



## Transformation of Sufi Practices in the Digital Age: the Case of Central Asia

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### Abstract

The article explores a phenomenon of the digital Sufism. It will assess extent of Sufi engagement on social media, analyze the thematic content of their sermons, and compare their digital initiatives with those of other Islamic organizations. Additionally, it investigates how Sufi orders adapt to the digital environment and whether they reveal esoteric practices in online spaces. The article introduces the concept of "digital Sufism" as a framework to understand how Sufi traditions have embraced modern technology to enhance the reach and relevance of their teachings. The study highlights the significance of Sufism in the digital age and its ability to adapt to contemporary challenges, demonstrating how Sufi traditions have evolved to maintain their relevance. The primary objective is to examine the dissemination of Sufi teachings via digital platforms and assess an impact of this transformation on spiritual practices. By using a qualitative approach, the research relies on content analysis to examine the online presence and activities of Sufi orders across social media platforms. This method facilitates the identification of underlying narratives and dissemination strategies employed by these spiritual communities. Ultimately, the article emphasizes the shift of Sufism from a mystical, exclusive brotherhood to a more open and accessible spiritual path shaped by digital interaction. This transformation lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of Sufi practices within the context of modern Central Asia.

*Keywords:* Sufism, preachers, digital religion, online religious authority

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## 1. Introduction

Digital Islam is emerging as a new domain for religious dissemination, transcending geographical boundaries and providing a platform for global interaction. Virtual spaces such as websites, social media, and mobile applications are transforming into digital mosques and madrasas, where Muslims worldwide can acquire religious knowledge, engage in dialogue, and strengthen their faith (Raya, 2025). Digital Sufism is emerging as a facet of Digital Islam—a complex tapestry interweaving ancient spiritual wisdom with modern technology. It marks a compelling convergence where traditional Sufi ideals, such as introspection, divine love, and the pursuit of inner knowledge, are being reimagined within the digital landscape. By utilizing engaging formats such as videos, inspirational quotes, and interactive discussions, Sufi practitioners foster online communities rooted

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in mindfulness and inner peace. This digital engagement serves as a counterbalance to the overwhelming nature of the modern information age and aligns with the principle of *zuhud*, advocating for spiritual focus and simplicity in a world increasingly driven by material excess (Wijaya, 2023).

The participatory nature of social media enables users to share personal experiences related to their spiritual journeys, cultivating a sense of belonging and collective growth that extends beyond geographical boundaries (Jallab et al., 2023). Sufism, the mystical tradition within Islam, has effectively adapted to the digital sphere, giving rise to the phenomenon of "digital Sufism," which reflects the adaptability and resilience of Sufi traditions in a globally interconnected world. Key factors driving this trend include the accessibility afforded by the internet and digital platforms, which dismantle traditional barriers of geography and culture. Significant transformations in Sufi practices and interpretations have emerged in this context. These include the rise of personalized spiritual exploration, the integration of eclectic elements from various traditions, and the emergence of more horizontally structured Sufi communities that challenge conventional hierarchies (Iqbal, 2024). As Sufism transitions into the digital domain, it encounters a combination of opportunities and challenges. Online platforms have revolutionized the dissemination and accessibility of Sufi teachings, fostering transnational dialogue and spiritual engagement, as evidenced by findings that underscore the transformative impact of digital technologies on Sufi practices (Waheed et al., 2024).

This digital sharing acts as a beacon, illuminating the path of Sufi teachings for a global audience. It nurtures a dynamic virtual community where seekers of wisdom can connect and explore their spiritual beliefs without the limitations of physical proximity. Through platforms such as social media, webinars, and online forums, individuals from diverse backgrounds engage in meaningful dialogue, share insights, and support one another on their spiritual journeys. The rise of online congregations revitalizes traditional practices, allowing the Sufi community to flourish in the digital sphere. These virtual spaces not only preserve the teachings of esteemed Sufi masters but also empower contemporary spiritual leaders to disseminate knowledge with broader reach and influence. This digital renaissance reinforces the relevance and authority of Sufi scholars and guides, ensuring their insights resonate across generations—bridging the gap between the sacred traditions of the past and the evolving spiritual needs of the present (Hidayat, 2022).

