REPRESENTATION OF POPULAR ISLAM IN DIGITAL SPACE: RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN SUFI EXPRESSIONS ON THE INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT "_zukkk"

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ABSTRACT

The development of digital technology and social media has transformed the landscape of religious practices, particularly in the context of Popular Islam in Indonesia. This article examines the representation of Popular Islam through Sufi expressions on the Instagram account _zukkk, focusing on how visually Sufi-inspired representations convey messages of tolerance and religious inclusivity in the digital space. Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach is used to analyze the visual meanings in these digital artworks, while Stuart Hall's theory of representation is applied to understand how these meanings are constructed and negotiated within social and media contexts. The analysis shows that the Sufi expressions on _zukkk are not merely artistic works, but a social construction that emphasizes the values of moderation and openness in Popular Islam. Sufism, as the spiritual foundation of this expression, also helps shape an inclusive and tolerant view of religion, engaging in interfaith dialogue amidst the dominant narratives of conservative and digital religiosity. This study also highlights the important role of social media as a space for negotiating meaning, where visual representation becomes an effective medium for spreading spiritual and social messages. This research contributes to the study of Popular Islam and digital media by presenting Sufism as an inclusive discourse that is visually represented and socially produced within the digital realm. These findings encourage a new understanding of the relationship between art, spirituality, and religious tolerance in the complex and diverse virtual world.

Keywords: Islam, Popular, Representation, Sufi, Tolerance

INTRODUCTION

The digitalization process, which encompasses various aspects of human life, brings about fundamental changes. Digitalization, as the result of technological acceleration, transforms the formulation of values from conventional to digital forms (Sefriyono, 2020). One of the most significant impacts of this shift is the transformation in the relationship between religion and digitalization. As paradoxical as it may seem, religion today faces the challenge of adapting to the digital world. Religious doctrine must now find a way to respond to the digital world while anticipating its effects on society and culture (Maulana, 2022).

The increasing use of social media and digital media has become a necessity in responding to religious challenges in Indonesia, particularly in the context of religious understanding. The emergence of digital media has led to a shift in the orientation of religious authority, from traditional sources such as mosques, madrasas, and pesantren, toward digital authorities on the internet (Fakhruddin, et al., 2020). This phenomenon has resulted in the spread of religious thinking that is freer and sometimes unstructured (Nisa, 2018).

This media development provides both opportunities and challenges. It blurs the boundaries between good deeds (ma'ruf) and evil deeds (munkar) (Nisa, 2018). Thomas L. Friedman even stated that the world has become "flat," meaning that the internet and social media networks have succeeded in uniting people from various parts of the world (Gobang, 2019).

On the other hand, the dynamics of religious discourse often involve a contest between inclusive and exclusive attitudes. The challenge arises when exclusive views of religion try to dominate the digital public space. This is reflected in the rise of radical and fundamentalist religious groups that often ignore social aspects and reject pluralistic religious thoughts (Nisok and Resa, 2023). Consistent with research by Zamzami, et al., in 2023, Indonesia's digital media space between 2015 and 2020 was filled with competing Islamic narratives, where conservative groups dominated the space with radical and intolerant rhetoric, excluding inclusive narratives that emphasized dialogue and tolerance (PPIM

UIN Jakarta, 2020; Diprose et al., 2019; Hadiz, 2021). This phenomenon was worsened by the rise of the echo chamber effect in algorithm-driven social media systems, which further amplified radical voices (Kieron, 2015; Cinelli et al., 2021).

In the midst of the dominance of intolerant narratives in digital media, there is hope that inclusive Islamic teachings packaged in popular and easily accessible forms can reach a wider audience. Inclusive attitudes not only respect differences as God-given realities but also recognize that truth does not belong exclusively to one belief system. It instead promotes universal values and prioritizes interfaith harmony (Hyangsewu, 2022). Inclusive groups actively participate in creating public spaces that are open for constructive dialogue, mutual understanding, and tolerance, as well as building cross-faith collaboration as a foundation for a peaceful and harmonious society.

Referring to the teachings of tasawuf (Islamic Mysticism), religious tolerance is often taught by both classical and modern Sufi philosophers, including Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Frithjof Schuon, Muhammad Legenhausen, Farid Essack, and Abdul Aziz Sachedina, who are pioneers of inclusive thought. In Christian circles, thinkers such as William Cantwell Smith, W. Montgomery Watt, Huston Smith, Harvey Cox, John Hick, Hans Küng, and Diana Eck have contributed significantly to the development of pluralism in religion. In Indonesia, Muslim thinkers such as A. Mukti Ali, Alwi Shihab, and Nurcholish Madjid, as well as Christian scholars such as Father Franz Magnis Suseno, have become key figures advocating openness and religious tolerance. Together, these figures have paved new pathways for understanding religion in a more inclusive way, and appreciating diversity as a gift that must be honored (Hamdi, 2019).

The legacy of inclusive thought from Sufi scholars, philosophers, and interfaith intellectuals has become an important foundation for building dialogue and religious tolerance in the digital era. However, in practice, challenges arise due to the dynamics of social media, which has now become a major arena for spreading religious discourse. Social media plays a dual role: it is a platform for spreading inclusive religious views, while also a fertile ground for the growth of radicalism and violent extremism. Therefore,

the efforts of certain religious communities to be actively involved in using social media are crucial to counter negative influences and amplify messages of religious inclusivity (Setia and Haq, 2023).

