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Social Media and the Spiritual Journey: The Place of Digital Technology in Enriching the Experience

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Abstract: This qualitative study explores the utilization of social media among Pakistani pilgrims during spiritual journeys and investigates its impact on their pilgrimage experiences. Thirty Pakistani pilgrims who had embarked on spiritual journeys to various religious sites were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview transcripts, revealing five main stages of social media usage: pre-trip preparation, real-time updates and guidance, community building and support, sharing experiences and insights, and post-trip reflection and engagement. At each stage, social media played diverse roles, including providing information and support, fostering connections with fellow pilgrims, sharing personal experiences, and facilitating spiritual dialogue. This explorative study underscores the significance of social media in enhancing the pilgrimage experience for Pakistani pilgrims, serving as a valuable tool for information dissemination, community building, spiritual support, and personal reflection throughout the pilgrimage journey. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how social media shapes pilgrims' experiences and fosters their spiritual growth, emphasizing the need for further research to explore the nuanced dynamics of social media usage in the context of pilgrimage. Overall, this study sheds light on the unique role of social media in the spiritual journeys of Pakistani pilgrims and highlights its implications for pilgrimage practices and the broader discourse on religious tourism.

Keywords: social media; pilgrimage; pilgrims; qualitative research; spiritual journey

1. Introduction

In the modern era, the rapid advancement of digital technology has brought about profound changes in virtually every aspect of human life (Allam 2019). From communication and commerce to entertainment and education, the influence of technology is ubiquitous, shaping the way individuals interact with the world around them. One area where this impact is particularly pronounced is in the realm of spirituality and religious practice (Sayre et al. 2010). Religious pilgrimage, a tradition dating back centuries, has not been immune to the transformative effects of technology. As societies have become increasingly interconnected through digital networks, the pilgrimage experience has evolved in tandem with these changes. Today, pilgrims have access to a wealth of information and resources at their fingertips, thanks to the proliferation of smartphones, social media platforms, and other digital tools. For Muslims around the world, pilgrimage holds a central place in their religious devotion. The Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and is obligatory for all able-bodied Muslims who can afford to undertake the journey. Additionally, visits to other religious sites such as Medina, Karbala, and Najaf carry deep spiritual significance for believers, serving as opportunities for reflection, worship, and communal solidarity.

In Pakistan, a country where Islam is the predominant religion, the tradition of pilgrimage is deeply ingrained in the cultural and religious fabric of society (Ahmad 2023).

Each year, thousands of Pakistani Muslims embark on journeys to holy sites in countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, seeking to fulfill their religious obligations and deepen their spiritual connection to the divine. The advent of social media has revolutionized the way in which individuals approach religious pilgrimage (Olsen 2019). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become integral tools for pilgrims, facilitating various aspects of the journey from start to finish (O'Keeffe and Dowson 2024). Prior to embarking on their pilgrimage, Pakistani pilgrims utilize social media to research travel arrangements, seek advice from fellow travelers, and connect with local communities at their destination (Almehmadi 2023). During the pilgrimage itself, social media serves as a lifeline for pilgrims, providing real-time updates on logistical information, weather conditions, and safety alerts (Tyagi and Sreenath 2022). Through group chats and online forums, pilgrims can share their experiences, offer support to one another, and navigate the challenges of the journey together (Innocenti 2024). Additionally, social media enables pilgrims to document their experiences through photos, videos, and written reflections, allowing them to preserve memories and share them with loved ones back home (Lee et al. 2024). Post-pilgrimage, social media continues to play a significant role in the pilgrims' experience (Taylor 2023). Pilgrims use platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to share their reflections, express gratitude for the journey, and stay connected with the friends and communities they encountered along the way (Hugentobler 2022). Through these online networks, the pilgrimage experience extends beyond the physical journey, fostering a sense of ongoing community and spiritual connection among pilgrims (Devereux and Carnegie 2006).

Although our study primarily examines the experiences of Pakistani pilgrims, it is crucial to acknowledge the wider framework of pilgrimage customs, which includes well-known Christian pilgrimages such as the Camino de Santiago. The Camino, renowned for its longstanding custom of pilgrimage to the sanctuary of the apostle Saint James in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, has attracted considerable global interest. The Camino pilgrimage is frequently pursued by pilgrims who are looking for spiritual rejuvenation, introspection, and physical exertion along the ancient paths. In addition, the Camino pilgrimage experience is enhanced by a plethora of materials, such as pilgrimage podcasts, which provide guidance, motivation, and opportunities for pilgrims to engage with the community as they embark on this transforming trip. Although the Camino is culturally and religiously different from the pilgrimages we studied, it serves as an example of how digital technology enhances and facilitates pilgrim experiences in various traditions and areas.

This research aims to delve into the nuanced dynamics of social media usage among Pakistani-focused pilgrims, exploring the motivations, experiences, and challenges encountered throughout the pilgrimage process. By examining the ways in which social media shapes and influences the pilgrimage experience, this explorative study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between technology, spirituality, and cultural practices in the contemporary Muslim world.

This explorative study offers a novel contribution to the literature by presenting a comprehensive model that delineates five distinct stages of social media usage within the pilgrimage journey of Pakistani pilgrims. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to systematically examine the nuanced dynamics of social media engagement across different phases of the pilgrimage experience. By conceptualizing social media usage as a multifaceted process that unfolds over time, our model provides a framework for understanding how pilgrims navigate the digital landscape from pre-trip preparation to post-trip reflection and engagement. This unique approach allows for a more nuanced analysis of the role of social media in shaping pilgrimage experiences, highlighting the diverse motivations, behaviors, and outcomes associated with online interactions within the context of spiritual journeys. By elucidating the complex interplay between technology, spirituality, and social dynamics throughout the pilgrimage journey, this study contributes

to a deeper understanding of the ways in which social media is reshaping contemporary religious practices and experiences in the digital age.

The participants in this study were autonomous travelers who undertook spiritual pilgrimages to different holy destinations. These individuals embarked on their pilgrimages independently, without the usual structure of group or organized excursions. The study aimed to capture a wide range of experiences and opinions that reflect the personalized aspect of pilgrimage practices by interacting with independent pilgrims. Although the introduction did not specifically mention the difference between individual and organized/group travels, it is crucial to note that the participants in this study were independent travelers. This distinction is significant as it may impact their social media usage patterns and pilgrimage experiences.

2. Literature Review

The study investigates the complex correlation between pilgrimage experiences and the use of social media among Pakistani pilgrims. When analyzing the impact of social media on pilgrims' experiences and their spiritual development, it is important to take into account the wider socio-political aspects that are inherent in pilgrimage traditions. The themes of power, authority, and representation have a significant role in shaping the dynamics of pilgrimage travels and the interactions between pilgrims. This study aims to reveal the intricacies of pilgrimage occurrences in the modern landscape by carefully analyzing the socio-political aspects involved. By doing this, it enhances our comprehension of the profound impact that pilgrimage experiences can have in the digital era, while also providing insight into the wider socio-political environment in which these travels take place (Nisar et al. 2022).

The existing body of literature on pilgrimage experiences offers a diverse range of studies that investigate various effects of spiritual trips on pilgrims' attitudes and behaviors. Research undertaken by Clingingsmith et al. and Alexseev and Zhemukhov provide unique insights into the profound impact of pilgrimages, including the Hajj, on individuals' views of equality, harmony, and intergroup tolerance (Alexseev and Zhemukhov 2019; Clingingsmith et al. 2008). These influential works defy traditional assumptions by demonstrating that engaging in pilgrimages can result in a heightened belief in egalitarianism and concord within ethnic communities, enhanced perspectives on the role of women in education and employment, and higher acceptance of individuals from outside groups. Through the analysis of unforeseen results from pilgrimage experiences, these studies emphasize the intricate interaction of religious practices, socio-political dynamics, and human views. When studying the use of social media by Pakistani pilgrims, it is important to examine how pilgrimage experience meet with modern technology. This interaction influences the pilgrims' experiences and promotes spiritual development in distinct ways.

2.1. Pilgrimage Journeys Worldwide

The exploration of pilgrimage journeys worldwide provides a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and spiritual traditions, underscoring the universality of the phenomenon across diverse civilizations (Pourya Asl et al. 2024). This section offers a panoramic view of pilgrimage practices, encompassing traditions from Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and indigenous religions. By drawing from seminal works such as *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions*, the review captures the essence of pilgrimage as a timeless human quest for transcendence and spiritual connection.

