

Spiritual Integrity in the Digital Realm: Sufism and Technology Dilemmas

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Abstract

The intricate interaction of technology growth and human values in this modern society is agitating and stirring up concerns about its ethical governance as it comes with unprecedented hurdles that gaining traction at an exponential rate. The adversity of infringement of data ownership, uncertainty on the authenticity of data, and plagiarism illustrates the problems of overreliance on digital technologies. It has been proposed that moral thinking and ethical conduct should be revamped in the face of technological advancements, nevertheless, the enlightenment of moral values from the prospect of Sufism, toward technology is still limited. Thus, this study delves into one of the branches of Islamic teaching named Sufism to assess its ethical teaching toward technology. By applying the qualitative method, this study utilises contextual analysis in assessing the books, and journal articles of Islamic philosophers and scholars. The findings of this study highlighted the significance of Sufism's moral values in uplifting ethical awareness in confronting technological progress.

Keywords: Sufism, Human Values, and Technology

Introduction

The emergence of technological advancement has raised enormous benefits and is remarkably competent in executing cognitively complex tasks. However, it is undeniable that the unrestricted usage of technology comes with adverse circumstances. Significant ethical concerns have been brought up, especially regarding intellectual property, plagiarism, and generative artificial intelligence (AI). The boundless evolution and domination of AI in generating content led to doubt about its genuineness and reliability in its outcomes (Lebovitz, Levina, & Lifshitz-Assaf, 2021), the prevalence of digital copyright infringement (Zandt, 2023) and rampant issues of digital plagiarism (Cyber Plagiarism & Statistics, 2024) necessitate the application of an ethical lens to ensure ethical standards of guidance for this technological practice and development.

The legality landscape of technology is hard to maintain equivalently with the accelerated rate of technological progress. The pretext of "Grey Area" in these digital

copyright issues is always stressed in the field of the administration of justice (The Gray Area of Digital Copyright Infringement, 2023) (Ito, 2023) (Greco, 2023). While there are efforts to improve the law, there is still a long way to go as the laws of copyright are filled with uncertainty in discerning right and wrong (Nellis, 2014). To be exact, the Malaysian legal system has made significant progress by declaring digital infringement as a criminal offense (Laws of Malaysia, 2022) but is still behindhand and does not have any specific legislation that regulates and copes with artificial intelligence (Yen & Edhan, 2023).

Besides policymakers, educational institutions are suggested to unfold the pedagogical frameworks in response to adapting technologies transformation, benefits, and drawbacks (Hutson, 2024). Smedley et al., (2015) found that the execution of educational intervention in curtailing plagiarism has boosted students' comprehension of paraphrasing and enhanced their capability in paraphrasing and referencing. Persistence education on technology ethics will forewarn their ethical implications (ChaseC, 2023) thus highlighting the affirmation of the vitality of integrating AI ethics into digital literacy education (Chen, 2024).

Sufism-based ethical education is one of the ethical education options for Muslims especially in Malaysia as Sufism is identified as one of the dimensions of Islamic teachings specified in the Fatwa of States in Malaysia (Shuhairi, 2021; Al-Ghari, 2021). Sufism otherwise acknowledged as Tasawwuf also classified as Fardhu Ain (Al Ghazali, 2018) and promotes Islamic mysticism (Al Attas, 1963), the sciences of morality Al Kattani, n.d (as cited in Al-Qushaiyri, 1989), the purification of the soul, and the improvement of morals Al Anshari, n.d (as cited in Al-Qushaiyri, 1989). By incorporating Sufism principles into the education of Digital Ethics, any futuristic technological breakthrough may be comprehended to be consistent with ethical conduct and respect.

The purpose of this study is to delve into the potential of Sufism parameters as ethical teaching in approaching technological advancement dilemmas of plagiarism, intellectual property, and generative artificial intelligence. Particularly, this research aims to provide an in-depth look at some ethical values toward technology according to Sufism's scope of *Akhlaki*, or else known as Tasawwuf *Akhlaki*, and its applicability to modern-day plagiarism issues, intellectual property, and generative artificial intelligence.

Literature Review

Ethical Reasoning and Decision Making

The basic interpretation of ethical reasoning and decision-making is to underline the acts that are beneficial to others' welfare and the acts that attenuate others' welfare (Paul & Elder, 2018) which foster the place's social and cultural set of values (Prasad, 2019) religion and philosophy (Ghillyer, 2012). Recognising ethical arguments in confronting moral issues is ethical reasoning, the decision-making process in contemplating the principles of ethics in solving realistic challenges of moral problems. These principles of ethics are applied as a practical philosophy to adapt to new knowledge in various disciplines such as technologies, business, research, and the medical field (Kuzior, 2021).