In the digital era, Instagram as a social media platform has become an effective space for communities or individuals to convey messages of religious tolerance. Tolerance is aimed at building understanding, harmony, and peace between different groups (Pamungkas, et al., 2023). The advancement of digital platforms has changed how campaigns are conducted, offering new opportunities for public expression and social participation. One account actively advocating for religious inclusivity on Instagram is _zukkk. This artist uses painting and the Instagram platform to express spiritual works rooted in Sufism.

The existence of this account is interesting, as it successfully represents Sufi expressions in a form of Popular Islam that are friendly, unique, and attractive. Through artworks and inspiring posts, the account opens up space for understanding Sufism as an inclusive Islamic discourse relevant to everyday life. This is made possible as social media is an open, accessible, and low-cost platform that can build inter-group networks through ideas, activities, and shared interests (Anderson and Rainie, 2021). The presence of social media and online platforms is significant as they allow individuals to express their beliefs, making the digital space a new arena rich with diverse religious discourse.

Sufi expressions in the digital realm play a strategic role in conveying religious messages that are more readily accepted by the wider community across various backgrounds. Through wise quotes, short videos, and informative articles, Sufi expressions presented in digital form become a part of Popular Islam. This can attract people who may not be familiar with traditional Sufi teachings. Messages of inclusivity and tolerance embedded within the posts not only resist negative stereotypes about Islam, but also affirm that Sufism teaches a life of harmonious coexistence with others, not merely a vertical relationship with the Creator.

This article focuses on analyzing the representation of Popular Islam as depicted through Sufi expressions on the Instagram account _zukkk. Using a semiotic approach, the study examines the artworks and accompanying texts that convey messages of inclusivity and religious tolerance. Through social media, as a vast and dynamic digital space, the account presents Sufism as an effective medium for spreading messages of peace and openness in interfaith life. This research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how visually Sufi-inspired artworks acts as a medium for promoting religious inclusivity in the digital era, while also making a significant contribute to the study of Popular Islam and religious discourse in digital spaces.

Literature Review

The development of digital technology and the advancement of social media have opened up vast opportunities for social movements and religious tolerance initiatives, particularly within the framework of Popular Islam. This phenomenon of Popular Islam has emerged as a form of religious practice that adapts to the demands of modernity, blending tradition and popular culture to reach a broader audience through an inclusive and tolerant approach (Syarif, 2023; Jati, 2015; Fakhruroji et al., 2020). This dynamic plays a key role in understanding how religious identity continues to transform, especially among the rapidly growing urban communities and Muslim middle class.

In this context, this study focuses on how the representation of tasawuf (Islamic mysticism), as one dimension of spiritual Islam, is portrayed. This is explored through digital visual expressions on social media, particularly on the Instagram account _zukkk. Such expressions functions as a medium for spreading messages of religious peace and inclusivity to a broader audience. This study also aims to contextualize previous research on Popular Islam, tasawuf, and the role of social media in supporting inclusive religious movements, while also identifying the gaps that have yet to be addressed in studies of visual representation of tasawuf in the digital realm.

As a spiritual dimension, tasawuf plays an important role in shaping an inclusive and tolerant Islamic identity within Popular Islam. Sufi thinkers such as Martin Lings emphasize that the core of the Sufi tradition is the mystical experience that transcends religious boundaries, thus becoming a foundation for interfaith dialogue and respect for pluralism

(Nisok & Resa, 2023). This Sufi perspective enriches the discourse of Popular Islam with values of compassion and moderation that align with the challenges of religious diversity faced by today's society (Hamdi, 2019; Hidayat, 2022).

The advancement of technology and social media has not only increased public access to religious teachings, but also provided individuals with space to creatively and personally express diversity, including tasawuf expressions in visual and digital forms (Munandar, 2023; Waheed et al., 2024). Through social media like Instagram, users are allowed to present spiritual expressions that are not only aesthetically pleasing, but also carry inclusive and tolerant messages (Pamungkas, et al., 2024). This marks a significant shift in how religious messages are disseminated from traditional to digital spaces, allowing greater participation in digital religious dialogue (Anam et al., 2022).

However, the transformation of tasawuf practices into the digital realm is not without challenges. Adapting rituals and spiritual experiences such as *ijazah* (authorization) and *wirid* (chanting practices) raises questions about the depth and authenticity of spiritual experiences through online platforms (Rizki & Rusdi, 2024). Furthermore, even though digital technology opens up broader access, the presence of tasawuf on social media also risks distorting and commercializing spiritual content, which can weaken the intrinsic values of tasawuf (Waheed et al., 2024). Therefore, a critical approach is required in managing and curating spiritual digital content to ensure that inclusive messages remain protected.

Within this dynamic, traditional spiritual authorities in tasawuf have also undergone significant transformations. Figures such as Habib Luthfi bin Yahya have utilized social media to expand their influence and reaffirm their spiritual authority in increasingly digital and open contexts (Hidayat, 2022). This phenomenon reflects how tradition and modernity can interact harmoniously, preserving the practice of tasawuf and maintaining its relevance in contemporary society.

A review of the literature reveals that most research uses qualitative approaches through case studies, digital ethnography, and discourse analysis to understand tasawuf and Popular Islam in digital media (Waheed et al., 2024; Nisok & Resa, 2023; Anam et al., 2022). Semiotic approaches have also been used to analyze the visual representation of tasawuf on digital platforms (Munandar, 2023; Rizki & Rusdi, 2024). However, studies that simultaneously integrate all three tasawuf, Popular Islam, and social media with a focus on digital visual arts and inclusive religious representations in social media, remain very limited.

