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Platform convergence, divergent reported benefits: Persian spiritual content across Kashmiri and Iranian youth

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Abstract

Background: Instagram has become a significant site for the circulation of Persian-language spiritual content.
Aims: This paper asks not simply why such content is consumed, but how its reception differs across three related youth populations: Kashmiri Muslims in Kashmir (K-K), Iranian Muslims in Iran (I-I), and Kashmiri Muslims living in the Iranian diaspora (K-I).
Methodology: Drawing on a structured survey of 225 participants (75 per group, recruited by purposive, convenience and snowball methods), each pattern is read through a specific theoretical lens–cultural hybridity, mediatization, religious-social shaping of technology, plausibility structures, and uses and gratifications–offered as a possible reading, not a tested explanation. The study used a comparative, cross-sectional survey design.
Findings: Near-identical platform preference across the three groups; sharply different usage rhythms, with K-K respondents most often using the platform daily (56.0%) and K-I respondents mostly weekly (61.3%), a pattern that holds within each gender and age band; and lower self-reported benefits among I-I respondents than among either Kashmiri group on all sixteen separately worded outcome measures, where, after adjusting for gender and age, K-K respondents report a benefit 1.7 to 2.5 times as often as I-I respondents and K-I respondents 1.1 to 2.0 times as often (clearly so on ten of the sixteen), while K-K and K-I cannot be distinguished from each other and reported mosque attendance and prayer do not separate the groups clearly. All three groups converge on Instagram as their preferred platform for this content; what varies is how often it is used and what respondents report gaining from it. Because the outcomes are self-reported benefits in non-probability samples recruited through different channels, the paper treats these patterns as descriptive.
Conclusion: The paper closes by considering what a descriptive, non-probability design can and cannot establish, and what an inferential follow-up study would need to test directly.

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1. Introduction

Two things can be true of the same platform at once: that nearly everyone in a population uses it, and that what happens on it, once in use, varies enormously depending on who is looking. This paper is about that second fact. It examines how Persian-language spiritual content on Instagram, a lot of it drawing on classical mystic poets whose work long predates any digital medium, is received across three youth populations with a layered relationship to that tradition: Kashmiri Muslims in Kashmir (K-K), Iranian Muslims in Iran (I-I), and Kashmiri Muslims living in the Iranian diaspora (K-I).

This paper is organised around three findings that we consider the most theoretically significant. One concerns the platform itself, not why it has been accepted as spiritually legitimate, a claim this paper does not test, but why all three groups converge on it despite different conditions of access. One concerns usage rhythm: K-K respondents most often use the platform daily, K-I respondents mostly weekly, and I-I respondents fall between them. One is that I-I respondents report fewer benefits than either Kashmiri group, while K-K and K-I cannot be distinguished from each other and institutional practice does not separate the groups clearly. Other K-I measures (novelty, experimentation, trust and spiritual use) are reported descriptively, because their differences are too small to carry a separate claim.

Section 2 sets out the theoretical framework. Section 3 develops five specific lenses drawn from that framework, chosen for their fit to particular patterns in the data rather than applied uniformly. Section 4 describes the method. Section 5 presents the three findings with their supporting data. Section 6 draws them together into an argument about what platform convergence does and does not tell us about Instagram's function as a spiritual medium. Section 7 states the limitations of this design directly. Section 8 considers what the findings mean for digital religion research more broadly. Section 9 concludes.

2. Literature review

Research on "digital religion" has moved, over roughly the last fifteen years, from treating the internet as a novel add-on to religious life towards treating online and offline religious practice as thoroughly intertwined (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022). A foundational strand of this literature, developed by Campbell (2010), argues that religious communities do not simply adopt or reject new media wholesale but actively negotiate their use of it in light of tradition, community values, and communal discourse, a process she terms the "religious-social shaping of technology". This paper does not assume that negotiation has concluded for Instagram specifically. Section 5.7 shows near-uniform platform preference across all three groups, but preference is a usage measure, not evidence that Instagram has been judged religiously

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appropriate; a distinction this paper maintains throughout, and returns to directly in Section 6.

Much of the wider digital religion literature has focused on Christian and, to a lesser extent, Muslim communities in North America and Europe, where Muslim digital media use specifically has been studied. Bunt's (2009) account of "cyber-Islamic environments" remains a key reference point, emphasising that digital spaces create new, sometimes contested, sites of religious interpretation and authority rather than simply carrying existing authority online unchanged. Persian-language spiritual content specifically, however, has received comparatively little attention in this literature, and almost none of it has examined how such content is received by audiences outside Iran, still less by audiences with a layered, non-nationality specific relationship to the tradition, as in the present study.

Diaspora media studies offer a related but distinct thread. Georgiou's (2006) study of Greek and Greek Cypriot communities in London and New York remains a touchstone: her account of diasporic media use as an active, spatial practice of identity construction. It provides a useful model for thinking about the K-I group in the present study, even though that group's specific configuration (diasporic into, rather than away from, the tradition's source country) inverts the more familiar case Georgiou considered. Her broader point, that diasporic in-betweenness can function as an actively used resource rather than only as an absence of belonging, is directly relevant to Section 5.6 below; Section 5.2's content-type data, by contrast, positions K-I as the intermediate case between K-K and I-I rather than as a distinct outlier, and does not itself support this reading.

A further relevant strand concerns the global circulation of Persian mystical poetry itself, independent of any digital platform. Rumi in particular has long circulated well beyond Persian-speaking or Muslim audiences, frequently in translations that soften or omit the poetry's specifically Islamic and Persian theological content. This raises a question directly relevant to the present study: when Persian spiritual content is encountered on Instagram specifically, is it encountered as continuous with this global, often de-contextualised popular circulation, or as something closer to its source-culture meaning? Section 5.2 speaks to this question directly.

Finally, work specifically on Instagram as a religious or spiritual medium has emphasised the platform's visual and aesthetic affordances, its suitability for short devotional or poetic content, its algorithmic curation of similar material, and the participatory behaviours (liking, sharing, commenting) it invites (Evolvi, 2021). This paper draws on that work but asks a question less often posed in it: whether a platform's affordances produce uniform effects across audiences, or whether the same affordances are taken up differently depending on the viewer's cultural distance from the content's source, and whether some

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dimensions of religious life (affective, existential) are more responsive to those affordances than others (institutional, devotional).

Taken together, this literature leaves a specific gap that the present study addresses: almost all existing digital religion research examines a single population's relationship to a single tradition and medium, or compares populations that do not share the same instrument. Three-way comparative designs using an identical instrument across a source-country population, a geographically external but historically connected population, and a diaspora population positioned between the two remain rare, and rarer still for Persian-language spiritual content specifically. This is the gap the present study is positioned to fill, and the reason its findings are organised, in Section 5, around specific points of cross-group divergence rather than a general description of any one group's media practice.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Identity and hybridity

Stuart Hall's (1990) account of cultural identity as an ongoing process of "becoming", rather than a fixed inheritance, frames Persian spiritual media as a living discourse through which participants negotiate belonging. Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity, and Vertovec's (2009) work on transnationalism, together provide a way of reading the diaspora (K-I) group specifically, not as a statistical midpoint between the other two groups, but as a potentially distinct cultural formation produced by movement, translation, and continued contact with both contexts. Whether the data support this stronger reading is addressed in Sections 5.1, 5.6 and 5.8: K-I's usage rhythm differs from both other groups, but on the benefit, novelty and trust measures K-I sits between, or close to, the other two groups, so the data support the hybridity reading only in part; Section 5.2's content-type data likewise shows K-I as the intermediate case, and does not support this reading on its own.

3.2. Mediatization, domestication, and networked communication

Hjarvard's (2013) mediatization thesis holds that media increasingly become the primary channel through which cultural and religious meaning is produced, not just transmitted. Silverstone's (2007) attention to the everyday, domesticated texture of media use, and Castells' (2010) account of networked communication, together inform how this paper interprets differences in the rhythm and intensity of engagement across the three groups (Section 5.1).

3.3. Religious-social shaping of technology

Campbell's (2010) religious-social shaping of technology (RSST) framework argues that religious communities actively negotiate, and do not just passively receive, new media technologies, weighing them against tradition, community values, and communal discourse. This

paper uses RSST as a lens for interpreting the near-uniform platform preference documented in Section 5.7, not as confirmation that such a negotiation has concluded. What the data show is convergence in practice; RSST offers one plausible account of how that convergence might arise, without this paper treating the underlying negotiation as settled or resolved.

3.4. Plausibility structures

Berger's (1967) concept of a "plausibility structure"– the social infrastructure of relationships, institutions, and routines that make a religious worldview feel credible and sustainable– offers a possible lens for the contrast between reported benefits and institutionally anchored practice examined in Sections 5.3 and 5.4, a contrast the data do not establish as a separate pattern: if Persian spiritual content on Instagram were to shift affective and existential outcomes considerably more than it shifts institutionally anchored practice, Berger's framework would offer one reason why. A brief, individually consumed piece of digital content can plausibly alter how someone feels in the moment, Berger's framework suggests, but is much less likely, on its own, to substitute for the sustained social plausibility structure that underwrites regular devotional practice.

3.5. Uses and gratifications

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch's (1974) uses and gratifications approach treats media audiences as active agents seeking to satisfy specific psychological or social needs through media use, rather than passive recipients of uniform media effects. This paper draws on it to interpret one plausible, unmeasured account of Section 5.5's most counter-intuitive finding: that the highest self-reported benefit percentages for Persian spiritual content occur in the group (K-K) living under the most politically constrained conditions, although K-K cannot be distinguished from K-I. A uses-and-gratifications reading treats this as consistent with the theory's core claim, that media use intensifies where the needs it gratifies are least available through other means, while two other explanations, named directly in Section 5.5, remain equally live and untested.

4. Methodology

4.1. Design

The study used a comparative, cross-sectional survey design. A questionnaire was chosen over interview or ethnography-based approaches partly for reach, comparing three groups across three settings at reasonable scale (Bryman, 2016), and partly because a structured, anonymous instrument offered Kashmiri participants in particular a lower-exposure way of participating, given the political sensitivity of research involving Kashmir.