In light of this trend, the article aims to evaluate not only the extent of Sufi outreach on social media but also to examine the themes of their sermons and the strategies employed to communicate religious messages. The study will analyze how various Sufi orders utilize digital platforms to expand their influence and identify the narratives that most effectively engage their audiences. Furthermore, it will compare Sufi preaching with the digital outreach efforts of other Islamic groups, offering insight into the distinctive role Sufis play in shaping Islamic discourse in the digital era. Particular attention will be given to the effectiveness of Sufi preaching online, their methods of engaging followers, and the patterns through which their messages are disseminated. In an era where nearly every Islamic sect is represented by "online religious influencers" and "digital spiritual authorities," the research will investigate how Sufi orders navigate and respond to this evolving landscape. Additionally, the study will explore whether Sufi communities choose to disclose their mystical practices online or retain their traditional secrecy despite the openness of modern technology. The findings highlight the substantial role Sufis play in advancing Islamic narratives within the age of digital communication.

### *1.1. Literature review*

The research articles to date include discussions on the rise of "digital Sufism," a trend that reflects the adaptability of Sufi traditions in the contemporary digital world. This involves use of internet and digital platforms to make Sufi teachings more accessible and widespread, transcending traditional geographical and cultural boundaries. They examine a role of social media in transforming Sufi practices and interpretations, highlight how digital platforms have allowed for personalized spiritual exploration and the development of individualized practices, while also incorporating eclectic elements from various spiritual traditions. The research papers also include insights on the interplay between religion and media, highlighting methods to understand religious representation in the media environment. This is crucial for analyzing how Sufi practices are portrayed and perceived in the digital domain. The key feature of our research is laying foundation for understanding the complex dynamics of Sufi practices on social media, setting the stage for the paper's exploration of digital Sufism in contemporary Central Asia.

## **2. Method**

The paper employs a qualitative research methodology to examine the dynamics of Sufi practices on social media. This approach enables a deep and nuanced understanding of data collected from various sources, including existing literature and digital platforms. Information was gathered from a range of social media sites, allowing for a thorough investigation into how Sufi orders interact with their online audiences. The use of a multifaceted data collection strategy enhances the depth and accuracy of the study. A central element of the research is content analysis, which is used to uncover underlying narratives, recurring themes, and the dissemination strategies employed by Sufi orders. The study focuses specifically on Central Asia, a region with a profound historical connection to Sufism and a significant cultural influence. Language served as a key selection criterion, with an emphasis on Russian, Kazakh, and Uzbek, reflecting their widespread use in the region. This linguistic focus ensures a broader and more inclusive perspective on digital Sufi engagement. In addition, the article evaluates the posting frequency of selected accounts to assess their level of engagement with followers. Together, these methods contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how Sufi traditions are being reshaped and represented in the digital sphere, particularly within the Central Asian context.

The primary focus is Central Asia, region rich in ancient history and a vibrant crossroads of cultures, which holds deep significance due to the enduring impact of Sufism. For centuries, this mystical branch of Islam has shaped the spiritual landscape, leaving a lasting influence on art, literature, music, and philosophical thought (DeWeese, 2018). The research paper article does not encompass Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan owing to insufficient data. However, it is significant to note that the Russian is extensively utilized within these two nations. We hereby acknowledge the limitations of this study. The focus on the Central Asian context may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions where the relationship between Sufism and social media may differ.

## **3. Discussion**

he dead adversary. In today's digital age, social networks serve as powerful tools for promoting and disseminating information about religions, including Islam and its mystical branch, Sufism. These platforms not only help share knowledge but also connect disciples with religious authorities, fostering a sense of community among followers (Mashita & Darsista, 2024). As technology

advanced into the 21st century, the digital landscape became a new frontier. Social media, podcasts, and online platforms have transformed the nature of Sufi outreach, allowing practitioners and seekers to instantly share teachings, creating a global network of interconnected souls united by the quest for divine love and understanding (Dudoignon, 2020). The evolution of social media has opened Sufism, once a mystical and exclusive brotherhood, to a broader audience. This transformation has enabled the teachings of Sufi masters to transcend geographical and cultural barriers, creating a tapestry of spiritual discourse accessible to all seekers. Previously hidden knowledge, once cloaked in tradition and secrecy, now flows freely through digital platforms, fostering community among diverse practitioners through shared experiences (Ahtisham, 2024). Within this context, Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, emerges as a significant area of study, offering unique insights into the interaction between traditional spiritual practices and contemporary global dynamics (Weismann, 2014).

