

## GENDER AND MEDIA: THE IMPERATIVE FOR COMMUNICATING ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND SUFI IDEOLOGY

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### **Abstract**

*The rendezvous of gender and media has brought forth a critical focal point in contemporary discourse, with an ever growing recognition of the need for inclusive and diverse representations that addresses the complexity of human experiences. This study delves into the essential role of media in communicating Islamic thought and Sufi ideology, emphasizing the urgency of bridging the gap between traditional teachings and the evolving landscape of gender dynamics.*

*Islamic thought deriving essence from Quranic principles and prophetic traditions, has a very history to procure ethical framework regarding every chore of life. However it is call of time to adapt the communication and teaching of this ideology to address the nuanced challenges faced by individuals as societies undergo rapid transformations including gender roles and relationships concerns. Media being a powerful tool shapes commonplace perceptions is considered to play a pivotal role in disseminating these messages. Sufi ideology; an integral part of Islamic spirituality emphasizes love, tolerance, compassion, peace and a direct personal connection with the Divine. Sufism promoting a holistic understanding of human existence, also procures teachings that are often overshadowed by mainstream representations of Islam. Media can serves as a conduit to elevate Sufi principles thereby fostering a more nuanced cognition of Islam that transcends stereotypical portrayals.*

*Preeminent issue situated at the nexus of gender and media within an Islamic discourse is the misrepresentation and oversimplification of women's roles. Traditional gender norms perpetuated via media reinforce stereotypes and block the progress toward gender equality. This research advocates for a reevaluation of media narratives to encompass a more authentic female representation acknowledging their multifaceted roles and contributions in Islamic societies.*

*Perpetuation of toxic masculinity and rigid gender norms via media needs to be readdressed by promoting values rooted in justice, compassion, equality, and dismantling harmful patriarchal structures. The evolving landscape of digital media especially Social media has become a dynamic space where diverse voices can amplify the voices of female scholars, Sufi practitioners, and progressive Islamic thinkers in fostering a more nuanced understanding of Islam resonating with contemporary challenges. Study underscores the immediate need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to the communication of Islamic thought and Sufi ideology through media for*



*reexamining gender representations and challenging stereotypes. Digital platforms procure transformative potential to bridge the gap between traditional teachings and the realities of the contemporary world.*

**Key words:** *Communication, Teaching, Sufism, Islamic thought, Media, Perpetuation, Gender role, Stereotypes, Patriarchal rigidity, Equality*

## INTRODUCTION

The 20th century have reinforced its standing as the century of inventions, scientific breakthroughs, and information technologies. In a time of unparalleled advancement in communication technology and widespread media influence, the relationship between gender and religious discourse is a crucial field that demands further investigation. With an emphasis on the complex interplay of Sufi ideology, this study explores the interaction between gender dynamics, media representation, and the dissemination of Islamic ideas. Understanding how identity, spirituality, and inclusivity are communicated through media becomes not just important, but essential for promoting diverse and informed discussions as societies struggle with changing ideas of identity, spirituality, and inclusivity.

With its many customs and interpretations, the Islamic world is frequently portrayed and understood through a variety of media platforms. Nonetheless, given the complexity and inclusivity of Sufi philosophy, the significance of gender in these depictions is still understudied. Sufism, a fundamental component of Islamic mysticism, places a strong emphasis on reunification, mystical encounters, and the quest for a closer relationship with God. However, in order to evaluate the influence on views and interpretations, a detailed examination of the gendered aspects of Sufi practices and the media's depiction of Sufi values is necessary. Motivated by the importance of effectively disseminating these ideologies in an information-rich world, this investigation explores the complex ways in which gender is portrayed and constructed in media outlets, and the ways in which these depictions may profoundly impact the comprehension and application of Sufi and Islamic traditions (Eltantawy & Dwyer, 2011). It is important to recognize that gender interpretations and behaviors vary widely across various geographical, cultural, and historical settings within both Islamic and Sufi traditions (Hatem, 2002). In order to avoid generalizations and interact with the lived reality of people and communities, this research will aim to traverse these complexity, acknowledging the need for inclusive and sensitive approaches (Esack, 2009).

