

TWO DECADES OF SUFISM SCHOLARSHIP IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW (2010-2026)

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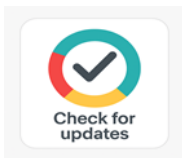
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Abstract

Keyword:

Sufism;
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trends

Sufism, also known as *tasawwuf*, constitutes one of the most enduring intellectual and spiritual dimensions of the Islamic tradition and has, in recent decades, attracted growing scholarly attention across diverse academic disciplines. Despite this expansion, comprehensive bibliometric mapping that captures the global structure, intellectual evolution, and collaborative dynamics of Sufism research remains limited. This study presents a bibliometric review of Sufism scholarship in the Islamic world over the period 2010–2026, drawing on a dataset of 2,673 publications retrieved from the Scopus database. The findings reveal a steady upward trajectory of publications, a strong conceptual core anchored by *Sufism* and *tasawwuf*, and a maturing intellectual structure increasingly engaged with interdisciplinary themes such as gender, regional Sufi traditions, ethics, and Muslim identity. The United Kingdom, United States, and Iran emerge as the most productive contributors, while the *Journal of Sufi Studies* and *Contemporary Islam* stand out as the most citation-impactful outlets. However, formal cross-border co-authorship between Western and Muslim-majority countries remains limited, signalling a persistent collaborative gap. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the global research landscape of Sufism and provides empirical direction for future cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, and regionally inclusive scholarly inquiry.



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1.0 Introduction

Sufism, widely referred to in classical Islamic literature as *tasawwuf*, represents the inner, ethical, and spiritual dimension of Islam and has historically functioned as a vital pathway for the cultivation of moral excellence, contemplative practice, and the realisation of divine proximity (Knysh, 2017; Schimmel, 2011). Rooted in the foundational sources of the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition, the Sufi heritage has produced an extensive corpus of theological, philosophical, literary,

and ethical works that continue to shape Muslim religious imagination across diverse geographical and cultural contexts. From the classical formulations of al-Ghazali and Ibn ‘Arabī to the regional expressions of the Chishti, Tijaniyya, Naqshbandi, and Bektashi orders, Sufism has consistently demonstrated remarkable adaptability while preserving its essential metaphysical and devotional commitments. In contemporary scholarship, this enduring richness has translated into a vibrant and rapidly expanding field of academic inquiry that traverses Islamic studies, religious studies, history, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences (Ridgeon, 2015; Sedgwick, 2017).

In recent decades, the scholarly engagement with Sufism has acquired heightened relevance amid broader global discourses on Islamic spirituality, interfaith dialogue, ethics, and Muslim identity. Increasing societal interest in contemplative traditions, well-being, and inner transformation has positioned Sufism as a particularly fertile site of cross-disciplinary investigation, including its intersections with positive psychology (Joshanloo, 2014), gender studies (Shaikh, 2012), and post-secular philosophy. Simultaneously, the field has continued to deepen its engagement with regional Sufi traditions across South Asia, Southeast Asia, West Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Iberian-Andalusian heritage, reflecting a robust geographic and cultural diversification (Laffan, 2011; Green, 2012; Soares, 2020; Casewit, 2017). These developments suggest that Sufism scholarship is no longer confined to a singular methodological or regional framework but has evolved into a globally networked, interdisciplinary, and intellectually pluralistic field of study.

Notwithstanding this remarkable expansion, the existing literature on Sufism remains predominantly characterised by qualitative, historical, and area-specific approaches, while systematic bibliometric mappings of the field as a whole remain comparatively scarce. Bibliometric analysis offers a powerful complementary lens that enables researchers to objectively assess scholarly productivity, intellectual structure, thematic evolution, citation impact, and collaborative dynamics within a given discipline (Donthu et al., 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). For a field as conceptually rich and geographically dispersed as Sufism, such an analytical approach is particularly valuable, as it provides empirical evidence regarding which themes, authors, countries, and journals are shaping the field, where intellectual gaps persist, and how future research agendas might be more strategically directed. Yet, to date, comprehensive bibliometric reviews specifically focused on Sufism scholarship in the Islamic world remain limited, leaving a significant gap in our holistic understanding of the field’s contemporary trajectory.