To address this gap, this study employs Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory of signs to analyze the visual meanings in digital Sufi artworks. In addition, Stuart Hall's theory of representation is used to understand how religious meanings and identities are formed and constructed through digital media. The combination of these two theories provides a comprehensive analytical framework for examining Sufi expressions as a medium of religious inclusivity within Popular Islam in the digital space, particularly on the Instagram account _zukkk.

Conceptual Framework

In the context of religious dynamics in the digital era, religious practices have become increasingly intertwined from digital platforms that facilitate communication and broad-based expression. This phenomenon offers an opportunity for the rise of what is known as Popular Islam, which presents contemporary religious expressions that are more flexible, fluid, and adaptive to the socio-cultural changes of society today. Popular Islam presents religious spirituality in new packaging that is more open, inclusive, and accessible in the digital space.

Among these emerging expressions of digital religiousness, tasawuf (Sufism) appears as one form of spirituality that historically has conveyed messages of inclusivity and tolerance. However, in the digital realm, tasawuf is presented through more visually appealing and personal representations, especially on social media platforms such as Instagram, notably on accounts like _zukkk. This platform offers tasawuf not only as textual content, but also as a visual experience. In this context, the researchers define it as a visual expression of tasawuf.

As an analytical foundation, this study uses two theories as complementary tools of analysis: first, Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach, which is used to uncover

the visual meanings embedded in the Sufi expressions displayed on the _zukkk account by identifying signs (representamen), objects, and interpretants. Second, Stuart Hall's theory of representation is applied to explain how messages of inclusivity and tolerance are formed, distributed, and communicated within the cultural context of the digital space. In short, the semiotic approach answers the question "what is being said?" through visual expression, while the representation theory explains "how the message is constructed and socially received".

Subsequently, this framework acts as the foundation for the research structure, covering three main aspects: first, to explain the historical development of Popular Islam in the digital space; second, to examine the meaning of Sufi digital artworks, especially those found on _zukkk; and third, to explain how Sufi expressions visually represent the message of religious inclusivity in today's socio-cultural digital context. Thus, the conceptual framework functions as both a theoretical and methodological guide to explore the relationship between Popular Islam, visual representation, and religious tolerance in the digital realm. Here is a simple diagram to clarify the conceptual framework of the research:

Figure 1: Diagram to Clarify the Conceptual Framework of the Research

Source : Data Analysis
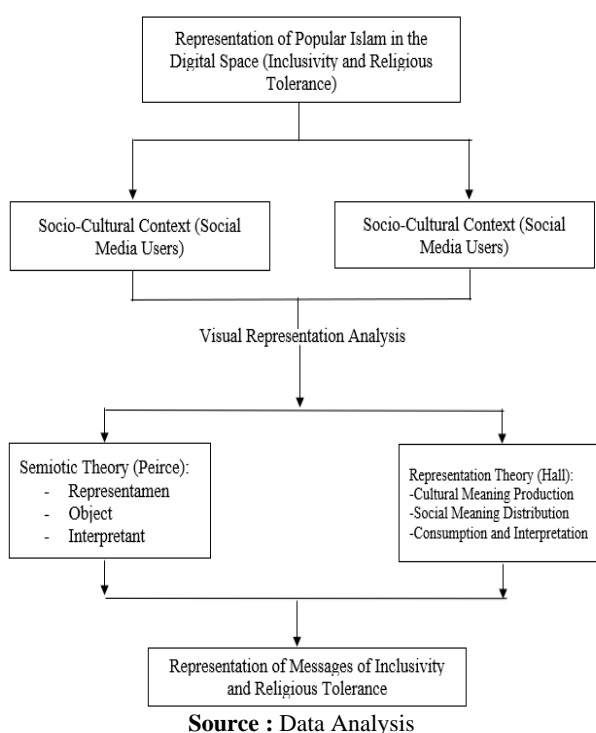
RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with semiotic analysis methods based on Charles Sanders Peirce's and Stuart Hall's theory of representation. These theoretical approaches were chosen for their relevance in exploring visual meanings as well as the construction of socio-cultural representations in the context of Popular Islam and its relation to Sufism and religious tolerance. Specifically, the research consists of two main stages: data collection and data analysis, as detailed below.

1. First stage: data collection was carried out through observation and digital documentation of visual artworks posted on the Instagram account _zukkk between 2022 and 2025. The posts were selected based on the images that displayed Sufi elements, messages of religious tolerance, and inclusivity within Popular Islam. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with the owner of the Instagram account _zukkk. The interviews were semi-structured, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the background, motivations, and intentions behind the visual works analyzed. The interviews also served as complementary data to verify and strengthen the interpretation derived from the visual content analysis.

2. Second stage: data analysis was conducted using the Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic method. Unlike Ferdinand de Saussure's model which consists of only two elements, Peirce offers a more complex triadic model consisting of three main components, namely the representamen, object, and interpretant.
   a. Representamen is the physical form or manifestation of the sign that can be seen, such as words, images, sounds, or symbols that directly refer to something. In this study, representamen serves as the "vehicle" of the sign or media that conveys meaning.
   b. Object is the thing referred to or represented by the sign, which can be a physical entity, concept, idea, or any source of meaning derived from the sign. The object is not always tangible, but may also be abstract.

c. Interpretant is the meaning or effect generated by the sign in the mind of the interpreter. The interpretant is not limited to a personal perception, but may also be a response, new concept, or new sign that emerges as the result of the interpretation process (Chandler, 2017).

