

Digital Sufism for Mental Resilience in the AI Era

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Abstract

The accelerating dominance of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies has profoundly reshaped human cognition, emotion, and moral sensibility, while also generating new forms of psychological fragmentation and spiritual detachment. This study introduces Digital Sufism as a spiritually grounded and philosophically integrative framework for restoring inner equilibrium and sacred awareness in the digital era. Using a qualitative philosophical approach, the study synthesizes recent scholarship published between 2018 and 2024 on AI, mental health, and digital ethics with textual analysis of classical Sufi works, particularly *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyah* by al-Qushayrī and *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* by al-Ghazālī. The analysis examines how *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *murāqabah* (divine mindfulness), and *muhāsabah* (ethical self-reflection) can be reinterpreted as moral and psychological principles for AI design and digital conduct. The findings indicate that Sufism offers not only ethical direction but also existential resilience amid the algorithmic mediation of human life. By incorporating Sufi epistemology into digital environments, Digital Sufism fosters self-awareness, moral accountability, and transcendental consciousness as foundations for spiritually responsive technology. This study contributes to the formulation of a theoretical foundation for Digital Sufism as a contemporary articulation of Islamic mysticism that bridges spirituality, psychology, and digital ethics to promote holistic human development.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Digital Ethics; Digital Sufism; Existential Resilience; Spirituality

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI) has radically transformed human life, shifting the center of existence from tangible encounters to algorithmically mediated networks. While digital immersion enhances connectivity and cognitive efficiency, it simultaneously generates a crisis of selfhood—manifesting in anxiety, depression, and existential disorientation. The global pandemic further intensified this condition, exposing a latent spiritual vacuum beneath hyper-digitalized living. Many contemporary interventions—technological or psychological—merely address external symptoms while neglecting the deeper metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of human well-being. (Koenig, 2024)

Recent interdisciplinary studies have shown that digital environments can be reconfigured to nurture mental and spiritual resilience. Park and Huberty, (Park et al., 2024) for instance, found that digitally assisted mindfulness significantly strengthens spiritual grounding and emotional stability among Generation Z users. Likewise, Schäfer et al. (Schäfer et al., 2024) demonstrate that digital interventions designed around reflective awareness improve psychological resilience across demographic groups. These findings reinforce the insight long upheld by spiritual traditions—that the path to equilibrium (*tawāzun*) lies not merely in technical optimization but in spiritual centering.

Within the Islamic intellectual legacy, *taṣawwuf* offers a profoundly integrative model of human transformation grounded in *taẓkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *murāqabah* (divine mindfulness), and *muḥāsabah* (ethical self-accounting). Classical thinkers such as al-Ghazālī, al-Juwaynī, and al-Bāqillānī articulated spirituality as an epistemic process oriented toward *ma'rifah*—a consciousness that harmonizes intellect and revelation. Yet, despite this heritage, contemporary discourses on AI ethics and digital design remain largely anthropocentric and procedural. As Elmahjub notes, the integration of Islamic ethical reasoning into AI frameworks has been conceptually underdeveloped, often reduced to policy compliance rather than inner transformation. (Elmahjub, 2023) Similarly, Al Kubaisi re-examines the *Sunnah* as a moral compass for AI ethics, arguing that the prophetic model embodies an ontological balance absent in modern algorithmic logic. (Al Kubaisi, 2024)

A systematic review by Çetinkaya et al. (Çetinkaya & Billings, 2023) further substantiates that Islamic–Sufi practices—such as *dhikr*, meditation on divine presence, and *murāqabah*—are significantly correlated with improved mental well-being, reduction of

anxiety, and increased existential coherence. Despite this growing evidence, the majority of studies continue to treat spirituality as a therapeutic supplement rather than as a foundational epistemology for digital and AI systems. Consequently, the current landscape lacks a comprehensive conceptual model that systematically integrates *taṣawwuf* into the architecture of digital ethics and the design of AI systems oriented toward holistic well-being.

This study addresses that gap by formulating a theoretical construct termed “Digital Sufism,” which synthesizes classical Sufi spirituality with the contemporary discourse on AI ethics and mental resilience. Methodologically, it employs a qualitative philosophical approach, drawing from Sufi texts, Islamic psychology, and digital ethics to articulate an integrative epistemology. The study argues that *taṣawwuf* should be understood not only as an inner path (*ṭarīq al-bāṭin*) but also as a normative paradigm for re-humanizing digital life. The framework of Digital Sufism therefore prioritizes spiritual consciousness (*ḥudūr al-qalb*) over the prevailing data-driven logic of AI, offering a path to reconstruct mental resilience and spiritual integrity within an algorithmic civilization.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative philosophical design grounded in *taṣawwuf* as both an epistemic and ethical paradigm. Rather than investigating empirical behavior, the research explores *taṣawwuf* as an ontological discourse that addresses digital anxiety, identity fragmentation, and ethical alienation in the era of artificial intelligence (AI). Methodologically, it adopts a hermeneutic–critical approach to interpret classical Sufi texts alongside contemporary discourses in Islamic psychology and digital ethics. This philosophical orientation follows the tradition of Islamic epistemology that regards knowledge (*ilm*) as both rational and spiritual illumination (*maʿrifah*), integrating reason, ethics, and transcendence. Consequently, *taṣawwuf* is not merely a path of inner purification (*ṭarīq al-bāṭin*) but a normative paradigm capable of rehumanizing digital life through moral intentionality and ontological awareness (Griffel, 2021; Habib & Shabir, 2021).