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4.2. Participants

225 participants aged 18-38 were surveyed, 75 in each of three groups: Kashmiri youth in Kashmir (K-K), Iranian youth in Iran (I-I), and Kashmiri youth living in Iran (K-I). Age skewed younger in all three groups but unevenly: 65.3% of K-K, 57.3% of I-I, and 82.7% of K-I were 18-28, the remainder 28-38. Gender balance also varied: K-K was 68.0% female, I-I was close to even (53.3% female), and K-I was 72.0% male. Recruitment combined purposive and convenience sampling, with snowball referrals used specifically to reach the smaller, less publicly visible diaspora subgroup; recruitment differed by group and was not equivalent: K-K was drawn partly from university lists, student groups and religious educational settings; I-I primarily through university networks; and K-I through Kashmiri diaspora groups on WhatsApp and Telegram, reaching students in Tehran, Qom and Isfahan. Differences between groups may therefore partly reflect who took part, and recruitment channel is not recorded in the response file, so it could not be adjusted for. No eligibility criterion required prior consumption of Persian spiritual content on Instagram; participation was open on demographic and national/ethnic category alone. This is a non-probability sample; the findings below describe and compare the groups as sampled, and should not be read as generalising statistically to the wider populations they are drawn from.

4.3. Instrument, language, and ethics

A structured, 50-item questionnaire was developed for the study and piloted with 20 participants prior to full deployment; a small pilot sample, adequate for catching basic comprehension problems in item wording but too thin to support pilot-stage reliability estimates, a limitation named here directly rather than left implicit. The instrument covered platform use and frequency, content-type preference, trust in digital spiritual sources, and religious, spiritual and psychological outcomes, with items analysed individually rather than combined into summated scales; Cronbach's alpha, which requires correlation between items intended to measure a single construct, does not apply to single-indicator items of this kind (Gliem & Gliem, 2003) and is not reported for the instrument as a whole, consistent with the recognised risk of treating a heterogeneous, multi-construct instrument as if it were unidimensional (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011; Zakariya, 2022).

Persian-language proficiency was not tested directly for any group. For I-I, native fluency can be assumed. For K-I, functional proficiency is close to a precondition of the sample, since Kashmiris studying in Iran are required to learn Persian before coursework begins. For K-K, the sample was drawn partly from the Persian department at Kashmir University and from local religious schools where Persian is taught, so basic exposure can reasonably be assumed for at least part of this group; though this is exposure through instruction, not the functional,

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immersion-based proficiency K-I's presence in Iran implies, and general Kashmiri Muslim youth outside this recruitment channel have no comparable basis for it. Baseline religious practice, prior to any exposure to this content, was also not measured for any group; a limitation that bears directly on the institutional-practice findings in Section 5.3, where a low reported increase could reflect either limited effect or an existing practice level already near ceiling. For I-I specifically, this is not merely a hypothetical concern: Tezcur, Azadarmaki and Bahar (2006), and Kazemipur and Goodarzi (2009) both document a gap between strong personal religious belief and weaker institutional practice among Iranians generally, consistent with a ceiling reading for this group. No comparable literature exists for K-K or K-I.

This study was conducted under the direction of the Department of Communication Studies at Allameh Tabataba'i University, and the department's ethics board was informed of the study prior to data collection. Given the politically sensitive context for K-K respondents specifically, the instrument was designed to protect participants: no personally identifying information was collected, participation was voluntary, and responses were anonymous throughout.

4.4. Procedure and a note on disruption

Data were collected online across the three settings from late 2024 to the end of 2025. Two periods of severe internet disruption in Iran fell within or after this window. The first began in mid-to-late June 2025, lasting close to two weeks, with connectivity monitors recording a fall of over 90% in Iranian internet traffic during the outage (Miaan Group, ASL19 and IODA, 2025); this period fell inside the data collection window. A second, longer disruption began on 8 January 2026, after data collection had concluded, and affected the analysis phase specifically, including software-dependent tools, for an extended period afterward (Human Rights Watch, 2026).

4.5. Analytic strategy

The analysis presented here is descriptive and comparative rather than inferential: frequencies and percentages, are interpreted through the theoretical framework above, and not through significance-tested differences. Group differences are additionally summarised as adjusted ratios of percentages, that is, how many times as often one group gives the reported answer as another, with 95% confidence intervals. These are estimated by Poisson regression with robust standard errors (Zou, 2004), separately for each item (top answer against all other answers) and for daily and weekly Instagram use, with group, gender and age band as predictors and I-I as the reference group; odds ratios from logistic regression with the same predictors are given alongside in Table 1. Because the samples are non-probability samples, these intervals

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indicate the size of differences relative to sampling noise and are not offered as inference to wider populations, and no significance threshold is used to declare findings.

Table 2 lists the wording, answer options and reported cut-point of every outcome and practice item. Two considerations motivate this choice. Methodologically, inferential statistics generally assume some form of probability sampling; applying significance tests to a purposive/convenience/snowball sample risks implying a generalisability the design does not support (Bryman, 2016).

Practically, the disruption described above limited software-dependent analysis during part of the study period; the ratios, odds ratios and intervals reported here were computed afterwards, from the complete response file. Section 7 sets out what an inferential follow-up study, designed from the outset for that purpose, would need to look like. We note, finally, that a descriptive design of this kind is not simply a fallback when inferential analysis is unavailable, it is a legitimate and well-established mode of analysis in its own right within cultural and media studies traditions that prioritise pattern description and theoretical interpretation over hypothesis testing (Riffe et al., 2019), and the present paper's findings are offered within that tradition rather than as a diminished version of an inferential study.

Rule applied throughout: the paper reports the top answer (Yes, Greatly or Largely); all other answers are counted as not Yes. Items 1 to 9 are reported individually in Sections 5.3 and 5.4; items 10 to 19 are named collectively in Section 5.3; items 20 and 21 (daily and weekly use) are reported in Section 5.1.

5. Findings: Three points of divergence

5.1. Platform choice and usage rhythm

Asked generally which platform they use most for spiritual content, all three groups name Instagram most often, though with real variation: K-K n=54/75 (72.0%), I-I n=61/75 (81.3%), K-I n=58/75 (77.3%); a 9.3-point spread between the highest and lowest group, not near-total uniformity. The remainder is not evenly distributed across the other four options. K-K respondents who do not name Instagram turn overwhelmingly to YouTube (n=18/75, 24.0%, the highest YouTube figure of the three groups) and, in a small number of cases, Facebook (n=3/75, 4.0%); no K-K respondent named Telegram or WhatsApp. I-I and K-I respondents who do not name Instagram turn instead to Telegram– I-I n=11/75 (14.7%), K-I n=5/75 (6.7%)– with only a small YouTube minority (I-I n=3/75, 4.0%; K-I n=12/75, 16.0%) and no Facebook or WhatsApp use in either group. Telegram's presence specifically among I-I and K-I, and its complete absence for K-K, is consistent with Telegram's established role as a widely used platform within Iran itself; K-K, accessing this content from Kashmir, has no equivalent local reason to use it.

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Table 1. Adjusted ratios of percentages (first line of each cell) and adjusted odds ratios (second line, OR), with 95% confidence intervals, for giving the reported answer

#	Item	K-K vs I-I	K-I vs I-I	K-K vs K-I	Male vs female
1	Stress/anxiety reduction	2.22 (1.45 to 3.42) OR 3.99 (1.99 to 8.02)	1.76 (1.11 to 2.80) OR 2.45 (1.20 to 5.00)	1.26 (0.90 to 1.76) OR 1.63 (0.81 to 3.28)	1.08 (0.80 to 1.46) OR 1.16 (0.65 to 2.07)
2	Contentment	2.32 (1.46 to 3.67) OR 4.07 (1.99 to 8.35)	2.04 (1.23 to 3.39) OR 3.09 (1.46 to 6.56)	1.14 (0.79 to 1.63) OR 1.32 (0.66 to 2.65)	0.93 (0.67 to 1.29) OR 0.88 (0.49 to 1.59)
3	Peace	2.21 (1.39 to 3.54) OR 3.61 (1.76 to 7.38)	1.77 (1.08 to 2.88) OR 2.36 (1.13 to 4.94)	1.25 (0.86 to 1.82) OR 1.53 (0.76 to 3.08)	1.25 (0.89 to 1.76) OR 1.48 (0.82 to 2.68)
4	Meaning in life	2.27 (1.33 to 3.85) OR 3.33 (1.60 to 6.94)	1.83 (1.05 to 3.18) OR 2.31 (1.08 to 4.96)	1.24 (0.82 to 1.88) OR 1.44 (0.71 to 2.91)	1.08 (0.74 to 1.58) OR 1.13 (0.62 to 2.06)
5	Life goals	2.17 (1.28 to 3.70) OR 3.09 (1.48 to 6.43)	1.81 (1.02 to 3.23) OR 2.28 (1.05 to 4.92)	1.20 (0.77 to 1.88) OR 1.36 (0.67 to 2.76)	0.94 (0.63 to 1.41) OR 0.91 (0.50 to 1.67)
6	Physical health	2.26 (1.18 to 4.33) OR 2.88 (1.27 to 6.49)	1.59 (0.79 to 3.21) OR 1.77 (0.74 to 4.21)	1.42 (0.81 to 2.50) OR 1.62 (0.74 to 3.54)	1.21 (0.73 to 1.99) OR 1.29 (0.66 to 2.52)
7	Meditation	2.11 (1.39 to 3.21) OR 3.71 (1.86 to 7.40)	1.74 (1.11 to 2.74) OR 2.46 (1.20 to 5.01)	1.21 (0.87 to 1.69) OR 1.51 (0.75 to 3.02)	1.01 (0.74 to 1.36) OR 1.02 (0.57 to 1.81)
8	Mosque/religious spaces	1.63 (0.76 to 3.52) OR 1.79 (0.71 to 4.49)	1.69 (0.82 to 3.51) OR 1.89 (0.75 to 4.73)	0.96 (0.48 to 1.92) OR 0.95 (0.40 to 2.24)	1.43 (0.78 to 2.63) OR 1.55 (0.74 to 3.27)
9	Prayer frequency	1.90 (0.85 to 4.24) OR 2.12 (0.83 to 5.40)	2.24 (0.99 to 5.05) OR 2.63 (1.02 to 6.75)	0.85 (0.43 to 1.69) OR 0.81 (0.35 to 1.87)	1.06 (0.58 to 1.93) OR 1.07 (0.52 to 2.23)
10	Psychological well-being	2.11 (1.20 to 3.69) OR 2.86 (1.34 to 6.10)	1.92 (1.05 to 3.52) OR 2.45 (1.09 to 5.47)	1.10 (0.67 to 1.79) OR 1.17 (0.56 to 2.42)	0.92 (0.60 to 1.42) OR 0.89 (0.48 to 1.65)
11	Connection with inner self	1.96 (1.20 to 3.18) OR 2.87 (1.40 to 5.89)	1.76 (1.06 to 2.92) OR 2.32 (1.09 to 4.92)	1.11 (0.75 to 1.64) OR 1.24 (0.61 to 2.52)	0.72 (0.50 to 1.04) OR 0.57 (0.31 to 1.05)
12	Hope and optimism	2.13 (1.25 to 3.63) OR 2.99 (1.43 to 6.26)	1.89 (1.06 to 3.36) OR 2.43 (1.11 to 5.32)	1.13 (0.72 to 1.76) OR 1.23 (0.60 to 2.51)	0.88 (0.59 to 1.32) OR 0.82 (0.45 to 1.51)
13	Gratitude	2.00 (1.22 to 3.27) OR 2.82 (1.37 to 5.78)	1.60 (0.95 to 2.70) OR 1.95 (0.93 to 4.09)	1.25 (0.82 to 1.91) OR 1.45 (0.71 to 2.94)	1.24 (0.84 to 1.81) OR 1.40 (0.77 to 2.55)
14	Sympathetic behaviour	1.79 (1.01 to 3.16) OR 2.24 (1.05 to 4.78)	1.75 (0.97 to 3.15) OR 2.13 (0.95 to 4.77)	1.02 (0.63 to 1.66) OR 1.05 (0.50 to 2.21)	0.66 (0.42 to 1.04) OR 0.56 (0.29 to 1.05)