The ultimate goal of this investigation is to promote a more profound comprehension and admiration of the complexity of Islamic and Sufi philosophy, while emphasizing the vital role that media plays in influencing stories concerning gender and religious identity. Through encouraging positive discourse, challenging detrimental stereotypes, and supporting inclusive representation, this research aims to create a the world where a variety of voices are valued and acknowledged and where media acts as a conduit for significant communication with rich religious and cultural traditions.

### Research Questions

This research seeks to address several key questions:

1. How are Islamic thought and Sufi ideology communicated through various media platforms?
2. To what extent do gender dynamics influence the representation of these concepts?
3. What role does media play in shaping societal attitudes towards the intersection of gender and spirituality within the Islamic context?

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

By unraveling these complexities, we aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how media, gender, and religious discourse intersect, and consequently, how they shape contemporary perceptions of Islamic thought and Sufi ideology. The intricate tapestry woven between gender, media, and religious thought has played a pivotal role in shaping societal narratives throughout history.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

The complex relationship that exists between gender, media, and religious ideas has received a lot of scholarly attention, especially when it comes to Islam and Sufism. This review of the literature digs into this rich tapestry of studies, examining how perceptions of gender roles and identities within these many traditions are shaped by media depictions. For this investigation, a basic grasp of gender dynamics in Islamic thinking is essential. The historical and theological complexity of gender readings is highlighted by academics such as Leila Ahmed (2016) and Amina Wadud (2006), who emphasize the need to move beyond essentialist viewpoints and interact with an array of scholarship and real-life experiences.

Furthermore, research on the complex readings of Quranic passages and gender-related judicial rulings by Elizabeth Morant (2013) and Khaled Abou El Fadl (2001) challenges the oversimplified generalizations that are frequently repeated in media narratives. A common theme in the literature is how the media shapes popular opinions about Islam and gender. The works of Edward Said (1979) and John Esposito (2011) criticize the pervasive Orientalist clichés in Western media that depict Islam as fundamentally sexist and Muslim women as downtrodden. Studies like Purnima Mankekar (2010) and Marwan Kraidy (2009) look at how Muslim media creators deal with these stereotypes, frequently using counter-narratives that can be just as problematic in their essentialism. Furthermore, the significance of intersectional perspectives is emphasized by the works of Valentine Melling (2014) and Reina Lewis (2013), which acknowledge the ways in which gender intersects with other identity markers like as race, class, and ethnicity, influencing experiences and interpretations within these traditions.

Numerous studies have examined how gender is portrayed in the media, and their findings have exposed widespread prejudices and stereotypes that shape public opinion (Gill, 2007). Studies conducted in the Islamic setting have looked at how media portrayals support the maintenance of traditional roles and the establishment of gender norms (Al-Rawi, 2016; Ahmed, 2018). It is imperative to place these results in the larger context of how religious identities are portrayed in the media. Scholars of religious communication highlight how the media shapes the public's perception of religious beliefs (Hoover, 2006). When discussing Islam, media representations frequently vacillate between presenting complex viewpoints and perpetuating stereotypes (Elsayed, 2019). Gender intersectionality in these stories is still an important topic that needs further investigation. In cultural representations, sufism has been both exalted and misrepresented as a mystical facet of Islam (Chittick, 2005). Studies like Nasr's (2010) examination of the spiritual aspects of Sufism highlight the necessity of examining how media narratives either support or contradict common assumptions of Sufi doctrine. The analysis of Sufism in media settings complicates the conversation about Islamic philosophy in general. Feminist studies have placed a strong emphasis on the intersectionality of gender and religion, calling for a complex understanding of women's experiences in Islamic contexts (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mir-Hosseini, 2011). Using Islamic feminism as a framework, Badran (2009) examines how Muslim women negotiate religious settings and challenges essentialist ideas. To fully comprehend the complexity of gender in Islamic philosophy, one must comprehend the role the media plays in presenting these tales.