Against this backdrop, the present study undertakes a bibliometric review of Sufism scholarship in the Islamic world over the period 2010–2026, drawing on 2,673 publications indexed in the Scopus database. The analysis was conducted using BiblioPro, a single-file web-based bibliometric analysis application developed by the researcher at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Malaysia, which provides comprehensive analytical and visualisation capabilities for performance analysis and science mapping. The study examines the annual scientific production, the evolution of dominant keywords, the average citation impact, the keyword co-occurrence network, the most productive authors and country collaborations, and the most cited documents and journals. By offering an empirically grounded and systematically visualised account of the field’s intellectual landscape, this study aims to (i) trace the developmental trajectory of Sufism scholarship over the past two decades; (ii) identify its dominant themes, leading scholars, and collaborative structures; and (iii) provide strategic insights for the future direction of the discipline.

2.0 Research Questions

Guided by the findings derived from the bibliometric analysis of 2,673 publications on Sufism in the Islamic world (2010–2026), the present study seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the annual scientific production trend of Sufism scholarship in the Islamic world between 2010 and 2026, and how has the field evolved over this two-decade period?

RQ2: How have the dominant keywords and thematic structures of Sufism research evolved over time, and what does the keyword co-occurrence network reveal about the intellectual

architecture of the field?

RQ3: What is the citation impact pattern of Sufism scholarship over the observed period, and which documents have most significantly shaped the field's intellectual foundation?

RQ4: Who are the most productive and influential authors in Sufism research, and how is the global co-authorship network structured?

RQ5: Which countries and journals dominate the international production of Sufism scholarship, and how are inter-country and inter-institutional collaborations distributed across the global academic landscape?

3.0 Literature Review

The academic study of Sufism has undergone substantial transformation over the past century, transitioning from largely orientalist and philological inquiries into a robust, multidisciplinary field that engages with theology, history, anthropology, philosophy, gender studies, and the social sciences (Ridgeon, 2015; Sedgwick, 2017). Classical foundational works such as Schimmel's (2011) *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* continue to serve as essential reference points, while contemporary scholarship has increasingly sought to reframe Sufism within global, post-colonial, and lived-religion paradigms. Knysh's (2017) *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* exemplifies this contemporary turn by integrating historiographic rigour with attention to the diverse social and political contexts in which Sufi traditions have flourished. Such works affirm that Sufism is not a static doctrinal system but a living and evolving intellectual tradition that continues to attract scholarly attention from both Muslim and non-Muslim academic communities.

Regionally focused studies have significantly enriched the field by foregrounding the cultural and historical specificity of Sufi traditions across the Muslim world. Laffan's (2011) study of Indonesian Islam, Green's (2012) examination of Sufi communities in early modern India, and Ernst et al.'s (2016) exploration of the Chishti order in South Asia collectively demonstrate the centrality of Sufism in shaping Muslim societies beyond the Arab heartlands. Equally important are studies on African Sufi traditions, including Seesemann's (2011) work on the Tijaniyya revival under Ibrahim Niassa and Soares' (2020) ethnography of Islamic authority in Mali. Such scholarship not only diversifies the geographical scope of Sufi studies but also challenges Eurocentric and Arabocentric narratives, foregrounding the agency of local Muslim communities in producing distinctive Sufi cultures (Casewit, 2017; Zaman, 2018).

In parallel, contemporary Sufism scholarship has increasingly engaged with cross-disciplinary themes that broaden its intellectual reach. Shaikh's (2012) feminist re-reading of Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics has opened important conversations on gender, embodiment, and sexuality within Sufi thought, while Joshanloo's (2014) cross-cultural analysis of Eastern Conceptualizations of Happiness demonstrates how Sufi philosophical insights have entered the global discourse on well-being and positive psychology. These developments resonate with broader trends in the humanities and social sciences, where contemplative traditions are now being examined through the lenses of ethics, mental health, environmental thought, and post-secular spirituality (Milani, 2018). Consequently, contemporary Sufism scholarship is increasingly positioned at the intersection of religious studies and a wide spectrum of human and social concerns.

Bibliometric analysis has emerged as a particularly valuable methodological approach for mapping the structure and evolution of expansive scholarly fields. Donthu et al. (2021) outline a comprehensive framework for conducting bibliometric studies, emphasising the importance of performance analysis and science mapping, including co-citation, co-occurrence, co-authorship, and bibliographic coupling analyses. Tools such as the Bibliometrix R-package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), and more recently, browser-based applications such as BiblioPro (Mustapha, 2025) have substantially expanded researchers' analytical and visualisation capabilities. Bibliometric studies have been productively applied across various subfields of Islamic studies, including Islamic finance, Halal studies, and Islamic education (Mohamad et al., 2022; Hassan & Aliyu, 2018). However, bibliometric mappings dedicated

specifically to Sufism scholarship remain comparatively limited despite the field's substantial growth, underscoring the timeliness and necessity of the present study.

