

Sufism in the Digital Media Era: Integration of Islamic Spirituality in Addressing Digital Fatigue and the Modern Human Crisis

Khusnul Khotimah

UIN Profesor Kiai Haji Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Indonesia.

* Corresponding Author: khusnulhotimah@uinsaizu.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

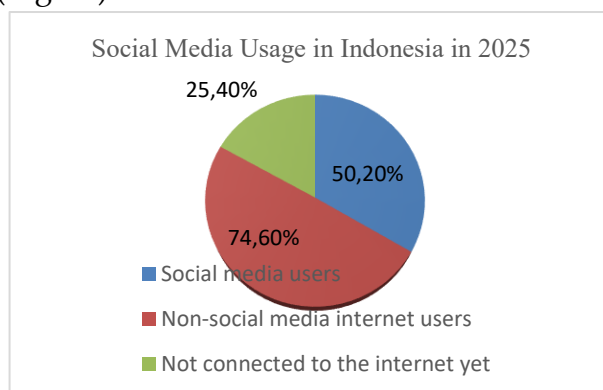
This study aims to examine and discuss the relevance of Sufism as a spiritual approach to addressing digital fatigue, which frequently affects individuals in the digital age. The research was conducted using a qualitative method with a literature review approach. Data were collected from various primary sources, including the thoughts of Imam al-Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, and several other Sufi figures, forming the basis for analysis. The findings indicate that digital fatigue arises from excessive exposure to technology and the blurring of boundaries between professional performance and personal life, with all aspects expected to be always on. This condition leads to stress and mental exhaustion. Sufism offers a transcendental solution through spiritual values such as *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *zuhd*, *ikhlas*, and *sabr*, which serve to cultivate self-awareness, inner peace, and life balance. These findings affirm that Sufism is not merely a traditional spiritual heritage but also a contemporary approach relevant for maintaining mental health and holistic mindfulness in media engagement in the digital era.

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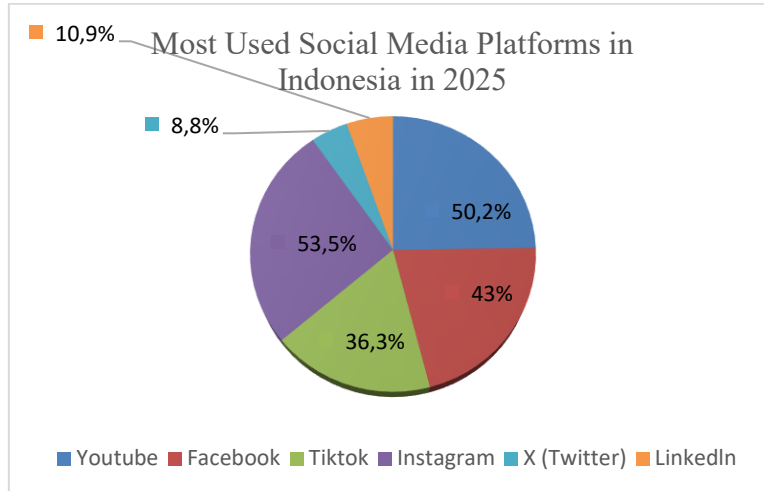
1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has brought major changes to human life. Learning, working, and even social interactions are now largely conducted through digital devices (Hasnawati, 2021). While technology provides convenience (Alvira et al., 2023), it also introduces new challenges. The following data show the number of social media (digital) users in Indonesia:



Source: Digital 2025: Indonesia – DataReportal – Global Digital Insight

According to a report compiled by DataReportal, Indonesia has a population of 278 million, with an estimated 212 million internet users, or 74.6% of the total population. Among them, 143 million are active social media users, accounting for 50.2%, while 25.4% of Indonesians remain unconnected to the internet. The social media platforms most frequently used by Indonesians are shown in the diagram below:

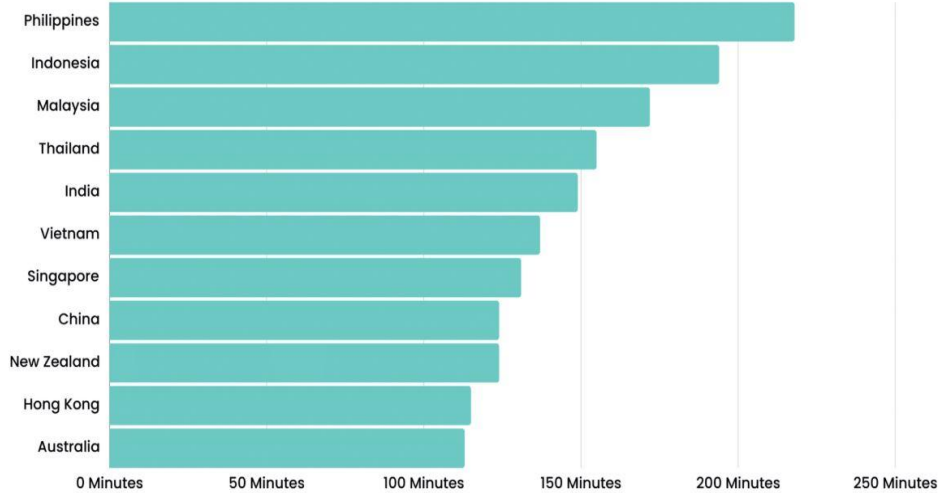


Source: Digital 2025: Indonesia – DataReportal – Global Digital Insight

Based on the diagram, the most frequently used digital platforms are YouTube with 143 million users, Facebook with 122 million, TikTok with 108 million, Instagram with 103 million, LinkedIn with 31 million, and X (Twitter) with 25.2 million. With such numbers, the potential for productivity is equally matched by the risk of individuals experiencing what is known as digital fatigue. Digital fatigue refers to a state of exhaustion caused by excessive use of digital technology (Supriyadi et al., 2025; Zulmi et al., 2025). This phenomenon has become increasingly evident since the rise of remote work and online learning, where nearly all daily activities depend on screens (P. C. Putri & Samiyah, 2025).

Digital media also affects workers' work-life balance. The implementation of virtual systems fosters an always-on work culture, a condition in which employees feel compelled to stay constantly connected to work and tasks without time boundaries. In the long term, according to Suryawijaya & Putri (2025), this can worsen the balance between professional and personal life. Meanwhile, among university students, the term zoom fatigue has emerged, which, according to Kuntardi (2021), while it may initially support student performance, can eventually lead to severe exhaustion.

The main trigger of digital fatigue lies in the disproportionate management of time spent on digital media. The following data illustrate this clearly:



Source: Average Time Spent on Social Media by App and Trend (2025)

Data compiled by App and Trend (2025) show that digital media users in Indonesia spend an average of 3 hours and 14 minutes per day browsing social media. According to TNGlobal (2025), Indonesians also access an average of 7.93 social media platforms per person. Additionally, Indonesians spend an average of 45 hours per month scrolling through TikTok. Therefore, Indonesia ranks among the most active social media users in Southeast Asia.

This phenomenon signifies that digital media has a profound impact on the development of each individual's life. Hence, every individual must equip themselves with sufficient intellectual knowledge, mental resilience, and strong spirituality as preventive measures against digital fatigue.

This Islamic spiritualism is closely related to the values of Sufism. There are various interpretations of Sufism, such as the spiritual state of being "with" Allah without any intermediary (Zebua et al., 2025), and the purification of the heart from all impurities and immoral behavior (Mahmood et al., 2020; Ni'am, 2020). Imam al-Ghazali defined Sufism by saying that "Sufism begins with knowledge, continues with practice, and ends with divine grace (mawhibah)" (Arif Muzayin Shofwan, 2021; Zaini, 2017). Meanwhile, Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani described Sufism as a means of purifying the heart from anything other than the reality of Allah (Jilani, 1956). Thus, Sufism represents a transcendental and sacred process through which humans come to know Allah more profoundly through various methods.

Today, many Sufism study platforms have developed through digital media, such as online studies of Ihya 'Ulumuddin (Fitriana & Ridlwan, 2021; Qudsy & Muzakky, n.d.), Tasawuf Underground (Pratama, 2022) which uses YouTube for preaching, and the Majelis Kalbun Salim (MKS) community, which frequently uploads Sufi-themed activities on digital platforms (Khotimah et al., 2024). Great expectations arise when digital media are used for religious learning and Sufi practice, as they provide individuals and groups with references to enrich their knowledge and self-actualization, as well as serve as a defense mechanism when digital fatigue begins to emerge.

Recent research by various scholars demonstrates that Sufism has strong

relevance as a spiritual and psychological approach to addressing widespread digital fatigue in the modern era. Wahid and Maskhuroh (2024) explain that Sufism functions as a means of maintaining spiritual awareness amid the digital distractions that erode focus and inner peace. Practices such as dhikr, introspection, and self-control are believed to stabilize mental states disturbed by excessive technological exposure.

The study by Rosfiyanti, Wahidin, and Hannase (2024) expands this perspective by highlighting the emergence of cyber-Sufism, a transformation of Sufi practices into digital spaces. While it opens broad access to spirituality, this phenomenon can also lead to spiritual fatigue due to shallow interactions and superficial knowledge.

Additionally, research by Rahayu, Bahar, and Nurdin (2025) shows the concrete role of Sufism in strengthening the mental health of young generations. Through dhikr practice and pesantren-based spiritual guidance, students experience increased tranquility, self-control, and resilience against digital pressures. Meanwhile, Rochman (2025) points out that students' spirituality in the technological era can develop through online communities, although it is vulnerable to exhaustion caused by the flood of religious content without deep understanding.

Overall, these studies affirm that Sufism is not merely a traditional spiritual heritage but also a contemporary framework relevant for cultivating inner balance, psychological serenity, and ethical media engagement amid the growing phenomenon of digital fatigue.

In this context, the purpose of this study is to explore the values of Sufism in addressing the psychological problems of modern humans caused by the penetration of digital media. This study also demonstrates that Sufism functions as a spiritual approach within modern life dominated by technology. More specifically, it examines the relevance between Sufism and the concept of mindfulness in modern psychology as an effort to maintain inner balance.