Although some researchers argue the relevance of ethical principles influenced by religious beliefs (Paul & Elder, 2018) and mores of the society (Ibiricu & Made, 2020), it is undeniable that religious and philosophical traditions of morality and ethics are vital to society

because the ethical orientations of societies differ from one another (Ali, 1996). Studies have demonstrated that religiosity is associated with higher ethical judgments (Vitell, 2010). The integration of spirituality and technology is indispensable to avoid adversity in utilizing technology (Fernandez-Borsot, Spirituality and Technology: A Threefold, 2022). Besides, studies emphasised the affluence of cultural ethics diversity and highlighted its need to be addressed and incorporated (Böhm, et al., 2022) including in the scope of the technology as it is momentous to acknowledge the significant role of cultures in ethics and values because the practices and viewpoints from divergent backgrounds enhance the value of any product or system (Hickok, 2020).

The importance of Islamic ethics in fulfilling spiritual needs and cultivating the moral values of Muslims in ethical reasoning and decision-making may leverage technology more effectively. Islamic principles are demonstrated as comprehensive, realistic, and poised to keep the state of balance whereby can be adapted per current developments (Al-Aidaros, Shamsudin, & Idris, 2013). In Islamic ethics, either individual or collective perspectives are important, and its theory presents the amalgamation of deontological, consequentialist, and virtue ethics which are timeless relevant in regulating human decision-making (Abdallah S. , 2010). Islamic decision-making appears to incorporate ethics more precisely than Western scholars due to Islamic ethical principles, does not separate morality and law into separate dimensions to comply with other regulations and rules as dictated by Islamic ethical principles (Shaikh, 1988).

Sufism

The origin of Sufism is developed from asceticism from the Prophet's Companions' acknowledgment of the prophet's spiritual experiences (Al Attas, 1963) rooted in the Islamic spiritual value of *Ihsan* (Zarruq al-Fasi al-Barnusi, 2005). The sciences of Sufism highlighted the knowledge of the attitude or the soul quality (Virtues and Vices) and the knowledge of the apparent form or activity (Modes in manner consideration and worship) (Umaruddin M. , 2021) (Al Ghazali, 2018). The heart of Sufism teachings revolves around the feature of goodness and may vary according to the needs of the knowledge seeker (Zarruq al-Fasi al-Barnusi, 2005). Current research on Sufism approached Sufism in three dissects namely Sufism *Falsafi* (Philosophical Sufism), Sufism *Akhlaki* (Moral Sufism), and Sufism *Amali* (Practical Sufism) to facilitate academic research as these attributes of Sufism is indivisible (Kahfi & Nasution, 2023).

Technological Uncertainty and Moral Quandaries

The rapid expansion of technological breakthroughs in this recent year has been catalysing various uncertainty issues in a wide range of domains besides its profoundly positive impact due to its indecisive nature of development. This ambiguous development of technology does not exempt the field of ethics as it exposes the ethics field to unprecedented ethical issues and traditional ethical cases can't adequately describe these intricate technological advances due to uncertainty about the imminent repercussions, influence, and applications (Sollie, 2007). Moral inquiry is addressed to answer this ethical uncertainty by exploring values and concepts (Nickel, Kudina, & Poel, 2022) through the integration of substantive approaches and procedural approaches of Sufism.

In response to the increasing demand for a diverse and comparative ethical perspective on resolving ethical uncertainties associated with emerging technologies (Wong, 2016), the Theory of Sufism is upheld as a feasible ethical teaching (Jaelani, 2024) considered a substantive approach. Sufism emphasises the importance of attaining a good inner disposition which is the inception of good ethical conduct through spiritual education. Tazkiyatun Nafs is imperative in spiritual education to acquire the attainment of technological breakthroughs (Musrifah, 2019). According to Al-Ghazali, a person's character depicts the soul's quality and image internally, the heart is the leader of its troop, the leader of outward and inward senses that should be guided by knowledge; however, an unclean, anxious, and wicked heart may obscure the cognizance of the knowledge thus human need to conquer the devil characters in his heart, empowering and purifying it under the rule of the lordly component within him, then for him, the heart will be the dwelling place of knowledge, and wisdom that may lead him to attain an honourable personality (Al Ghazali, 2018) (al-Sharif, 1871) that sustain in certain or uncertain decision making.