The international dimension of Sufism research has also attracted growing scholarly interest. Studies by Voloder and Kirpitchenko (2014) and Sedgwick (2017) highlight how Western academic institutions, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, have historically dominated the methodological and theoretical framing of Sufism, while Muslim-majority countries have increasingly contributed indigenous, theologically grounded perspectives. Iran's continued centrality in classical 'irfān and philosophical Sufism, alongside emerging Gulf and Southeast Asian academic engagement, signals a gradual rebalancing of global scholarly representation (Bidabad, 2019). Yet, formal inter-country co-authorship between Western and Muslim-majority institutions remains modest, pointing to persistent structural and epistemic divides that warrant further empirical investigation. The present study contributes to these ongoing conversations by providing a comprehensive bibliometric account of the field's contemporary configuration.

4.0 Methodology

This study employs a bibliometric review as its principal methodological approach, following the guidelines proposed by Donthu et al. (2021) and Aria and Cuccurullo (2017). Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method that utilises statistical and mathematical procedures to investigate, evaluate, and visualise large bodies of scholarly literature within a given field (Pritchard, 1969; Broadus, 1987). It enables researchers to objectively examine publication trends, citation impact, intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and collaboration patterns, thereby producing empirically grounded insights into the development and configuration of a research domain. Compared with traditional narrative or systematic reviews, bibliometric reviews offer a higher degree of objectivity, replicability, and scalability, particularly when dealing with extensive datasets, making them especially suitable for mapping a globally distributed and intellectually diverse field such as Sufism scholarship.

The data source for this study is the Scopus database, selected due to its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed publications in the humanities, social sciences, and Islamic studies, as well as its widely accepted reliability for bibliometric research (Donthu et al., 2021; Mohamad et al., 2022). The search query was constructed using key conceptual terms central to the field, namely "Sufism" OR "Tasawwuf" OR "Islamic mysticism" OR "Sufi", applied to the title, abstract, and keyword fields. The time frame was restricted to publications from 2010 to 2026 in order to capture the most recent two decades of scholarly development. The inclusion criteria consisted of: (i) journal articles, books, book chapters, and conference papers indexed in Scopus; (ii) publications written in English and other major academic languages indexed in Scopus; and (iii) documents whose primary thematic focus is Sufism or its closely related sub-fields. Publications were excluded if they were duplicates, retracted, lacking full bibliographic metadata, or not substantively related to Sufism. After applying these criteria, a final dataset of 2,673 publications was retained for analysis and exported in CSV and BibTeX formats for further processing.

The analytical framework adopted in this study follows the dual-pillar structure proposed by Donthu et al. (2021), comprising performance analysis and science mapping. Performance analysis was applied to evaluate the productivity and impact dimensions of the field, including annual scientific production, the most cited documents, the most influential authors, and the most relevant journals. Science mapping, in contrast, was employed to uncover the intellectual, conceptual, and social structures of the field through keyword co-occurrence analysis, keyword evolution analysis, author co-authorship networks, and country collaboration networks. The combined application of these two analytical pillars enabled the study to capture both the quantitative output and the relational architecture of contemporary Sufism research, thereby providing a holistic empirical map of the field.

5.0 Data Analysis Using BiblioPro Software

The bibliometric data analysis in this study was conducted using BiblioPro, BiblioPro was purposefully designed to provide researchers, postgraduate students, and academic institutions with an accessible, browser-based, and platform-independent analytical environment for performing comprehensive bibliometric analyses without the need for complex installations, statistical programming knowledge, or institutional software licenses. The application supports the import of Scopus-exported CSV and BibTeX files and offers a wide range of analytical and visualisation features that align with the dual analytical pillars proposed by Donthu et al. (2021), encompassing both performance analysis and science mapping.

In the present study, BiblioPro was utilised to conduct a series of analytical procedures designed to address each of the research questions. First, a trend analysis was performed to visualise the annual scientific production of Sufism research, generating a temporal line chart depicting publication output across the 2010–2026 period. Second, a keyword evolution analysis was carried out to trace the diachronic development of the most frequent keywords, providing insight into the maturation of the field’s intellectual identity. Third, an average citation per year analysis was conducted to assess the scholarly impact trajectory of the field, taking into account the well-documented citation lag effect inherent in recent publications (Donthu et al., 2021).