Theoretically, this study offers several novelties, including the integration of Islamic spiritual concepts (Sufism) with contemporary psychological theories of mindfulness and psychological well-being, providing guidance for individuals (particularly younger generations of digital media users) to apply Sufi values as a strategy to cope with digital fatigue, and, most importantly, reinforcing Sufi teachings in modern contexts as ethical and spiritual guidance in the digital era.

2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative design with a library research approach. This method was chosen because the focus of the study lies in the conceptual analysis of Sufi thought and its relevance in addressing the phenomenon of digital fatigue in the modern era. According to Zed (2008), library research aims to examine various written sources such as books, scholarly articles, and academic documents to establish a strong theoretical foundation without involving field data collection.

The approach used is descriptive-analytical, which involves describing key

concepts found in the literature on Sufism, spirituality, and the phenomenon of digital fatigue, followed by an in-depth analysis of their interrelation. As stated by Moleong (2014), descriptive-qualitative research seeks to reveal the meaning and context of phenomena based on the researcher's interpretation.

The data sources in this study are divided into primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include classical and contemporary works on Sufism such as the thoughts of al-Ghazali (A. H. M. bin M. Al-Ghazali, 1992; Ghazali, 2013), Ibn 'Arabi (Al-'Arabi, 2016; Arabi, 2004), and al-Qushayri (Al-Qusyairi, n.d.; Qusyairi & Naisaburi, 2013), which serve as the conceptual basis for understanding the spiritual dimensions of Islam. The secondary sources are drawn from scientific journals, research articles, and previous studies discussing the relationship between spirituality, mental health, and digital media, such as the studies by Wahid & Maskhuroh (2024) and Rosfiyanti et al. (2024).

Data analysis was carried out through content analysis, which involves selecting, categorizing, and interpreting texts based on the main themes relevant to the research focus, namely Sufism as a spiritual approach to reducing digital fatigue in the modern era.

3. Results and Discussion

Digital Fatigue

Digital fatigue has become an important issue because it directly affects physical and mental health (Leonardi, 2021) as well as the quality of social relationships (Venus et al., 2025). Many individuals feel easily tired, find it difficult to focus, and experience a decline in productivity when constantly exposed to digital devices (Hapsari et al., 2025). If left unaddressed, this condition not only affects performance in work and study but also overall well-being. It can reduce productivity and social welfare simultaneously (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Derks et al., 2014; Reinecke & Oliver, 2016).

In daily life, digital fatigue often appears during activities that require intensive online interaction. Examples include the phenomenon of zoom fatigue that occurs during long video conferences (Kuntardi, 2021), boredom caused by repetitive short-message or email exchanges (Huang et al., 2019), and fatigue due to constant digital notifications (Fabrizz et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2019). Research also shows that face-to-face communication tends to be lighter and less tiring than asynchronous text communication such as email or chat (Fabrizz et al., 2021).

The phenomenon of digital fatigue does not arise spontaneously but is influenced by various interrelated factors. One of the main causes is excessive screen exposure, which has significantly increased in the digital era (Dianah et al., 2024). This is reflected in data from APJII (2025), which reported 229.4 million internet users, or around 80.66% of Indonesia's total population, a number that continues to grow every year (Teknologi.id, 2025). Prolonged device use without breaks can cause eye strain (Munawaroh, 2021), brain fatigue, and reduced focus and concentration (Aubryla & Ratnawati, 2023). In addition, habitual digital multitasking also

contributes significantly. Constantly switching between applications, responding to messages, emails, and notifications makes the brain work harder (P. C. Putri & Samiyah, 2025). This condition is known as technostress, a form of psychological pressure resulting from excessive technology use (Tarafdar et al., 2011). Studies indicate that continuous task-switching reduces efficiency and depletes mental energy (Mark et al., 2005).

The lack of face-to-face interaction also reinforces the emergence of digital fatigue (Medina, 2025). Communication activities dominated by digital media, whether synchronous such as video conferences or asynchronous such as chats and emails, tend to consume more cognitive energy than direct interaction (Fabrizz et al., 2021). This often leads to feelings of boredom, isolation, and even emotional exhaustion (Munawaroh, 2021). Another contributing factor is the increased demand for remote work and learning. Since the pandemic, many activities have become fully dependent on digital devices, resulting in longer online hours. Consequently, the boundaries between productive time and rest time have become increasingly blurred, leading to both physical and mental fatigue (Adler & Benbunan-Fich, 2012; B. Wang et al., 2020).

Digital fatigue carries wide-ranging consequences that include cognitive, emotional, social, and physical aspects. Cognitively, it leads to decreased concentration, reduced working memory capacity, and difficulty maintaining focus on a single task (Hapsari et al., 2025). This ultimately lowers productivity and performance quality in both academic and professional contexts (B. Wang et al., 2020). Emotionally, individuals experiencing digital fatigue tend to feel more easily stressed, anxious, and exhibit symptoms of burnout (Andryan & Suminar, 2024). The psychological pressure from excessive digital communication demands can worsen mental states and reduce motivation (Derks et al., 2014). Similarly, this fatigue affects both physical and psychological conditions, not only decreasing daily performance but also causing mental and physical health problems (Medina, 2025; Zulmi et al., 2025).