The textual corpus includes two primary categories. First, classical Sufi texts—*al-Risālah al-Qushayrīyah* by al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) (Al-Qushayrī, 2001) and *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011a) particularly the *Dār al-Minhāj* ten-volume edition (Jeddah)—provide authoritative insights on *murāqabah* and *muhāsabah*.

Second, contemporary peer-reviewed sources from journals such as *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* and *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* were selected for their scholarly rigor and relevance. (Nizamie et al., 2013)

Data collection relied on a comprehensive literature review across Islamic studies, psychology, and computer science, using databases including Scopus, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Brill Online. Keywords such as “digital spirituality,” “Islamic ethics and AI,” and “*taṣawwuf* and mental health” guided the search. Each source was assessed for methodological quality, publisher credibility, and conceptual relevance. Validity was reinforced through peer-reviewed publication, academic recognition, and citation triangulation. (Firnando, 2024)

Analysis used thematic synthesis grounded in philosophical hermeneutics. (Braun & Clarke, 2021) This interpretive process facilitated a dynamic engagement between classical Sufi teachings and modern discourse on digital psychology and AI ethics. (Keles et al., 2020) The three analytical phases included: (1) semantic and epistemological study of *taẓkiyat al-nafs*, *murāqabah*, and *muḥāsabah*; (2) alignment with digital psychological issues like identity fragmentation and *technostress*; and (3) the construction of the “Digital Sufism” framework emphasizing spiritually conscious AI design that nurtures ethical coherence and existential awareness. (Raquib et al., 2022)

This approach revealed recurring thematic convergences, establishing *taṣawwuf* as a dynamic epistemological system capable of guiding ethical and spiritual innovation in the digital age. The literature review, source selection, and thematic synthesis were conducted over a three-month period from January to March 2026. This duration enabled iterative hermeneutic engagement between classical Sufi texts and contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship on artificial intelligence, digital psychology, and ethics.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings in eight thematically structured subsections, each elucidating aspects of *Digital Sufism* as a spiritually grounded framework for psychological and technological resilience. The analysis aligns with three primary objectives: (1) to examine the psychological and spiritual consequences of digitalization, (2) to reinterpret classical Sufi doctrines for contemporary application, and (3) to propose a holistic spiritual model for

digital technology. Each thematic discussion builds cumulatively toward an integrative synthesis of psychological, spiritual, and design-oriented insights.

Digital Anxiety and the Sufi Path to Inner Peace

The integration of digital technology into daily life has profoundly reshaped human cognition, emotion, and social behavior. While enhancing efficiency and connectivity, it has also contributed to escalating mental health challenges. Anxiety disorders, already widespread, have intensified amid algorithmic and hyperconnected digital culture. In 2019, the World Health Organization reported over 301 million people suffered from anxiety-related disorders—a figure likely higher after the pandemic's disruptions. (World Health Organisation, 2017) Chronic anxiety, panic attacks, and emotional withdrawal now affect diverse populations globally.

Beyond biological causes, recent studies highlight digital media's role in amplifying anxiety. Jean M. Twenge and colleagues found a strong correlation between excessive screen exposure and declining psychological well-being, especially among adolescents. (Twenge et al., 2018) Social media's architecture fosters constant self-monitoring and algorithmic comparison, eroding identity boundaries and generating internal fragmentation.

This phenomenon, termed *technostress*, refers to the cognitive-emotional strain produced by constant connectivity and data overload. (Tarafdar et al., 2019) Notifications, endless scrolling, and blurred work-life boundaries hinder introspection and diminish inner tranquility, fragmenting one's sense of self.

In contrast, the Sufi discipline of *taṣawwuf* offers a profound spiritual counter-paradigm. Rather than focusing on symptom relief, it heals the existential root of suffering by realigning the self with the Divine. Central practices such as *murāqabah* (vigilant awareness of God) and *muḥāsabah* (ethical self-accounting) function as inner disciplines of sacred attentiveness. *Murāqabah*—defined as *dawām 'ilm al-qalb bi-ḥuqūq al-Rabb* (“the heart's continual awareness of God's rights”)—cultivates sustained divine consciousness, guiding individuals away from digital overstimulation toward sacred stillness.

Similarly, *muḥāsabah*, as defined by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, entails the continuous evaluation of one's inner and outer actions (*muḥāsabat al-naḥs 'alā kull naḥs wa ḥarakah, zāhiran wa baṭīman*), nurturing moral vigilance and spiritual coherence. Abū Naṣr Al-Ṭūsī. Al-Sarrāj,

Al-Luma'. ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Tāhā 'Abd al-Bāqī Surūr (Mesir: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditsah, 1960). Amid algorithmic urgency, *muḥāsabah* restores reflective space and ethical intentionality. Together, *murāqabah* and *muḥāsabah* act as ontological correctives, rebuilding fractured interiority through divine mindfulness rather than secular cognitive models.