As digital Sufism evolves, it's important to assess how traditional practices adapt to this new context. In our digital age, where interactions often occur behind screens and anonymity may reduce accountability, the moral teachings of Sufism offer a valuable solution. Grounded in values of love, empathy, and self-awareness, Sufism suggests alternative methods for communication and self-expression. Emphasizing the importance of connections and respect for others can help reduce the intensity of online disputes and hostility (Rizki & Rusdi, 2024). Sufi teachings encourage looking beyond the physical world, emphasizing spiritual principles that can reduce harmful behaviors like excessive gambling. Meditation and self-reflection provide a path to inner peace, helping individuals discover their true desires and aspirations, free from outside influences. In this way, Sufism offers guidance toward a more meaningful and harmonious life in the digital age, where relationships and ethical principles remain essential (Syakur et al., 2024). The online preaching activities of Sufi orders can be described as a dynamic adaptation of traditional spiritual practices to the digital age. This outreach transcends geographical boundaries, attracting a global audience seeking spiritual guidance and connection. The online sphere allows for greater accessibility, enabling individuals unable to attend physical gatherings to participate in Sufi rituals and teachings. However, the commodification of spirituality and the potential for misinterpretation remain challenges. Navigating these complexities, Sufi orders strive to maintain authenticity and ethical conduct while embracing the opportunities presented by online platforms (Saeed, 2021).

Central Asian Sufis are launching a propaganda campaign on the contemporary social media platforms to disseminate their teachings and engage prospective adherents. This encompasses using poignant poetry, excerpts from renowned Sufi sages, and concise videos illustrating various rituals and spiritual methodologies. Significant emphasis is placed on the exaltation of compassion, morality and humanity—fundamental tenets of Sufism. The strategic approach incorporates interactive sessions with participants, wherein Sufi sheikhs respond to inquiries and provide spiritual counsel. They also offer narratives from the lives of saints and accounts of miraculous occurrences. The overarching aim of this initiative is to dismantle prevailing stereotypes surrounding Sufism and to portray it as a dynamic, pertinent, and beneficial teaching in the contemporary context (Khan, 2022). This modern approach to spirituality allows for a dynamic exchange of ideas, where traditional doctrines meet contemporary discourse. Through captivating visuals, thought-provoking posts, and live discussions, Sufi communities cultivate a vibrant online presence, engaging both followers and curious seekers alike (Hakim et al., 2024).

Our research faced a significant challenge in selecting Sufi preachers on social media. The fluid nature of Sufi identity online, combined with the vast amount of content, required a rigorous filtering

process. It was difficult to differentiate genuine practitioners from those merely adopting Sufi aesthetics. Additionally, assessing the influence and reach of these online figures demanded sophisticated analysis since follower counts didn't always reflect actual impact. Establishing clear selection criteria, balancing qualitative assessments with quantitative data, and addressing potential biases were crucial to ensuring the validity and representativeness of our study.

Before selecting relevant Sufism-related accounts on social media, we used hashtags like #sufism, #sufi, and #tariqat across platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. We required consistent online engagement and exclusive focus on Sufi topics. However, we chose to abandon these criteria for a simpler approach. Our language criteria included Russian, Kazakh, and Uzbek. Given the widespread use of Russian, we decided to research Sufism content in this language. The Russian language still hold a strong position in the Central Asian region being a lingua franca (Kubieva et al., 2021). We excluded the Turkmen and Kyrgyz languages due to a lack of proficiency. Our final criterion involves consistent engagement on social media. We chose preachers who consistently post online.

**Table 1. List of active Sufi preaching accounts in social media (as per our criteria)**

Account	Subscribers	Major social platform	Language
hazrat_qurbanali_akhmad_ishan	27,2 thousand	Youtube	Kazakh/Russian
Sheikh Nazim's Saltanat TV	71,6 thousand	Youtube	Uzbek
Суфийское Братство Накшбанди ( <i>Naqshbandi Sufi Brotherhood</i> )	128 thousand	Youtube	Russian
Из мрака к свету ( <i>from darkness to light</i> )	324 thousand	Youtube	Russian

The account hazrat\_qurbanali\_akhmad\_ishan published 888 videos, Sheikh Nazim's Saltanat TV – 3824, Naqshbandi Sufi Brotherhood – 3384, from darkness to light just 930 videos so far. The account from darkness to light was registered in 2022 as compared to other three accounts that came alive long before (2012, 2014).