University students represent one of the most vulnerable groups to digital fatigue. This is due to the high demands for digital device use, including computers, laptops, and smartphones, to support academic and non-academic activities (José-María Romero-Rodríguez, Francisco-Javier Hinojo-Lucena, Kamil Kopecký, 2023; Subroto, 2024). Activities such as online lectures, assignment preparation, and intensive communication through social media increase the risk of experiencing symptoms of digital fatigue (Nurhalizah & Widyastuti, 2023).

Physically, the common symptoms include eye strain, headaches, migraines, muscle and joint pain in the neck, shoulders, and back areas (Hasnawati, 2021). Emotionally, symptoms may manifest as anxiety, excessive fear, irritability, mood swings, and sleep disturbances (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Subroto, 2024; Iloponu et al., 2025; Medina, 2025). If left unaddressed, this condition can further deteriorate both productivity and overall well-being.

The social impact can be observed in the declining quality of interpersonal

interaction. Dependence on virtual communication reduces opportunities for face-to-face engagement, which is actually more effective in fostering emotional closeness (Suryani et al., 2025). This can lead to feelings of alienation, boredom, and social isolation (Reinecke & Oliver, 2016). From a physical perspective, excessive use of digital devices causes complaints such as eye fatigue, headaches, neck pain, and sleep disorders due to blue light exposure from screens (Xiao et al., 2019). If untreated, these physical effects may develop into more serious health problems.

Addressing digital fatigue requires strategies that not only focus on reducing technology use but also emphasize time management and balanced lifestyle patterns (Medina, 2025; Nisa & Fitriani, 2024). One essential step is regulating the duration of digital device usage, or screen time management (Pandoh et al., 2025; Sari & Wajdi, 2024). By limiting screen exposure and providing regular breaks, individuals can maintain eye health (Sari & Wajdi, 2024), reduce cognitive stress, and restore concentration. Moreover, practicing digital detox serves as an effective alternative (Medina, 2025). Allocating specific times without digital devices, such as during family gatherings, exercise, or engaging in hobbies, helps restore emotional energy (Febri, 2024), create balance between the real and virtual worlds, and reduce notification overload (Nareswari Paramesti et al., 2025).

Another effective strategy is to increase face-to-face interaction. Although technology facilitates long-distance communication, direct contact provides a healthier and less mentally exhausting form of interaction (Fadhilah et al., 2025). In this regard, maintaining social relationships outside the digital sphere is essential to prevent feelings of isolation (Zahwa et al., 2025).

Additionally, mindfulness practices and physical activities have been proven to help reduce the effects of digital fatigue. Short meditation sessions, regular exercise, and adequate sleep can improve both physical and mental conditions (Lisa Khoirunnisa & Nur Muhammad Soleh, 2025). The digital environment also needs to be managed effectively, such as by turning off unnecessary notifications, setting task priorities, and organizing technology use schedules to avoid excessive multitasking (Nabila et al., 2023). By applying these strategies, digital fatigue can be minimized, allowing digital technology to continue supporting productivity and well-being without causing excessive exhaustion.

Sufi Practice as Mindfulness

In the fast-paced and distraction-filled modern world, many people experience stress, anxiety, and difficulty maintaining focus. For instance, a study conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang revealed that the majority of students experienced moderate stress (57.4%) and a smaller proportion suffered from severe stress (7.0%). These conditions were influenced by internal factors such as difficulty coping with personal problems, and external factors including family pressure, social environment, interpersonal relationships, and increased academic workload that often leads to burnout among final-year students (Ambarwati et al., 2017). Research has shown that meditation, or mindfulness therapy, can reduce anxiety

and improve psychological well-being.

Mindfulness-based therapeutic models such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP) are generally viewed as integrations of Buddhist and Western psychology (Isgandarova, 2019). Although these models were initially developed to address depression relapse, they also show strong alignment with Islamic traditions. Studies of Islamic theological and psychological sources indicate that similar principles have long been integral to Sufi psychology (Isgandarova, 2019).

Sufism itself is recognized as the spiritual core that has animated Islam since its early development and serves as an essential foundation for Islamic psychotherapy (Chittick, 2001; Ernst, 2011). One of its central concepts is the training of the *nafs* (self or soul), which in Islamic understanding represents both the spiritual potential and the lower desires of human beings (Nanda Nurlina & Bashori Bashori, 2025). The Sufi approach to managing the *nafs* has proven beneficial in reducing stress and addressing depression and anxiety (Sholeh & Mudlofir, 2024). For this reason, many Muslim counselors recommend spiritual practices such as *dhikr* (the rhythmic repetition of the names of God) as taught by Sufi masters (Isgandarova, 2019).