As stated by Price (1969, 92), a sign involves a three-part relationship, also referred to as a three-term relation. A sign (A) does not represent the object (B) directly; rather, it only represents it for an individual who consciously interprets the sign. In line with Saussure's model, a sign is a unitied entity that cannot be separated and only acquires meaning when interpreted by its recipient.

In semiotic studies, it is important to distinguish between a sign as a complete meaningful ensemble, which according to Peirce (1992, vol. 2, 303), is not a real entity with a sign vehicle, but a physical form that can be sensed such as words, images, or symbols. This sign vehicle is referred to as the representamen in Peirce's framework, while structuralist studies more commonly refer to it as the signifier. However, in everyday usage, the term "sign" is often used loosely, so this distinction is not always clearly noted.

Peirce explains that a sign is something that stands for something else to someone, in some capacity. A sign "speaks" to someone, creating a thought in that person's mind that is equivalent to or even more complex than the original sign. This thought is referred to as the interpretant of the first sign. The sign represents something, its object, but it does not represent that object in every aspect. Instead, it does so within a specific framework or concept that Peirce refers to as the ground of the representamen, which is the basic link connecting the representamen with the object.

Figure 2: Connecting the Representamen
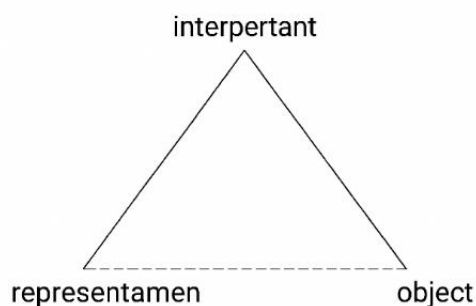
Source: Data Analysis

At the base of the triangle lies a dashed line, indicating that there is not always a direct or concrete connection between the representamen and the object. In other words, a sign does not stand for its object directly; rather, the meaning of the sign depends on the interpretation constructed by the receiver. Peirce himself did not explicitly depict this model as a triangle, many semioticians have adapted Peirce's terminology into the conventional semiotic triangle (Ogden and Richards, 1923; Eco, 1976).

Some scholars prefer to visualize Peirce's model as a tripod, with three interrelated legs connected by a central knot (Merrell, 1997; Bühler, 1933). Others have criticized the triangular form for potentially giving the impression of three separate dyadic relationships (sign-object, sign-mind, and object-mind), when in fact the three components are interdependent and dynamically interact, each mediating the others.

This dynamic interaction is referred to by Peirce as semiosis, meaning "the process of meaning-making". Semiosis involves a mediating process as follows: the representamen conveys meaning and acts as a mediator between the object and the interpretant; the interpretant mediates between the sign and the object to interpret meaning; while the object mediates between the interpretant and the sign as the foundation of meaning (Chandler, 2017).

Floyd Merrell (1997) also emphasized that Peirce's semiotic triangle rejects a rigid triadic view, instead offering an understanding that signs operate through flexible and interwoven relationships among the three components. Thus, Peirce's model presents a dynamic perspective on how the meaning of a sign emerges and evolves through continuous interaction between form, referent, and interpretation.

The concept of ground in this model refers to the specific context or framework in which a sign is interpreted. The ground serves as the basis for why and how a representamen refers to a particular object. This indicates that the meaning of a sign is highly dependent on social and cultural context, and therefore, sign interpretation may vary according to the background of the interpreter (Ogden and Richards, 1923; Eco, 1976).

Overall, Peirce's semiotic model does not merely focus on a simple relationship between sign and object, but emphasizes the importance of the interpretive process that occurs in the mind of the individual, making sign meaning dynamic, contextual, and ever-evolving. This makes Peirce's model highly relevant and useful for analyzing visual and symbolic signs in the context of digital media and visual art, such as the Sufi artworks on the Instagram account __zukkk.

3. Third Stage: the Researcher focuses on religious tolerance as represented in Popular Islam on the Instagram account _zukkk. In this stage, Stuart Hall's theory of representation is applied. Hall's theory is part of Cultural Studies, which focuses specifically on how meaning is produced and distributed within cultural and social contexts. According to Hall, representation is a process of meaning production through language, which not only refers to spoken or written language, but also encompasses images, symbols, cultural artifacts, and the social practices used in everyday life (Barker, 2005).

Stuart Hall, in his theory, outlines three main approaches to understanding representation:

a. Reflective Approach

This approach views representation as a reflection of reality. In other words, the meaning contained within a sign is assumed to directly mirror the world as it is. From this perspective, language (including images) is seen as a tool to depict or copy objective reality.

b. Intentional Approach

In this approach, meaning comes from the intention or mindset of the creator. In other words, what is conveyed in a sign is determined by the intent of the artist or creator.

c. Constructivist / Constructionist Approach

This approach holds that meaning is neither simply reflected from reality nor solely created by the producer of the sign. Instead, meaning is formed through social and cultural practices in the process of representation. In other words, meaning is the result of the interaction between signs, cultural context, and the audience interpreting them (Hall, 1997).

In the context of this research, the constructivist approach is considered the most relevant. The researcher does not aim to interpret the artistic intentions behind each visual work, but rather to understand the artwork as a collective representation shaped socially and culturally within the digital realm. This analysis seeks to explore how Sufi expressions in the _zukkk account represent the values of Popular Islam and broad-based religious tolerance.