The procedural approaches of Sufism aim for external conduct that depicts the stance of one's inner ethics in the circumstance of technology. Al Ghazali specified that a trait or character that is embedded in the soul will give rise to various forms of action easily, unconsciously without the need for thought and consideration (Sa'ari, 2019). Moral interpretation will be facilitated by the collective components of embedded moral routines to approach the current circumstances resort to uncertainty (Nickel, Kudina, & Poel, 2022). Good digital ethics and character may be formed by Sufi principles as it cultivates responsibilities, integrity, preserving privacy, and self-harming behaviour in oneself and others (Wahid & Maskhuroh, Tasawuf dalam Era Digital (Menjaga Kesadaran Spiritual di Tengah Arus Teknologi, 2024). Thus, the embracement of Sufism principles in digital ethics education is required to establish adaptive Sufism procedural ethics practically as moral routines towards technology.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in approach and library-based in research whereby draws upon primary and secondary sources. Notably, the accumulation of primary data originates from the Quran, hadiths of the prophet, and the books of Turath, the intellectual gem from Islamic scholars and experts, whereas secondary resources are from the articles, journals, books, and other materials relevant to the discussion of Islamic ethic and technology. Data is then analysed through a combination of descriptive and analytical methods.

Results and Discussion

The Relevance of Spiritual Integrity in the Digital Age

The importance of spiritual development in the Information Age is recognized and valued, resulting in an increased realization of the need for spiritual growth (Kaewkitipong, Beaunoyer, Ractham, & Guitton, 2023). The necessity of spirituality is demonstrated as a mediator for the profusion of technology as well as the prevention of tech-driven pandemics (Fernandez-Borsot, Spirituality And Technology: A Threefold Philosophical Reflection, 2023). Besides, spirituality promotes resilience that develops the strenuous effort of confronting any difficulties, encourages coexistence for communal harmony, and lifts hope for humanity in this era (Jackelén, 2021). The spiritual integrity of Sufism is vital for Muslims to ameliorate and guide their *nafs* from overruling themselves in associating technological advancements.

Digital governance that adopts the Sufism spiritual integrity may provide Sharia-compliant ethical management by ensuring the common good of ethical conduct corresponding to Islamic Ethical principles in technology consumption. The employment of accountability and transparency principles is always emphasized in digital conduct. The concept of accountability in technology governance explains the accountable information, to whom, for what, to what extent the accountability and why while transparency refers to the lucidness of interpretation, explanation, or review (Williams, et al., 2022). The indoctrination of accountability and transparency from the Islamic perspective refers to the Principles in the Quran and Sunnah from the command of Allah by which the Muslims are obligated which is different from the general indoctrination of these principles that are human made.

The interpretation of Islamic accountability may be referred to as *Taklif* in the context of social responsibility which should come with *Taqwa* (The Quran 5:2). The principles of *Taqwa* itself are comprehensive, Al Nawawi stated the basics of *Taqwa* as complying with Allah's commands and avoiding his prohibitions (Al Nawawi, 1987). Implementing *Taqwa* in the principle of accountability in the digital realm will heighten Muslim cognizance of Allah, as Ibnu Mas'ud stated *Taqwa* is obeying Allah and not disobeying Him, being grateful to Him and not disbelieving in Him, remembering Him and not forgetting Him (Al-Tabarani, 1985) thus the awareness about Allah will improve Muslims ethical decision-making in utilising technology and taking precautions to avoid any adversity since they believe their actions are being watched and accounted for. Besides, the concept of *Taqwa* of truthfulness (The Quran 9:119) is suitable for elucidating transparency by being sincere and beware of manipulating digital technology and seeking to uphold the truth and trustworthiness to avoid any deception in digital affairs and respect the rights of others by avoiding any invasion of privacy. Furthermore, *Taqwa* from the perspective of Sufism is about controlling oneself and one's emotions and being unsub missive from following one's lustful tendencies, thus Muslims should be reminded of the concept of *Taqwa* so that they can hold fast to Allah and control their evil instincts as the sophistication of technology has facilitated various digital trickery and deceptions (Rajab, 2007).

Addressing Intellectual Property and Copyright Dilemmas

The unlimited use of digital applications causes a downside of foregone revenue, the cost of gross plagiarism, and copyright infringement (Bottom-line losses: Counting the cost of copyright abuse, 2024), besides confusion of authorship from the products of deep learning of artificial intelligence (Papadopoulou, 2021) whereby challenged various ethical standards such as ethics of copywriting, content creation, and other authenticity quandaries (Abdallah & Salah, 2023). Even though the issues of intellectual property and copyright dilemmas are still in the grey area in Malaysia, a basic, flexible, and resilient digital ethical teaching is needed to decelerate the impact of its complexities.