### 3.1. Differences between above mentioned accounts.

The first three represent the Naqshbandiya order, which has deep historical roots and remains active in Central Asia. It significantly shaped the spiritual and cultural landscape of the region. Originating in the 12th century, the order evolved through various historical contexts, especially during the 16th to 18th centuries, influencing social life, education, and intercultural relations among regional peoples (Shanazarova, 2021). Consequently, their presence in the cyberspace does not raise any questions. The account *from darkness to light* (for purpose of convenience we will further use English translation of the accounts in this article) stands out specifically due to several reasons. Firstly, unlike the three accounts mentioned earlier, this account does not claim affiliation with any Sufi order. Secondly, it is managed by a Russian convert who is not a leader of any Sufi order. Thirdly, the content creator actively utilizes various social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram, in contrast to others who primarily use YouTube for preaching. Our research indicates that the Naqshbandis predominantly depend on YouTube for their teachings, while they use Instagram and Facebook mainly for sharing quotes from their teachers, and Telegram for communication and announcements. Lastly, this account promotes the teachings of the renowned Turkish Sufi, Said Nursi. He is recognized as a founder of neo-Sufism, which aims to blend traditional mystical practices with

modern realities. Said Nursi is often linked to Sufism, particularly through his unique interpretation and adaptation of its principles to contemporary contexts. His approach combines intellectual and spiritual dimensions, stressing the importance of both the heart and intellect in understanding the divine. This synthesis offers a modern interpretation of Sufism, addressing the challenges faced by urban Muslim society and the secular world (Sahin & Zaimul, 2021). The table presented below is constructed to demonstrate the principal similarities and differences between these accounts.

**Table 2. Similarities and differences between accounts**

hazrat_qurbanali_akhmad_ishan Sheikh Nazim's Saltanat TV Naqshbandi Sufi Brotherhood	Allah's love to creatures, video lectures from classical sufi books, telling stories about their religious authorities, methods of becoming saint,
Из мрака к свету ( <i>from darkness to light</i> )	Active, permanent publication, engagement with audience, wide range of themes, live streaming, discussing modern day issues

### 3.2. *Preaching methods.*

Our content and careful observations discovered that Sufis in preaching roles employ below preaching methods. Three accounts representing the Naqshbandi order focus on the spiritual dimensions of Islamic rituals, treating outward forms as paths to inner transformation. They stress the importance of intention (niyya) behind actions, with sincerity (ikhlas) and devotion (taqwa) being essential. Sufis interpret the five daily prayers not just as ritualistic acts, but as elevated conversations with the Divine. In this perspective, each gesture and word become a profound expression of connection, symbolizing an intimate dialogue between the temporal and the eternal. Prayer transcends the realm of mere mechanical recitation of memorized expressions, transforming instead into a fluid stream of consciousness wherein aspirations, trepidations, gratitude, and invocations converge. According to Sufis, the five daily prayers are not static rites, but rather dynamic communications with God, providing a unique opportunity to cultivate a personal relationship with the Creator. *From darkness to light* proffer pragmatic counsel regarding the enhancement of prayers, advocating for a period of meditation prior to their commencement. The claim it will help to divert attention from worldly concerns and concentrate on the Divine presence. Another Islamic ritual fasting is explained by Sufis as an instrument for self-discipline, rather than mere abstention from sustenance and beverages. Sufis perceive fasting as a valuable occasion to restrain their desires and passions, cultivate self-control, and fortify their communion with the divine. Genuine fasting, in accordance with Sufi teachings, transcends mere abstinence from corporeal nourishment, extending also to the fasting of the intellect and the heart. This entails relinquishing negative thoughts, emotions, and actions, including but not limited to anger, envy, avarice, and pride. Sufis endeavor to purify their inner being, thereby transforming it into a deserving vessel for divine love and wisdom.

### 3.3. *Special Narratives*

In their online sermons, they highlight the historical roots of Sufism in the region. By emphasizing the ancestral practice of Sufism and its role in shaping moral principles and educating individuals, these narratives resonate with listeners and reinforce the community's cultural and spiritual heritage. Furthermore, Sufis emphasize the significance of the concept of insan kamil, or the "perfect human," which holds a central position in Sufi philosophy and spirituality. This concept serves as a crucial framework for understanding spiritual development. Sufism, with its rich array of mystical traditions

and practices, focuses on the journey toward self-realization and the attainment of a higher state of being. *Insan kamil* embodies the ideal qualities and attributes that individuals must cultivate to achieve spiritual perfection and closeness to the Divine. This concept not only reflects the Sufi aspiration for personal transformation but also highlights the broader ethical and moral dimensions of human existence. By delving into the significance of *insan kamil*, individuals can gain deeper insights into the Sufi understanding of humanity, the quest for spiritual enlightenment, and the ultimate goal of achieving harmony with the universe (Leccese, 2025).