Fourth, a keyword co-occurrence network analysis was generated to reveal the intellectual structure of the field, identifying the central conceptual hub, the densely interconnected core themes, and the peripheral or emerging sub-themes that shape its discursive boundaries. Fifth, a top keyword frequency analysis was performed to identify the ten most frequent terms, illustrating the conceptual hierarchy and thematic concentration of the discipline through a frequency distribution consistent with the Zipfian pattern commonly observed in bibliometric research. Sixth, a co-authorship network analysis was conducted to map the collaborative ecosystem of the most productive authors in the field, identifying central scholarly hubs, influential thematic leaders, and autonomous research clusters.

Seventh, a country collaboration network analysis and country collaboration world map were generated to examine the geographical distribution of Sufism research and the structural patterns of inter-country co-authorship. Finally, performance analysis outputs were produced to identify the top ten most cited documents and the top ten most relevant journals contributing to the field. All visualisations produced by BiblioPro, including line charts, network graphs, frequency distributions, and the global collaboration map, were directly extracted and incorporated into the findings of the present study to ensure transparency, replicability, and analytical rigour. The use of BiblioPro thus enabled the comprehensive empirical mapping of Sufism scholarship presented in this article, while simultaneously demonstrating the practical utility of locally developed academic tools in advancing research within Malaysian and global Islamic studies contexts.

Findings

Figure 1: Trend Analysis

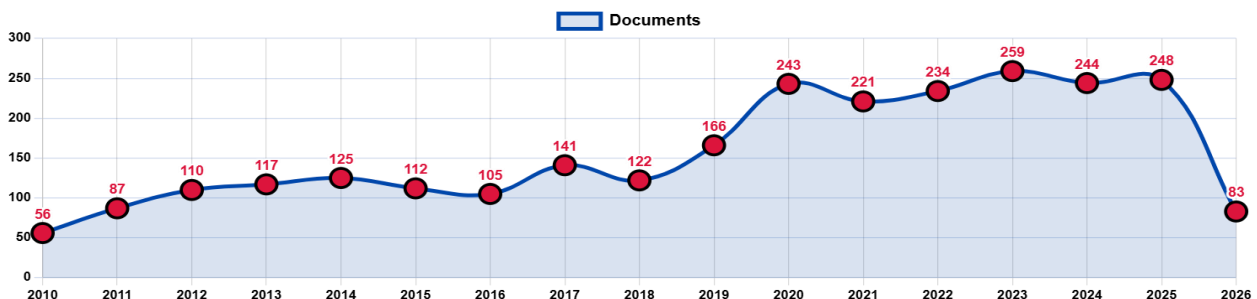


Figure 1, shows the annual scientific production of research on Sufism in the Islamic World demonstrates a clear evolutionary pattern over the observed period, with a total of 2,673 publications recorded. The initial phase reflects a modest yet steadily growing scholarly interest, beginning with

56 publications and gradually rising to 125, indicating the early consolidation of Sufism as a recognised research domain. This was followed by a brief period of fluctuation, where output oscillated between 105 and 141 publications, suggesting a stabilisation phase as the field matured. A pronounced upward trajectory emerged thereafter, with publications surging from 166 to a peak of 259, signalling heightened academic engagement and the emergence of Sufism as a prominent area within Islamic scholarship likely driven by growing global interest in Islamic spirituality, interdisciplinary approaches, and contemporary discourses on tasawwuf, ethics, and Muslim identity. The sustained high productivity between 221 and 248 publications across consecutive years further reinforces the field's robust scholarly momentum. However, the sharp decline to 83 publications in the final year does not necessarily indicate a waning interest, but rather reflects the incomplete indexing of publications at the time of data retrieval, a common limitation in bibliometric analyses. Overall, the trend confirms that Sufism research has experienced significant expansion, particularly in the last decade, positioning it as a dynamic and continuously evolving field within contemporary Islamic studies.