These disciplines thus operate as spiritually grounded therapies countering digital fragmentation. By centering divine presence and cultivating ethical awareness, *taṣawwuf* offers a holistic response to anxiety that unites psychological resilience with metaphysical rootedness. Unlike secular mindfulness, Sufi consciousness is fundamentally theocentric—presence is sacred, not merely attentional.

Ultimately, *taṣawwuf* constitutes more than ritual devotion; it is an ontological framework for spiritual healing. As Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī explains in his exposition of *al-insān al-kāmil* (the perfected human), internal harmony mirrors divine order. (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011d) The reformation of the self through *murāqabah* and *muḥāsabah* thus yields not only psychological balance but also metaphysical grounding in an age of digital disintegration.

Digital Distress and the Sufi Revival of Ontological Significance

The global rise of mental health challenges parallels the rapid digitalization of human life. A longitudinal study by Duan et al. reveals a strong correlation between intensive internet engagement—particularly social media and gaming—and increasing anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, especially among adolescents whose identities evolve within algorithmic environments. (Duan et al., 2020) These digital pathologies often evade conventional psychiatric diagnosis and remain beyond standard therapeutic paradigms.

Mainstream mental health systems, rooted in cognitive-behavioral models, frequently overlook the deeper existential wounds caused by digital overstimulation and fragmented selfhood. The growing reliance on AI-based mental health tools—apps, chatbots, and automated meditation—may offer convenience but often lack ethical nuance and metaphysical grounding. While such technologies can ease symptoms, they seldom address the deeper afflictions of the digital self: the erosion of identity, loss of meaning, and estrangement from transcendence.

In contrast, Sufism articulates a spiritually grounded anthropology, viewing humans as a composite of *jasad* (body), *nafs* (soul), and *ruh* (spirit)—a triadic ontology rarely addressed in secular psychology. Al-Ghazālī emphasizes the cultivation of harmony among these dimensions through sustained spiritual discipline (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011a; Khoshimovich, 2021). This model establishes a framework for restoring ontological integrity rather than merely managing symptoms.

Harold Koenig observes that religion and spirituality do more than console—they anchor identity, shape moral narrative, and offer existential orientation, filling a gap left by technocratic or purely psychological approaches. (Koenig, 2012) In the Sufi paradigm, healing unfolds through *taẓkiyat al-nafs* (self-purification), *muḥāsabah* (ethical self-accounting), and *murāqabah* (divine mindfulness)—disciplines that act as inner mechanisms of ontological restoration.

Murāqabah cultivates *ḥudūr* (spiritual presence) with the Divine—a state Ibn 'Arabī identifies as the hallmark of the *'arif* (gnostic), where the soul reorients toward its primordial intimacy with *al-Ḥaqq* (the Real) (Ibn 'Arabī, 1911). Likewise, al-Kalābādhī teaches that true realization (*taḥqīq*) requires disciplined *taẓkiyat al-nafs* and *muḥāsabah*, refining perception and reviving ethical intentionality. (Al-Kalābādhī, 1994)

These practices thus function not merely as devotional acts but as spiritual therapies restoring coherence, meaning, and transcendence. Within this framework, Sufism emerges as a vital spiritual psychology for the digital age—reintegrating the fragmented digital self into a sacred orientation of being.

Reframing Social Isolation via Sufism: From Alienation to Sacred Solitude

Paradoxically, digital technologies created to enhance connectivity have deepened loneliness and existential detachment. Sherry Turkle describes this state as being “alone together”—a condition where individuals remain digitally connected yet emotionally estranged. (Campbell, 2021) For many, particularly youth, virtual interaction has supplanted embodied presence, producing emotional desensitization and identity erosion.

This crisis intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockdowns and remote communication replaced physical gatherings. A longitudinal study by Bu et al. found a marked increase in loneliness across the UK, especially among young adults and those living

alone,(Campbell, 2021) revealing the psychological toll of hyperconnectivity severed from embodied sociality.

Contrary to secular readings that pathologize isolation, Sufism reinterprets solitude as sacred. The practice of *khalwah* (intentional seclusion) is not escapism but a disciplined return to the *qalb* (heart)—the locus of divine encounter. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī calls the heart the “sanctuary of gnosis” (*ma'rifah*), cultivated through stillness, silence, and continuous *dhikr* (Al-Makkī, 2001).

Hudūr (presence) emerges in *khalwah* when the seeker (*murīd*) faces the illusions of the *nafs* and realigns with the Divine. Al-Qushayrī views this seclusion as an “inner courtyard” where metaphysical truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) unfold to the purified heart. Al-Qushayrī, *Al-Risālah Al-Qushayrīyah Fī 'ilm Al-Taṣawwuf*, 292–293. Complementing this is *muḥāsabah*, the ethical discipline of examining intentions and redirecting the self toward transcendence. Together, these practices transform isolation into spiritual agency and ontological realignment.