4. Data Validity Triangulation

To ensure the validity of the research, data triangulation was used. Triangulation was carried out by comparing and integrating three primary sources: the results of semiotic analysis of visual content, socio-cultural interpretation using Stuart Hall's theory of representation, and data from in-depth interviews with the owner of the _zukkk Instagram account.

Through this triangulation, the research not only gains depth in visual interpretation but also ensures the accuracy of meaning representation within the actual context. The triangulation process will be explained in detail and systematically in the following subsections to demonstrate the transparency and credibility of this study.

DISCUSSION

Presentation of Interview Data with the Owner of the Instagram Account __zukkk

The Instagram account __zukkk features paintings by the artist Mohamad Marzuki. In this context, the __zukkk profile page serves as a virtual gallery showcasing the artwork of a single painter Mohamad Marzuki himself. As observed by the researchers on August 20, 2023, the account had 25,100 followers. By May 21, 2025, the number had grown to 76,500 followers. Based on a brief online interview conducted by the researchers with Marzuki on July 27, 2023, several insights were gained regarding the painter's background and his motivations for creating works inspired by Sufism (tasawuf).

Table. 1: Interview Result

No	Question	Interview Result
1.	What is the background of Gus Marzuki's life?	Mohamad Marzuki was born in Jember and now resides in Nganjuk, East Java. He studied at the Islamic boarding school (pesantren) PP. Salafiyah-

No	Question	Interview Result
		Syafi'iyah, Sukorejo, Situbondo, before continuing his fine arts studies at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Yogyakarta.
2.	What is the motivation and purpose behind Gus Marzuki's interest in creating Sufi-themed paintings?	For Marzuki, painting is a medium for inner healing, a way to express something complex with simple and accessible visual language. Additionally, it serves as a reminder to himself, which in turn reminds those around him of something fundamental and essential to life: "love." His background in pesantren heavily influences his works, with many of Marzuki's paintings featuring traditional Islamic symbols such as yellow books (Islamic texts), prayer rugs, caps, sarongs, whirling dervish dances (Maulawi), and more. According to Marzuki, most of his audience sees his work as being inspired by Tasawuf (Sufism) (Marzuki, 2023).
3.	In relation to the topic of our research, based on our observations, we assume that elements of tasawuf have been manifested through the Instagram account _zukkk and the paintings displayed there. In other words, tasawuf can also be appreciated and studied through visual perception through images. Then, among the many paintings created, which one best illustrates religious inclusivity and implies that tasawuf is not only focused on a vertical relationship (between humans and God), but also a horizontal one that is, an equal relationship between humans and other fellow human beings?	This question is answered in the form of paragraphs below. It will be discussed through semiotic and representational analysis.

Source: Data Analysis

Semiotic Analysis of Visual Art on the Instagram Account _zukkk

The initial step in this analysis involved selecting several paintings or visual artworks from the Instagram account _zukkk that contain interpretations related to religious tolerance. The researcher then gathered and described supporting texts based on indicators relevant to this theme. Based on data obtained from the _zukkk account, the analysis focused on six visual artworks published between 2022 and 2025 that explicitly represent values of religious tolerance. The analysis of these works was conducted using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach to uncover the meaning and messages embedded in each visual element.

1. Post on October 29, 2022

Representamen	
Object	This painting is titled "Mirror of the Self?". In the painting, two people wearing sarongs are seen facing each other. The first person stands upright holding a mirror that hides their face. The second person stands facing the first, seeing their own reflection in the mirror. This reflects a common Sufi teaching method where moral messages are conveyed through stories or dialogues between teacher and disciple. This post was also used by the _zukkk account to convey an explanation of the painting. The caption for the post reads: Disciple: "O Master, how do we know we have become good people?" Master: "As long as you still view others as wrong or evil (in any way), you are not yet a good person." The disciple fell silent and wept uncontrollably.
Interpretant	Several comments on the post revealed a range of interpretations from users. They generally offered diverse yet complementary perspectives. For instance: @dbay._ "Every human flaw should be seen as a reflection of our own spiritual state. If we label someone else evil, it means there is still evil in us. A good heart is one that reflects God's mercy and is not quick to blame others." @sum_elrasyid wrote: "Judging others is actually judging yourself." This aligns with well-known Sufi dialogues about not judging others. One story tells of a disciple asking his master, "If there's a devout worshipper who is arrogant and another who doesn't worship but is kind, which one is better, Shaykh?" The master replied, "The kind one. Because the first one received God's guidance but became arrogant. The second did not receive guidance but

remained humble and kind, thus worthy of divine grace."

The disciple then asked, "So which of them is evil?"

The master answered, "Those who think others are evil. Those who are busy judging others have not yet learned to judge themselves." (Dimyathi, 2023)

A Sufi once said that people should stop pointing fingers and judging others, especially when the judgment is based on external appearances. The practice of self-awareness must come first. Realizing one's limitations and reflecting on our inner condition helps us become more tolerant of differing backgrounds, making it difficult to harshly judge others. (Mamlutaar, 2021)