The concept of *Insan Kamil*, as explored in our research, is promoted by Naqshbandi representatives. In their online sermons, Sufis describe *Insan Kamil* as the pinnacle of spiritual development. They stress that *Insan Kamil* is more than an ideal person; it is a mirror reflecting Divine attributes. The journey to this state involves love, devotion, and self-denial. The sermons highlight the crucial role of a spiritual mentor in guiding the student towards *Insan Kamil*. The mentor, serving as a living example, aids in overcoming obstacles and unveiling the true nature of humanity, ultimately leading to union with God. The author of "From Darkness to Light" explains the concept of *Insan Kamil* to the audience through the insights of the medieval Sufi scholar Al-Jili. Al-Jili highlights the importance of spiritual ascent and self-realization to achieve *Insan Kamil*. This process involves purifying the heart, annihilating the ego, and attaining subsistence in God. Through divine grace and rigorous spiritual practice, the seeker can realize their inherent potential as a perfect reflection of the Divine (Abdillah, 2023). Other three offer Naqshbandi views on the perfect human concept but do not disclose them in detail.

#### 3.4. *Debunking myths and misunderstandings about Sufism*

The author of *from darkness to light* is the only from the list to break down stereotypes about Sufism. The text seeks to challenge the entrenched stereotypes associated with Sufism. While many scholars and popularizers have either idealized this mystical tradition or depicted it as an outdated relic, it offers a fresh perspective. The author does not shy away from difficult questions and contradictions, openly acknowledging the diversity of interpretations and practices within Sufism. Moreover, he effectively demonstrates the relevance of Sufi transformations to modern society, highlighting their potential in addressing democratic and spiritual crises. His works not only expand the understanding of Sufism but also inspire individuals to find inner meaning and balance. In today's environment, Sufism is characterized by a decline in social and political influence, leading some academics to create Neo-Sufism—a modern interpretation of classical Sufi teachings that blends exoteric and esoteric elements to connect with urban Muslim communities (Hermansen, 2023).

Sufism, often misunderstood as a separate sect or religion, is essentially the mystical aspect of Islam. It represents a path of spiritual purification and a direct experience of the Divine, not a deviation from Islamic principles. Incorrectly associated with fatalism, passivity, or syncretism that weakens Islamic orthodoxy, Sufism is actually a pursuit for direct communion with the Divine. It is active and requires rigorous self-discipline and ethical refinement (Hill, 2021). The idea that Sufism promotes neglecting worldly duties is incorrect. Many Sufi masters were notable scholars, jurists, and even political leaders. Their involvement in society was driven by justice, compassion, and selfless service. Such narratives are delivered partially in the lectures of *hazrat\_qurbanali\_akhmad\_ishan*.

#### 3.5. *Unique topics*

Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, is renowned for its profound spiritual insights and practices that emphasize love, unity, and the pursuit of divine connection. As society evolves, Sufism faces the

significant challenge of integrating its timeless teachings with the complexities of modern life. This delicate balance requires not only the preservation of its core principles but also an adaptation of its expression to resonate with contemporary audiences. However, our content analysis found no effort by Sufis to address this issue.

The relationship between Sufism and modernity is complex. Some view Sufism as a mystical tradition that contrasts with the rationalism and secularism typical of modernity. Sufism emphasizes inner experience and devotion, differing greatly from modern society's focus on materialism and scientific progress. However, others believe Sufism offers a meaningful spiritual alternative to the challenges of modernity, highlighting its focus on morality, compassion, and humanism as solutions to issues like alienation, environmental degradation, and global inequality. Sufism's principles of self-reflection and ethical behavior resonate deeply with contemporary goals for personal growth and purposeful engagement (Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2024).

### 3.6. *Explaining Asceticism within the context of Sufism*

Asceticism constitutes a fundamental aspect of Sufi doctrine, expressed through diverse manifestations of self-denial and rigorous discipline. At the heart of Sufi asceticism lies the conviction that earthly desires and passions represent suffering, obstructing an individual from realizing the authentic objective – the comprehension of God. Consequently, Sufis endeavor to curtail their actions, regulate their desires, and channel them towards spiritual endeavors. This may involve embracing a modest lifestyle, refraining from excesses in sustenance and beverages, renouncing opulence and amusement, as well as seeking solitude and engaging in contemplative practices (Greeley, 2022). In their online sermons Naqshabdnis regard asceticism as a means to attain a profound spiritual proximity to the Divine. They assert that a genuine ascetic is not merely one who is stripped of material possessions, but rather one who is liberated from attachment to such possessions. For them an excessive attachment to the material realm diverts the heart from God, thus creating a barrier between humanity and the Divine. Asceticism serves to dismantle this barrier, purifying the heart of egocentric aspirations and guiding it towards the spiritual realm. The *from darkness to light* presents the notion of asceticism through the perspectives of Said Nursi's teachings. "The quest for wealth and temporal possessions is not deemed prohibited; rather, it is advocated, yet it is imperative to possess them in one's hands, not within one's heart." The pivotal aspect here is the "heart." In accordance with Nursi's teachings, it is the heart that ought to be directed towards God, rather than towards ephemeral entities. Wealth and achievement are regarded as instrumental for the realization of loftier objectives, such as assisting those in need, disseminating knowledge, and contributing to societal well-being.