Recent psychological research increasingly validates the therapeutic value of spiritual frameworks. Harold Koenig asserts that spirituality nurtures resilience, moral coherence, and meaning—resources largely absent in secular therapy.(Koenig, 2020) Within the Sufi tradition, solitude induced by digital modernity becomes not a psychological deficit but a spiritual aperture. In this light, the alienation of hypermodern life is reframed as *kashf* (unveiling), where solitude becomes a threshold to divine encounter, self-reclamation, and inner harmony.

Synthesizing the Crisis: Digital Disintegration and the Sufi Counter-Paradigm

The algorithmic ecology of the digital age—marked by relentless cognitive demands, AI-driven personalization, and monetized attention—has generated a crisis deeper than psychological exhaustion. At its root lies an ontological disintegration: the fragmentation of *tawḥīd al-nafs*, where human consciousness becomes externalized, commodified, and dispersed.(Hasenhütl, 2018)

Sufism offers a counter-paradigm grounded in metaphysical anthropology, viewing the human being as a *salik*—a spiritual wayfarer whose flourishing depends on the alignment of *nafs*, *qalb*, *'aql*, and *ruh*.(Agyekum et al., 2023) Its central disciplines—*dhikr* (remembrance), *murāqabah* (divine attentiveness), *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification), and *khalwah*

(spiritual retreat)—are not escapist but disciplined methods to cultivate *ḥudūr* (presence) amid distraction. (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011b)

Although al-Ghazālī does not privilege *dhikr* over *tafakkur* (contemplation), he consistently regards it as the prerequisite for authentic reflection: *dhikr* vivifies the spiritual heart, enabling *tafakkur* to illuminate divine realities (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011c). Similarly, al-Qushayrī asserts that without *ḥudūr* and self-discipline, the heart remains veiled from the subtle *ḥaqā'iq al-ma'naviyyāt* (metaphysical truths) of the Divine. (Al-Qushayrī, 2001) Al-Sulamī, in *Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah*, records early masters—such as al-Junayd and Sahl al-Tustarī—who describe *murāqabah* and *khalwah* as means of liberating the *qalb* from sensory domination and rekindling its divine luminosity. (Al-Sulamī, 1953)

In contrast, modern digital well-being discourse often reduces spirituality to neurocognitive or behavioral metrics, stripping it of sacred depth and ontological meaning. (Büchi, 2024) Sufism, however, conceives the *qalb al-mudrik* not merely as an affective center but as the ontological locus of *ḥudūr*, *ma'rifah* (divine knowledge), and *ma'nā* (meaning). This integrative perspective aligns with recent interdisciplinary research connecting AI, contemplative practice, and spiritual health. (Isgandarova, 2019; Nizamie et al., 2013)

Sufism, therefore, does not reject digital modernity; rather, it reorients it. Through its spiritual grammar, it transmutes distraction into contemplation, fragmentation into coherence, and alienation into *qurb*—nearness to the Divine.

Table 1. The Digital Crisis vs. Sufi Counter-Paradigm.

A comparative matrix highlighting digital malaise and Sufi remedies for restoring ontological and psychological balance.

Digital Symptoms	Sufi Counter-Principles
Fragmentation of attention	<i>Dhikr</i> (Remembrance of God)
Identity instability	<i>Tazkiyat al-nafs</i> (Purification of the soul)
Emotional numbness	<i>Murāqabah</i> (Vigilant awareness of the Divine)
Social isolation and nihilism	<i>Khalwah</i> (Sacred seclusion for divine intimacy)
Disconnection from meaning	<i>Ḥudūr, Muḥāsabah</i> (Presence with God, ethical self-auditing)

Explanation: This table demonstrates how the spiritual methodology of Sufism addresses the various layers of psychological and existential disintegration precipitated by

digital saturation. Where digital culture fragments, isolates, and destabilizes, Sufi principles anchor, reorient, and restore.

Dhikr as Existential Integration: A Sufi Reflection on Digital Malaise

Mental dysfunctions in the digital age—*techno-anxiety*, attention fatigue, and emotional desensitization—cannot be resolved through algorithmic optimization or standardized therapy. These afflictions signify a deeper ontological rupture: *faṣl 'an Allāh* (severance from the Divine) and estrangement from the *nafs al-ḥaqīqīyah* (God-oriented self). Digital hyperstimulation fragments the soul, uprooting it from its metaphysical axis and drowning it in informational excess.

Sufism interprets this malaise not merely as psychological disorder but as spiritual dislocation. Its psychospiritual disciplines—*dhikr* (remembrance), *murāqabah* (divine attentiveness), and *muhāsabah* (ethical self-audit)—constitute technologies of presence that reintegrate the scattered self. These practices do not promote escape but cultivate attentional refinement, moral lucidity, and ontological rootedness amid digital relativism.