In Islamic tradition, Sufi meditation that involves breathing, concentration, and the repetition of *dhikr* serves to calm the mind, regulate emotions, and cultivate mindfulness, enabling students to become more focused, productive, and resilient to stress (Ahmad et al., 2024). According to Al-Ghazali, Sufi meditation is a discipline that unites knowledge and action to attain *ma'rifatullah* (the knowledge of God) through concentration, contemplation, and *dhikr* (Ahmad et al., 2024). The ultimate aim of the Sufi path is to enable direct communion with the Creator through the cultivation of *ihsan*, which forms the basis of ethical and social conduct (Shaikh, 2012). In this context, *dhikr* is regarded as the central meditative practice in Islam (Elias, 2013; Nasr, 1986), known since the 10th century in two forms: *dhikr lisani* (verbal remembrance) and *dhikr qalbi* (remembrance of the heart) (Applebaum, 2025). Of the two, *dhikr qalbi* is considered superior because it reflects a profound internalization that leads to the dissolution of everything other than God in pure witnessing (Hillenbrand, 2014). This is the form most commonly practiced by Akbari Sufis (Buehler, 1998).

Mindfulness-based therapy has been shown to assist with various physical and mental health conditions (Simkin & Black, 2014). In this regard, *muraqabah* is often used as an Islamic contemplative exercise (Haque et al., 2016). While it can be practiced by non-Muslim therapists with appropriate training, it provides particular benefit for Muslim psychotherapists in addressing clients' mental, emotional, and spiritual challenges (Isgandarova, 2019).

In Arabic, *muraqabah* derives from *raqeeb*, meaning "to observe," "to guard," or "to pay attention," and in the Qur'an it is also one of the divine names of Allah,

referring to His role as the Protector and Watcher (Ernst, 2011). In Sufi tradition, muraqabah is translated as “meditation” (Ernst, 2011) or “contemplation” (Azeemi, 2005), referring to a salik’s (spiritual seeker’s) practice of observing the nafs (soul) and understanding its relationship with the Creator by being aware of inner feelings and the surrounding world (Isgandarova, 2019). This practice can be performed individually or in the presence of a teacher, focusing on three dimensions of existence: the inner (batin), the outer (zahir), and the hidden (aib) (Bashori, 2025).

Muraqabah consists of several levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced) in which the salik contemplates spiritual realities such as ihsan (spiritual excellence), nur (divine light), haatif-e ghabi (subtle cosmic voice as a manifestation of divine attributes), reflection on life after death, the spiritual heart, life purpose, emptiness, and non-material reality (Isgandarova, 2019).

There are several stages in muraqabah, one of which is mushahada (preparation). Muslim psychotherapists begin by establishing rules for clients, similar to how a salik observes the first maqam (spiritual station) in the Sufi path (Hussein, 2018). These guidelines can be adapted from the Naqshbandi order, where a shaikh provides clear direction and supervision. Preparation usually begins with wudu’ (ritual purification). If this is not feasible, Islam allows flexibility in its observance. Afterward, clients are guided to enter a state of muraqabah which are observing thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations for 5 to 15 minutes, which can later be extended as needed.

In traditional practice, a salik sits in a dark room before a shaikh with eyes and mouth closed, focusing on inner awareness while the shaikh ensures the disciple’s vigilance (Hussein, 2018). In modern clinical settings, however, the therapy room does not need to be dark; dim lighting is sufficient to promote relaxation and a positive atmosphere. Clients may sit calmly rather than kneel to maintain comfort and composure. This stage aligns closely with the body scan technique used in mindfulness-based therapies (Hussein, 2018).

Breathing plays an essential role and should be taught by Muslim psychotherapists with an emphasis on slow, deep breathing techniques (Jarman Arroisi, 2023). In Naqshbandi muraqabah, for instance, the salik imagines white light entering through the abdomen while inhaling and reciting dhikr, such as “Allah Hu,” regarded as one of the most sacred invocations as it directly refers to God (Gazali, 2015). This integration of breathing and dhikr is believed to help the salik progress spiritually. As Sa’di Shirazi beautifully expressed: “Each breath taken restores life, and when released, it brings joy to the soul. Thus every breath counts as two blessings, and every blessing requires gratitude” (Chittick, 2005).

This quotation can serve as a reflection for clients that breathing is both an act of gratitude and a means of healing. To deepen reflection in muraqabah, Muslim psychotherapists may arrange the physical setting by lighting candles, placing flowers, and minimizing distractions to maintain concentration (Isgandarova, 2019). Such arrangements enhance sensory awareness through sound and sight.

Traditional Sufi writers emphasize that effective *muraqabah* is closely connected with prayer (*salat*), charity (*sadaqah*), social responsibility, kindness, and good manners (A. H. Al-Ghazali, 1993). Additionally, maintaining *wudu* (ritual purity) as a symbol of spiritual cleansing, engaging in *tafakkur* (reflection) on God's creation and His 99 attributes, and practicing *muhasabah* (self-evaluation) before and after prayer are recommended as contemplative preparations.

The preparatory phase also includes attitudes toward healing, as explained by Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, who identified three main barriers to seeking psychological help: cultural beliefs about obsession, negative attitudes toward therapy, and loss of hope for recovery (Awaad & Ali, 2015). Such preparation assists clients in confronting defensive attitudes toward therapy, finding solutions, and reducing *ghaflah* (heedlessness). In this context, Keshavarzi and Haque assert that a person's inner state, like that of a driver who is intoxicated, exhausted, or angry, significantly affects their behavior. Therefore, Muslims are encouraged to remain reflective in monitoring their actions, thoughts, and daily conduct (Haque et al., 2016).