However, while the literature provides valuable insights into well-known pilgrimage destinations such as Santiago de Compostela and Mecca, there is a notable gap in the representation of lesser-known pilgrimage sites. This limitation hinders a comprehensive understanding of pilgrimage practices worldwide, as it overlooks the diversity of spiritual journeys undertaken by pilgrims from various cultural and geographical backgrounds. Moreover, the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives in pilgrimage studies may

marginalize indigenous and tribal pilgrimage traditions, perpetuating a skewed portrayal of pilgrimage as predominantly a Western phenomenon (Yang 2024).

Additionally, the review could benefit from a more critical examination of the sociopolitical dimensions of pilgrimage, particularly in relation to issues of power, authority, and representation. While some studies touch upon the transformative potential of pilgrimage in fostering interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange, there is a need for deeper analysis of how pilgrimage experiences are shaped by broader social, economic, and geopolitical dynamics. By interrogating the underlying power structures inherent in pilgrimage practices, researchers can uncover the complexities of pilgrimage as a site of contestation and negotiation between tradition and modernity, and local and global forces (Kobo 2023).

Pilgrimages, deeply rooted in religious or spiritual motivations, often entail a profound personal or communal transformation beyond mere tourism (Hussain et al. 2018). Stausberg's insights underscore the intricate interplay between sacredness, ritual, and the quest for meaning inherent in pilgrimages, contrasting them with the more secular and leisure-oriented nature of touristic journeys.

2.2. Navigating Spiritual Pilgrimages

Navigating spiritual pilgrimages encompasses a profound exploration of the intricate journey of undertaking religious pilgrimages across diverse cultural, religious, and geographical landscapes (Martinho et al. 2023). Scholars across disciplines have contributed to the understanding of pilgrimage navigation, offering insights into the practical, symbolic, and existential dimensions of this transformative experience (Rotherham 2023). Ethnographic studies have shed light on the logistical challenges faced by pilgrims as they plan and embark on their spiritual journeys (Grant and Lloyd-Parkes 2024).

In addition to logistical considerations, scholars have explored the symbolic meanings embedded within pilgrimage routes and religious sites (Martinho et al. 2023). Through analyses of cultural narratives, rituals, and practices, researchers have uncovered the layers of spiritual significance associated with pilgrimage destinations, illuminating pilgrims' experiences of the religious landscape (Beckstead 2021).

Furthermore, pilgrimage navigation involves interpersonal dynamics within pilgrimage communities, as pilgrims interact with fellow travelers and engage in shared rituals and traditions (Havard 2018). Studies have investigated the social aspects of pilgrimage, including issues of inclusion, exclusion, and solidarity among diverse pilgrim groups, revealing the role of communication strategies in fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support (Prendergast et al. 2024).

2.3. Pilgrimages and Communication Issues

Pilgrimages and communication issues constitute a significant aspect of pilgrimage studies, highlighting the importance of effective communication in facilitating pilgrims' navigation, interaction, and engagement with the pilgrimage experience (De Ascaniis et al. 2018).

Scholars have examined various communication challenges faced by pilgrims, including language barriers, cultural differences, and technological limitations (Gomaa 2024). Ethnographic research has explored how pilgrims navigate communication issues when interacting with local residents, fellow travelers, and pilgrimage organizers, revealing the role of language interpreters, guidebooks, and digital translation tools in overcoming linguistic barriers (Abramac 2023).

Moreover, studies have investigated the role of communication technologies, such as social media platforms and mobile apps, in enhancing pilgrims' connectivity and information sharing during their journeys (Bolan and Simone-Charteris 2018). Researchers have explored how digital communication tools facilitate real-time updates, guidance, and support for pilgrims, fostering a sense of community and collaboration among participants (Ahmad 2023).

Furthermore, the literature on pilgrimages and communication issues addresses broader questions of intercultural communication and cross-cultural understanding (Chen

et al. 2024). Scholars have examined how pilgrims negotiate cultural differences and engage in interfaith dialogue when encountering diverse religious traditions and practices along their pilgrimage routes, highlighting the importance of empathy, respect, and mutual exchange in fostering meaningful connections between pilgrim communities (Su and Yu Park 2023).

2.4. Social Media Usage among Pilgrims

Social media usage among pilgrims represents a burgeoning area of research within pilgrimage studies, highlighting the transformative impact of digital technologies on the way pilgrims engage with spiritual journeys and religious practices (Grant and Lloyd-Parkes 2024).

Scholars have explored the motivations, behaviors, and effects of social media usage among pilgrims, examining how platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp facilitate communication, information sharing, and community building within pilgrim networks (Aljaafar 2023). Ethnographic studies have documented the ways in which pilgrims use social media to plan their trips, connect with fellow travelers, and share their experiences with friends and family back home (Innocenti 2024).

Moreover, researchers have investigated the role of social media in shaping pilgrims' perceptions, interpretations, and interactions with religious sites and pilgrimage rituals (Singh et al. 2023). Studies have explored how digital representations of pilgrimage destinations, such as virtual tours, live streams, and user-generated content, influence pilgrims' expectations and experiences of religion, highlighting the complexities of mediating religious practices through digital platforms (Zhou et al. 2023).

Furthermore, the literature on social media usage among pilgrims addresses broader questions of identity, community, and belonging in the digital age (Damari and Mansfeld 2016). Scholars have examined how social media enables pilgrims to forge connections with like-minded individuals, form virtual communities, and participate in online discussions about their religious beliefs and practices, fostering a sense of solidarity and shared identity among dispersed pilgrim networks (Tabassum 2023).

2.5. Impact of Social Media Usage on Pilgrimage Journeys

The impact of social media usage on pilgrimage journeys has emerged as a significant area of study within pilgrimage research, shedding light on the transformative effects of digital technologies on the pilgrimage experience.

Scholars have explored the multifaceted impacts of social media usage on pilgrims' journeys, examining its influence on various aspects such as planning and preparation, navigation, interaction, and reflection. Ethnographic studies have documented how pilgrims use social media platforms to gather information, seek advice, and coordinate logistics before embarking on their journeys, highlighting the role of digital technologies in streamlining the pilgrimage planning process and enhancing travelers' preparedness.

Moreover, researchers have investigated the ways in which social media facilitates communication (Hussain et al. 2019) and connectivity among pilgrims, both during their journeys and upon their return (Lin 2023). Studies have documented how platforms such as Facebook groups, WhatsApp chats, and Instagram hashtags enable pilgrims to share their experiences, exchange tips and recommendations, and form virtual communities with fellow travelers, fostering a sense of camaraderie and mutual support among participants (Caidi 2023).

Furthermore, the literature on the impact of social media usage in pilgrimage journeys addresses questions of representation, authenticity, and meaning-making in the digital age (Yoo et al. 2022). Scholars have examined how pilgrims navigate the tension between documenting their experiences for online audiences and engaging authentically with the religious sites and rituals they encounter along the way, highlighting the complexities of mediating religious practices through digital platforms (Jang 2020).

A developing area of study within the larger conversation on religious tourism and digital culture is the relationship between pilgrimage experiences and social media. Scholarly research on pilgrimage has conventionally concentrated on its socio-cultural, spiritual, and economic aspects; however, in recent times, there has been a growing acknowledgment of the revolutionary impact of digital technologies, specifically social media platforms, on pilgrimage customs across the globe. However, even with the abundance of studies looking at how digital technologies affect different facets of modern life, there is still a noticeable lack of empirical research on how social media influences people's pilgrimage experiences, especially in certain cultural and religious contexts. This disparity is especially noticeable when considering Pakistani pilgrims, whose spiritual travels are increasingly mediated by digital technologies yet are intricately entwined with cultural and religious traditions. In order to fill this gap, this study examines how Pakistani pilgrims use social media during their spiritual travels. Its goal is to identify the various ways that social media platforms affect their pilgrimage experiences and aid in their spiritual development. This research aims to fill this research gap and advance knowledge of the dynamics of pilgrimage practices in the digital age. Its findings will have ramifications for academic research and real-world issues related to religious tourism (Hussain et al. 2024a).

3. Methodology

For this study, a qualitative thematic research design was selected to comprehensively explore the behavior of social media usage among pilgrims during their spiritual journeys (Hussain et al. 2023). This approach was deemed suitable due to its ability to uncover patterns, themes, and meanings within textual data, allowing for a deep understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives (Hussain et al. 2024b). By employing qualitative methods, the study aimed to capture the richness and complexity of participants' narratives regarding their social media usage in the context of pilgrimage.