Classical authorities emphasize the transformative power of *dhikr*. Al-Sulamī, in *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*, writes that *dhikr* “illuminates the heart and lifts the veils (*ḥujub*) between the servant and the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*)” (Al-Sulamī, 2001). Likewise, al-Kalābādhī regards *dhikr* as the matrix of all Sufi disciplines—reviving the *qalb*, awakening *ḥudūr*, and transmuting egoic dispersion into divine receptivity. (Al-Kalābādhī, 1994) *Dhikr*, therefore, is not mechanical repetition but a mode of sacred embodiment and ontological reorientation.

Empirical research substantiates this perspective. Wulandari and Huriyati found that a single *dhikr* therapy session reduced pre-operative anxiety scores from 21.61 to 6.61 ($p = 0.000$). Indah Wulandari and Aty Huriyati, “Anxiety’s Level of Bantenes Patient’s: The Effect of Dhikr Therapy before Surgical Procedure,” *International Journal of Research in Medical Sciences*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.18203/2320-6012.ijrms20151518>. Anggun et al. likewise observed significant anxiety reduction among hemodialysis patients following structured *dhikr* programs ($p < 0.005$). (Anggun et al., 2021) These results affirm *dhikr* as a powerful psychospiritual coping mechanism bridging traditional spirituality and clinical practice.

The Qur’ān declares: “Surely, in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest” (Q 13:28). Sacred invocations—*lā ilāha illā Allāh*, *Allāhu akbar*, *subḥān Allāh*—center the self in

divine awareness, reintegrating consciousness and protecting the soul from digital dissipation. Thus, *dhikr* is not retreat but recalibration: a spiritual discipline enabling one to inhabit digital spaces with serenity, coherence, and sacred intentionality.

In this light, *dhikr* transcends reactive therapy to become proactive formation. As the modern self navigates hyper-fragmented digital landscapes, *dhikr* offers a path to dwell within them without disintegration—anchored in *ḥudūr*, suffused with meaning, and aligned with the Divine (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011d; Hussain & Wang, 2024).

Toward a Spiritual Epistemology of Technology: Interpreting Digital Sufism

The proliferation of AI-mediated systems and algorithmic feedback loops has generated not only new interfaces but also a deep techno-existential anxiety—marked by attentional dissociation, emotional numbness, and spiritual disorientation. (Büchi, 2024) In response, Digital Sufism reclaims classical Sufi wisdom as a living epistemology: an integrative framework that redirects technology toward human meaning, ethical awareness, and spiritual depth.

While dominant AI paradigms prioritize optimization and engagement, a Sufi epistemology emphasizes inner modalities—*muhāsabah* (ethical self-audit), *murāqabah* (vigilant God-consciousness), and *ḥudūr* (presence)—as vital to genuine human flourishing. These “inner technologies” may be integrated into digital systems; for instance, biometric or behavioral indicators of cognitive overload could activate brief *dhikr*-based interventions, transforming digital environments from distractions into moments of recollection.

Emerging scholarship in AI ethics aligns with this vision. Ezzeddin Elmahjub proposes pluralistic Islamic benchmarks—such as *taqwā* (God-consciousness) and *tazkiyah* (self-purification)—as moral criteria for AI governance. (Elmahjub, 2023) Likewise, Amana Raquib and colleagues promote Islamic virtue ethics as design principles, emphasizing *ḥilm* (forbearance), *ʿadl* (justice), and *ṣidq* (truthfulness) to infuse AI innovation with moral integrity. (Agil & Alkhiri, 2022; Raquib et al., 2022) These frameworks resonate with the metaphysical vision of Sufism, in which epistemology is inseparable from spiritual discipline and ethical formation.

Classical authorities clarify this synthesis. In *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, al-Ghazālī affirms that genuine contemplation (*tafakkur*) is inseparable from *dhikr*; while *dhikr* may occur

without reflection, true *tafakkur* cannot exist without remembrance (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011d). Thus, *dhikr* transcends devotional function—it becomes an epistemic modality, restoring sacred perception within the flux of digitized life.

In an age accelerated by algorithmic logic, *dhikr* serves as an epistemological anchor—reuniting fragmented consciousness and affirming the possibility of divine awareness amid digital saturation. Hence, Digital Sufism is not a mystical appropriation of technology but a coherent spiritual epistemology that addresses the psychological, ethical, and ontological fractures of digital modernity.

By centering *dhikr* as existential methodology, Sufism offers not mere solace but a compass for navigating technological complexity with mindfulness, ethical grounding, and transcendence. It suggests that the most advanced technologies are not those that accelerate cognition but those that deepen it—aligning perception with *ma'na* (meaning), consciousness with *ḥaqq* (truth), and action with *wilāyah* (spiritual realization).

These integrative aspects of *dhikr* reveal how spiritual embodiment functions not merely as reaction but as proactive cultivation of presence and purpose. As modern individuals traverse fragmented digital realities, *dhikr* offers timeless recalibration—anchoring identity in transcendental awareness and enabling believers to inhabit digital spaces without spiritual erosion (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011d; Hussain & Wang, 2024).