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#	Item	K-K vs I-I	K-I vs I-I	K-K vs K-I	Male vs female
15	Sympathy generated	2.01 (1.17 to 3.43) OR 2.69 (1.28 to 5.64)	1.62 (0.90 to 2.91) OR 1.92 (0.89 to 4.14)	1.24 (0.78 to 1.98) OR 1.40 (0.68 to 2.88)	1.12 (0.74 to 1.70) OR 1.18 (0.64 to 2.18)
16	Quality of life	1.68 (1.00 to 2.81) OR 2.12 (1.03 to 4.36)	1.13 (0.63 to 2.04) OR 1.17 (0.54 to 2.54)	1.48 (0.89 to 2.45) OR 1.80 (0.86 to 3.79)	1.05 (0.68 to 1.63) OR 1.08 (0.58 to 2.00)
17	Wonder about life	2.34 (1.36 to 4.04) OR 3.39 (1.61 to 7.14)	1.71 (0.96 to 3.05) OR 2.04 (0.92 to 4.49)	1.37 (0.88 to 2.14) OR 1.66 (0.81 to 3.42)	0.98 (0.66 to 1.45) OR 0.97 (0.52 to 1.79)
18	Desire to know divinity	2.33 (1.38 to 3.93) OR 3.54 (1.71 to 7.36)	1.78 (1.01 to 3.13) OR 2.21 (1.02 to 4.78)	1.31 (0.86 to 2.00) OR 1.60 (0.79 to 3.25)	0.89 (0.61 to 1.31) OR 0.83 (0.46 to 1.53)
19	View of nature and creation	2.48 (1.44 to 4.27) OR 3.77 (1.79 to 7.93)	1.85 (1.02 to 3.36) OR 2.30 (1.05 to 5.04)	1.34 (0.88 to 2.05) OR 1.64 (0.81 to 3.34)	0.97 (0.66 to 1.43) OR 0.96 (0.52 to 1.76)
20	Daily Instagram use	1.88 (1.25 to 2.85) OR 3.00 (1.52 to 5.94)	0.63 (0.34 to 1.16) OR 0.54 (0.24 to 1.21)	2.99 (1.74 to 5.15) OR 5.53 (2.52 to 12.13)	0.96 (0.66 to 1.39) OR 0.93 (0.50 to 1.71)
21	Weekly Instagram use	0.62 (0.31 to 1.23) OR 0.56 (0.24 to 1.28)	2.54 (1.59 to 4.07) OR 4.98 (2.37 to 10.48)	0.24 (0.13 to 0.45) OR 0.11 (0.05 to 0.26)	1.06 (0.73 to 1.55) OR 1.11 (0.58 to 2.13)

Table 2. Wording, answer options and reported cut-point of every outcome and practice item analysed, with the number of respondents (out of 75, and %) giving the reported answer in each group

#	Item	Question wording (as recorded)	Answer options (as recorded)	Counted as "Yes"	K-K n/75 (%)	I-I n/75 (%)	K-I n/75 (%)
1	Stress/anxiety reduction	Has it lessened your stress and anxiety?	Yes / No	Yes	44 (58.7%)	20 (26.7%)	36 (48.0%)
2	Contentment	Has it increased your contentment with life?	Yes / No	Yes	41 (54.7%)	18 (24.0%)	33 (44.0%)
3	Peace	Has it instilled peace?	Greatly / Never / Moderately / Sparingly	Greatly	38 (50.7%)	18 (24.0%)	32 (42.7%)
4	Meaning in life	Has the content given meaning to your life?	Largely / Never / Moderately / Sparingly	Largely	34 (45.3%)	15 (20.0%)	29 (38.7%)
5	Life goals	Has it increased your focus on life goals?	Yes / No	Yes	33 (44.0%)	15 (20.0%)	27 (36.0%)
6	Physical health	Has it had a positive impact on your physical health?	Yes / No	Yes	24 (32.0%)	11 (14.7%)	18 (24.0%)

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#	Item	Question wording (as recorded)	Answer options (as recorded)	Counted as "Yes"	K-K n/75 (%)	I-I n/75 (%)	K-I n/75 (%)
7	Meditation	Has it increased meditation and contemplation?	Yes / No	Yes	44 (58.7%)	21 (28.0%)	36 (48.0%)
8	Mosque/religious spaces	Has it increased your visits to mosque/religious places?	Yes / No	Yes	14 (18.7%)	9 (12.0%)	17 (22.7%)
9	Prayer frequency	Has it increased your frequency of prayers?	Yes / No	Yes	15 (20.0%)	8 (10.7%)	18 (24.0%)
10	Psychological well-being	Has it helped your psychological well-being?	Greatly / No / Moderately / Sparingly	Greatly	29 (38.7%)	14 (18.7%)	24 (32.0%)
11	Connection with inner self	Has it helped you connect with your inner self?	Greatly / Never / Moderately / Sparingly	Greatly	36 (48.0%)	17 (22.7%)	30 (40.0%)
12	Hope and optimism	Has it instilled hope and optimism?	Greatly / Never / Moderately / Sparingly	Greatly	32 (42.7%)	15 (20.0%)	26 (34.7%)
13	Gratitude	Has it instilled gratitude?	Greatly / Never / Moderately / Sparingly	Greatly	33 (44.0%)	17 (22.7%)	29 (38.7%)
14	Sympathetic behaviour	Has your behaviour become sympathetic towards others?	Largely / Never / Moderately / Sparingly	Largely	27 (36.0%)	14 (18.7%)	23 (30.7%)
15	Sympathy generated	Has it generated sympathy towards others?	Greatly / Never / Moderately / Sparingly	Greatly	30 (40.0%)	15 (20.0%)	26 (34.7%)
16	Quality of life	Has it improved your quality of life?	Largely / No / Moderately	Largely	29 (38.7%)	17 (22.7%)	21 (28.0%)
17	Wonder about life	Has it filled you with wonder about life?	Greatly / Never / Moderately / Sparingly	Greatly	33 (44.0%)	14 (18.7%)	24 (32.0%)
18	Desire to know divinity	Has it created a desire to know more about divinity?	Greatly / Never / Moderately / Sparingly	Greatly	36 (48.0%)	15 (20.0%)	27 (36.0%)
19	View of nature and creation	Has it impacted your view of nature/creation?	Largely / No / Moderately / Sparingly	Largely	35 (46.7%)	14 (18.7%)	26 (34.7%)
20	Daily Instagram use	Frequency of Instagram use	Daily / Every couple of days / Weekly	Daily	42 (56.0%)	22 (29.3%)	14 (18.7%)
21	Weekly Instagram use	Frequency of Instagram use	Daily / Every couple of days / Weekly	Weekly	11 (14.7%)	18 (24.0%)	46 (61.3%)

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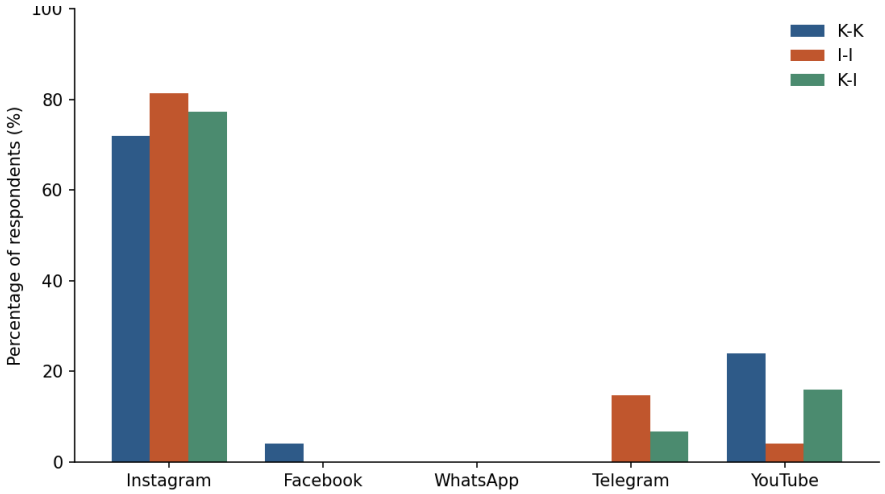