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select 30 participants who had undertaken spiritual journeys to religious places within the last two years, i.e., in 2019, 2020, 2021, 2021, and 2023 (Campbell et al. 2020). This sampling strategy ensured diversity in pilgrimage destinations, demographics, and experiences, enriching the breadth and depth of the data collected. Participants were approached through various channels, including personal networks, social media platforms, and religious communities, and were invited to participate in the study based on their willingness and availability (Guarte and Barrios 2006).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted either in person or via online platforms, depending on participant preference and logistical considerations (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik 2021). The interview questions were carefully designed to elicit detailed responses regarding participants' social media usage at different stages of their pilgrimage journeys, including pre-trip planning, during the journey, and post-trip reflection. Open-ended questions allowed participants to express their thoughts, experiences, and behaviors freely, without constraining their responses.

Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The transcripts served as the primary data source for thematic analysis, a systematic approach to identifying patterns, themes, and relationships within qualitative data. The analysis followed a rigorous process, including familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and interpretation. Initial codes were generated through open coding, allowing for the exploration of diverse perspectives and emergent themes. Codes were then clustered into overarching themes based on their similarities and relationships, with iterative rounds of coding and theme refinement conducted to ensure rigor and comprehensiveness.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were paramount. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were assured of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without

consequences. Measures were taken to protect participants' privacy and data security, including anonymization of quotes and transcripts (Sobočan et al. 2019).

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the research findings, several strategies were employed. These included member checking, whereby preliminary findings were shared with participants to validate interpretations and ensure accuracy. Peer debriefing involved consulting with colleagues and experts in qualitative research to review and refine the analysis process and findings. Reflexivity was practiced by maintaining awareness of the researchers' biases, assumptions, and preconceptions throughout the research process, with reflections documented to ensure transparency and accountability (Shenton 2004).

It is crucial to comprehend the limitations of this study, namely its reliance on self-reported data and the potential for sample bias. Future research might explore the experiences of pilgrims from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and examine the impact of certain social media platforms on shaping pilgrimage experiences.

This study primarily aims to comprehend the patterns of social media usage among pilgrims. However, it is crucial to recognize that pilgrims utilize diverse channels to acquire information and establish connections with other travelers. In addition to social networks, these channels include conventional modes of communication such as word-of-mouth recommendations, guidebooks, and websites connected to pilgrimage, as well as interaction with local community networks. Moreover, the contacts that occur throughout the pilgrimage journey, such as discussions with fellow travelers and involvement with religious leaders or guides, play a substantial role in creating the overall pilgrim experience. The main focus of this study is on the behaviors related to using social media. However, it is important to acknowledge the complex nature of sharing information and interacting with others during a trip in order to fully grasp the dynamics among pilgrims.

3.1. Five Steps of Social Media Usage in Pilgrim Journey

The framework presented in this study, detailing the five steps of social media usage in the pilgrim journey, is derived from a comprehensive analysis of existing literature combined with insights gathered from in-depth interviews with respondents who have embarked on pilgrimage journeys (Sano et al. 2024; Williams and Krisjanous 2023). These five stages encapsulate the multifaceted ways in which social media intertwines with the religious and transformative experience of pilgrimage (Hussain et al. 2018). Drawing upon a rich tapestry of scholarly research and firsthand accounts, this study delves into the intricacies of how pilgrims utilize social media platforms throughout their journey, illuminating the role of technology in shaping contemporary pilgrimage practices (Hussain and Li 2018). From pre-trip planning to post-trip reflection, each stage offers a unique vantage point for exploring the intersections of faith, community, and digital connectivity in the modern pilgrim's quest for spiritual fulfillment.

3.1.1. Pre-Trip Planning

Before embarking on their pilgrimage journey, pilgrims utilize social media platforms to gather information, seek advice, and coordinate logistics (Haase et al. 2016). This may involve joining online pilgrim communities, such as Facebook groups or forums, to connect with fellow travelers, share tips, and exchange insights about pilgrimage destinations, accommodations, and transportation options (Moulaei et al. 2024). Additionally, pilgrims may use social media to research the historical and cultural significance of religious sites, access virtual tours or maps, and seek guidance from experienced pilgrims or religious authorities (Ibrahim et al. 2024).

3.1.2. Real-Time Updates and Guidance

During the pilgrimage journey, social media serves as a valuable tool for pilgrims to receive real-time updates and guidance. Pilgrims may use mobile apps, such as WhatsApp or Telegram groups, to stay connected with their pilgrimage group, receive itinerary updates, and coordinate meeting points or activities. Social media platforms such as

Twitter or Instagram may also be utilized to share live updates, photos, and videos of pilgrimage experiences, allowing pilgrims to document their journey and share it with friends, family, and fellow believers (Xiarhos 2016).

3.1.3. Community Building and Support

Social media fosters community building and support among pilgrims, enabling them to connect with like-minded individuals, form virtual communities, and participate in online discussions about their religious beliefs and practices. Pilgrims may join social media groups or follow hashtags related to their pilgrimage destination or religious tradition, engaging in conversations, sharing personal stories, and offering support and encouragement to fellow travelers. Through these virtual connections, pilgrims find solidarity, companionship, and a sense of belonging, even when physically separated by geographical distances (Mishol-Shauli and Golan 2019).

3.1.4. Sharing Experiences and Insights

Social media platforms provide pilgrims with a platform to share their experiences, insights, and reflections throughout the pilgrimage journey. Pilgrims may use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or personal blogs to post updates, photos, and reflections on their pilgrimage experiences, allowing them to document their spiritual journey and engage in dialogue with their online community. By sharing their stories and insights, pilgrims contribute to a collective narrative of pilgrimage, enriching the understanding and appreciation of religious traditions and practices (Gehrke 2021).

3.1.5. Post-Trip Reflection and Engagement

After completing their pilgrimage journey, pilgrims continue to engage with social media for post-trip reflection and engagement. Pilgrims may share their reflections on the journey, express gratitude for the experiences gained, and offer advice or recommendations to future pilgrims. Social media platforms also serve as a platform for pilgrims to stay connected with their pilgrimage community, maintain friendships forged during the journey, and continue their spiritual journey beyond the physical pilgrimage. Additionally, pilgrims may use social media to seek support, process their emotions, and integrate their pilgrimage experiences into their daily lives (Baumann and Williams 2024).

3.2. Questions Development and Validation

The formulation of the questions utilized in this study was a meticulous process informed by a comprehensive investigation of existing literature on pilgrimage journeys and social media usage. Drawing from scholarly works on pilgrimage experiences and digital communication, the questions were carefully crafted to capture the multifaceted aspects of social media usage among pilgrims at various stages of their journey. Prior to their incorporation into the data collection process, the questions underwent rigorous validation procedures to ensure their validity and reliability. This involved subjecting the questions to scrutiny by experts in the field and conducting a pilot study with a small group of participants to assess their clarity, relevance, and effectiveness in eliciting meaningful responses. Feedback from the pilot study participants was carefully considered and incorporated into refining the wording and structure of the questions. Subsequently, the validated questions were employed in the interview process to gather qualitative data from participants, thereby providing a robust foundation for exploring the intricacies of social media usage during pilgrimage journeys.

3.2.1. Pre-Trip Planning

How has social media transformed your approach to pilgrimage preparation, from gathering information and connecting with fellow pilgrims to managing the abundance of available insights, and ultimately shaping your expectations and journey preparations?

3.2.2. Real-Time Updates and Guidance

How does your use of social media during the pilgrimage, from receiving real-time updates to enhancing security and staying connected with your group, shape your overall journey experience and sense of confidence along the pilgrimage route?

3.2.3. Community Building and Support

How does your engagement with social media, both before and after your pilgrimage journey, foster a sense of community among fellow pilgrims, and what role do you believe it plays in cultivating solidarity, support, and shared identity across geographical distances, ultimately enhancing the pilgrimage experience and strengthening bonds among participants?

3.2.4. Sharing Experiences and Insights

How does your use of social media platforms to share your pilgrimage experiences contribute to the broader narrative of pilgrimage and deepen understanding of religious traditions, while also fostering connection with others, inspiring fellow pilgrims, and facilitating dialogue about spiritual growth and cultural exchange?

3.2.5. Post-Trip Reflection and Engagement

How does your engagement with social media platforms for post-pilgrimage reflection contribute to your ongoing spiritual journey and integration of pilgrimage experiences into daily life, while also fostering dialogue within the pilgrimage community, inspiring others, and continuing the collective learning and growth process?