Table 2. Core Epistemological Principles in Digital Sufism.

A conceptual model outlining the inner structure of Sufi-inspired epistemology in the digital era.

Epistemological Pillar	Sufi Conceptual Basis	Digital Application
Ontological Centering	<i>Qalb al-mudrik</i> (The knowing heart)	Intuitive spiritual guidance in interface design
Moral Gravity	<i>Taqwā</i> (God-consciousness)	Ethical foundations for AI policy and governance
Depth of Awareness	<i>Muraqabah</i> (Divine attentiveness)	Contemplative interface and deep engagement platforms
Sacred Presence	<i>Hudūr</i> (Presence before God)	Attention design anchored in transcendent presence
Ethical Self-Reflection	<i>Muḥāsabah</i> (Moral accountability)	Feedback systems and ethical self-auditing tools

Explanation: This table outlines how the internal architecture of Sufi knowledge can shape a spiritually responsive digital epistemology. It invites developers and designers to infuse technological environments with metaphysical intentionality—offering a sacred counterbalance to the abstractions of secular technocentrism.

Operationalizing Digital Sufism: A Functional Spiritual Framework for AI

In response to the fragmentation of consciousness and psycho-existential dislocation in the digital era, this study presents Digital Sufism not merely as a theological stance but as a functional and integrative framework. It outlines an architecture encompassing ontological, psychological, and technological dimensions—rooted in classical Sufi praxis yet adaptable to digital systems. At its center, this model embeds the spiritual disciplines of *dhikr* (remembrance), *murāqabah* (attentive awareness of the Divine), and *muḥāsabah* (ethical self-examination) as operational modules within human–technology interaction (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011d; A. Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, 2011).

These modalities are not abstract rituals detached from modern contexts. Rather, they offer structured responses to algorithmic saturation by nurturing inward stillness, attentiveness, and moral direction. As Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī reminds in *al-Hikam*, “The soul escapes its desolation only through remembrance of the One it seeks in solitude.” (Anis et al., 2021) In this vision, digital environments are transformed from distractions into loci of sacred mindfulness.

To realize such integration, operationalization must occur at the intersection of design science, contemplative practice, and theological hermeneutics. Empirical research supports this potential. Lone’s study on algorithmic moderation informed by Sufi ethics shows how digital communities can operate as *muḥāsabah*-based ecosystems, prompting users toward *tazkiyah* (spiritual refinement). (Lone, 2022) Likewise, *The Digital Sufi Gaze* project illustrates how interface design inspired by *murāqabah* enables contemplative interaction—turning platforms into catalysts of vigilance rather than distraction. (Iqbal, 2024)

This framework also invites interdisciplinary collaboration among computer scientists, Sufi scholars, mental health experts, and design theorists. Together, they can create spiritually sensitive design templates that prioritize wholeness over optimization, contemplation over manipulation, and transcendence over distraction. Such initiatives may

redefine user engagement, interface rituals, and AI ethics in light of spiritual anthropology. (Kabir et al., 2024)

Ultimately, this model envisions AI systems that embed contemplative cues and ethical prompts at key decision nodes—transforming machine learning into a spiritually responsive ecosystem that affirms the user’s metaphysical dignity and moral agency. (Hussain & Wang, 2024)

Table 3. Digital Sufism Integrative Framework.

A three-tiered model for embedding Sufi principles into psychospiritual technology design.

Tier	Elements
Spiritual Foundations	<i>Dbiker</i> (Remembrance), <i>Murāqabah</i> (Divine Awareness), <i>Muḥāsabah</i> (Self-Audit)
Ethical Principles	<i>Tazkiyah</i> (Purification), <i>Taqwā</i> (God-Consciousness), <i>Ḥilm</i> (Forbearance)
Digital Embodiments	Mindful Apps, Ethical Algorithms, Digital <i>Muḥāsabah</i> Communities

This tripartite framework provides a concrete model for integrating the interior technologies of the self from the Sufi tradition into digital environments—recasting digital design as a domain not of egoic reinforcement, but of soul cultivation.

Digital Sufism as Epistemology and Design: Toward Spiritually-Responsive Technology

Contemporary interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) have proven effective in enhancing attention and reducing emotional dysregulation. Yet, as Zairotus Sholikah observes, these approaches often neglect the soul’s metaphysical displacement in hyper-digitized realities, offering symptomatic relief without addressing deeper ruptures in existential and spiritual coherence. (Sholikah, 2024)

Digital Sufism responds by restoring classical Sufi wisdom as a living epistemology—a spiritually grounded mode of knowing that harmonizes perception, ethics, and ontology. Central to this are *dbiker* (remembrance), *murāqabah* (divine attentiveness), and *muḥāsabah* (ethical self-audit), which act not only as rituals but as cognitive-spiritual processes centering the *qalb* (heart) in *ḥudūr* (Divine presence) and *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self-purification), countering the dispersal of attention typical of algorithmic culture.