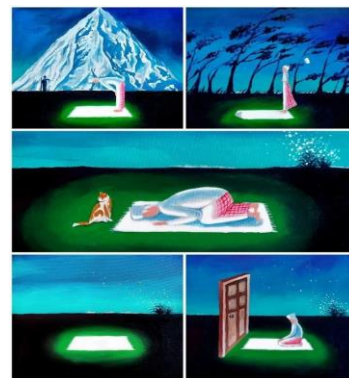## 2. Post on February 17, 2023

Representamen

Object	This painting depicts a number of male figures with typical Middle Eastern attributes such as robes, turbans, and chin-length beards, along with other men adorned with accessories traditionally associated with deities from the Asian region. Marzuki himself captioned the post with: "The Prophets and the Gods all kneel before You…"
Interpretant	The painting seems to highlight the commonalities between religions—in their rituals, teachings, and traditions. Discovering these shared elements is one way to weave unity through diversity. Nur Cholis Madjid referred to this as the "meeting point," inspired by the Qur'anic term kalimatun sawa (Qur'an 3:64), which denotes a common ground in interfaith encounters namely, belief in God and shared ethical concern (Rachman, 2014). The account @rumisidhdharta used this painting as a promotional image for an online class he organized. The course explores the historical roots and backgrounds of 48–55 prophets in the Jewish tradition, 68 prophets in Christianity, and 25 prophets in Islam. These prophetic figures across the three traditions often overlap bearing similar names but different identities and reside in the shadows of history. In line with this, religious diversity in the Indonesian context is constitutionally guaranteed by Article 29, Paragraph 1 of the 1945 Constitution, which upholds the freedom to embrace one's religion and beliefs. This resonates with the contextual meaning of the final verse in Surah Al-Kafirun, where Islam emphasizes the importance of religious tolerance (Saifullah and Hidayat, 2023).

3. Post on July 15, 2023

Representamen

Object	According to Marzuki himself, some of his artworks illustrate that tasawuf (Sufism) is not only focused on the vertical relationship with God, but also on the horizontal relationship between human beings. One such work is the painting titled "The Essence of Prayer". He included the following caption on the post: "The Honorable Prophet Muhammad was neither a painter nor an artist, but he was the pinnacle of beauty itself." The Master began a conversation with Surip. Surip then bravely asked about the essence of prayer (salat). Surip: "Then what is the essence of prayer?" The Master paused for a moment... Master: "Prayer is about living rightly, and a righteous life is what prevents immoral and wicked behavior. Standing symbolizes firmness and uprightness, strength of conviction, and honest authenticity." Surip: "And bowing (rukuk)?" Master: "Bowing means humility, to be modest and not arrogant." Surip: "And prostration (sujud)?" Master: "Submission and obedience to Allah the Almighty." Surip: "Sitting?" Master: "It means patience and contentment (qona'ah), sincerely accepting every decree from Him." Surip: "And the final greeting (salam)?" Master: "Awareness of those to your right and left—spreading love and compassion to others." "Ah... the Religion of Love... 🖤🖤🖤" murmured Surip, his heart blooming.
Interpretant	In essence, prayer that is deeply internalized will result in good conduct toward fellow human beings. According to Ibn 'Ata'illah, a person who performs prayer but is not deterred from committing shameful and unjust acts has not truly prayed. A Sufi will always strive to monitor the movements of the heart and the body to avoid harming the universe, because a Sufi realizes that the diversity in this universe including religious diversity is the will of God. A spiritually alive experience of worship generates positive energy and manifests in avoiding harmful behavior. Maulidi, drawing from Clifford Geertz's theory,

states that religion influences cultural values. Properly internalized prayer will yield good behavior and an awareness of kindness, which in turn can become ingrained as a cultural norm (Maulidi, 2019).

4. Post on August 2, 2023

Representamen

Object	This painting depicts a person laying aside their prayer rug and busily constructing a grand statue in the shape of themselves. Marzuki included the caption on this post: "Ambition, lust, ego, hatred, envy, and jealousy are efforts to build an idol within oneself." The post is accompanied by the song "Inti Lambung" by Panji Sakti (a musician and writer), featuring lyrics that repeat: "Me, me, always me."
Interpretant	The post received a comment and interpretation from @edi.setiawan7, who quoted Rumi: "The mother of all idols is the self." This aligns with another Rumi verse: "Your lust is the mother of all idols; physical idols are like serpents, but inner idols are like dragons." (Rumi, 1925) To imprison the heart and mind, to feel absolutely right, and to look down on others are signs of exclusivism like someone erecting an idol of themselves in their own soul. Supriyanto stated that exclusivism can be harmful to efforts aimed at bridging interfaith dialogue. He further explained that the danger of exclusivism lies in the potential for discrimination among fellow humans. In relation to religious practice, exclusivist attitudes can lead one to believe their religion is the only truth while discrediting others, which may even result in violence committed in the name of God (Supriyanto, 2009). Such a closed-off attitude stands in contrast to openness—or what is called religious inclusivity. Nor Salam drew a connecting thread to the inclusive reasoning of the renowned Quranic interpreter Quraish Shihab, who interprets several Quranic verses using an inclusive mindset: one that is open toward other religions, yet remains firmly rooted in one's own faith. Such interpretations can foster harmony among people of different religions (Salam, 2018).

5. Post on 2024

Representamen

Object	"Money is Love. So spread Love." A short quote written in the caption of the painting. The artwork depicts a man in a suit placing a red rose into a donation box. The blue background, adorned with flowing Arabic calligraphy resembling waves of water, evokes a spiritual, peaceful, and profound atmosphere.
Interpretant	The donation box symbolizes social piety, particularly in Islam, which teaches almsgiving (sadaqah), charitable contributions (infak), and obligatory alms (zakat) as manifestations of concern for others. However, in this context, the donation box is not filled with money but with a rose. The red rose represents love, peace, and universal values that transcend religious boundaries (Cirlot, 2002). In Islam, mahabah (love) for fellow human beings is a vital part of spiritual life (Hizaz, 2023). Thus, placing love into the donation box suggests that the most meaningful acts of charity are those done with compassion, not merely as routine physical gestures. The Arabic calligraphy background, shaped like flowing water, conveys the idea that religious teachings (Islamic ones, in this case) should flow like water cooling, nourishing, and life giving. The message of religious tolerance grows from its roots: a spirituality rooted in peace and love.