### 3.7. *Questions and Answers*

Our research found that Sufi preachers mentioned in this article do not engage directly with their subscribers. This lack of interaction hampers the spread and reception of their teachings online. Without feedback mechanisms, preachers cannot tailor their content to their audience's needs and understanding, which may reduce the impact of their message. Engaging with the audience through open conversations is a highly effective strategy. To maintain their presence on social media, preachers should actively interact with their followers. Our research indicates that the *from darkness to light* uniquely addresses subscriber inquiries. Rather than solely publishing content, it fosters dialogue, engaging the audience in discussions and problem-solving. With prompt responses, detailed comments, and a willingness to share experiences, it cultivates a loyal and active community. Unlike

many accounts focused merely on self-promotion or information dissemination, "From Darkness to Light" genuinely prioritizes the needs of its subscribers.

### 3.8. *Difference of preaching methods from other Islamic sects*

We analyzed Sufi sermons to explore differences between Sufis and other Islamic sects. Unlike other sects, Sufis don't discuss *aqida* (creed) or *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) issues, as shown by the content analysis. Instead of engaging in complex debates on theological doctrines or legal rulings, Sufi discourse focuses on the inward journey and personal experience of the Divine. While other sects often prioritize doctrinal purity or adherence to jurisprudential norms, Sufis encourage individuals to explore their souls, fostering a personal relationship with the divine. This unique approach centers on the heart instead of the mind, leading to profound insights and transformative experiences. It reveals faith not through strict rules but through the dynamic interplay of love, humility, and surrender to the Divine will. Ultimately, while Sufis may steer clear of *aqida* and *fiqh* debates, their contributions to the broader Islamic discourse—especially in terms of moral and ethical guidance—remain profoundly significant. This emphasis on inner spirituality and personal connection to the divine has inspired countless followers, fostering a rich tapestry of poetry, music, and art that reflects their deep devotion and understanding of faith beyond mere legalistic frameworks (Hosen, 2023).

Unlike some orthodox Islamic schools that emphasize fear of divine punishment, Sufis prioritize love for Allah. This love is the driving force toward spiritual perfection, aiming for union with the divine. Sufi love for God transcends mere worship or adherence to religious rules; it is a profound, all-consuming passion that compels the Sufi to renounce anything separating him from the Beloved. This love purifies the heart of egoism, pride, and attachment to worldly possessions (Jung, 2024). Three accounts (*hazrat\_qurbanali\_akhmad\_ishan*, *Sheikh Nazim's Saltanat TV*) Naqshbandi Sufi Brotherhood, representing Naqshbandi order, emphasizes developing love for God through a deep understanding of His attributes and manifestations. This knowledge is not seen as contrary to religious practices but as an essential component and driving force. Naqshbandi teachings stress maintaining the heart's conscious presence (*huzur*) in every prayer and action, as mere mechanical ritual performance is deemed insufficient.

Another difference we detected during our research is absence of the female preachers. Other Islamic sects proactively use women for spreading their teachings. Sufi orders lag behind in this term. This disparity likely stems from varying interpretations of Islamic scripture and traditions concerning women's roles in public life and religious authority. While some groups embrace female scholarship and active participation in proselytization, others maintain more conservative stances, restricting women's involvement primarily to domestic or private spheres. Further investigation could explore the specific theological and social justifications underpinning these contrasting approaches within each sect, examining how historical context and regional cultural norms influence the acceptance or rejection of female preachers. The impact of such variance on the reach and appeal of each group also warrants consideration.