Empirical research supports their efficacy. Bozorgzadeh and Grasser found that integrating a heart-centered Sufi paradigm into psychotherapy produced significant reductions in anxiety and improved spiritual resilience ($p < .001$). (Bozorgzadeh & Grasser, 2021) Likewise, Rothman and Coyle demonstrated that Islamic psychospiritual frameworks enable clients to confront not only symptoms but also questions of meaning and belonging. (Rothman & Coyle, 2023)

These findings align with classical metaphysics. In *Iḥyā' 'Ulum al-Dīn*, al-Ghazālī asserts that while *dhikr* may exist without reflection, true *tafakkur* (contemplation) cannot occur without remembrance—yielding holistic spiritual perception essential to existential integration. (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011d; Mamat et al., 2019) Hence, Digital Sufism emerges not as nostalgic revivalism, but as a recalibrated epistemology capable of informing design, therapy, and socio-technological innovation.

This epistemology naturally extends into a design philosophy embedding *taqwā* (God-consciousness), *ḥilm* (forbearance), and moral attentiveness into digital systems. Rather than optimizing for addiction or behavioral capture, spiritually responsive technology prioritizes contemplation, coherence, and ethical depth. Metrics of success thus shift from platform engagement to indicators of mindful interaction and inner harmony.

Further, this epistemic orientation carries implications for AI policy. It redefines AI governance as an ethical–spiritual domain, evaluating technologies by their capacity to sustain presence, integrity, and alignment with transcendent purpose. (Najahah et al., 2024) In this view, digital space is no longer neutral infrastructure but a moral ecosystem shaping consciousness and collective destiny.

Ultimately, the contribution of Digital Sufism lies in bridging sacred interiority and technological creativity. As spiritual and digital boundaries blur, designing systems imbued with divine intentionality becomes a moral imperative. The proliferation of online *dhikr* and virtual *majālis* exemplifies this convergence, showing how digital media can preserve—and even amplify—the affective depth of Sufi devotion. (Iqbal, 2024) Recent ethnographies further affirm that remote ritual practices can foster both connectivity and experiences of transcendent presence. (Kozubaev & Howell, 2024).

DISCUSSION

The Spiritual Framework of Digital Sufism

The digital age, while offering unprecedented connectivity, has simultaneously intensified existential fragmentation and spiritual desensitization. Within this paradox, *taṣawwuf*—as the inner science of the soul (*‘ilm al-bāṭin*)—emerges as a restorative paradigm that reorients human consciousness toward transcendence. The Sufi principles of *taẓkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *murāqabah* (divine mindfulness), and *muḥāsabah* (ethical self-accountability) provide a spiritual framework for rehumanizing digital life.

Classical texts such as *al-Risālah al-Qushayrīyah* and *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* articulate that spiritual health depends on the harmony between inner intention and outward action. This insight aligns with recent interdisciplinary findings showing that digital well-being cannot be achieved merely through behavioral regulation but requires a deeper spiritual consciousness. (Khalil, M.H., 2023; Koenig, 2024) Thus, *Digital Sufism* situates spirituality not as escapism from technology, but as the ethical and contemplative ground upon which digital engagement must stand. In this sense, *dhikr* (remembrance) functions as a counterbalance to digital distraction, reconstituting inner stillness (*sakīnah*) amid technological overstimulation.

Psychological Implications: From Technostress to Spiritual Resilience

Psychologically, the digital condition fosters an overstimulation of the senses and an underdevelopment of reflective awareness, leading to what scholars describe as *technostress* and *digital fatigue*. (Keles et al., 2020) The Sufi therapeutic model, however, addresses these disruptions through interior practices that stabilize attention and emotional regulation. Studies in Islamic psychotherapy confirm that *murāqabah* functions analogously to mindfulness-based therapy, yet transcends it by embedding moral intention and divine orientation. (Isgandarova, 2019)

From a Sufi psychological standpoint, anxiety and alienation are not merely cognitive distortions but symptoms of spiritual disconnection. The Sufi path (*ṭarīqah*) prescribes a dialectic between *mujābah* (self-discipline) and *tawakkul* (trust in God), producing a state of inner balance resilient to digital instability. When adapted to digital contexts, these practices cultivate *sakīnah*—a tranquil consciousness that enables users to engage ethically and meaningfully with technology. Hence, *Digital Sufism* reframes digital anxiety not as a

pathological burden but as an invitation to recover ontological coherence through remembrance and reflection.

Ethical Dimension: Rehumanizing Technology through Sufi Virtue

The ethical crises of artificial intelligence—bias, dehumanization, and moral disengagement—necessitate frameworks that restore moral intentionality to technological design. Islamic virtue ethics, grounded in *taṣawwuf*, provides a compelling response by centering human action within a teleology of divine accountability. As al-Ghazālī notes, ethical virtue (*faḍīlah*) arises when human intention is purified through *ikhlāṣ* (sincerity) and *taqwā* (God-consciousness). (A. H. Al-Ghazālī, 2011b)

Recent proposals for “virtue-based AI” echo this paradigm by advocating that algorithmic systems be designed with moral cognition reflecting human spiritual values. (Raquib et al., 2022) Within this ethical synthesis, *Digital Sufism* extends the classical Sufi notion of *iḥsān*—acting as if one sees God—to the digital domain, envisioning technology as an instrument of compassion, justice, and awareness. This approach does not romanticize AI but positions it within the continuum of divine trust (*amānah*), emphasizing moral responsibility in technological innovation.