Rituals are essential to the development of a religious identity, and media portrayals of these rituals frequently frame them in particular ways (Freedman, 2017). The media's depiction of Sufi and Islamic rites has the capacity to affect gender-specific events via constructing religious identity (Kapchan, 2007). Gendered communication regarding religion is better understood when the media's influence on how people view religious practices is examined within an Islamic context.

## METHODOLOGY

This study takes a multidisciplinary approach to thoroughly examine the complex interplay among gender, media, and the dissemination of Sufi doctrine and Islamic thought. The adopted



methodology aims to offer an intricate understanding of the ways in which these components interact, moulding contemporary opinions within the confines of Islamic theology. This research will be grounded in a comprehensive review of the body of knowledge regarding gender, media portrayals, and Islamic studies. The researcher seeks to identify areas that need more inquiry and knowledge gaps by reviewing academic works, articles, and pertinent texts. This review of the literature will influence the conceptual framework and direct further research stages. Media material pertaining to Sufi doctrine and Islamic thought will be examined both quantitatively and qualitatively. To identify trends in how gender is portrayed in the light of these spiritual narratives, a variety of media ( including print, online,) as well as audiovisual aids will be closely examined. To find repetitive subject matter, stereotypes, and subtle portrayals, coding and thematic analysis will be utilised. In order to gather primary data, scholars, media professionals and religious authorities will be contacted for interviews. The purpose of these interviews is to learn about their viewpoints on how Sufi thoughts and Islamic beliefs are highlighted in the media, especially with regard to gender interaction. Surveys will also be distributed to a representative sample of the general public in order to understand the public's opinions and impressions regarding gender roles in the media's coverage of these religious ideas. Detailed case studies will be conducted to investigate particular situations in which media portrayals interact with discourse on gender and religion. By offering a qualitative lens through which to view the multifaceted nature of real-world examples, these case studies will offer context-dependent insights that advance researcher knowledge of the topic under consideration.

A comparative analysis will be carried out to evaluate the disparities in media depiction among various media platforms, cultures, and geographical areas. In order to provide a more thorough and mutual comprehension of the dissemination of Islamic thought and Sufi ideology via media, this research compares various contexts in an effort to find trends and differences in gendered depictions. The present study aims to provide substantial insights into the disciplines of media studies, gender analysis, and Islamic studies by amalgamating findings from these various methodological strategies. This will enable a more refined and intricate understanding of the nuanced connection between gender dynamics and the dissemination of religious ideologies through current media avenues.

### ANALYSIS

A detailed examination of the relationship between gender, media exposure, and the propagation of Islamic philosophy and Sufi opinions can be built upon the integration of the reviewed literature. The purpose is to clarify the nuances present in this convergence and to highlight important themes, areas of ambiguity, and possible lines of inquiry for further study. A complex picture emerges when one looks at how gender is portrayed in Islamic scenarios in the media. The way Sufism is portrayed in the media is a topic of both appreciation and misinterpretation (Chittick, 2005). The spiritual dimension of Sufi doctrine is highlighted in Nasr's (2010) work, which underscores a shared bond with the divine. But media depictions frequently fall short of capturing this nuance, which distorts perceptions. This calls to question the degree to which gender relations are intertwined into these narratives and the manner in which Sufism's inclusive and spiritual aspects are conveyed. To find out how media representations affect how the general public views Sufi theology, more research is indispensable. Within Islamic feminism in particular, the intersectionality of religious beliefs and gender becomes a prevalent topic (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Badran, 2009). Literature points out essentialist ideas and stresses the importance of acknowledging the variety of Muslim women's viewpoints. For an understanding of how these narratives contribute to the wider discourse on gender parity across Islamic thought, it is imperative to comprehend the interaction between gender patterns, media depictions, and Islamic feminism.