The limited presence of female preachers within Sufi orders may also reflect a differing emphasis on the nature of religious preaching. Unlike other groups prioritizing outward propagation and active conversion, Sufism emphasizes inner transformation and direct experiential knowledge of the divine. This inward focus might lead to a de-emphasis on formal preaching, regardless of gender, favoring instead the transmission of knowledge through personal mentorship, devotional practices, and the example of a realized master, roles that women have historically fulfilled within Sufi contexts

(Nielsen, 2021). To gain a deeper understanding, it is essential to study individual Sufi orders and their unique historical paths. In today's digital age, women's involvement in religious preaching has become a pivotal focus for religious communities and scholars. As more women pursue roles in spiritual leadership, their participation not only enriches religious discourse but also expands its scope (Kurmanaliyev et al., 2024).

The Central Asian Sufi orders tailor their propaganda to different social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube. On Facebook, they primarily use visual content by sharing photos with inspirational quotes to succinctly convey their spiritual messages. In contrast, YouTube is used for more detailed exploration of Sufi thought, where practitioners publish video lectures that offer deeper insights into their beliefs and practices. The dissemination of Sufi teachings and practices through social media platforms reveals a nuanced approach tailored to the unique characteristics of each platform. On Facebook, the emphasis on visual content and citations suggests a strategy aimed at engaging users in a quick, digestible manner, fostering an immediate connection with the audience. Conversely, the use of video lectures on YouTube indicates a preference for more in-depth exploration of Sufi concepts, allowing for a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the philosophy and practices.

Our research revealed that Sufis refrain from publicly exhibiting their rituals, which are meant to be mysterious and secret, in the digital age. These rituals, rich in mysticism and esoteric knowledge, are not mere performances but pathways to personal transformation and divine connection. By keeping these practices private, Sufis preserve their mystique, making their profound teachings accessible only to those with a genuine desire to engage deeply. Sufis are navigating a delicate balance—embracing digital connectivity while preserving the mystical essence of their traditions. Their approach highlights a deep respect for spirituality's inner dimensions, elusive to the casual observer and requiring a deeper exploration. Through this perspective, Sufism invites seekers into a world where the sacred maintains its enigmatic allure, embodying the essence of their timeless teachings.

### *3.9. Maintaining confidentiality of rituals amidst the era of accessible information*

Our research indicates that, despite the vast potential for spreading religious practices via social media, Sufis do not engage in additional rituals online. This observation raises important questions about authentic religious traditions in the digital age. Social media offers an unprecedented platform for spreading ideas, attracting new followers, and fostering connections among like-minded individuals. Many groups leverage these opportunities, creating online communities, broadcasting religious services, and sharing extensive written works.

Sufis, known for their emphasis on personal experiences, mystical knowledge, and unique rituals, are a result of this paradigm. Sufism traditionally values oral knowledge and the experiential transmission from teacher to student. Digital platforms, which focus on visual content and brief messages, may fall short in conveying the nuances and transformations of Sufi practices. By deliberately avoiding social networks for their rituals, Sufis effectively maintain a balance between their cherished traditions and the opportunities offered by modern technology (Akman, 2010).

In their online sermons, Sufis navigate a complex landscape, strategically omitting themes central to their mystical tradition. The power of *zikr*, the rhythmic remembrance of God, a key practice for Sufi spiritual growth, is often minimized or omitted. Similarly, discussions distinguishing the material and spiritual worlds, foundational to Sufi cosmology and understanding of reality, are frequently avoided.

The crucial role of a murshid, a spiritual mentor and guiding light on the Sufi path, also receives surprisingly little attention. Online Sufi sermons focus on universal themes like love, compassion, and ethical behavior to build bridges while carefully addressing the complex Sufi doctrine. This content selection reflects a delicate balance. The digital realm demands accessibility, and overly esoteric teachings might be misunderstood or even seen as heretical by those unfamiliar with Sufism.

Emphasizing universal virtues enables Sufi teachers to connect with individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering shared humanity and promoting positive social engagement. This method introduces Sufi principles without immediately engaging in the complexities that require extensive initiation and personal guidance. However, this approach raises concerns about the authenticity of the online Sufi experience, questioning whether focusing solely on ethical conduct may reduce Sufism to a mere philosophy of life, thereby stripping it of its transformative spiritual power. The essence of Sufism lies in the direct experience of the divine, facilitated through practices like zikr and the guidance of a mentor – elements that are often conspicuously absent in the online discourse. Ultimately, the online presentation of Sufism is a reflection of the digital age itself: a space where accessibility and simplification often take precedence over depth and complexity (Rozeahna, 2023).