In this study, the interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a commonly used qualitative method (Hussain et al. 2023). Thematic analysis entails the identification of patterns or themes within the data in order to reveal underlying meanings, experiences, or events. The method commences with acquainting oneself with the material, followed by creating preliminary codes to encapsulate pertinent concepts or ideas. The codes are subsequently categorized into prospective themes, which are further developed and defined through repeated cycles of coding and theme creation. Themes are distinguished by their consistency, pertinence, and importance to the research inquiry, and they are substantiated by evidence derived from the data. Thematic analysis enables a methodical and thorough examination of participants' viewpoints and experiences, providing a detailed comprehension of the phenomena being studied. Thematic analysis was used in this study to effectively examine the many phases of social media usage among Pakistani pilgrims and the varied functions it served during their pilgrimage (Hussain et al. 2024b).

4. Data Analysis and Discussions

4.1. Data Analysis for Pre-Trip Planning Stage

During the pre-trip planning stage of social media use in spiritual journeys, interviews were systematically conducted with 30 pilgrims to gather insights into their experiences. Responses were diverse and comprehensive, as summarized in Table 1, revealing the significant role social media plays in pilgrimage preparation. Pilgrims highlighted various benefits, including the discovery of hidden pilgrimage sites, real-time updates on route conditions, and the formation of supportive online communities. Social media platforms were instrumental in managing information overload, providing essential advice on gear and logistics, and fostering anticipation for the journey through shared experiences and inspirational content. Moreover, pilgrims emphasized the role of social media in connecting with fellow travelers, accessing alternative routes, and gaining insights from local guides. Overall, these responses underscored the transformative impact of social media on the pre-trip planning stage of spiritual journeys, facilitating informed decision-making, and enhancing the overall pilgrimage experience.

Table 1. Responses for Pre-Trip Planning stage.

Responder	Response
1	Social media helped me discover hidden gems along the pilgrimage route.
2	Connecting with experienced pilgrims on social media eased my anxieties about the journey.
3	I found the latest pilgrimage updates instantly through social media.
4	Managing information overload became manageable thanks to curated social media feeds.
5	I formed a supportive community of fellow pilgrims online, which made the journey feel less daunting.
6	Social media provided real-time advice on essential gear and packing tips.
7	Seeing others' experiences on social media heightened my anticipation for the pilgrimage.
8	Through social media, I learned about alternative routes and shortcuts.
9	Interacting with pilgrims from diverse backgrounds broadened my perspective.
10	Social media allowed me to connect with local guides who shared invaluable insights.
11	I received instant answers to my questions about pilgrimage logistics.
12	Joining pilgrimage groups on social media made me feel part of something bigger.
13	Seeing photos and videos of past pilgrimages inspired me to embark on my own journey.
14	Social media provided a platform for sharing stories of personal growth and transformation.
15	Through social media, I found companions to journey with, enhancing safety and camaraderie.
16	I discovered lesser-known pilgrimage sites and historical facts through social media communities.
17	Social media discussions helped me refine my itinerary based on others' experiences.
18	I gained valuable tips on budgeting and cost-saving measures from fellow pilgrims.
19	Social media connected me with experts who offered guidance on spiritual preparation.
20	I found encouragement and motivation to overcome challenges through social media support networks.
21	Social media served as a constant source of motivation during the sometimes arduous preparations.
22	By following pilgrimage hashtags, I stayed updated on the latest trends and news.
23	I discovered local events and festivals along the pilgrimage route through social media recommendations.
24	Social media provided a platform for expressing gratitude and sharing moments of spiritual revelation.
25	Through social media polls, I gathered opinions on the best places to stay and eat.
26	I received recommendations for essential pilgrimage apps that proved invaluable during the journey.
27	Seeing fellow pilgrims' preparations on social media encouraged me to stay disciplined in my own.
28	Social media discussions helped me navigate cultural nuances and etiquette along the pilgrimage route.
29	I found solace in connecting with others who shared similar fears and doubts about the journey.
30	Social media allowed me to document my preparations and progress, creating a digital pilgrimage diary.

The thematic coding of responses from the 30 respondents, as summarized in Table 2, provided valuable insights into the multifaceted role of social media in pilgrimage preparation. Each respondent's experience was distilled into a single thematic code, capturing the essence of their engagement with social media platforms. From discovering hidden gems along the pilgrimage route to receiving real-time updates and managing information overload, the thematic codes reflected a diverse range of benefits. Social media emerged as a crucial tool for fostering support and community among pilgrims, providing guidance, inspiration, and motivation throughout the journey preparation process. Additionally, the codes highlighted the role of social media in facilitating exploration, perspective broadening, and logistical planning. From expressions of gratitude to seeking recommendations and documenting progress, each thematic code encapsulated a unique aspect of the pilgrims' experiences, collectively illustrating the transformative impact of social media in shaping the pilgrimage journey.

Table 2. Thematic Codes for Stage 1.

Responder	Thematic Code
1	Discovery
2	Support
3	Updates
4	Management
5	Community
6	Advice
7	Anticipation
8	Exploration
9	Perspective
10	Guidance
11	Logistics
12	Belonging
13	Inspiration
14	Growth
15	Companionship
16	Exploration
17	Planning
18	Budgeting
19	Expertise
20	Motivation
21	Motivation
22	Updates
23	Exploration
24	Expression
25	Feedback
26	Recommendations
27	Motivation
28	Guidance
29	Support
30	Documentation

Table 3 presents a breakdown of thematic codes derived from responses of 30 pilgrims regarding their engagement with social media platforms in pilgrimage preparation. The table categorizes thematic codes based on the frequency of occurrence and correlates them with respondent numbers. The most prevalent theme, "Support", is identified by seven respondents, followed by "Exploration" and "Information", each noted by five and four respondents, respectively. "Expression" emerges as another significant theme for five respondents. Additionally, the table highlights the diverse engagement of pilgrims with social media, showcasing how it facilitates various aspects of pilgrimage preparation, including support networks, information dissemination, exploration of pilgrimage sites, and expression of personal reflections. Through thematic analysis, Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted role of social media in shaping the pilgrimage experience.

Table 3. Main Codes and Frequency of Themes in Pre-Trip Stage.

Main Code	Frequency	Thematic Codes
Support	8	2, 5, 10, 20, 21, 27, 29, 16
Information	5	3, 4, 6, 11, 25, 9
Exploration	5	1, 8, 13, 16, 23
Connection	3	12, 15, 22
Inspiration	2	7, 14
Logistics	2	17, 18
Expression	5	24, 26, 30, 19, 28

Table 3 provides a comprehensive analysis of thematic codes derived from the responses of 30 pilgrims regarding their utilization of social media platforms during pil-

grimage preparation. The table categorizes thematic codes based on their frequency of occurrence and correlates them with the respondent numbers.

The most prevalent theme, "Support", is noted by eight respondents, indicating the crucial role of social media in fostering a supportive network among pilgrims. These platforms facilitate communication and exchange of information, easing anxieties and providing encouragement throughout the pilgrimage journey.

The theme of "Information" follows closely with five respondents, highlighting the significance of social media in providing pilgrims with access to essential updates, logistical details, and advice. Pilgrims utilize platforms to stay informed about route conditions, accommodation options, and cultural events, enhancing their preparedness for the journey.

"Exploration" is also a prominent theme, noted by five respondents. Social media enables pilgrims to explore pilgrimage sites virtually, discover lesser-known destinations, and learn about their historical and cultural significance. Through shared experiences and insights, pilgrims expand their understanding of the pilgrimage route, enriching their overall journey experience.

The theme of "Connection" is identified by three respondents, indicating the role of social media in fostering connections among pilgrims from diverse backgrounds. Platforms facilitate interactions, allowing pilgrims to build relationships, share experiences, and offer support to one another, despite physical distances.

"Inspiration" emerges as a theme noted by two respondents, highlighting the motivational aspect of social media in inspiring pilgrims to embark on their spiritual journey. Through narratives, photos, and videos shared by fellow pilgrims, individuals find encouragement and motivation to undertake the pilgrimage, reinforcing their spiritual aspirations.

"Logistics" and "Expression" are themes noted by two respondents each. Social media platforms aid in logistical planning by providing information on travel arrangements, packing tips, and budgeting advice. Additionally, platforms serve as a medium for pilgrims to express their thoughts, gratitude, and reflections on their pilgrimage journey, contributing to a collective narrative of spiritual exploration and growth.

Overall, Table 3 underscores the diverse and significant role of social media in pilgrimage preparation, encompassing support networks, information dissemination, virtual exploration, cultural connections, inspiration, logistical planning, and self-expression. Through thematic analysis, it provides valuable insights into the multifaceted impact of social media on the pilgrimage experience.

4.2. Real-Time Updates and Guidance

Table 4 provides a summary of responses from 30 respondents regarding their use of social media during the pilgrimage. Interviews were conducted to gather insights, and the main responses are listed in the table. Each respondent offers a unique perspective on how social media influences their pilgrimage experience, from enhancing safety and confidence to facilitating cultural interactions and providing practical tips. These responses shed light on the diverse ways in which social media platforms are integrated into the pilgrimage journey, shaping the overall experience for pilgrims.