Studies show how media narratives perpetuate conventional gender stereotypes. These representations shape people's attitudes about society and how they interact with Islamic ideas. This gendered prism offers an essential context for comprehending how the media creates and



perpetuates cultural norms regarding gender roles inside the context of Islam. The literature draws attention to the way media plays a couple of roles in influencing how the general public perceives religious beliefs. In the backdrop of Islam, media narratives frequently oscillate between upholding stereotypes and providing complex viewpoints. Examining Sufi ideology illustrates this duality in particularly distinct ways, as mystical insights and inclusivity may conflict with popular media interpretations. The intricate makeup of media's role in engaging Islamic thought is partly due to the tension between challenging and perpetuating stereotypes.

According to Freedman (2017), media portrayals have an impact on how people view rituals, which are crucial to the formation of religious identities. The way that Islamic ceremonies and Sufi practices are portrayed in the media creates narratives that influence how people identify religiously. The representation of these rituals through a gendered viewpoint introduces a further level of intricacy and raises concerns about how the media shapes people's understanding and perceptions of religious customs. The literature review spotlights how critical it is to take into account regional differences in media representations as well as global viewpoints (Kapchan, 2007). Understanding differences in the communication of Sufi ideology and Islamic philosophy becomes mandatory when considering comparative analysis, especially when considering gender-related dynamics. A more thorough understanding of the global influence of media narratives can be obtained by investigating these regional variations.

An in-depth investigation of the complexities present in the relationship between gender, media, and the dispersion of Sufi ideology and Islamic concept is vital, as analysis points out. In order to better understand the complicated interactions of media representations and their effects on societal opinions, the formation of religious identities, and the advancement of inclusivity in the Islamic context, it is advocated that future research initiatives be conducted. Researchers are urged to conduct further studies in light of the constraints and gaps in the literature in order to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of this multifaceted interplay.

### FINDINGS

The analysis of media representations within Islamic contexts reveals a pervasive presence of traditional gender norms. Women are often depicted in roles aligned with traditional expectations, reflecting broader societal perceptions. This finding suggests a need for media literacy initiatives and efforts to challenge and diversify portrayals to promote a more inclusive understanding of gender roles within Islamic thought.

The study affirms the dual role of media in shaping public understanding of Islamic thought and Sufi ideology. While some media narratives perpetuate stereotypes, others offer nuanced perspectives that challenge prevailing notions. This duality underscores the complexity of media's influence, necessitating a nuanced approach to media analysis that considers both reinforcing and transformative elements in the representation of religious ideologies. The analysis of Sufi ideology reveals a significant gap between its spiritual depth, emphasizing unity and inclusivity, and the oversimplified representations in media. Media portrayals often fail to capture the intricacies of Sufi thought, leading to a limited understanding among the audience. This finding underscores the importance of accurate and nuanced portrayals to foster a more informed public perception of Sufism.

This study finds that the intersectionality of gender and religion remains an ongoing struggle, particularly within the context of Islamic feminism. While there are efforts to challenge essentialist notions and recognize diverse experiences, media representations often fall short in adequately capturing the complex narratives of Muslim women. This finding highlights the need for more inclusive and intersectional portrayals in media to contribute to a more accurate understanding of the diverse experiences of Muslim women. Rituals play a crucial role in religious identity formation, and media representations significantly influence how these rituals are perceived. The study finds that media portrayals contribute to the shaping of religious identity, with potential implications for gendered experiences within religious practices. This finding suggests the need for a nuanced





examination of media's impact on individuals' perceptions and experiences of religious rituals within the Islamic context.

The analysis emphasizes the importance of considering regional variations and global perspectives in media representations. Findings suggest that media portrayals of Islamic thought and Sufi ideology vary across regions, influencing the global discourse on these subjects. This underscores the need for comparative analyses to uncover variations and similarities, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the global impact of media narratives.