By reintroducing *taṣawwuf* into digital ethics, the study advocates for a moral recalibration in which users and developers alike are guided not only by technical efficiency but by spiritual intentionality. The ethical imperative of *Digital Sufism* thus redefines “progress” as a movement toward the perfection of the heart, not merely of the machine.

Epistemological Integration: Toward a Sufi Philosophy of Technology

At the epistemological level, this study advances *Digital Sufism* as an integrative paradigm where knowledge (*‘ilm*) and presence (*ḥuḍūr*) converge. The Sufi understanding of knowledge transcends the dualism between objectivity and subjectivity by positing that true knowing requires moral transformation. As al-Qushayrī asserts, “Knowledge without adab is ignorance.” (Al-Qushayrī, 2001) In the context of AI and digital cognition, this view implies that technological intelligence must be informed by ethical and spiritual awareness to achieve its human purpose.

Through hermeneutic synthesis, this study reveals that the triadic movement of *tazkīyah*, *murāqabah*, and *muḥāsabah* provides not only a psychological framework but also an

epistemological model for reinterpreting technology. *Tazkiyah* purifies perception from egoic distortion, *murāqabah* cultivates divine attentiveness within digital consciousness, and *muḥāsabah* ensures moral accountability in knowledge production. Together, they form an epistemic structure for what may be called “spiritually responsive technology.”

In this light, *Digital Sufism* does not oppose technological advancement but reclaims it as part of humanity’s spiritual vocation—to embody divine attributes (*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*) within creation. Hence, the future of AI ethics must evolve from regulatory compliance toward ontological responsibility, guided by the Sufi insight that every form of intelligence, whether human or artificial, remains accountable to the Source of Being.

Limitations and Future Theoretical Boundaries. This study is limited by its philosophical-hermeneutic design and therefore does not include empirical validation involving digital users, Muslim communities, or AI-assisted therapeutic systems. While the conceptual framework of Digital Sufism offers a robust epistemological and ethical foundation, its practical effectiveness in real-world digital environments remains to be tested through field-based, experimental, or mixed-method studies.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *taṣawwuf*—as both a spiritual discipline and an epistemological framework—offers a profound foundation for addressing the ethical, psychological, and existential challenges of the digital age. By integrating classical Sufi insights with contemporary discourses in psychology and AI ethics, the research articulates a Digital Sufism Framework that repositions spirituality as the center of digital humanism. In this view, the problem of digital alienation is not merely technological but ontological—rooted in the loss of spiritual intentionality and moral coherence in digital life.

Methodologically grounded in philosophical hermeneutics, this study shows that *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *murāqabah*, and *muḥāsabah* form an interrelated triad that can be operationalized as ethical-psychological instruments to cultivate awareness, sincerity, and accountability in technological contexts. *Tazkiyah* purifies digital intention from egoic consumption, *murāqabah* fosters spiritual mindfulness amid distraction, and *muḥāsabah* ensures ethical self-reflection in the face of algorithmic determinism. Together, these principles offer a transformative model for nurturing spiritual resilience and moral agency in the age of artificial intelligence.

Philosophically, the research underscores that *taṣawwuf* must be interpreted not only as a path of inward purification (*ṭariq al-bāṭin*) but as a normative paradigm of being capable of rehumanizing technology. In this sense, *Digital Sufism* transcends dualistic boundaries between the sacred and the secular by framing AI development as a moral act within the continuum of divine trust (*amanah*). The integration of *taṣawwuf* and digital ethics thus represents a new trajectory of Islamic thought—one that unites metaphysical insight, psychological balance, and ethical innovation in response to modern crises of meaning.

Practically, this framework offers three key implications. First, for mental health and spiritual psychology, *Digital Sufism* provides a culturally and theologically grounded therapeutic orientation that complements contemporary mindfulness models.

Second, for ethics and AI governance, it introduces a virtue-based paradigm emphasizing *iḥsān* and *taqwā* as design principles in developing human-centered technologies. Third, for Islamic education and da'wah, it offers a renewed pedagogical vision in which digital engagement becomes a medium for spiritual awareness rather than distraction.

Ultimately, the study reaffirms that the future of digital civilization depends not only on technical intelligence but on spiritual intelligence—the ability to see technology through the lens of divine responsibility and ethical compassion. In this light, *Digital Sufism* is not a nostalgic return to mysticism but a forward-looking epistemology, reclaiming the human heart as the moral compass of the algorithmic age.

Future research should empirically examine the applicability of the Digital Sufism framework among Muslim digital natives, higher education students, and AI-assisted mental health platforms. Quantitative and mixed-method studies may further assess its effectiveness in reducing technostress, strengthening spiritual resilience, and informing spiritually responsive interface design.

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