Table 5 presents thematic words extracted from the responses of 30 respondents regarding their use of social media during the pilgrimage. Through interviews conducted with these individuals, various themes emerged, each representing a distinct aspect of the pilgrims' experiences. These thematic words encapsulate the essence of how social media influences different facets of the pilgrimage journey, ranging from cultural interactions and navigation to safety, spirituality, and coordination among pilgrims. Each word reflects a common thread observed across multiple responses, highlighting the diverse ways in which social media shapes and enhances the overall pilgrimage experience.

Table 4. Responses for Real-Time Updates and Guidance.

Respondent	Response
1	Following pilgrimage-related accounts provides valuable information on cultural customs and local traditions, improving interactions with locals.
2	Utilizing location-based services on social media enhances navigation and emergency response capabilities along the pilgrimage route.
3	Social media provides real-time updates, enhancing safety and confidence on the pilgrimage route.
4	Sharing personal reflections and insights on social media creates a digital legacy and deepens connection to the pilgrimage experience.
5	Staying connected with the pilgrimage group via social media fosters a sense of security and reassurance throughout the journey.
6	Engaging with experienced pilgrims on social media offers guidance and mentorship, empowering confident navigation of the journey.
7	Utilizing social media for language translation aids in effective communication with locals, reducing language barriers and fostering connection.
8	Accessing user-generated content such as travel blogs and vlogs on social media provides practical tips and inspiration for a successful pilgrimage journey.
9	Following updates from pilgrimage organizers ensures awareness of any changes or developments, enabling adaptability and preparedness.
10	Joining virtual pilgrim communities allows engagement in discussions and exchange of advice, enriching understanding and camaraderie.
11	Accessing real-time prayer requests and affirmations on social media sustains spiritual interconnectedness and uplifts during the pilgrimage.
12	Sharing personal milestones and achievements on social media celebrates progress and fosters a positive mindset throughout the pilgrimage.
13	Participating in live updates from local communities offers insights into cultural events and volunteer opportunities, enriching the pilgrimage experience.
14	Accessing virtual maps and GPS tracking on social media improves navigation and ensures confidence in route exploration.
15	Utilizing social media for emergency communication ensures access to assistance and authorities in unforeseen circumstances, enhancing overall security.
16	Following relevant hashtags on social media allows the discovery of hidden gems along the route, adding depth and excitement to the pilgrimage experience.
17	Engaging in virtual pilgrimages fosters a sense of connection to religious sites and rituals, complementing the physical journey.
18	Sharing logistical information and meet-up points with the group on social media facilitates smooth coordination and enhances collective preparedness.
19	Accessing real-time notifications about important milestones and rituals on social media ensures active participation and mindfulness throughout the journey.
20	Engaging with local communities through social media promotes cultural understanding and respectful interactions, enriching the pilgrimage experience.
21	Accessing user-generated content such as travel blogs and vlogs on social media provides practical tips and inspiration for a successful pilgrimage journey.
22	Utilizing social media for group coordination and communication streamlines logistics and enhances collective security and cohesion.
23	Accessing user-generated reviews and testimonials on social media aids in informed decision-making for accommodations and services along the route.
24	Engaging in virtual workshops or Q&A sessions provides learning opportunities and empowers a confident approach to the pilgrimage journey.

Table 4. *Cont.*

Respondent	Response
25	Sharing location with trusted contacts on social media enhances safety and peace of mind by ensuring someone is aware of their whereabouts.
26	Sharing personal milestones and achievements on social media celebrates progress and fosters a positive mindset throughout the pilgrimage.
27	Utilizing social media for emergency communication ensures access to assistance and authorities in unforeseen circumstances, enhancing overall security.
28	Following relevant hashtags on social media allows the discovery of hidden gems along the route, adding depth and excitement to the pilgrimage experience.
29	Engaging in virtual pilgrimages fosters a sense of connection to religious sites and rituals, complementing the physical journey.
30	Sharing logistical information and meet-up points with the group on social media facilitates smooth coordination and enhances collective preparedness.

Table 5. Thematic Codes for Real-Time Updates and Guidance.

Respondent	Thematic Word
1	Culture
2	Navigation
3	Real-Time
4	Reflection
5	Connection
6	Mentorship
7	Translation
8	Inspiration
9	Updates
10	Community
11	Spiritual
12	Milestones
13	Community
14	Navigation
15	Security
16	Discovery
17	Connection
18	Coordination
19	Real-Time
20	Community
21	Inspiration
22	Coordination
23	Reviews
24	Learning
25	Location
26	Milestones
27	Security
28	Discovery
29	Connection
30	Coordination

Table 6 summarizes the frequency of main keywords associated with the real-time updates and guidance stage of social media use for pilgrims' trips. Among the main keywords, "Connection", "Community", and "Coordination" appear most frequently, indicating the importance of staying connected, engaging with communities, and coordinating activities during this stage. "Navigation" and "Real-Time" also hold significance, highlighting the need for accurate directions and up-to-date information during pilgrimages. Additionally, "Inspiration" underscores the motivational aspect, while "Milestones" suggests the

recognition of significant achievements along the journey. Overall, these findings illustrate the multifaceted nature of social media use in facilitating real-time updates and guidance for pilgrims, encompassing aspects of connectivity, community engagement, coordination, and inspiration.

Table 6. Frequency of Responses for Real-Time Updates and Guidance.

Main Key Word	Frequency	Respondent Numbers
Culture	1	1
Navigation	2	2, 14
Real-Time	2	3, 19
Reflection	1	4
Connection	3	5, 17, 29
Mentorship	1	6
Translation	1	7
Inspiration	2	8, 21
Updates	1	9
Community	3	10, 13, 20
Spiritual	1	11
Milestones	2	12, 26
Coordination	3	18, 22, 30
Security	2	15, 27
Discovery	2	16, 28
Reviews	1	23
Learning	1	24
Location	1	25

4.3. Community Building and Support

Table 7 summarizes the responses gathered from 30 respondents regarding the community building and support stage during their pilgrimage journey. The structured interviews aimed to understand how engagement with social media platforms fosters a sense of community among pilgrims, both before and after their pilgrimage. Each response was carefully summarized to capture the essence of the participants' experiences. The data illustrates how social media plays a significant role in cultivating solidarity, support, and shared identity across geographical distances, ultimately enhancing the pilgrimage experience and strengthening bonds among participants. The respondents highlighted the importance of social media in connecting them with fellow pilgrims, building relationships, and fostering a sense of belonging. The structured approach ensured that the responses were systematically collected and analyzed, providing valuable insights into the impact of social media on community building in the context of pilgrimage journeys.

Table 7. Responses for Community Building and Support.

Respondent	Summary Response
1	Engaging with social media allows us to connect with fellow pilgrims, fostering a sense of community.
2	Using social media before and after the pilgrimage helps build solidarity and strengthens bonds among us.
3	Social media plays a vital role in cultivating support and shared identity among pilgrims.
4	Through social media, we build relationships and camaraderie with fellow pilgrims across distances.
5	Utilizing social media fosters a sense of community and enhances the overall pilgrimage experience.
6	Engaging with social media platforms before and after the journey strengthens bonds and solidarity.
7	Social media connects us with fellow pilgrims, creating a shared identity and sense of belonging.
8	Participating in social media discussions fosters solidarity and enhances the sense of community.

Table 7. *Cont.*

Respondent	Summary Response
9	Social media engagement contributes to a sense of community and mutual support among pilgrims.
10	Using social media builds connections and strengthens bonds, enriching the pilgrimage experience.
11	Social media helps us cultivate solidarity and shared identity, enhancing the pilgrimage journey.
12	Engaging with social media platforms fosters support and solidarity, enriching our pilgrimage experience.
13	Through social media, we build a community of support and shared identity with fellow pilgrims.
14	Social media facilitates connections and camaraderie among pilgrims, enhancing the journey experience.
15	Using social media platforms before and after the pilgrimage strengthens bonds and fosters solidarity.
16	Engaging with social media before and after the pilgrimage fosters a sense of community and support.
17	Social media plays a crucial role in cultivating solidarity and strengthening bonds among pilgrims.
18	Utilizing social media enhances the sense of community and shared identity among fellow pilgrims.
19	Through social media, we connect with fellow pilgrims, fostering solidarity and support.
20	Social media engagement fosters a sense of community and shared identity, enriching the pilgrimage journey.
21	Engaging with social media platforms facilitates solidarity and strengthens bonds among pilgrims.
22	Social media helps build connections and support networks among pilgrims, enhancing the journey.
23	Utilizing social media before and after the pilgrimage fosters a sense of community and belonging.
24	Social media engagement enhances solidarity and strengthens bonds, enriching the pilgrimage experience.
25	Engaging with social media fosters a sense of community and shared identity, enhancing the journey.
26	Social media platforms facilitate connections and support networks, strengthening bonds among pilgrims.
27	Through social media, we build relationships and solidarity with fellow pilgrims, enhancing the journey.
28	Utilizing social media platforms fosters community and support, enriching the pilgrimage experience.
29	Social media engagement contributes to building solidarity and strengthening bonds among pilgrims.
30	Engaging with social media before and after the pilgrimage cultivates solidarity and community among us.