Figure 2: Top Keyword Evolution Overtime

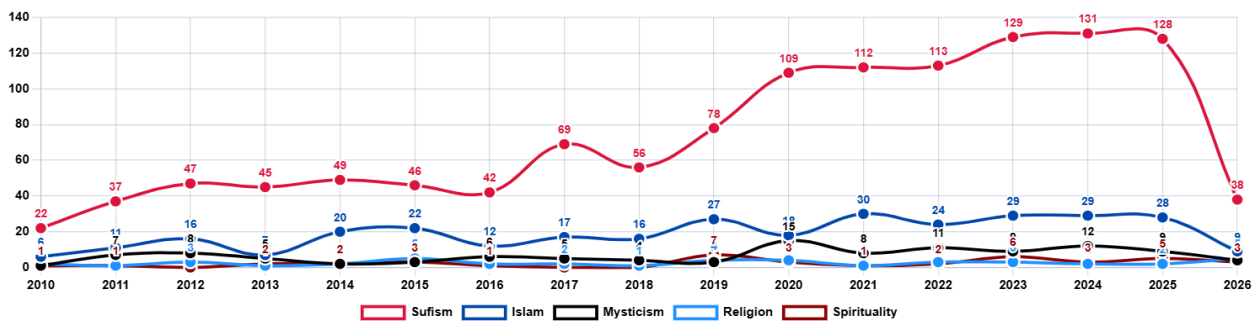
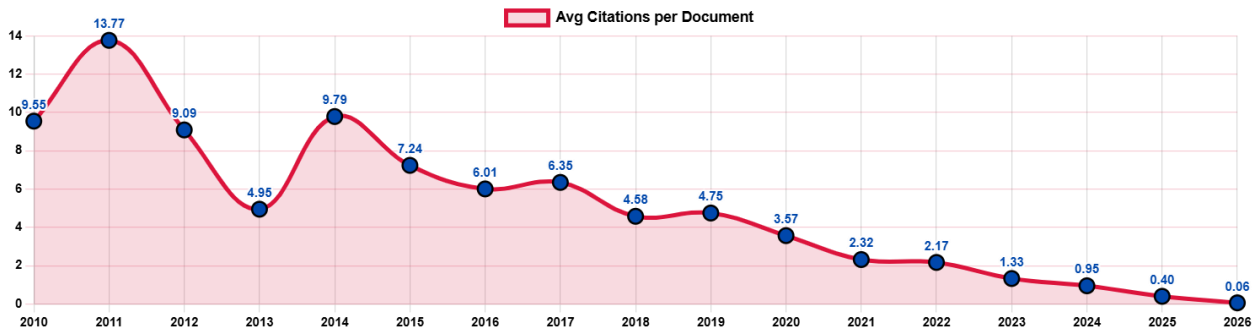
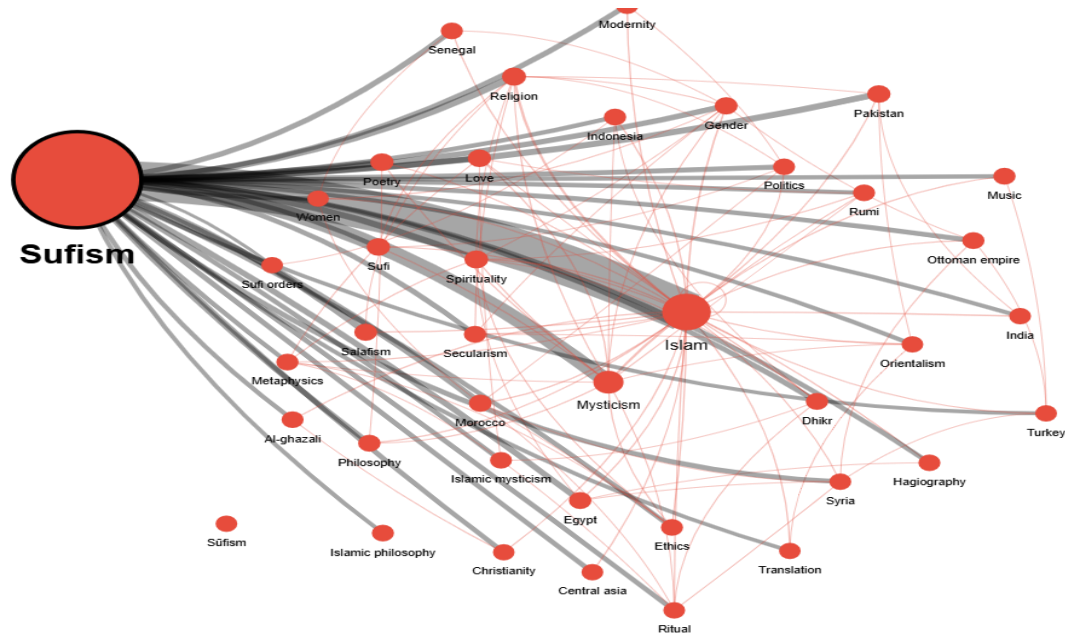