Figure 1. Platform mostly used for spiritual content generally (Q7)

Frequency of use diverges more sharply than platform choice. K-K respondents were considerably more likely to engage daily (n=42/75, 56.0%) than either I-I (n=22/75, 29.3%) or K-I (n=14/75, 18.7%); K-I respondents were the most likely by a wide margin to describe their engagement as weekly rather than daily (n=46/75, 61.3%, against n=11/75, 14.7% for K-K and n=18/75, 24.0% for I-I). Read through Silverstone's (2007) and Hjarvard's (2013) attention to the everyday, domesticated texture of media use, this suggests the three groups have not just adopted this content at broadly similar platform-preference rates, but have domesticated it into qualitatively different daily rhythms: closer to habitual practice for K-K, and closer to occasional, purposeful engagement for K-I. I-I falls between the two, mostly engaging every couple of days (n=35/75, 46.7%). This ordering holds within every gender and age band: in each of the four subgroups (women, men, aged 18-28, aged 28-38), K-K has the highest daily share (53.8% to 57.1%) and K-I the highest weekly share (61.1% to 61.9%). Adjusting for gender and age together leaves the ratios essentially unchanged: K-K respondents use the platform daily 1.88 times as often as I-I respondents (95% interval 1.25 to 2.85; 1.91 unadjusted), and K-I respondents use it weekly 2.54 times as often as I-I respondents (1.59 to 4.07; 2.56 unadjusted). K-K is also clearly above K-I on daily use (2.99, 1.74 to 5.15) and below it on weekly use (0.24, 0.13 to 0.45), whereas K-I and I-I do not differ clearly on daily use (0.63, 0.34 to 1.16), nor K-K and I-I on weekly use (0.62, 0.31 to 1.23); odds ratios are in Table 1.

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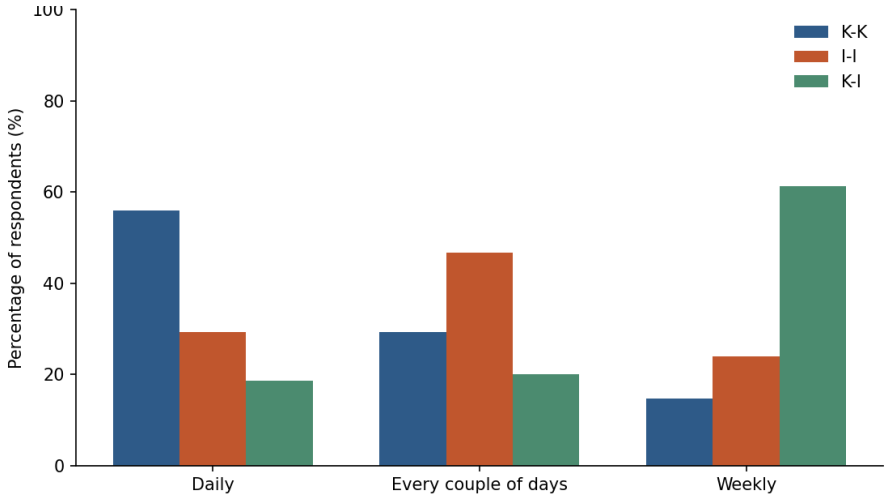


Figure 2. Frequency of engagement with Persian spiritual content

5.2. Content-type preference

Respondents were asked what type of content they consider spiritual: content from religious figures and scholars ("pure religious"), content from religious influencers, content from influencers who are not purely religious, or a mix of the two latter categories ("both"). K-K respondents showed the strongest concentration on pure religious content (n=34/75, 45.3%), the lowest reliance on non-religious-influencer content alone of the three groups (n=4/75, 5.3%). I-I showed the most even distribution across all four categories, with no single category dominating. K-I sat between the two, leaning towards pure religious content (n=26/75, 34.7%) without K-K's degree of concentration.

K-K's strong pull towards pure religious content fits directly with how this group was recruited (Section 4.2): a sample partly drawn from religious schools and Persian department would be expected to lean toward institutionally recognisable religious content specifically. This is not a picture of Kashmiri Muslim youth in general, but of a group whose recruitment channel already predicted a stronger orientation toward this particular content type.

A related measure asked which languages, of Persian, Kashmiri, English, and Urdu, respondents use to access this content, with multiple selections permitted. I-I respondents were almost entirely confined to Persian (n=74/75, 98.7%), with negligible English use (n=6/75, 8.0%) and no reported Kashmiri use; two respondents (n=2/75, 2.7%) used Urdu. K-K respondents drew on all four languages, led by Urdu (n=64/75, 85.3%) and English (n=41/75, 54.7%), with substantial Kashmiri use (n=30/75, 40.0%) and comparatively lower Persian use (n=19/75, 25.3%). K-I respondents showed the most even spread across all four languages, leaning hardest into Kashmiri (n=56/75, 74.7%),

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followed by English (n=49/75, 65.3%), Urdu (n=45/75, 60.0%), and Persian (n=41/75, 54.7%). This bears directly on whether K-K's engagement with this tradition is continuous with its de-contextualised global circulation or closer to source-culture meaning (Section 2): with only a quarter of K-K respondents accessing this content in Persian itself, and the clear majority doing so in Urdu or English, K-K's encounter with this material runs substantially through translation and adjacent-language circulation rather than direct engagement with the source language.

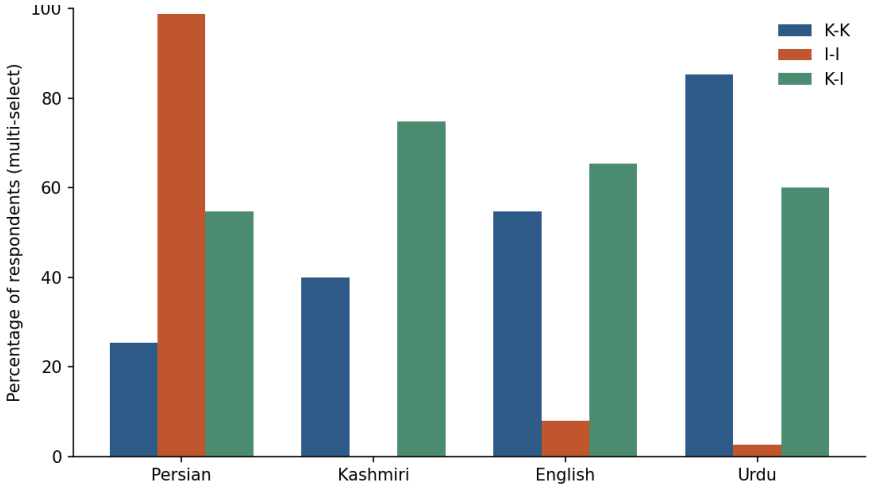


Figure 3. Languages used to access spiritual content (Q15)

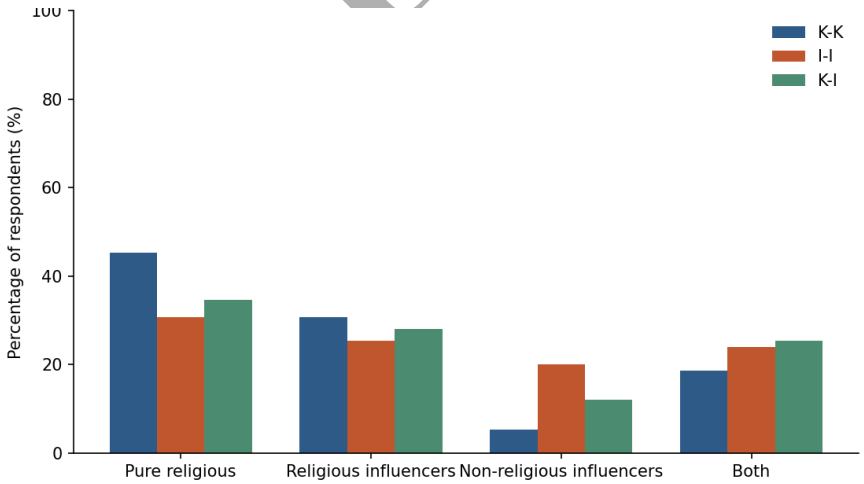


Figure 4. Type of spiritual content preferred

5.3. Reported benefits: I-I lower than both Kashmiri groups

On all sixteen separately worded outcome measures, I-I respondents report the fewest benefits. K-K and K-I are higher and close to each

other: K-K is numerically above K-I on every item, but by only 5 to 12% points, and these differences cannot be distinguished from chance (adjusted ratios 1.02 to 1.48, every interval including 1). K-K is clearly above I-I on all sixteen: K-K respondents report a benefit 1.7 to 2.5 times as often as I-I respondents, every interval above 1. K-I is above I-I on all sixteen measures (1.1 to 2.0 times as often), and the difference is clear (adjusted interval above 1) on ten of them, including stress/anxiety, contentment, peace, meaning in life and life goals; on the other six (physical health, gratitude, sympathetic behaviour, sympathy generated, quality of life and wonder about life) it points the same way, but the interval includes 1. Six measures are reported individually below; the remaining ten are named collectively. Table 1 gives the adjusted ratios, with odds ratios, for every item.