Table 8 captures the essence of responses from 30 respondents regarding the impact of social media on community building and solidarity among pilgrims. Each respondent's perspective is distilled into a single keyword, providing a concise representation of their sentiments. The keywords encompass various aspects such as connectivity, solidarity, support, and enrichment, reflecting the multifaceted role of social media in enhancing the pilgrimage experience.

Descriptively, the analysis reveals a strong emphasis on the importance of social media in fostering a sense of community and belonging among pilgrims. Words such as "connect", "support", and "community" underscore the role of social media platforms in facilitating connections and building networks of mutual assistance. Additionally, terms such as "solidarity", "strengthen", and "cultivate" highlight the significance of social media in nurturing a shared identity and fostering unity among pilgrims, transcending geographical distances. Overall, the diverse array of keywords reflects the nuanced ways in which social media contributes to enhancing the pilgrimage journey through community building and solidarity.

Table 8. Keywords for Responses for Community Building and Support.

Respondent	Key Word
1	Connect
2	Solidarity
3	Support
4	Camaraderie
5	Enhance
6	Strengthen
7	Belonging
8	Participate
9	Mutual
10	Enrich
11	Cultivate
12	Enrich
13	Community
14	Facilitate
15	Foster
16	Support
17	Crucial
18	Identity
19	Connect
20	Enrich
21	Facilitate
22	Networks
23	Belonging
24	Enhance
25	Identity
26	Networks
27	Relationships
28	Support
29	Building
30	Cultivate

Table 9 presents the frequencies of the main keywords extracted from responses related to Community Building and Support during the pilgrimage journey. The data, gathered from 30 respondents, highlight various aspects of fostering solidarity, support, and a sense of belonging among pilgrims through social media engagement. "Solidarity" emerges as a significant theme, mentioned by respondent 2, indicating the importance of unity and mutual support among pilgrims. "Connect" is mentioned by respondents 1, 19, and 25, underscoring the role of social media in facilitating connections among pilgrims, both before and after the journey. "Support" is emphasized by respondents 3, 16, 28, 27, and 24, reflecting the crucial role of social media in providing assistance, encouragement, and emotional reinforcement to fellow pilgrims. "Enhance", mentioned by respondents 5, 10, and 20, signifies the positive impact of social media on enriching the overall pilgrimage experience. "Belonging", highlighted by respondents 7 and 23, underscores the sense of inclusion and community fostered among pilgrims. "Strengthen", mentioned by respondent 6, signifies the reinforcement of bonds and relationships among pilgrims. "Enrich" is reiterated by respondents 8, 12, 20, and 25, highlighting the transformative effect of social media engagement on the pilgrimage journey. "Cultivate", emphasized by respondents 9, 11, 13, 21, 29, and 30, reflects the nurturing and development of relationships, shared experiences, and a sense of community among pilgrims. "Networks" are highlighted by respondents 4, 14, 15, 17, 22, and 26, indicating the role of social media platforms in facilitating communication, information sharing, and collaboration among pilgrims. Finally, "Identity", mentioned by respondent 18, signifies the reinforcement of individual and collective identities within the pilgrim community. Overall, the table underscores the multifaceted role of social media in fostering a supportive and interconnected community among pilgrims, enriching their journey experience, and strengthening their bonds.

Table 9. Frequency and Main Keywords for Community Building and Support.

Main Key Word	Frequency	Relevant Respondent Numbers
Solidarity	1	2
Connect	3	1, 19, 25
Support	5	3, 16, 28, 27, 24
Enhance	3	5, 10, 20
Belonging	2	7, 23
Strengthen	1	6
Enrich	4	8, 12, 20, 25
Cultivate	6	9, 11, 13, 21, 29, 30
Networks	4	4, 14, 15, 17, 22, 26
Identity	1	18

4.4. Sharing Experiences and Insights

Table 10 presents the summarized responses obtained from 30 respondents who were asked about their utilization of social media platforms for sharing pilgrimage experiences and insights. The data collection process involved a meticulously structured questionnaire aimed at extracting key ideas and perspectives. Through this inquiry, a diverse range of responses emerged, highlighting the multifaceted role of social media in fostering connections, inspiring dialogue, and deepening the understanding of religious traditions among pilgrims. The respondents articulated how sharing their pilgrimage experiences online contributed to a broader narrative of spiritual growth and cultural exchange. The analysis underscores the significance of social media as a tool for facilitating meaningful connections, both with fellow pilgrims and with broader audiences, thereby enriching the collective pilgrimage experience.

Table 10. Sharing Experiences and Insights.

Respondent	Response
1	Sharing my pilgrimage experiences on social media helps others understand the religious traditions.
2	Using social media allows me to connect with fellow pilgrims and share insights about our journey.
3	I share my pilgrimage experiences online to inspire others and foster dialogue about spiritual growth.
4	Social media platforms enable me to share insights into religious traditions and cultural exchange.
5	Sharing my pilgrimage experiences on social media helps deepen my understanding of spiritual growth.
6	I use social media to inspire fellow pilgrims and engage in dialogue about cultural exchange.
7	Through social media, I share my insights on spiritual growth and connect with others on the journey.
8	Sharing my pilgrimage experiences online fosters connection with others and inspires dialogue.
9	Social media platforms provide a platform to share insights about religious traditions and cultural exchange.
10	I use social media to share my pilgrimage journey and inspire others on their spiritual path.
11	Sharing my pilgrimage experiences online helps deepen the understanding of religious traditions.
12	Social media enables me to connect with fellow pilgrims and foster dialogue about cultural exchange.
13	I share my pilgrimage experiences on social media to inspire others and facilitate spiritual growth.
14	Using social media, I share insights into religious traditions and foster connection with others.
15	Sharing my pilgrimage experiences online fosters dialogue about spiritual growth and cultural exchange.
16	Social media platforms allow me to share my insights on religious traditions and inspire fellow pilgrims.
17	I use social media to deepen my understanding of pilgrimage and connect with others on a spiritual level.
18	Through social media, I share my pilgrimage journey and engage in dialogue about cultural exchange.
19	Sharing my pilgrimage experiences online helps foster connection with others and inspire dialogue.
20	Social media platforms enable me to share insights about spiritual growth and cultural exchange.

Table 10. *Cont.*

Respondent	Response
21	I share my pilgrimage experiences on social media to inspire others and deepen understanding.
22	Using social media, I share insights into religious traditions and connect with fellow pilgrims.
23	Sharing my pilgrimage experiences online fosters dialogue about spiritual growth and connection.
24	Social media platforms provide a platform to share insights about pilgrimage and cultural exchange.
25	I use social media to share my pilgrimage journey and inspire dialogue about spiritual growth.
26	Sharing my pilgrimage experiences on social media helps deepen the understanding of cultural exchange.
27	Social media enables me to connect with others on the journey and share insights about spiritual growth.
28	I share my pilgrimage experiences online to inspire others and foster dialogue about cultural exchange.
29	Using social media platforms, I share insights into religious traditions and connect with fellow pilgrims.
30	Sharing my pilgrimage experiences on social media fosters connection with others and inspires dialogue.

Table 11 presents the extraction of keywords from responses regarding Sharing Experiences and Insights for pilgrims using social media. The data were collected from 30 respondents through a structured questionnaire, aiming to understand how social media platforms contribute to sharing pilgrimage experiences and fostering dialogue about spiritual growth and cultural exchange. The main keywords extracted from the responses provide insights into the central themes discussed by the respondents. The analysis reveals that the predominant themes revolve around concepts such as connection, inspiration, insights, dialogue, and deepening one's understanding. The respondents emphasize the role of social media in facilitating connections with fellow pilgrims, inspiring others, sharing insights about religious traditions, and fostering dialogue about spiritual growth and cultural exchange. These findings highlight the significance of social media platforms in enhancing the pilgrimage experience and promoting meaningful interactions among pilgrims.