One of the key therapeutic implications of *muraqabah* is improving clients' concentration and focus. According to Khwaja Shahsuddin Azeemi, citing Syed Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, a *salik* should use perceptive power to concentrate on a particular object or idea, whether it be a Divine Attribute, the distinction between body and soul, or another focus (Azeemi, 2005). In practice, Muslim psychotherapists help clients achieve the ultimate goal of *muraqabah*: cultivating full awareness of God while training self-control and reducing unwanted thoughts (Hadi & Wibawa, 2024).

Unlike Western mindfulness, traditional *muraqabah*, as explained by Syed Ghauth Ali Shah (1804 to 1880), aims at reaching a state in which the individual becomes pure meaning and is no longer self-aware (Azeemi, 2005). Ibn 'Arabi described this stage as *mushahada* (witnessing), where the individual self dissolves (Chittick, 2005). Similarly, Sufis believe that when the heart is fully directed toward God, all inner faculties become submissive and aligned (Azeemi, 2005). Ibn 'Arabi's disciple, Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi, compared this state to total emptiness, corresponding to the modern notion of optimal consciousness, freeing the mind from distractions and being fully present. In contemporary therapy, a similar concept appears in the term *decentering* or *cognitive shifting*, which involves redirecting focus from the self or repetitive thoughts toward another object of attention (Mirdal, 2012).

In classical Sufi tradition, objects of contemplation include the face of the *shaikh*, the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an, and God Himself (S. Huda, 2017). Deep focus on these objects serves to restrain the wandering of the mind. In Islamic psychotherapy, such objects may be replaced with elements of nature to help clients observe emotional, sensory, and cognitive flow without becoming entangled, reactive, or distracted (Isgandarova, 2019). Proper *mushahada* practice allows clients to remain calm, tolerate emotional burdens, and release unwanted thoughts, leading to a positive experiential state. After three to five minutes of *mushahada*, Muslim psychotherapists may ask clients to describe bodily sensations, feelings,

and emotions in a nonjudgmental way. Clients should also be reminded that difficulty in controlling thoughts, desires, or memories is normal, as classical Sufi literature recounts that even great masters experienced spiritual and emotional states (ahwal) beyond their control (Ernst, 2011).

To support this process, therapists may draw upon key concepts from Mevlana Jalal-ad-Din Rumi, such as acceptance of both positive and negative experiences, unlearning old habits, seeing the world from a new perspective, decentering from self to others, and harmonizing body and mind (Mirdal, 2012). Rumi emphasized the importance of experiential engagement rather than experiential avoidance (Mirdal, 2012). Through this approach, Muslim psychotherapists can guide clients to embrace every experience that arises in muraqabah and reflect upon it to gain deeper insight.

Second, *Tasawwur* (imagination). In the clinical context, the Muslim psychotherapist acts as both a guide and a facilitator. This aligns with both Sufi tradition and modern psychology, which emphasize the crucial role of the therapist in the therapeutic relationship. Al-Ghazali, for instance, advised that a shaikh should guide patients to abandon bad habits gradually (A. H. Al-Ghazali, 1993). Mirdal also emphasized that achieving psychological and spiritual states requires a facilitator, just as mindfulness training requires an instructor (Mirdal, 2012).

A Muslim psychotherapist not only performs modern professional functions but also encourages clients to see with the eye of the heart. In the advanced stages of muraqabah, *tasawwur* enables the transfer of spiritual knowledge from teacher to disciple, from the Prophet to the follower, leading to the experience of *tajalli* (the manifestation of Divine attributes) (Br & Syamsuddin, 2025). In clinical settings, this process is manifested by helping clients acknowledge their internal states, thoughts, sensations, and emotions, while fostering openness to all inner experiences. Keshavarzi and Haque compare the therapist's role to that of the shaikh, who serves as a teacher, leader, and spiritual healer, historically regarded as a source of mental healing (Haque et al., 2016).

Third, *Tafakkur* (reflection on creation) and *Tadabbur* (reflection on the names and attributes of God). *Tafakkur* and *Tadabbur* serve as forms of contemplation aimed at gaining both outward and inward inspiration (Azeemi, 2005). In traditional practice, *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and *fikr* (reflection) are essential elements of spiritual awareness. For instance, the *dhikr* culture among the Oromo Hararghe community is regarded as a hermeneutical exercise involving the analysis of both the external and internal meanings of the world (Hussein, 2018). In general, muraqabah is understood as contemplation, focusing attention on a specific object through *tafakkur* and *tadabbur*, or theological reflection (Azeemi, 2005).

In clinical practice, Muslim psychotherapists may integrate *tafakkur* with guidance from the Qur'an, Hadith, and the social sciences. For example, clients may be invited to reflect on the story of Prophet Yusuf in relation to adoption, loss, or depression. Badri formulated four stages of reflection: (1) knowledge through the senses, (2) aesthetic and emotional appreciation, (3) connection with the Creator,

and (4) spiritual cognition (shuhud) (Badri, 2000). Moreover, the classical thought of Abu Zayd al-Balkhi in *Masalih al-Abdan wa al-Anfus* remains relevant. He classified anxiety into four forms: al-ghadab (anger), al-jaza' (sadness or depression), al-faza' (fear or phobia), and wasawes al-sadr (obsession) (Awaad & Ali, 2015). Psychotherapists can guide clients to reflect on how these intrusive thoughts interfere with activity, happiness, and concentration, as explained by al-Balkhi.