- **Stress/anxiety reduction:** K-K n=44/75 (58.7%), K-I n=36/75 (48.0%), I-I n=20/75 (26.7%)

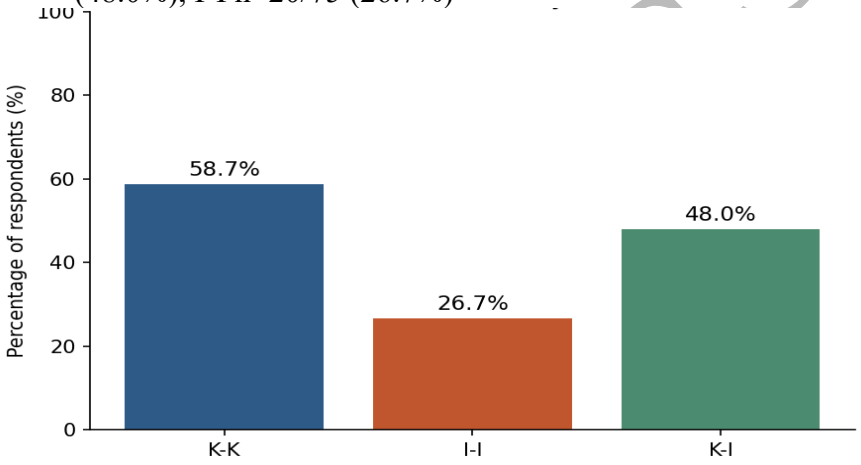


Figure 5. Persian spiritual content perceived to reduce stress/ anxiety

- **Increased contentment:** K-K n=41/75 (54.7%), K-I n=33/75 (44.0%), I-I n=18/75 (24.0%)

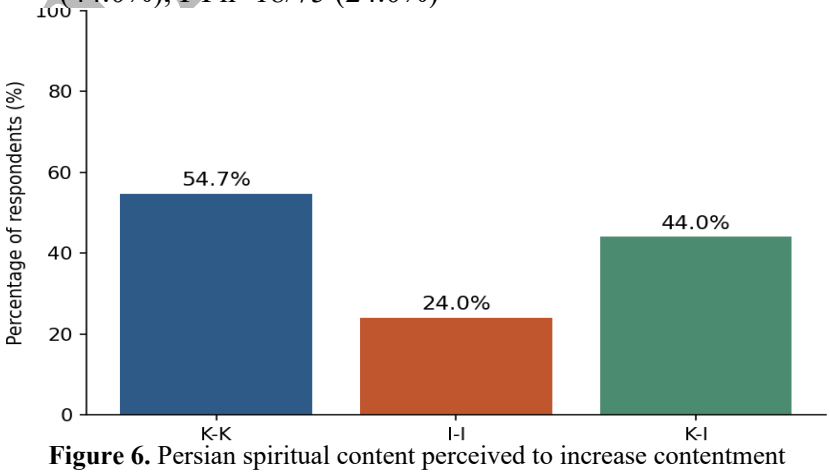


Figure 6. Persian spiritual content perceived to increase contentment

- **Peace:** K-K n=38/75 (50.7%), K-I n=32/75 (42.7%), I-I n=18/75 (24.0%)

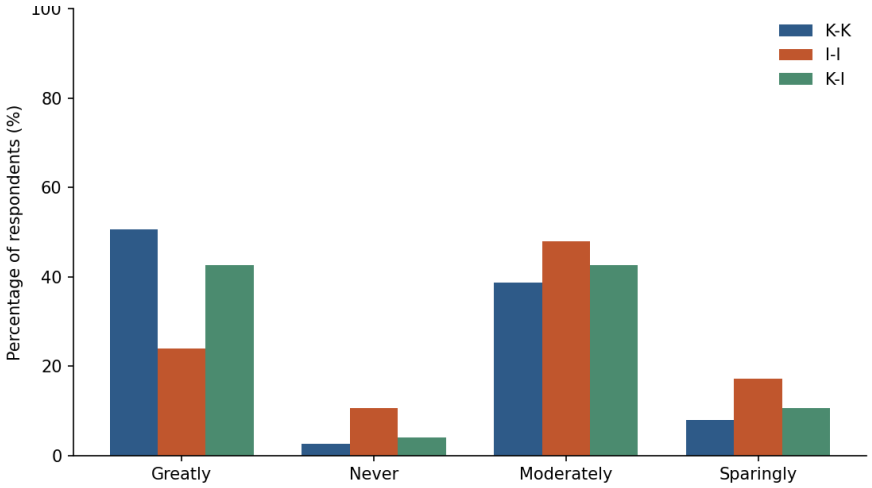


Figure 7. Persian spiritual content instilled a sense of peace

- **Meaning given to life:** K-K n=34/75 (45.3%), K-I n=29/75 (38.7%), I-I n=15/75 (20.0%)

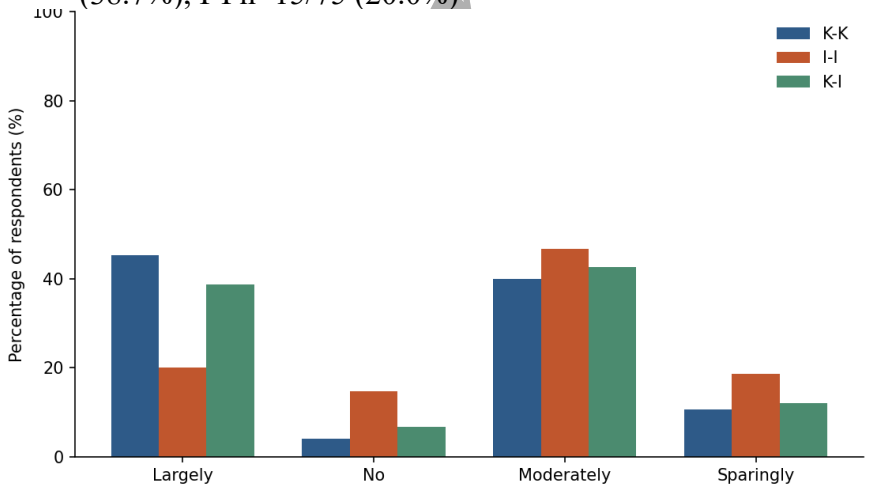


Figure 8. Persian spiritual content gave meaning to life

- Focus on life goals: K-K n=33/75 (44.0%), K-I n=27/75 (36.0%), I-I n=15/75 (20.0%)

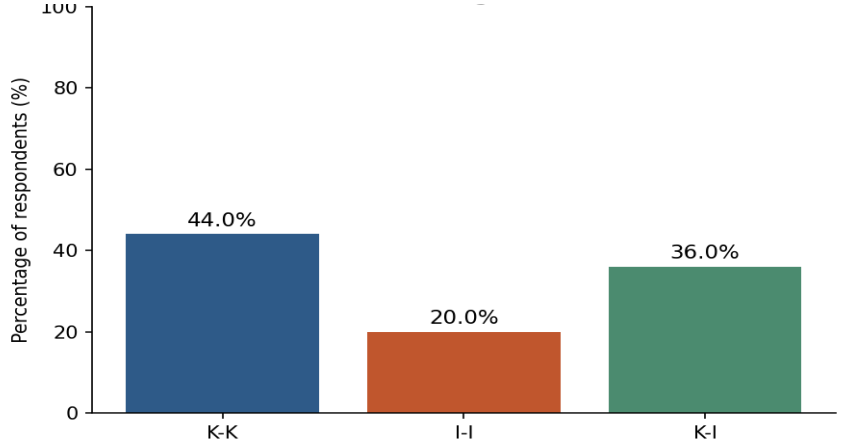


Figure 9. Persian spiritual content perceived to increase focus on life goals

- **Physical health improvement:** K-K n=24/75 (32.0%), K-I n=18/75 (24.0%), I-I n=11/75 (14.7%)

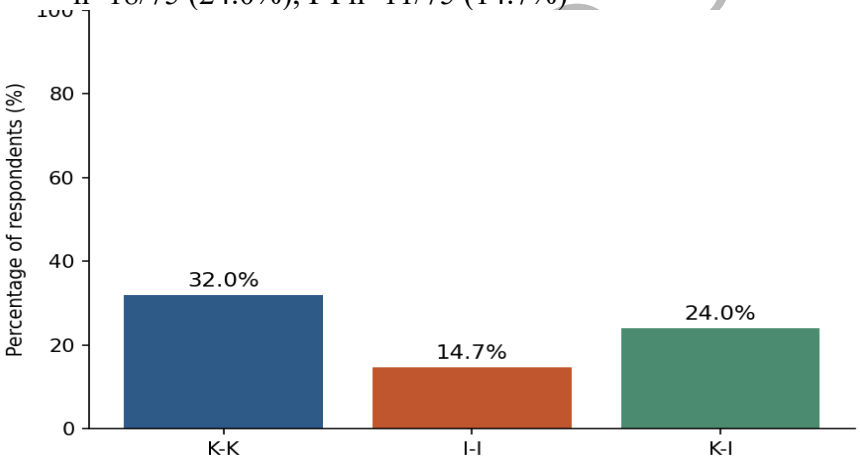


Figure 10. Persian spiritual content perceived to improve physical health

The same ordering recurs across a further ten separately worded measures in the survey (psychological well-being, connection with the inner self, hope, gratitude, sympathetic behaviour, sympathy generated, quality of life, wonder about life, desire to know more about divinity, and view of nature and creation), without exception. A consistency across this many largely independent items is harder to attribute to chance than any single measure would be; though this same consistency should be read alongside the response-tendency risk named in Section 7, since these sixteen items likely tap one or two broad underlying constructs rather than sixteen fully independent confirmations. Physical health, the item least plausibly moved by Instagram content, shows a K-K/I-I difference within the range of the other items (adjusted ratio 2.26, interval 1.18 to 4.33; odds ratio 2.88, interval 1.27 to 6.49), which

suggests that response style or selection may contribute as much as the content itself.

Institutional practice does not show the same ordering. Mosque or religious-space attendance: K-K n=14/75 (18.7%), I-I n=9/75 (12.0%), K-I n=17/75 (22.7%). Prayer frequency: K-K n=15/75 (20.0%), I-I n=8/75 (10.7%), K-I n=18/75 (24.0%). K-I is numerically highest on both items, but the groups are close and the intervals are wide (adjusted ratios against I-I: mosque or religious-space attendance 1.63 for K-K, interval 0.76 to 3.52, and 1.69 for K-I, 0.82 to 3.51; prayer frequency 1.90 for K-K, 0.85 to 4.24, and 2.24 for K-I, 0.99 to 5.05; odds ratios are in Table 1). The K-I interval for prayer includes 1 only narrowly, whereas the corresponding odds-ratio interval (1.02 to 6.75) narrowly excludes it. Because these practices are uncommon in every group, percentage-point gaps are small by construction, and the intervals overlap those of the benefit measures. The data therefore do not establish a separate institutional pattern.