The persistent inculcation of ethical principles from Sufism started with Soul Disciplining (*Riyadah An Nafs*) (Al Ghazali, 2018) (Hamjah & Akhir, 2007) followed by moral habituation (*Ta'widiyah*) in the present application of Sufism Akhlaki (Wadjedy, 2014). These techniques are vital in ethical digital learning to conduct uncertain ethical decision-making as aforementioned named as moral routine by a recent study (Nickel, Kudina, & Poel, 2022). The basis of the Islamic Ethic of Sufism lies in the concept of the psychological nature of human beings, the Heart (Al Ghazali, 2018) (Umaruddin M. , 2021), which then arouses behaviour.

Consistently habituating the fundamental ethical approach of Sufism, such as *Amanah* (trust) to preserve trust in managing digital conducts, especially in utilising Intellectual Property, embracing the creations and rights of others with respect, *Ihsan* (courtesies to others) to motivate the equitable sense in dealing and contemplation on the risk implied to others and *Adl* (Justice) to foster the sense of justice and fairness by corresponding the rights of copyright owners with community needs.

Apart from that, it is imperative to incorporate the Islamic ethical framework as a guideline to be adhered to by Muslims if digital proliferation outpaces legal guidelines. These guidelines must be assembled from the perspective of the Sharia, which includes all the principles in Islam namely Islamic Theology (*Akidah*), Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), and Islamic ethics (Sufism) whilst the Sufism ethical principles are essential to meliorate requirements from the ethical point of view. Any potential ethical threats and challenges of digital technology such as exploiting other intellectual copyrights, privacy information, and deep technology should be addressed and identified through its intent and context by applying these Islamic Ethical frameworks before concluding its ethical decision-making whether in a profit-making venture, or government administration, educational program, innovation, or any public initiative. The awareness of this Islamic ethical framework ought to be advocated to the public to encourage reflection and promote dialogue on ethical responsibility, ethical standards, and ethical implications thus generating an ethical digital environment.

Integrating Sufism Ethics into Technology

Technology literacy skills are no longer an option in this era, but a basic requirement that must be compelled with ethical consideration, by which for Muslims is Islamic ethics. The importance of the Islamic ethical education of Sufism in this digital era is significant for Muslims, since for Muslims, religion cannot be detached from life affairs or the current reality of life, which differs from secularism. The substantial influence of integrating Sufism ethics into information technology is established (Wahid & Maskhuroh, *Tasawuf Dalam Era Digital (Menjaga Kesadaran Spiritual di Tengah Arus Teknologi)*, 2023) . This research states that Sufism Ethics develops responsible personalities toward technology by taking precautions against risky behaviour and being attentive to its consumption.

The employment of technology should be embraced with knowledge as its benefits are beyond doubt yet may cause detrimental effects with mishandling, it must be aligned with strong internal discipline that balances out the positive and negative side. Immoderate utilization of advanced technology has indicated a serious repercussion that degrade human mental health notably derealization of reality, social misery, isolation in the community, and depression (Zohuri & McDaniel, 2019). Thus, Sufism Ethics education is exigent to address technology mental health disorders as it raises knowledge on soul disciplining and moral habituation to gain control and cognizance of technology activity and refrain from addiction accustomed to it.

Sufism Ethic is required to fulfil the faith commitment in the Muslim community technology space as the expansion of technology has been found to result in the decline of religious attachment (Downey, 2014) (McClure, 2020). The practice of Sufism can improve both the field of faith (tawhid) and sharia (jurisprudence) (Jalil, 2016) of Muslim. As technology allows easy access to diverse perspectives and ideologies, strategizing an

engagement of Sufism Ethics in technology with a strong emphasis on spiritual integrity and remembrance of Allah alongside digital ethics may inspire the soul of Muslims with the truth and beauty of Islam and their spiritual journey.

Conclusions

Sufism ethic is well-known as Islamic mysticism that offers spiritual guidance, rehabilitation, and regulation to guide, improve, and sustain good conduct of ethics. Embracing the Sufism Ethical Framework as a guide in the digital sphere in Malaysia is essential for upholding the ethical standards and values of the Muslim community, especially when navigating complex technological challenges. Besides, the importance of Sufism Ethics to deliver the urgent needs of Spiritual Integrity in Malaysia is incomparable due to the fact that Sufism is regarded as one of the important elements in the idea of Ahli Sunnah and Jama'ah in Malaysia and has proven as the initiator of the spread of Islam in the Malay region historically (Jalil, 2016).

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