At this stage, individuals need to reflect on these inner thoughts, as they may lead to sinful behavior or strong emotions such as shahwah (desire). Ibn Qayyim stated that every voluntary action originates from khawatir and wasawis (inner temptations), which develop into conscious thoughts, are stored in memory, evolve into intentions, and finally manifest as actions. Repetition of these actions turns them into ingrained habits; therefore, controlling the nafs is easier in the early stages before it strengthens (Al-Jawziyah, 1981).

Although fleeting thoughts are unavoidable, much like breathing, individuals can still choose to accept good khawatir and reject bad ones. At this stage, one learns to engage in positive thinking and spiritual contemplation. Badri noted that Ibn Qayyim's concept is similar to cognitive behavioral therapy and systematic desensitization, in which patients are trained to relax and imagine a peaceful place until calmness replaces anxiety (Badri, 2000).

In addition to dhikr and muraqabah, khalwat also plays a role in providing inner peace. Khalwat is defined as the process of physically and spiritually detaching oneself from worldly attachments for a specific period (Qusyairi & Naisaburi, 2013). This practice is understood as an act of remembrance of Allah carried out with deep devotion, a constantly present heart, and contemplation of His blessings day and night (Isa, 2014). In practice, khalwat involves reducing food and drink, focusing on dhikr and meditation, and limiting speech except with a meditation partner or the guiding Sufi master (Brunessen, 1996).

Khalwat is divided into external and internal forms (Aini & Rosyad, 2019). External khalwat refers to the physical act of retreating to a secluded place for a specific period, during which the body, heart, and mind are fully present in worship. Internal khalwat, on the other hand, is the continuation of the retreat experience in daily life, characterized by consistent dhikr, limited speech, and controlled eating and sleeping. Thus, even in the midst of crowds, a salik's heart remains in a state of musyahadah (witnessing the majesty of Allah).

During khalwat or *suluk*, several regulations must be observed by participants (Aini & Rosyad, 2019):

- 1) The ghusl taubah (ritual cleansing of repentance) is performed to purify oneself from outward and inward sins, followed by voluntary prayers for ablution, repentance, and hajat *suluk*.
- 2) Participants must remain in a state of ablution and perform congregational prayers at their prescribed times.

- 3) *Dhikr* is the central practice, performed either individually in private rooms or communally through khatam *tawajjuh*, a circular *dhikr* session where participants face each other while reciting selected verses and prayers (Al-Fatihah, salawat, Al-Insyirah, Al-Ikhlās, and istighfar). Female participants perform this practice in their respective *suluk* rooms to maintain modesty and proper decorum.

Participants are encouraged to limit worldly activities such as speaking (no more than 14 words per day with fellow participants and 7 words with outsiders), sleeping (allowed only as necessary, preferably in a sitting position), and eating (restricted to twice daily, at 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.). The diet is limited to plant-based foods, avoiding animal products to prevent physical or emotional disturbances.

The objectives of khalwat are to (1) train oneself in tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) through *dhikr* and repentance to cleanse both outward and inward sins, (2) ascend to the highest spiritual stations such as *muraqabah* (mindful awareness of God's presence) and *mushahadah* (inner witnessing of His majesty), ultimately reaching the *maqam ma'rifah* as the pinnacle of spiritual realization, and (3) prepare oneself to serve society sincerely and wholeheartedly after completing khalwat training (Lailatul Izzah, 2022).

Sufism as a Value Amid the Penetration of Digital Media

The digital era has brought fundamental changes to human lifestyles. The emergence of digital and social media provides unlimited access to information, expands communication spaces, and opens new opportunities in social interaction, education, and work (Salsabila & Anshori, 2025). However, the penetration of digital media also produces negative phenomena such as information overload, fear of missing out (FOMO), social media addiction, and identity crisis (L. Wang et al., 2024). These conditions significantly affect mental health, leading to stress, anxiety, depression, and the decline of social relationship quality.

In facing these challenges, the values of Sufism offer an alternative path toward inner balance (Nurani et al., 2025). As the esoteric dimension of Islam, Sufism emphasizes the purification of the soul, closeness to Allah, and self-control from worldly desires (Ayu Muntoharoh & Nur Aini, 2025). Amid the flood of digital media, Sufi values such as *zuhud* (detachment), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *sabr* (patience) serve as practical guidelines for building psychological resilience. These values are not only religiously relevant but also psychologically significant in strengthening individual well-being.

Essentially, Sufism is a spiritual path aimed at bringing humans closer to Allah and attaining tranquility of the soul (*al-nafs al-muthmainnah*) (Asmuni, 2018). This path is pursued through spiritual exercises such as *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *muhasabah*, and self-restraint from worldly temptations. In the classical era, Sufism served as a critique of materialistic and hedonistic tendencies, while in the digital era it functions as a critique of lifestyles that are excessively absorbed in virtual reality

(Hamdi, 2023).