First line: ratio of percentages, that is, how many times as often the first group gives the reported answer as the second, from Poisson regression with robust standard errors. Second line (OR): odds ratio from logistic regression. Both are adjusted for gender and age band (18-28, 28-38) and estimated separately for each item. I-I is the reference group for the first two columns and K-I for the third; female is the reference for the fourth. Items 20 and 21 are daily and weekly use of Instagram. An interval that excludes 1 indicates a difference larger than sampling noise alone would readily produce; intervals are a guide, not population inference, and no correction was made for multiple comparisons.

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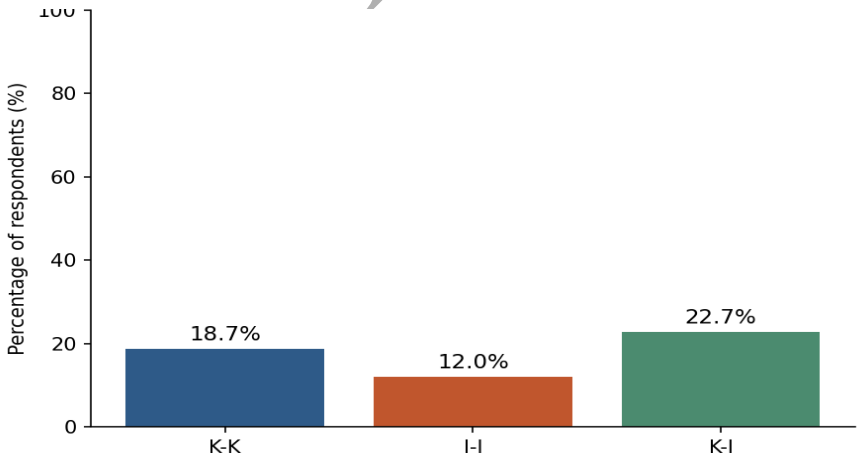


Figure 11. Persian spiritual content increased visits to religious spaces

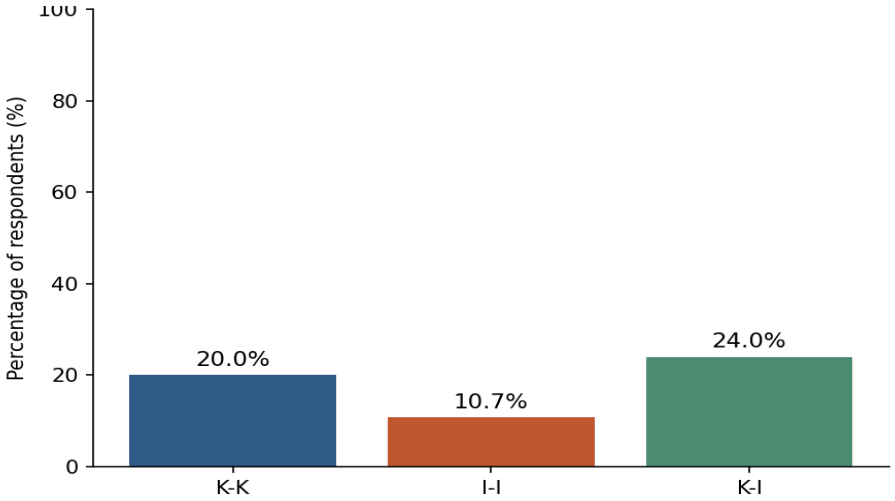


Figure 12. Persian spiritual content increased prayer frequency

5.4. Contemplative practice

Increased meditation or contemplative practice might reasonably be expected to pattern with the institutional measures above (prayer, mosque attendance) rather than with the benefit measures. It does not: K-K n=44/75 (58.7%), K-I n=36/75 (48.0%), I-I n=21/75 (28.0%), a spread as wide as the benefit measures in Section 5.3, following the same K-K > K-I > I-I ordering, with I-I lowest (adjusted ratios against I-I: 2.11 for K-K, interval 1.39 to 3.21, and 1.74 for K-I, 1.11 to 2.74). This is consistent with a distinction between individually-anchored and communally-anchored practice, although the data do not establish it. The relevant distinction would not be "spiritual versus non-spiritual" practice, but individually-anchored versus communally-anchored practice. Meditation requires no mosque, no congregation, no social confirmation; prayer in a communal sense and mosque attendance depend on an external social infrastructure that a piece of Instagram content cannot substitute for or create. Berger's (1967) concept of a plausibility structure - the surrounding social infrastructure that makes a religious worldview feel sustainable - offers one possible reason why such a distinction might exist: institutional practices are sustained by that infrastructure directly, while individually anchored practices depend far less on it. Because the mosque and prayer differences are small and their intervals overlap those of the benefit measures (Section 5.3), this is offered as a possible reading, not as an established finding.

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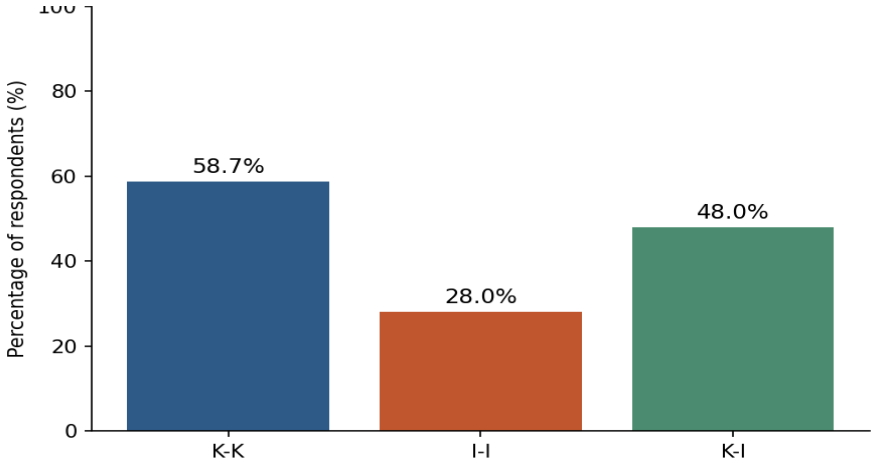


Figure 13. Persian spiritual content increased meditation/ contemplation

5.5. Why might the Kashmiri groups report more benefit than I-I?

Both Kashmiri groups, for whom Persian is not a native language (Section 4.3), report more benefit than I-I. K-K has the highest percentage on every one of the sixteen measures, but its difference from K-I is small and cannot be distinguished from chance, so the paper does not describe K-K as strongest. Stress/anxiety (K-K 58.7%, I-I 26.7%) and peace (K-K 50.7%, I-I 24.0%) illustrate the size of the gap with I-I.

Political constraint is offered here as one plausible explanation, not a measured one. This study did not include any survey item assessing respondents' experience of political restriction, and "constraint" is not something K-K respondents reported, it is an external contextual condition, documented independently through reporting on the region rather than assessed within this instrument. Treating it as the explanatory variable without that distinction would overstate what the data can show, and we do not do so here. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch's (1974) uses-and-gratifications logic, that media use intensifies where the needs it gratifies are least available elsewhere, is consistent with K-K's pattern, but so are two alternatives: demographic composition (K-K is the most female-skewed of the three groups and K-I the most male-skewed; however, women and men answered almost identically on every one of the 19 items, with male-to-female ratios of 0.66 to 1.43 and every interval including 1, and adjusting for gender and age changes the group ratios by 3.5% on average and by 12% at most; it leaves K-K clearly above I-I on every item, and moves four borderline K-I intervals across 1, two out (prayer and gratitude) and two in (psychological well-being and hope), Table 1) and a recruitment channel, the Persian department and religious schools discussed in Section 4.2, that may have selected for respondents already disposed toward strong religious and spiritual response, independent of anything

the content itself does. Recruitment channel is not recorded in the response file and could not be adjusted for, and because the three groups were recruited through different channels (Section 4.2), group cannot be separated from recruitment route. Gender and age can be set aside as explanations, but the constraint and recruitment explanations remain open, and this paper states that directly rather than defaulting to the theoretically most satisfying one.

5.6. Novelty and experimentation

Asked how attracted they were to varied, as opposed to narrowly familiar, spiritual content, K-K reported the strongest attraction to variety (n=23/75, 30.7% "greatly," n=38/75, 50.7% "moderately"), I-I a lower level (n=15/75, 20.0% and n=34/75, 45.3%), and K-I the lowest attraction to novelty (n=11/75, 14.7% "greatly") along with the highest combined "sparingly"/"never" total. K-I's lower attraction to novelty is only four respondents fewer than I-I's (n=11/75 against n=15/75 "greatly"), a difference too small to separate from chance.

The same ordering holds on a second, behaviourally distinct measure: whether social media helps respondents experiment with different spiritual traditions. K-K again leads (n=21/75, 28.0% "largely"), I-I is second (n=17/75, 22.7%), and K-I is lowest (n=14/75, 18.7%), with K-I also returning the highest "never" response of the three. K-I is three respondents below I-I on this measure (n=14/75 against n=17/75), again too small a difference to separate from chance. This is not a restatement of the attraction finding– attraction measures stated interest, these measures reported behaviour– and the two moving together strengthens the finding beyond what either shows alone.

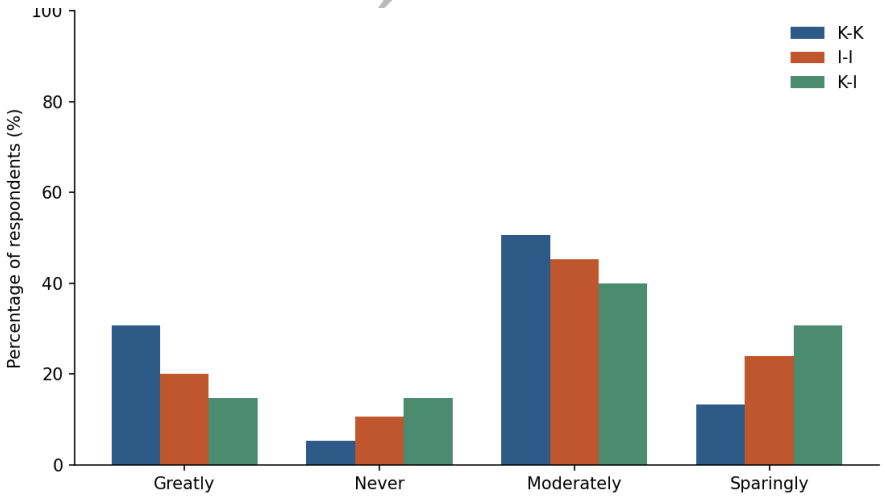


Figure 14. Attraction to varied spiritual content

Read alongside Section 3.1's identity/hybridity framework, and the finding in Section 5.2 that K-I shows the most even spread across all

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four languages, the lowest stated appetite for novelty in the group with the most even linguistic spread could be read as a tension. One possible reading is that K-I's breadth reflects an already-settled hybrid repertoire rather than ongoing exploration, consistent with Georgiou's (2006) account of diasporic in-betweenness as a resource that, once established, does not require constant renegotiation. The differences on which this reading rests are small, and it is offered as a possibility for future research, not as a finding.