### DISCUSSION

It is very crucial to pay heed towards the distinction between the simplistic descriptions of Sufi doctrine in the media and its deep spiritual profundity. By the media's ineptitude to comprehensively convey the subtleties of Sufi thought a more educated public perception is hindered. The campaigns that support truthful and complicated depictions of Sufism can aid in the general public's understanding of this facet of Islamic mysticism by calling attention to its mystic and inclusive aspect.

More intersectional narratives are required in light of Islamic feminism's continuous battle to be fairly portrayed in the media. The media plays a vital role in disseminating the varied experiences of Muslim women, dispelling myths, and advancing understanding. Promoting inclusive representations in the media becomes essential to moving the conversation forward about Islam and gender. To be fairly portrayed in the media, more intersectional narratives are required in light of Islamic feminism's continuous battle.

One important finding is the impact of media on people's understanding and experiences of religious rites in the Islamic environment. Religious identity is significantly shaped by media portrayals, which may have an impact on gendered experiences inside these rituals. This emphasizes the necessity for a careful analysis of the media's effects and how it might help create a more accepting atmosphere for a range of religious beliefs.

It is important to recognize the limits of this study, such as the probability of bias in media selection like it is content and it is dynamic nature. The examinations that are subsequent ought to delve into the efficaciousness of media literacy initiatives, and the function of social media in moulding attitudes towards Islamic philosophy and Sufi doctrine.

To conclude the conversation, we can say that there is a complex relationship that exists between women, the media, Sufi philosophy and Islamic thought. To ensure more accurate, inclusive and nuanced representations that support a global discourse, proactive measures are necessary. Nuanced representations support a global discourse with rich diversity and spiritual depth inherent in Sufi ideology and Islamic thought, this is all due to the basic reason because media continues to be a potent force that forms public perceptions.

### CONCLUSION

To conclude the above writing we can say that the study set out to thoroughly examine the relationships which are complex in nature and that influence how gender, media representations, Sufi ideology and the dissemination of Islamic philosophy connect. The conversations and outcomes have demonstrated the intricacies that are present in these domains. Moreover, they reveal obstacles as well as prospects within the Islamic framework for cultivating a more comprehensive and knowledgeable public conversation.

The findings in research show that in media representations traditional gender standards are still prevalent. These findings underscore the necessity of actions which are aimed at challenging and diversifying depictions that are within the Islamic context. The dual function of media in influencing perceptions and thoughts, both by giving nuanced viewpoints and perpetuating stereotypes. This all highlights the complexity of its power.

The impact of media on the perceptions of people of religious rituals in the Islamic context underscored crucial role of media in contouring the religious identity. The religious identity is shaped with potential implications for gendered experiences within these rituals. However, the



ongoing struggle of Islamic feminism to be precisely represented in the media narratives is required in light of the recognition of regional variances in media portrayals, which highlighted the diversity of narratives within the global Islamic community. For campaign to promote media literacy, inclusive representations and the subversion of conventional gender norms, these findings have important ramifications.

Potential biases in the selection of media content and the dynamic nature of media landscapes, must be addressed with proactive approaches, this is the limitation of this study. The influence of substitute media outlets, and the function of social media in moulding attitudes towards Islamic philosophy and Sufi doctrine must be examined through subsequent investigations.

In short we can say that, to effectively navigate the discourses around gender, media, Islamic philosophy, and Sufi ideology, it is imperative for scholars, media professionals and proponents of religious inclusivity to collaborate. Media landscapes are constantly evolving In order to ensure accurate, nuanced, and diverse portrayals that accord with the vast diversity and spiritual depth inherent in Islamic philosophy and Sufi ideology.

To support a transnational discussion that acknowledges the complicatedness of Islamic philosophy, honours the diversity of the Islamic community and dispels folklore that obstruct a thorough understanding of gender roles, religious rituals and the esoteric characteristics of Sufi ideology. We can promote an informed and inclusive global conversation that recognizes and celebrates the richness of Islamic perception and thought and spirituality, if we work together.

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