6. Post on April 19, 2025

Representamen

Object	In this post, _zukkk includes a quote: "Just do whatever your task is right now. As best as you can, as beautifully as you can!" The painting portrays a group of people sitting in a circle, performing kerokan, a

	traditional form of alternative therapy used to relieve symptoms of colds, done by scraping and pressing the skin with oil and a blunt object (such as a coin), leaving reddish marks or streaks on the skin. The individuals are dressed in various clothing styles and head coverings that reflect different cultural, ethnic, and possibly religious backgrounds. The use of diverse colors, calm facial expressions, and circular formation suggests a message of togetherness, equality, and harmony.
Interpretant	Interpretation in Relation to Religious Tolerance: First, the circle as a symbol of equality and unity. The circular formation symbolizes equality, as it has no end and no center point that stands above the rest (Islam, 2021). This implies that every individual regardless of religious or belief background holds an equal position within the community. Second, diversity of clothing and appearance. The variety of clothing and headwear represents cultural and religious plurality in society. It can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and indigenous beliefs coexisting peacefully. Lastly, the act of performing kerokan on each other. This act signifies solidarity and mutual support among people. Despite differences in background, they remain connected by shared human values and a spirit of mutual respect.

The Relationship Between Sufism and Religious Tolerance: A Constructed Perspective

The visual analysis of the artworks displayed on the _zukkk account reveals that Sufi expressions are not merely presented as artistic forms, but also functions as an important channel for conveying inclusive and peaceful religious messages. Through a semiotic approach, it becomes evident that the symbols used are not simply visual ornaments, but representations of universal values rooted in the Sufi tradition.

The interpretation of these artworks encourages a deeper discussion of Sufism as a spiritual foundation capable of shaping an open and tolerant religious outlook. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, Sufism holds a significant position as part of the three main pillars of Islamic teachings Islam, Iman (faith), and Ihsan (excellence in worship), with Sufism particularly emphasizing the aspect of Ihsan (Zarkasyi, 2020). Sufism is not only understood as a spiritual practice, but has also developed into an intellectual discourse within the Islamic tradition.

The urgency of religious diversity and interfaith understanding in today's world has become a reminder for Muslims to renew their commitment to respecting religious differences. The approach of Sufi-inspired tolerance was proposed by Idris Shah through his writings (Shah, 1996), which emphasize that dialogue between religions must be carried out not in a polemical tone that discredits other religions due to political, economic, and doctrinal interests, but in a spirit of mutual understanding. Similarly, Alwi Shihab, through his book Islam Inklusif, stated that we should not only accept the reality of religious diversity but actively engage in positive interactions with that pluralism (Shihab, 1999). Such an attitude reflects a firm commitment to one's own religious faith.

Within Sufism itself, as a tradition aligned with perennialism, there is an emphasis on the esoteric unity of all religious traditions, which transcends esoteric boundaries and places the search for absolute truth at the heart of universal spiritual experience. Within this framework, Sufism is not merely a path for individual spirituality but offers a collective ethic that stresses universal values such as love, compassion, and interreligious brotherhood. Through this perspective, religious tolerance is not simply encouraged as a social stance, but becomes an inherent part of the Sufi spiritual path itself (Nisok and Resa, 2023).

Furthermore, the modernization of religious practice in the digital era has encouraged renewed perspectives on religious-spiritual teachings, including Sufism. Sufi values are no longer confined to contemplative spaces but are present and reconstructed through digital and evolving social-cultural media. In the visual artworks featured on the Instagram account _zukkk, for example, Sufism appears not only as a personal spiritual language but also as a social narrative emphasizing universal love, humility, and respect for difference. When presented in familiar visual and aesthetic forms for the digital generation, Sufi values become increasingly relevant in shaping inclusive religious practices.

In this context, Sufi expressions are manifested as visual representations of Sufi values, constructed within the digital landscape. When viewed as a dimension of Islamic spirituality that emphasizes inner purification and love for God and His creation, Sufi expressions can serve as visual bridges

that reflect these values through media, symbols, artworks, and social actions. The expressions are not merely decorative or aesthetic, but serve as a medium for delivering messages of peace and shared spiritual values.

The connection between Sufism and religious tolerance in the digital is not static nor merely inherited, but is the result of a representational process involving interactions among artists, media, and community interpretation. In this framework, religious tolerance is not simply passively embedded in religious texts or heritage, but is actively constructed in response to contemporary challenges. It counters religious exclusivism in the digital realm. In such a condition, Sufi expressions become both visual constructions and narratives, allowing Sufism to be understood as a response to social restlessness: not retreat, but engagement.

Sufism thus appears as a spiritual foundation that not only emphasizes vertical human-to-God relationships, but also promotes horizontal relationships among people. The sacred values inherent in Sufism become an ethical source for a social aesthetic that is reproduced and interpreted collectively by artists, audiences, and communities within a cultural context that continues to evolve. Therefore, Sufi expression should not merely be promoted as a romanticized form of mysticism, but rather as a spiritual-social expression that reflects an open, dialogical, and inclusive attitude toward religious diversity.