A related measure asked whether exposure to Persian spiritual content had changed respondents' general entertainment habits on the platform. K-K reported the greatest change (n=21/75, 28.0% "great change"), K-I an intermediate level (n=17/75, 22.7%), and I-I the least (n=14/75, 18.7%), while I-I respondents were most likely to report no change at all (n=21/75, 28.0%, against n=14/75, 18.7% for K-K and n=17/75, 22.7% for K-I). On this measure K-I sits in the middle, rather than at either extreme, on how much this content has reshaped its general platform behaviour.

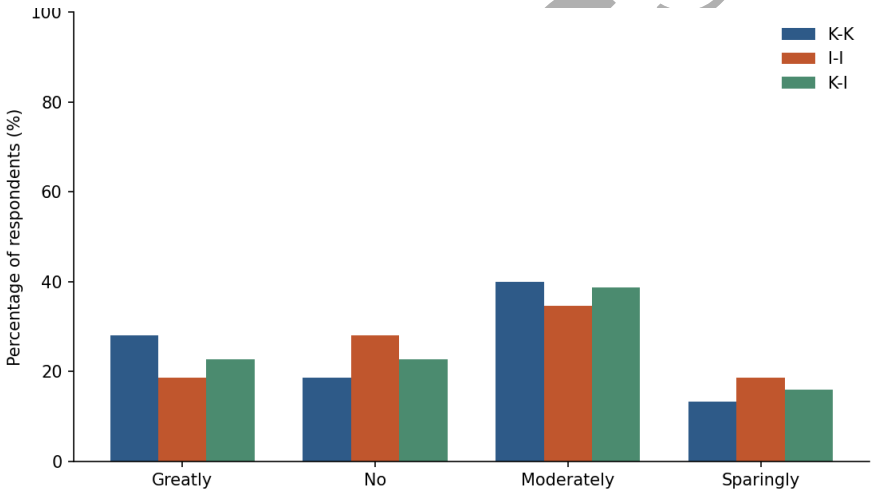


Figure 15. Change in entertainment engagement due to spiritual content

5.7. Platform preference, not platform legitimacy

Asked specifically which platform they use for Persian-language spiritual content, Instagram's dominance strengthens further across all three groups: K-K n=58/75 (77.3%), I-I n=64/75 (85.3%), K-I n=61/75 (81.3%). This is 4.0 to 5.3 points higher than the general-platform figure in Section 5.1 for every group, consistent with Instagram carrying particular strength for Persian-language content specifically rather than spiritual content generally. The remainder splits between YouTube (K-K n=14/75, 18.7%; I-I n=4/75, 5.3%; K-I n=7/75, 9.3%) and other platforms (K-K n=3/75, 4.0%; I-I n=7/75, 9.3%; K-I n=7/75, 9.3%).

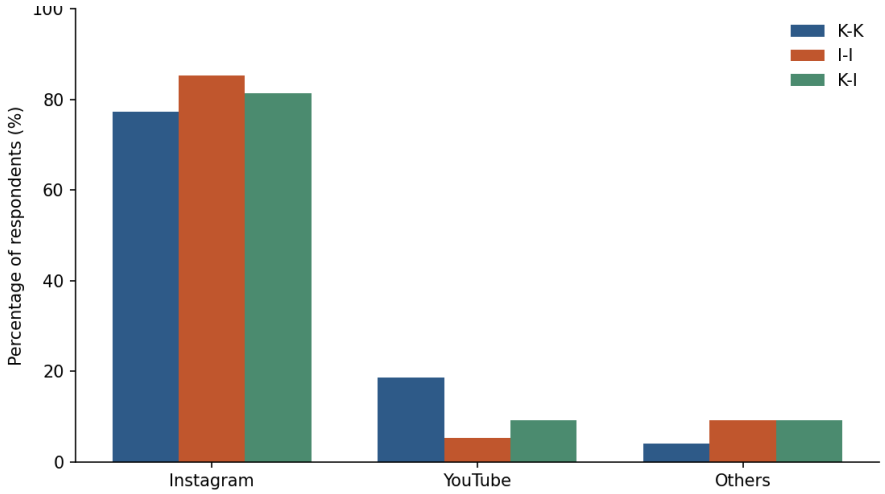


Figure 16. Platform used for Persian-language spiritual content (Q16)

This measures platform preference, not platform legitimacy, and the two should not be conflated. A respondent can name Instagram as their most-used platform for this content without regarding it as a sanctioned or spiritually appropriate space - and I-I and K-I respondents access Instagram exclusively through VPNs, given the platform's formal block in Iran since 2022. Heavy Instagram use, even under a government ban, doesn't prove people see it as legitimate, it could just as easily mean it's the only real option they have.

Choosing to circumvent a government ban specifically to reach this content is a costly signal; arguably harder-won evidence of genuine valuing than casual use of an unrestricted platform would be. This paper does not resolve which reading is correct. What it can say is that the present design cannot distinguish compelled use from valued use, and both remain live interpretations of the same behavioural fact.

A related measure asked whether Instagram is the best available platform for this content: K-K n=44/75 (58.7%), I-I n=49/75 (65.3%), K-I n=47/75 (62.7%) say yes. This is closer to an evaluative judgment than simple usage, but "best among the available options" is still not "legitimate as a space for religious practice"; a respondent can judge a platform the best of several imperfect or compelled choices without regarding it as spiritually sanctioned.

5.8. Trust and spiritual use

Asked how much they trust content on social media generally, K-K reports the highest "moderately trusting" figure (n=45/75, 60.0%), I-I second (n=39/75, 52.0%), K-I lowest (n=33/75, 44.0%), with K-I correspondingly highest on "sparingly" (n=34/75, 45.3%). K-I is six respondents below I-I on the "moderately trusting" figure (n=33/75 against n=39/75), a difference too small to separate from chance.

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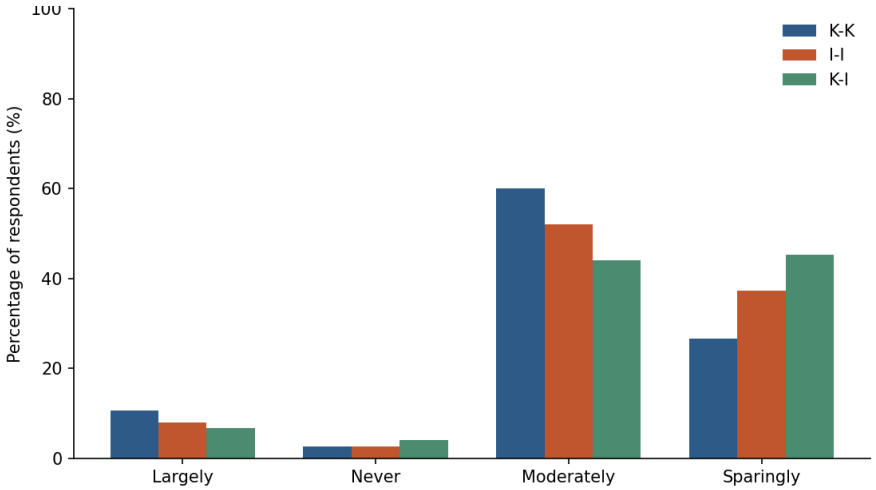


Figure 17. Trust in social media content generally

Asked directly whether they use social media to seek spiritual experience, K-K reports the highest "yes" (n=34/75, 45.3%), K-I midway between the other two groups (n=30/75, 40.0%), I-I lowest (n=26/75, 34.7%). K-K's trust and use move together here, both highest of the three groups, not a tension. K-I reports the lowest trust of the three groups (44.0%) while still reporting substantial use (40.0%, midway between K-K and I-I); a group expressing somewhat less confidence in what it encounters while continuing to engage with it. These differences are small (K-I is six respondents below I-I on trust and four above on use) and are reported descriptively, not treated as a separate pattern.

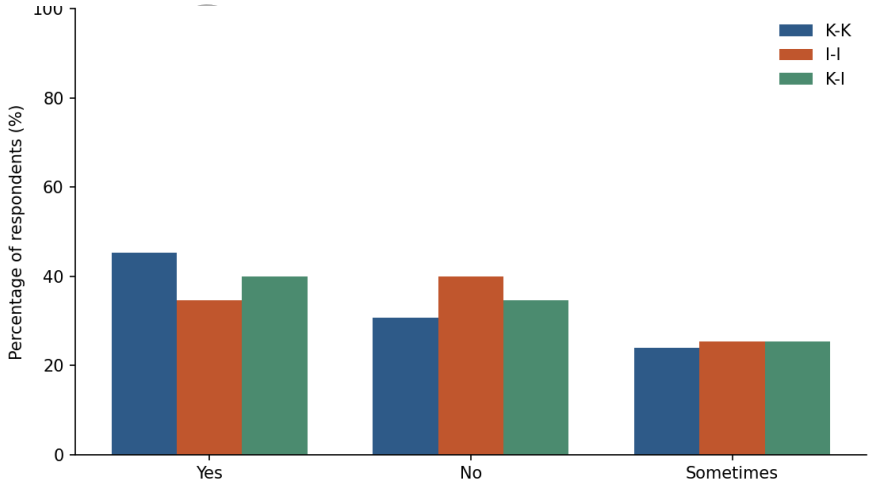


Figure 18. Use of social media to seek spiritual experience

If K-I's lower trust is more than a chance difference, Couldry's (2012) account of trust as situational rather than general would be the more precise fit for K-I specifically: a K-I respondent can doubt the factual reliability of a specific claim circulating on Instagram while separately judging the same content symbolically or emotionally meaningful, two judgments Goffman's (1974) frame analysis treats as capable of coexisting without one overriding the other.