The penetration of digital media presents serious psychological challenges. The limitless flow of information triggers information overload, in which individuals feel overwhelmed by excessive exposure (Rahmah et al., 2025). At the same time, social media fosters a culture of self-image and social comparison, causing feelings of inferiority and existential anxiety. The FOMO phenomenon drives individuals to stay constantly connected, often resulting in psychological fatigue and the deterioration of real-life relationships (Gemasih, n.d.). In other words, the digital world that was supposed to simplify life has instead generated new pressures in the form of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Within this context, Sufism provides an alternative path. It does not reject the digital world but offers a value framework for responding to it wisely (Hamdi, 2023). In daily practice, this can be applied through regular dhikr, self-reflection, simple living (zuhud), maintaining harmonious social relations (mu'amalah), and performing heart meditation for about 30 minutes each day (Ahmad et al., 2024). The values of zuhud, ikhlas, and sabr form the spiritual foundation for balancing digital life with inner well-being.

One of the most fundamental Sufi values relevant to the digital era is zuhud. Zuhud does not mean total withdrawal from the world, but rather detachment of the heart from its allure (Nur Safaat, 2024). In the context of digital life, zuhud means maintaining distance from excessive attachment to social media, digital devices, and unnecessary information consumption. A person who practices zuhud is not easily tempted by superficial online appearances, avoids digital consumerism, and uses technology proportionally (Sosial, 2025). Zuhud frees individuals from the anxiety caused by virtual competition and nurtures a sense of contentment and inner peace (Alifya, 2025).

The next value is ikhlas, which essentially means purifying one's intention solely for Allah (Taufiqurrohman, 2019). In the digital age, many people fall into the culture of self-image and social validation (L. S. Putri et al., 2025). Online sharing activities are often driven by the desire for recognition through likes or positive comments (Nuresa, 2025). Consequently, one's happiness becomes dependent on others' responses. Ikhlas serves as an antidote to this tendency. Through ikhlas, individuals learn that the true meaning of life is not determined by external appreciation but by sincerity of intention and honesty of heart (Mufarrohah, 2024). This attitude prevents social anxiety, enhances self-confidence, and strengthens one's sense of life purpose.

The value of sabr also holds a crucial role in dealing with digital media penetration. Sabr does not merely mean passive endurance but includes self-control, emotional regulation, and consistency in goodness (Ernadwita & Rosdialena, n.d.). In digital spaces that are often filled with hate speech, provocation, and misinformation, sabr functions as a control mechanism (Mansyur, 2020). A patient person is not easily provoked by negative comments, does not rush to spread unverified information, and maintains emotional balance under pressure.

With *sabr*, individuals are not only protected from the negative impacts of digital interactions but also develop stronger psychological resilience to navigate modern life dynamics (Aisyah, 2024).

The values of Sufism intersect with concepts in modern psychology, particularly in the area of psychological well-being. According to Carol Ryff, psychological well-being consists of six dimensions: self-acceptance, purpose in life, autonomy, positive relationships with others, environmental mastery, and personal growth (Rahimsyah & Muhajirin, 2025). The value of *zuhud* supports the development of autonomy by freeing individuals from excessive dependence on the digital world. *Ikhlas* strengthens self-acceptance since individuals no longer rely on external validation, while *sabr* enhances emotional regulation and helps maintain healthy social relationships.

The concept of mindfulness in contemporary psychology also shares similarities with Sufi practices. Mindfulness emphasizes full awareness of the present moment without judgment. In Sufism, practices such as *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, and *khalwah* represent forms of complete awareness oriented toward Allah (I. R. Huda & Priyatna, n.d.). Sufi values can be understood as a form of Islamic mindfulness that highlights the transcendental dimension (Fitriya et al., n.d.). This integration allows Sufism to function not only as a spiritual practice but also as a psychotherapeutic approach to addressing psychological problems in the digital age. In this way, Sufism is no longer viewed merely as a religious heritage but as a source of universal values that can harmonize with modern scientific knowledge (Agus Darmawan, 2024). It provides a spiritual framework capable of balancing digital life with mental health while enriching interdisciplinary approaches that connect religion, psychology, and media studies.

4. Conclusion

Sufism holds profound relevance as a spiritual path in responding to the growing phenomenon of digital fatigue in the modern era. Practices such as *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, and *khalwah* cultivate full awareness (Islamic mindfulness) that helps individuals manage stress, anxiety, and digital distractions more constructively.

Core Sufi values such as *zuhud*, *ikhlas*, and *sabr* serve as ethical guides for maintaining inner balance, regulating emotions, and building psychological resilience against the penetration of digital media. By internalizing these values, individuals not only attain peace of mind but also develop a wise, productive, and spiritually grounded approach to digital life.

The integration of Sufism with modern psychology, particularly the concept of mindfulness, enriches therapeutic strategies for addressing psychological pressure resulting from excessive technology use. Thus, Sufism can function as an effective digital detoxification mechanism as well as an ethical foundation for cultivating a civilized digital culture. This study also underscores the importance of incorporating spiritual approaches within academic discourse in responding to the

increasingly pervasive influence of technology.

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