Sufi Expressions as a Visual Representation of Popular Islam on Instagram _zukkk

The concept of Popular Islam cannot be separated from popular culture, which is born and shaped by mass media and influences conventional religious practices. In the context of religion, especially Islam popular, culture plays a significant role. This is evidenced by how Islamic teachings are later presented and marketed as pop (Hery, 2009). The framing of Islam in the discourse of Popular Islam also reflects a shift in religious language into simpler terms and religious vocabulary that are easier to understand by laypeople. On the one hand, this allows religious messages to be conveyed in everyday language lighter, simpler, and more accessible to broader audiences.

In this context, Popular Islam is often associated with middle-class Muslim identity. In Indonesia, the middle-class Islam is shaped by militaristic narratives and is often based in urban areas of East Java, which are known as central points for determining what is considered "Islamic" in modern Southeast Asian contexts. Popular Islam demonstrates how religious interpretations can vary and influence everyday Muslim life differently. In this context, Popular Islam in the digital world also shapes and influences how Malay-Muslim identities are defined in the wider Southeast Asian region (Weintraub, 2011).

Referring to Wasisto Raharjo Jati, Popular Islam can be interpreted as a cultural construction of Islam that emerges in public space and is influenced by modernism, especially dominated by the Middle Class with a strong emphasis on performance and commodification of Islamic culture through fashion, music, lifestyle, and related forms. From this perspective, Popular Islam is no longer limited to the Middle Class but has penetrated into various segments of society. Through modern media, it is manifested in physical or digital visual expressions in public spaces and in the corridors of religious symbols. The development of digitalization enhances its meaning, where media and digital platforms like Instagram become effective spaces to disseminate religious messages, showing the flexibility of Islamic meaning and practice in everyday contemporary life (Al-Ayyubi, 2025).

Popular Islam itself can be described as a cultural phenomenon that reflects religious practices that are adaptive to modernity, using simple, inclusive communication styles that are easily accepted by various social groups, particularly the younger generation (Fakhruroji et al., 2020). In the digital realm, platforms like Instagram have become strategic arenas for representing Popular Islam with a moderate breath through visual media (Nuriana and Salwa, 2024). The _zukkk account presents visual expressions of Sufism that blend traditional Islamic symbolism and contemporary aesthetics, effectively delivering messages of tolerance and religious moderation to a wide audience.

Through Hall's lens of representation theory, particularly the constructivist view, Popular Islam's digital representation is not merely a reflection of religious reality. Rather,

it is a social and cultural process in which meaning is produced, constructed, and negotiated within a system of signs that encompasses language, imagery, symbols, and religious practices. Hall's constructivist approach rejects the notion that meaning is a passive reflection of reality or simply the result of the creator's intent. Instead, it sees meaning as the result of dynamic interactions between signs, cultural context, and audiences that continuously evolve. On the _zukkk account, the Sufi expressions are not merely individual artistic products, but a collective representation of Popular Islam that is socially constructed and understood within a diverse and heterogeneous digital space.

Using Hall's framework, it can be understood that the meaning of these Sufi visual expressions is collectively constructed, involving the producer (artist), visual texts, and the meaning-receivers (digital audience) in an ongoing process of meaning negotiation (Hall, 1997; Couldry, 2021). The Sufi symbols depicted in these artworks function as signs that negotiate inclusive socio-cultural relationships, reinforcing a moderate and contextual identity of Popular Islam in the digital world.

Furthermore, the _zukkk account adopts a visual aesthetic that bridges the spiritual tradition of Sufism with a modern, communicative visual language. This approach facilitates the reception and understanding of Popular Islam messages by diverse digital communities, positioning Sufi expressions as a medium that constructs and disseminates socio-religious meaning in the digital public sphere. In other words, the Sufi visuals on this account are not merely aesthetic; they represent an active cultural practice in meaning-making.

Amidst the dominance of conservative and exclusive religious narratives that often prevail in digital spaces, the Sufi visual representations presented by the _zukkk Instagram account emerge as a crucial counter-narrative (Hadiyanto, et al., 2025). Through its artworks, this account actively amplifies messages of moderation, inclusivity, and religious tolerance values that form the foundation for a peaceful and pluralistic social life. This representation not only offers an aesthetic alternative but also drives social processes that gently, reflectively, and inspirationally reject polarization and exclusivism.

CLOSING

This research successfully reveals how Sufi expressions on the Instagram account _zukkk represent Popular Islam that is inclusive and tolerant through visual media in the digital realm. By employing the semiotic method of Charles Sanders Peirce and Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this study demonstrates that the visual representations are not merely the result of individual artistic expression, but rather a product of complex and dynamic socio-cultural meaning constructions. This research contributes to the discourse on how contemporary religious visual narratives serve as channels of communication and religious reflection that emphasize moderation and inclusivity within the broader discourse of Popular Islam.

Nonetheless, this study has limitations, particularly regarding the scope of data which is limited to one Instagram account and a specific time period. Therefore, any generalization must be approached with caution. In addition, the focus on semiotic and visual representation analysis has not yet explored the real-world social impact of these messages on audience perception in digital media.

As a recommendation for future research development, it is suggested to deepen the study by involving multiple digital media platforms and more diverse subjects, as well as integrating quantitative approaches to measure how Sufi representations influence attitudes and social interactions. Future research should also more deeply explore the dynamic interaction between content creators, audiences, and cultural contexts in which meaning is produced in the digital realm. In doing so, further research can enhance our understanding of how digital media shapes a more inclusive and tolerant religious discourse in modern society.

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