6. Discussion: What this says about Instagram as a spiritual medium

Set side by side, the findings above resolve into three claims. One (Section 5.7) concerns platform preference, not acceptance, and shows near-uniformity with real variation underneath it once the full breakdown is examined. One (Section 5.1) is usage rhythm: K-K respondents most often use the platform daily and K-I respondents mostly weekly, with I-I between them, within every gender and age band. One (Sections 5.3-5.5) is that I-I respondents report fewer benefits than both Kashmiri groups, which cannot themselves be distinguished; institutional practice does not separate the groups clearly. Measures of novelty, trust and spiritual use (Sections 5.6 and 5.8) are reported descriptively, because their differences are too small to carry a separate claim.

Platform preference is close to uniform across the three groups (Section 5.7), but this paper does not read that as settled acceptance of Instagram as a legitimate spiritual medium. Preference among available platforms is not a normative judgment about a platform's religious appropriateness, and the instrument did not measure the latter. I-I and K-I access Instagram exclusively through VPNs, given the platform's formal block in Iran since 2022, and heavy use under an active ban is at least as consistent with Instagram being the only practical option as with any freely made judgment of legitimacy; though, as Section 5.7 notes directly, the opposite reading is equally available: circumventing a ban specifically for this content could be read as stronger evidence of valuing it, not weaker. What can be said is that all three groups have converged on the same platform in practice; why they have done so is not something this data can settle.

The clearest pattern that follows platform preference and usage rhythm is that I-I respondents report fewer benefits than both Kashmiri groups on all sixteen separately worded measures (clearly so against K-K on all sixteen and against K-I on ten); a consistency that strengthens the finding, but should be read alongside the general-response-tendency risk named in Section 7, since these sixteen items likely tap one or two broad underlying constructs rather than sixteen fully independent confirmations. Berger's (1967) concept of plausibility structures offers one possible reason why institutional practice might respond differently from the benefit measures: institutional practice depends on an ongoing social infrastructure a piece of Instagram content cannot substitute for, while affective outcomes may

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be more directly responsive to the content itself. The present data, however, do not establish that the institutional items differ from the benefit items (Section 5.3), so this is offered as a possibility, not an explanation. Contemplative practice patterns with the benefit measures, which is consistent with this possibility, since contemplation is individually rather than communally anchored.

The Kashmiri groups' higher reported benefit is where uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1974) does real work, offered as one plausible, unmeasured account among the three named in Section 5.5, not a settled explanation: media use intensifies where the needs it gratifies are least available elsewhere, and K-K, with the least direct access to the tradition's source, reports the highest percentages on all sixteen measures, though it cannot be distinguished from K-I. The present descriptive design cannot separate a Persian-content-specific effect from a general effect of any accessible source of psychological comfort under constrained conditions; this remains a genuine limitation, addressed directly in Section 7.

K-I's clearest distinguishing feature is its usage rhythm (Section 5.1): it is the group that most often uses the platform weekly, where K-K most often uses it daily. K-I also shows the most even language spread of the three groups (Section 5.2), but on the benefit, novelty, experimentation, trust and spiritual-use measures it sits between, or close to, the other groups (Sections 5.3, 5.6 and 5.8), and the small gaps against I-I on novelty, experimentation and trust (three to six respondents) do not support describing K-I as a distinct formation on those measures. Hybridity remains a possible reading of the rhythm difference, and Goffman's (1974) frame-analytic account of coexisting evaluative frames offers a possible reading of the combination of lower trust and continued use. We do not think the present data can rule out a simpler averaging explanation, and offer both readings as specific, testable claims for future inferential research, not settled findings.

The outcomes are self-reported benefits in non-probability samples that were not screened for exposure and were recruited through different channels: K-K partly from university lists, student groups and religious educational settings, I-I primarily through university networks, and K-I through Kashmiri diaspora groups on WhatsApp and Telegram. Differences between groups may therefore reflect who took part as well as what the content does. The physical-health result, which shows a K-K/I-I difference within the range of the other items (adjusted ratios 1.7 to 2.5), points the same way, since physical health is the item least plausibly moved by Instagram content. The paper therefore claims only that the groups differ in what they report, not that the content produces those differences.

7. Limitations and directions for future research

This study has five limits worth naming directly. First, and most

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importantly, the non-probability sampling design means the findings describe the sampled groups rather than generalising statistically to the broader populations they are drawn from, which also means that the ratios, odds ratios and intervals reported above are a guide to the size of differences relative to sampling noise, not inference to those populations. Second, the English-only instrument likely shaped who could and did respond in all three groups, plausibly toward more educated or internationally-oriented participants. Third, the consistent cross-outcome ordering noted in Section 5.3 raises the possibility of a general halo effect in respondents' self-reports, a tendency to answer several related wellbeing items in a similarly positive or negative direction regardless of each item's specific content, which the present design cannot rule out. A specific and relatively low-cost way to address this in a follow-up study would be to include at least one outcome item on which the theoretical framework predicts no cross-group difference (for instance, a general life-satisfaction measure not tied to Persian spiritual content specifically); if I-I's lower scores persisted even on such a control item, that would support the halo-effect explanation, while its absence would strengthen the substantive interpretation offered in Section 6. Fourth, data collection and analysis were both affected by significant, separately dated periods of internet disruption in Iran, detailed in Section 4.4.

None of these limits are fatal to what the study set out to do, describe and compare, but they mark out clearly what a next step would need to look like. A follow-up study using probability or matched-quota sampling, powered in advance for group-comparison tests (chi-square, ANOVA) and, ideally, exploratory factor analysis of the affective outcome items, could test directly whether K-I's usage rhythm reflects a distinct hybrid formation or a simpler blend of two other orientations, and whether the higher reported benefits in the Kashmiri groups reflect a Persian-content-specific effect, a general compensatory media-use pattern under political constraint, or a recruitment channel predisposed toward strong religious response; the competing, currently unresolved explanations named directly in Section 5.5, from which demographic composition has been set aside by the gender- and age-adjusted analysis. Three further limits apply to the ratios and odds ratios reported here. Recruitment channel is not recorded in the response file and could not be adjusted for; the intervals assume random sampling, which these samples do not provide, so they are only a guide to the size of differences relative to sampling noise; and no correction was made for the number of comparisons, so a few individual intervals excluding 1 could arise by chance, and the consistency of direction across items is more informative than any single interval.

A fifth, more specific limitation concerns Section 5.8's trust findings. The instrument measured trust and spiritual use as separate items, but did not measure the sequence in which respondents formed these evaluations,

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whether scepticism about content accuracy is arrived at before, after, or independently of spiritual engagement with the same material. A qualitative follow-up, using semi-structured interviews with a subset of K-I respondents specifically, would be well placed to establish whether the frame-analytic interpretation offered in Section 6 (separate, coexisting evaluative frames) matches how respondents themselves describe the relationship between their scepticism and their continued engagement, or whether a simpler explanation - that trust and use were interpreted as answering different practical questions rather than reflecting a genuine psychological split - better accounts for the pattern.

8. Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, this paper's central methodological suggestion is that comparative digital religion research should measure both affective/existential outcomes and institutional/devotional practice within the same instrument: doing so is what allowed the comparison between reported benefits and institutional practice in Sections 5.3-5.4 to be made at all, and it showed that, with samples of this size, the two cannot yet be separated, which is itself informative for the design of future studies. A second implication concerns diaspora and in-between groups specifically: this paper's data show that K-I's usage rhythm differs from both other groups' (Section 5.1), while on the benefit measures K-I sits between or close to the other groups, so whether such groups should be treated as a distinct formation or as a statistical midpoint remains an open empirical question.

Practically, for those designing religious or cultural content strategies aimed at diaspora or transnational Muslim youth audiences, the findings offer a specific caution: content that is associated with higher reported benefit for one audience may function quite differently, more as familiar, everyday practice, or as a bridge across an already-established linguistic and cultural repertoire, for other audiences encountering the same material from a different cultural position. These data cannot show whether digital spiritual content shapes mood, outlook, or individual contemplative practice, or whether it can substitute for the institutional structures that sustain formal religious observance; they show only that the groups differ in what they report.

Although this study examines one specific tradition and platform, the underlying pattern– near-uniform platform preference alongside divergent usage rhythm and reported benefit across source-country, external, and diasporic audiences– is not obviously specific to Persian Islamic spirituality or to Instagram. Similar three-way comparisons could, in principle, be run for other transnational spiritual and cultural traditions with an identifiable source country, an externally-located but historically connected population, and a diaspora population positioned between the two; whether the same pattern, lower reported benefit in the source-country audience and different usage rhythms across the

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three audiences, would recur in those cases is, we think, a genuinely open empirical question rather than a foregone conclusion, and one this paper's design offers a template for testing.

9. Conclusion

Instagram is, on this evidence, the platform of choice for Persian spiritual content across Kashmiri and Iranian youth audiences alike, converging near-uniformly despite very different conditions of access - including, for two of the three groups, a formal platform ban navigated through VPN use. This paper does not read that convergence as evidence of settled religious legitimacy; it reads it as the backdrop against which the real divergences become visible. Underneath that shared platform sit sharply different usage rhythms, content preferences, and– the paper's central finding– lower reported benefits among I-I respondents than among either Kashmiri group, supported across sixteen separate measures, with K-K and K-I indistinguishable and institutional devotional practice not clearly separating the groups. Read through a deliberately mixed theoretical toolkit, hybridity and diaspora theory for K-I's usage rhythm, plausibility structures as one possible reading of the difference between reported benefits and institutional practice, and uses and gratifications as one plausible, unmeasured account among several for the Kashmiri groups' higher reported benefit - these findings offer three specific, testable claims for future inferential research, and a demonstration that a shared platform can be used, and reported on, very differently by the different publics who use it.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the author on reasonable request.

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