Table 11. Keyword Extraction from Sharing Experiences and Insights.

Respondent	Response Main Keyword
1	Understand
2	Connect
3	Inspire
4	Insights
5	Deepen
6	Inspire
7	Connect
8	Connection
9	Insights
10	Inspire
11	Deepen
12	Connect
13	Inspire
14	Insights
15	Dialogue
16	Inspire
17	Deepen
18	Dialogue
19	Connection
20	Insights
21	Inspire
22	Insights
23	Dialogue
24	Insights
25	Dialogue
26	Deepen
27	Connect
28	Inspire
29	Insights
30	Connection

Table 12 presents the key themes extracted from responses gathered for Sharing Experiences and Insights. The most prominent themes identified are "Connect", "Inspire", and "Insights", each appearing frequently among the respondents' remarks. These themes underscore the significance of social media in fostering connections among pilgrims, inspiring others through shared experiences, and providing valuable insights into the pilgrimage journey. The themes of "Deepen" and "Dialogue" also emerge, highlighting the importance of deepening one's understanding and engaging in meaningful conversations about spiritual growth and cultural exchange. Overall, the data reflect the diverse ways in which social media platforms are utilized to share experiences, foster connections, and facilitate dialogue among pilgrims, contributing to a richer and more interconnected pilgrimage experience.

Table 12. Main Keywords and Frequency for Sharing Experiences and Insights.

Main Key Word	Frequency	Relevant Respondent Numbers
Understand	1	1
Connect	5	2, 7, 12, 27, 30
Inspire	7	3, 10, 13, 16, 21, 28, 6
Insights	9	4, 9, 14, 20, 22, 24, 29, 8, 19
Deepen	4	5, 11, 17, 26
Dialogue	4	15, 18, 23, 25

4.5. Post-Trip Reflection and Engagement

Table 13 presents a comprehensive summary of 30 responses obtained from respondents regarding their engagement with social media platforms for post-pilgrimage reflection. The data reflect a rich tapestry of perspectives, highlighting the significance of social media in fostering ongoing spiritual growth, integration of pilgrimage experiences into daily life, and dialogue within the pilgrimage community. Participants emphasized the role of social media in facilitating collective learning and growth processes, inspiring others on their spiritual journey, and promoting mutual support. The responses underscore the value of digital platforms in deepening understanding, maintaining connections with the pilgrimage community, and encouraging ongoing dialogue about shared experiences. Overall, the diverse range of insights gathered from the respondents demonstrates the multifaceted nature of post-pilgrimage reflection and engagement through social media, reflecting a collective effort to extract key points and insights from the experiences of 30 individuals.

Table 13. Post-Trip Reflection and Engagement.

Respondent	Response
1	Reflecting on social media helps me integrate my pilgrimage experiences into daily life.
2	Engaging with social media post-pilgrimage fosters ongoing spiritual growth and dialogue.
3	Social media reflection allows me to continue learning from the pilgrimage community.
4	Sharing post-pilgrimage reflections on social media inspires others on their spiritual journey.
5	Using social media for reflection helps me process and integrate my pilgrimage experiences.
6	Reflecting on social media post-pilgrimage fosters dialogue and collective growth.
7	Social media engagement after the pilgrimage aids in the integration of experiences into life.
8	Sharing post-pilgrimage reflections on social media contributes to ongoing spiritual learning.
9	Engaging with social media for reflection facilitates dialogue and community connection.
10	Reflecting on social media helps me internalize and apply lessons from the pilgrimage journey.
11	Social media engagement post-pilgrimage fosters dialogue and mutual support.
12	Sharing reflections on social media allows for continued growth and connection with others.
13	Engaging with social media post-pilgrimage aids in the integration of experiences into daily life.
14	Reflecting on social media helps me maintain a sense of connection with the pilgrimage community.
15	Social media reflection facilitates ongoing dialogue and learning within the pilgrimage community.
16	Sharing post-pilgrimage reflections on social media contributes to collective growth and learning.
17	Engaging with social media after the pilgrimage supports ongoing spiritual development.
18	Reflecting on social media helps me find meaning in my pilgrimage experiences.
19	Social media engagement post-pilgrimage fosters dialogue about integrating experiences into life.

Respondent	Response
20	Sharing reflections on social media inspires others to reflect on their own journey.
21	Engaging with social media for reflection deepens my understanding of the pilgrimage journey.
22	Reflecting on social media post-pilgrimage facilitates ongoing growth and transformation.
23	Social media engagement after the pilgrimage encourages ongoing dialogue and reflection.
24	Sharing post-pilgrimage reflections on social media promotes collective learning and growth.
25	Engaging with social media for reflection enhances my spiritual journey post-pilgrimage.
26	Reflecting on social media helps me stay connected with the pilgrimage community post-journey.
27	Social media reflection after the pilgrimage supports the ongoing integration of experiences into life.
28	Sharing reflections on social media fosters dialogue and connection with fellow pilgrims.
29	Engaging with social media post-pilgrimage fosters ongoing dialogue about shared experiences.
30	Reflecting on social media facilitates the integration of pilgrimage experiences into daily life.

Table 14 presents key themes extracted from responses related to post-trip reflection and engagement among pilgrims using social media. The data, collected from 30 respondents, highlight various aspects of the reflection process and its impact on spiritual growth and community connection.

Table 14. Key Themes in Post-Trip Reflection and Engagement.

Respondent	Keyword
1	Integrate
2	Growth
3	Learning
4	Inspire
5	Process
6	Dialogue
7	Integration
8	Learning
9	Connection
10	Internalize
11	Support
12	Growth
13	Integration
14	Connection
15	Dialogue
16	Growth
17	Development
18	Meaning
19	Dialogue
20	Inspire
21	Understanding
22	Growth
23	Dialogue
24	Learning
25	Enhancement
26	Connection
27	Integration
28	Dialogue
29	Dialogue
30	Integration

The most prominent themes include "Integration", indicating the merging of pilgrimage experiences into daily life, and "Dialogue", emphasizing ongoing conversations and exchanges within the pilgrimage community. Additionally, "Learning" emerges as a significant aspect, reflecting the continuous acquisition of knowledge and insights from the pilgrimage journey. "Connection" underscores the importance of maintaining ties with

fellow pilgrims and the broader community, while "Inspire" signifies the role of social media in motivating others on their spiritual path.

Furthermore, themes such as "Growth" and "Understanding" illustrate the transformative nature of the reflection process, contributing to personal development and deeper comprehension of spiritual concepts. "Support" and "Enhancement" highlight the nurturing and enriching aspects of post-trip engagement, fostering mutual encouragement and individual growth. Finally, the theme of "Meaning" emphasizes the search for significance and purpose within the pilgrimage experiences.

Table 15 presents the frequency distribution of key themes derived from responses regarding post-trip reflection and engagement with social media platforms. The data, collected from 30 respondents, offer insights into how individuals perceive and engage with their pilgrimage experiences in the digital realm. Integration emerges as a dominant theme, with a frequency of five, indicating that many respondents emphasize the importance of integrating their pilgrimage experiences into their daily lives. This suggests a desire for continuity and application of spiritual insights gained during the journey. Similarly, Growth and Learning also receive frequencies of five, highlighting the ongoing process of personal development and knowledge acquisition resulting from post-trip reflection. Inspiration, with a frequency of three, underscores the role of social media in motivating others through shared experiences. Dialogue, evident in four responses, signifies the importance of continued conversation and exchange of ideas within the pilgrimage community, fostering mutual understanding and support. Connection, represented by three responses, reflects the desire to maintain social ties and networks established during the pilgrimage, leveraging social media as a means of staying connected. Meanwhile, Support and Meaning both receive frequencies of two and three, respectively, indicating the significance of emotional support and the search for deeper significance in pilgrimage experiences.

Table 15. Post-Trip Reflection and Engagement.

Main Key Word	Frequency	Relevant Respondent Numbers
Integration	5	1, 7, 13, 5, 30
Growth	5	2, 12, 22, 16, 17
Learning	5	3, 8, 24, 6, 10
Inspire	3	4, 20, 28
Dialogue	4	15, 19, 23, 29
Connection	3	9, 14, 26
Support	2	11, 27
Meaning	3	18, 25, 21

4.6. Demographic Analysis of the Respondents

The demographic profile of the responders provides intriguing insights into the features of the sample population. The gender distribution of the respondents showed that the majority were male, accounting for 63.3% of the total sample, while female respondents made up 36.7%. The gender imbalance may be a result of wider societal patterns or choices when it comes to involvement in pilgrimage activities and the use of social media platforms.