The propagation of Sufi teachings is vital for enhancing spiritual growth and cultivating moral principles. By educating individuals on morality and spirituality, Sufism offers a path to understanding and transcending self-centered perspectives. It serves as a powerful vehicle for conveying profound truths, awakening the heart, and inspiring ethical action. Sufi practices, such as meditation and remembrance, promote mindfulness and self-awareness, empowering people to navigate life's challenges with grace and resilience. In essence, disseminating Sufi wisdom contributes to a harmonious and just society by nurturing spiritual growth and fostering a deep sense of interconnectedness among all beings. Approach the transmission of Sufi teachings with sensitivity and respect for diverse cultural contexts to ensure authentic representation and avoid appropriation. Supporting Sufi scholars and practitioners who exemplify the tradition is vital for maintaining authenticity and providing guidance. The aim of spreading Sufi teachings is not to convert individuals to a specific dogma, but to awaken the inherent goodness and wisdom within each person (Hidayati, 2022). By offering tools and pathways for self-discovery and spiritual growth, Sufism can help create a more peaceful, just, and interconnected world. This endeavor requires ongoing self-reflection, humility, and steadfast dedication to Islamic principles.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Sufi orders have adeptly modified their conventional spiritual practices to align with the digital epoch by employing platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. This transformation facilitates Sufi sheikhs and murids to disseminate lectures, share devotional poetry, and conduct virtual zikr sessions, thereby rendering their teachings more accessible to an international audience. The online domain empowers Sufi teachings to transcend geographical constraints, drawing individuals from across the globe who are in pursuit of spiritual direction and communion. This accessibility is especially advantageous for those who are unable to participate in physical assemblies, permitting them to engage in Sufi rituals and teachings remotely. Although online platforms present opportunities, they concurrently introduce challenges such as the commodification of spirituality and the risk of misinterpretation. Sufi orders endeavor to preserve authenticity and ethical standards while negotiating these intricacies. Notwithstanding the digital transition, Sufi orders underscore the importance of personalized spiritual guidance through interactive Q&A sessions, direct messaging,

and online mentorship programs. This methodology is instrumental in sustaining the traditional focus on individualized spiritual advancement.

The incorporation of multimedia elements, such as devotional music, aesthetically compelling poetry recitations, and animated narratives, significantly augments both engagement and accessibility for a wide array of audiences. This methodology facilitates the communication of Sufi doctrines in a manner that is both engaging and relatable. Sufi orders prioritize the establishment of online communities that are predicated on shared spiritual values and practices. These communities frequently integrate virtual zikr circles and collaborative study groups, thereby fostering solidarity and mutual support among adherents. Sufi teachings are meticulously tailored to confront contemporary social and personal dilemmas. By articulating these teachings in a nuanced and accessible fashion, Sufi orders attract individuals in search of spiritual solace and guidance in the contemporary landscape. Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue: The strategic employment of social media platforms serves to disseminate Sufi wisdom and foster interfaith dialogue, effectively expanding the reach of Sufi teachings beyond conventional geographical constraints.

The distinctive features of online preaching activities of Sufi orders are multifaceted, reflecting both traditional Sufi principles and the contemporary digital landscape. Firstly, the emphasis on personalized spiritual guidance is maintained through interactive Q&A sessions, direct messaging, and online mentorship programs. Secondly, the use of multimedia content, such as devotional music, visually captivating Sufi poetry recitations, and animated stories illustrating Sufi parables, enhances engagement and accessibility for diverse audiences. Thirdly, a focus on fostering online communities built on shared spiritual values and practices, often incorporating virtual zikr circles and collaborative study groups, promotes solidarity and mutual support. Fourthly, the careful adaptation of Sufi teachings to address contemporary social and personal challenges, presented in a nuanced and accessible manner, attracts individuals seeking spiritual solace and guidance in the modern world. Finally, the strategic leveraging of social media platforms to disseminate Sufi wisdom and promote interfaith dialogue helps broaden the reach of Sufi teachings beyond traditional geographical boundaries.

The paper suggests further research into the intersection of Sufism and social media, particularly in understanding how these dynamics influence individual belief systems and collective religious identities in the digital age. This shift to digital realms raises critical questions about the authenticity, accessibility, and evolving nature of Sufi teachings in online contexts. Sufism, traditionally reliant on face-to-face mentorship and oral transmission, now encounters a decentralized, democratized digital landscape. The further research should investigate the formation of neo-Sufi movements online. The role of visual media, such as shared devotional photos and video recordings of Sufi practices, warrants particular attention. Ultimately, exploring the intersection of Sufism and social media offers valuable insights into the broader phenomenon of religious identity formation in the digital age. By investigating the impact of these dynamics on individual belief systems and collective religious identities, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how traditional spiritual practices are evolving and adapting in the face of technological advancements.

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