual leaders. These sources frequently provide a more comprehensive comprehension of the tradition.

Certain Sufi groups utilize online platforms to disseminate information about their activities, gatherings, and teachings. Participating in community-based websites can offer valuable insights into the real-life encounters and experiences of individuals practicing Sufism. Publications from esteemed Islamic publishers or groups committed to preserving genuine Islamic teachings may provide literary works, scholarly papers, or online resources that delve into Sufi mysticism's intricacies and profound aspects. When searching for digital content about Sufism, it is recommended to ascertain the source's credentials and that the teachings

align with the fundamental principles of Islam and Sufism. Moreover, it can be advantageous to seek instruction from reputable Sufi scholars or engage with local Sufi groups when traversing the internet realm, as this approach facilitates the development of an authentic comprehension of Sufi traditions.

This discourse explores authentic digital Sufism via social media. Digital mysticism is characterized by its manifestation on social media platforms and its association with individuals who value disseminating actual teachings, spiritual profundity, and cultural comprehension. The following is an analysis of the visual presentation of this subject matter. The educational content is designed to enhance the user's knowledge and understanding of a subject matter. It aims to present information. The presence of platforms and personalities that disseminate instructional content is often considered a defining characteristic of true digital literacy. The platform encompasses a variety of educational content, including informative posts, articles, and videos, which elucidate the profound tenets of Sufism, with a particular emphasis on its spiritual and ethical dimensions. Sufi scholars and educators: Respected researchers and professors in the field of Sufism utilize social media platforms to facilitate live sessions, webinars, and interactive question-and-answer sessions. The website facilitates interactive engagement between followers and knowledgeable individuals, providing direct access to ideas regarding Sufi philosophy and practices.

The discussion pertains to the kind of music known as traditional Sufi music. The True Digital Sufism movement encompasses music channels and performances showcasing authentic Sufi music executed by proficient musicians who demonstrate reverence for this tradition's spiritual and cultural legacy (Saeed, M., Naeem, M., & Yousaf, U. 2021). Social media platforms provide a venue for disseminating and preserving Sufi musical traditions through the hosting of channels and performances. Community

engagement refers to individuals' active involvement and participation in various activities and initiatives. It encompasses the collaborative efforts of Interactive platforms that play a significant role in digital mysticism since they facilitate community participation through different social media platforms. Sufi communities or organizations may utilize these platforms to disseminate information regarding their activities, events, and meetings, fostering collective consciousness and interconnectedness among their adherents.

The platforms serve as spaces wherein the cultural abundance of Sufism is conserved and commemorated, fostering a holistic comprehension that extends beyond mere textual instruction. Interfaith dialogue refers to engaging in constructive and meaningful conversations amongst individuals or groups from different religious backgrounds. Promoting interfaith cooperation and inclusivity is a fundamental aspect of True Digital Sufism. Social media platforms offer an environment conducive to fostering open discourse, which encourages the cultivation of understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among individuals from various religious and cultural backgrounds.

The discussion also pertains to moral and human values; in the realm of Sufism, esteemed individuals impart statements and comments that underscore the significance of ethical principles, humility, and compassion. Social media has emerged as a tool for disseminating enduring wisdom that surpasses cultural and religious barriers. The availability of genuine instructional materials: the utilization of social media platforms enables the widespread distribution of authentic Sufi teachings globally, granting them the opportunity to reach a broader spectrum of individuals (Ewing, K. P. (1983). The utilization of digital platforms in true digital mysticism enables the dissemination of spiritual guidance to individuals who lack access to conventional sources of such advice.

It is imperative to acknowledge that genuine digital Sufism is distinguished by its honesty, humility, and a natural aspiration to disseminate the profound teachings of the tradition. The responsible utilization of social media platforms and influential individuals contributes to advancing a more profound comprehension of Sufism while simultaneously upholding its cultural and spiritual authenticity.

Traditional Sufism, founded in centuries-old practices, and Digital Sufism, emerging in the modern online milieu, have similarities but also differ. Spiritual Power or Traditional Sufism connects to God through methods such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God), meditation, and self-discipline (Santoso, I. R. 2020). Additionally, it attempts to preserve Sufism's spiritual core through online platforms, providing teachings, reflections, and conversations to a global audience. Traditional Sufism is based on the supervision of experienced Sufi teachers (Shaykhs) and the transmission of instructions through direct personal interactions. Digital Sufism shares teachings, lectures, and guidance via Internet channels, generally conducted by respected Sufi academics and practitioners. Expression of cultural diversity through traditional Sufism incorporates cultural aspects such as Sufi music, poetry, and art into spiritual expression. Sufi cultural heritage is preserved and promoted through internet platforms, which feature traditional music, calligraphy, and artistic expressions. Connection to the community through conventional Sufism, physical gatherings, communal prayers, and shared rituals are used to establish a sense of community. Digital Sufism creates virtual communities for followers to connect, share experiences, and debate Sufi beliefs.