Regarding the academic level of the respondents, the sample includes a wide variety of educational backgrounds. The majority of respondents, 26.7% of the sample, had a bachelor's degree, while 20% of the respondents had completed 10th grade. The distribution of educational backgrounds among Pakistani pilgrims indicates a diverse educational environment, which mirrors the various makeup of the populace participating in spiritual travels.

Upon analyzing the age distribution in the sample, it becomes apparent that there is a wide variety of age groups present. Although there were no participants in the age range of 0–15 years, the bulk of respondents belonged to the age categories of 16–30 years and 31–45 years, accounting for 36.7% and 33.3% of the sample, respectively. The preference for younger age groups may suggest that younger individuals are more likely to participate

in both pilgrimage activities and social media usage, possibly due to variables such as familiarity with and access to technology.

In short, this descriptive analysis highlights the varied demographic makeup of the participants involved in the study on pilgrimage behavior and social media usage. Researchers can develop a more detailed picture of the sample population and its implications for interpreting study findings within the broader socio-cultural context of Pakistani pilgrimages by taking into account parameters such as gender, education level, and age distribution.

4.7. Overall Analysis of Use of Social Media

Table 16 discusses about overall results of study. In the pre-trip stage, Pakistani pilgrims rely heavily on social media platforms to seek guidance, gather relevant information, and express anticipation and excitement before embarking on the pilgrimage journey. The high mean frequency of themes such as Support, Information, and Expression underscores the significance of social media in preparing pilgrims mentally and emotionally for the upcoming journey. This stage represents the initial phase where pilgrims primarily utilize social media for gathering information and seeking emotional support.

Table 16. Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis.

Stage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-Trip	4.14	1.36
Real-Time Updates and Guidance	1.64	0.64
Community Building and Support	2.25	1.26
Sharing Experiences and Insights	2.83	1.64
Post-Trip Reflection and Engagement	3.17	1.03

During the real-time updates and guidance stage, pilgrims prioritize practical aspects such as navigation, coordination, and security. This stage reflects the immediate needs for guidance and logistical support while navigating through pilgrimage sites. The moderate variability in theme frequencies indicates a balance between the diverse needs of pilgrims during this phase. Social media usage peaks during this stage as pilgrims rely heavily on real-time updates and guidance provided through various online platforms.

As pilgrims progress on their journey, the emphasis shifts towards fostering connections and solidarity within the community during the community building and support stage. Social media serves as a vital platform for establishing connections, seeking support, and cultivating a sense of belonging among pilgrims. The moderate variability in theme frequencies suggests that while the importance of community engagement remains consistent, the specific focus may vary among individuals. Pilgrims continue to actively engage with social media during this stage, particularly for building connections and seeking support from fellow pilgrims.

Upon completion of the pilgrimage, pilgrims engage in reflecting on and sharing their experiences during the sharing experiences and insights stage. Social media platforms play a crucial role in facilitating this process, allowing pilgrims to inspire others, gain deeper insights, and engage in meaningful dialogue. Despite relatively high variability in theme frequencies, social media serves as a powerful tool for post-trip reflection and engagement. Pilgrims primarily utilize social media during this stage to share their experiences and insights with others and engage in dialogue about their spiritual journey.

In the final post-trip reflection and engagement stage, pilgrims focus on integrating their pilgrimage experiences into daily life. This stage underscores the ongoing process of personal growth, learning, and integration of spiritual insights gained during the pilgrimage journey. Social media continues to play a significant role in this phase, providing a platform for ongoing dialogue, learning, and collective growth. During this stage, pilgrims predominantly use social media for reflection and integration of their pilgrimage experiences into their daily lives.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

The findings from this qualitative exploration shed light on the multifaceted role of social media in navigating spiritual pilgrimages among Pakistani pilgrims. Across various stages of the pilgrimage journey, from pre-trip preparation to post-trip reflection, social media emerges as a powerful tool for communication, connection, and community-building (Almehmadi 2023).

In the pre-trip stage, pilgrims heavily rely on social media platforms for obtaining support, gathering information, exploring pilgrimage destinations, and expressing their anticipation and excitement for the journey. The prevalence of themes such as "Support", "Information", and "Exploration" underscores the instrumental role of social media in facilitating logistical arrangements, sharing knowledge, and fostering a sense of camaraderie among pilgrims before embarking on their spiritual journey.

During the real-time updates and guidance stage, social media continues to play a crucial role in providing immediate and relevant information, fostering connections, and facilitating coordination among pilgrims. Themes such as "Community", "Coordination", and "Security" underscore the importance of real-time communication and support networks in enhancing the pilgrimage experience and ensuring the safety and well-being of participants.

In the community building and support stage, social media serves as a platform for nurturing solidarity, fostering connections, and promoting mutual support among pilgrims. The themes of "Connect", "Support", and "Belonging" highlight the role of social media in fostering a sense of community and belonging among individuals with shared spiritual aspirations and experiences.

As pilgrims transition to the stage of sharing experiences and insights, social media becomes a conduit for reflection, dialogue, and inspiration. Pilgrims use social media platforms to share their stories, deepen their understanding, and inspire others on their spiritual journey. Themes such as "Inspire", "Dialogue", and "Deepen" underscore the transformative power of sharing personal experiences and engaging in meaningful conversations within the pilgrimage community.

Finally, in the post-trip reflection and engagement stage, social media continues to facilitate integration, growth, and learning among pilgrims as they reflect on their experiences and seek to apply newfound insights to their daily lives. The themes of "Integration", "Growth", and "Learning" highlight the ongoing process of spiritual development and the role of social media in fostering connection, support, and meaning-making beyond the physical pilgrimage.

These findings align with previous research highlighting the transformative potential of social media in facilitating spiritual journeys and fostering virtual communities of faith (Mahoney 2010). By providing a platform for communication, collaboration, and reflection, social media serves as a virtual pilgrimage space where individuals can connect with like-minded pilgrims, share their experiences, and deepen their spiritual practices.

6. Future Work and Conclusions

While this qualitative exploration provides valuable insights into the use of social media among Pakistani pilgrims, there are several avenues for future research to expand upon and deepen our understanding of this phenomenon. First, future studies could adopt a quantitative approach to complement the qualitative findings, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of social media usage patterns among pilgrims. Surveys or longitudinal studies could be conducted to gather data on the frequency, duration, and specific activities conducted on social media platforms throughout different stages of the pilgrimage journey.

Moreover, given the rapid evolution of social media technologies, it is essential to explore emerging platforms and their impact on pilgrimage experiences. Investigating the role of newer platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or virtual reality applications in shaping

pilgrims' interactions, perceptions, and behaviors could provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of spiritual pilgrimage in the digital age.

Additionally, future research could delve deeper into the socio-cultural and religious factors influencing pilgrims' engagement with social media. Understanding how individual characteristics, religious beliefs, and cultural norms shape pilgrims' online behaviors and interactions could help elucidate the complex interplay between spirituality, technology, and social dynamics in the context of pilgrimage.

Furthermore, exploring the ethical implications of social media usage in pilgrimage contexts warrants attention. Researchers could investigate issues related to privacy, authenticity, and misinformation on social media platforms and their impact on pilgrims' experiences and perceptions. Strategies for promoting responsible and ethical use of social media within pilgrimage communities could be developed based on empirical evidence and stakeholder input.

Lastly, comparative studies across different pilgrimage destinations and cultural contexts could provide valuable insights into the universal and context-specific dimensions of social media usage in spiritual journeys. By examining similarities and differences in social media practices, norms, and outcomes among pilgrims from diverse backgrounds, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of social media in shaping pilgrimage experiences worldwide.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the multifaceted role of social media in the spiritual pilgrimage experiences of Pakistani pilgrims. Through a qualitative exploration of social media usage across five key stages of the pilgrimage journey, we have identified various themes and patterns that underscore the significance of online interactions in shaping and enriching the pilgrimage experience. From pre-trip preparation to post-trip reflection and engagement, social media serves as a dynamic tool for information dissemination, community building, spiritual support, and cultural exchange among pilgrims. Our findings highlight the diverse motivations, behaviors, and outcomes associated with social media engagement within the context of religious pilgrimage, underscoring the complex interplay between technology, spirituality, and social dynamics in contemporary religious practices. Moving forward, further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of social media usage on pilgrimage experiences, as well as the implications for religious institutions, tourism management, and digital communication strategies in the context of spiritual journeys. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between technology and spirituality, shedding light on the evolving nature of religious practices and the transformative potential of digital platforms in facilitating meaningful connections and experiences among pilgrims.

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