The Comparison between Physical Presence and Virtual Connection: Traditional Sufism places significant emphasis on the physical presence of individuals in the fact of a spiritual mentor and active engagement in customary rites within a tangible communal setting. Digital Sufism is a contemporary manifestation of the Sufi tradition that leverages virtual

platforms to facilitate practitioners' engagement with teachings, guidance, and community interactions while circumventing the need for physical closeness (Kostovski, D. 2018). The extent of personal interaction, traditional Sufism encompasses a framework that enables profound and intimate engagements between a Sufi adherent and a spiritual mentor, cultivating a dynamic mentor-disciple dynamic.

Digital Sufism entails a more restricted human engagement, facilitated mainly by online communication channels like messages, comments, or sporadic virtual gatherings. Consequently, this connection mode may impose some constraints on the extent of mentoring depth that may be achieved. The Influence on Rituals and Practices of traditional Sufism places significant emphasis on the observance of customary rites performed within tangible environments, including *dhikr* circles and community prayers. Digital Sufism adapts conventional Sufi practices tailored to the internet environment. This adaptation integrates virtual activities such as dhikr sessions, webinars, and live-streamed ceremonies.

In terms of accessibility and global reach, traditional Sufism has always been geographically confined, hence limiting its accessibility to certain areas and populations. Digital Sufism expands the global dissemination of Sufi teachings, facilitating its accessibility to persons worldwide who may lack exposure to conventional Sufi societies (Schmeding, A. 2021). The Potential Hazards of Commercialization: Traditional Sufism has a reduced susceptibility to commercialization due to its emphasis on localized and community-oriented activities. Digital Sufism is vulnerable to commercialization, creating opportunities for exploitation by both people and organizations that want to achieve financial benefits via the use of Internet platforms.

The use of digital media is seen as a means of adapting traditional Sufi practices to contemporary settings. Virtual dhikr sessions, online lectures, and webinars are seen as modern adaptations of conventional rituals,

serving the same spiritual objectives via current methods (Santoso, I. R. 2020). Digital Sufism is seen as a means of extending the reach of Sufi teachings to a worldwide audience, hence fostering inclusivity and granting access to persons residing in areas devoid of local Sufi groups. Potential for Superficiality: Scholars contend that the process of digitizing Sufi activities risks distorting their original profundity since there is a chance that these practices may become shallow or commodified to align with prevailing online fads.

Traditionalists may see the lack of physical presence and direct connection with digital Sufism as a distortion since it potentially compromises the close bond between a Sufi master and a follower (Noordin and Risley, 2013). The digital realm is susceptible to deception, as individuals may misuse the Sufi identity for their benefit. As mentioned earlier, the distortion can potentially engender a misinterpretation of genuine Sufi doctrines. Emerging Phenomenon: The Adaptation to Modern Technology: Advocates contend that the phenomenon of digital mysticism embodies a novel expression of conventional rituals, using contemporary technological advancements to accommodate and engage a broader spectrum of individuals. Online platforms are seen as an organic progression, facilitating the assimilation of Sufi teachings into the modern context.

The emergence of digital mysticism has been recognized as a novel phenomenon regarding establishing and developing communities inside the virtual realm. Online platforms facilitate the formation of virtual communities that exhibit distinct characteristics compared to conventional physical meetings since they provide novel avenues for establishing connections and engaging in shared experiences (Saeed, M., Naeem, M., & Yousaf, U. 2021). The utilization of digital media is seen as a progression in communication rather than a deviation. Online platforms have revolutionized the accessibility and propagation of Sufi teachings, fostering

an unprecedented avenue for conversations and cultural expression that was formerly unattainable. The subjective nature of classifying digital mysticism as a continuation, distortion, or a new phenomenon may lead to differing perspectives among practitioners and experts. While several individuals consider this phenomenon an inherent adjustment, others raise apprehensions over the possible erosion of conventional approaches. The problem lies in striking a balance between the advantages of worldwide accessibility and the need to safeguard the integrity of traditional teachings within the changing context of Sufism in the era of digitalization.

In summary, it can be seen that traditional and digital sufism exhibit a shared dedication to spiritual advancement and cultural manifestation. However, disparities arise in their approaches to community, instructional techniques, and the influence of technology on their respective practices. Digital Sufism exemplifies the assimilation of conventional customs into the virtual domain, which engenders prospects and complexities in the contemporary epoch.

D. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research highlights the significance of examining modern digital representations of Sufism in relation to core Sufi ideals and potential misinterpretations. It emphasizes the dual nature of social media, serving both as a platform for spiritual enlightenment and a potential vehicle for the misappropriation of Sufi principles. The findings suggest a complex interplay between traditional spirituality and the evolving landscape of 'digital Sufism,' indicating the need for a nuanced understanding of these dynamics in contemporary religious discourse.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The focus on the Pakistani context may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions where the relationship between Sufism and social media may differ. Furthermore, the subjective nature of analyzing

social media content introduces potential biases, and the vast amount of online material restricts the depth of the analysis. Future research could benefit from a more targeted approach, focusing on specific social media platforms or types of content to provide a more comprehensive examination of the subject.

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