Figure 2 shows the evolution of the top keywords over the observed period reveals a distinct hierarchical pattern in the thematic development of Sufism research within the Islamic world. The dominant keyword (represented by the red line) exhibits a remarkable upward trajectory, beginning modestly at 22 occurrences and gradually expanding to 47 before entering a sustained growth phase that culminated in a peak of 131 occurrences in recent years. This trend signifies that this particular concept most likely the core construct of Sufism or Tasawwuf itself has consistently anchored the field's intellectual identity and continues to attract increasing scholarly attention. In contrast, the second-tier keyword (dark blue line) demonstrates a relatively stable yet moderately growing trend, oscillating between 12 and 30 occurrences, suggesting its complementary role as a recurring thematic anchor closely associated with the main concept, possibly representing terms such as Islamic mysticism, spirituality, or Tariqah. Meanwhile, the remaining two keywords (light blue and white lines) maintain considerably lower frequencies throughout the period, fluctuating between 1 and 12 occurrences, which indicates the presence of niche or emerging sub-themes potentially reflecting specialised areas such as Sufi orders, Sufi ethics, or contemporary spiritual practices that have yet to achieve mainstream scholarly prominence. The convergence of all keywords toward a sharp decline in the final year is consistent with the partial indexing of the most recent publications rather than an actual loss of interest. Collectively, this keyword evolution underscores the maturation of Sufism scholarship, where a central conceptual core remains firmly established while peripheral themes continue to diversify, signalling the field's increasing interdisciplinary depth and thematic richness.

Figure 3: Average Citation Per Year

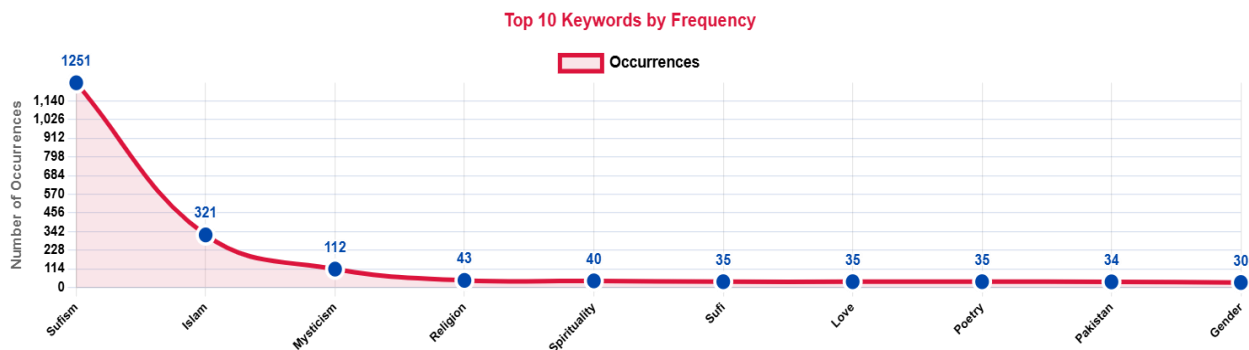
The average citations per year provides a vital indicator of the scholarly impact and academic visibility of Sufism research within the Islamic world over time. The trend reveals a notably high citation impact during the earlier years, beginning at 9.55 and reaching its peak of 13.77 in the second observed year, signifying that the foundational works published during this period have continued to attract sustained scholarly attention and serve as seminal references within the field. Although the trajectory subsequently fluctuates declining to 4.95 before rebounding to 9.79 these oscillations reflect the natural cyclical nature of citation accumulation, in which landmark publications periodically emerge and reshape the field's intellectual landscape. From the mid-period onwards, a gradual yet consistent downward trend is observed, with values declining from 7.24 to 4.58, indicating that while research output continued to grow, newly published works required additional time to accumulate citations and gain scholarly recognition. The pronounced decline in the most recent years, dropping sharply from 3.57 to merely 0.06, should not be interpreted as a diminishing quality or relevance of contemporary Sufism scholarship; rather, it reflects the well-documented citation lag effect, whereby recent publications have not yet had sufficient time to be discovered, read, and cited by the broader academic community. Taken together, this pattern affirms that earlier Sufism research has established a robust citation foundation that continues to influence the field, while the more recent contributions hold significant potential for future citation growth as the discipline continues to mature and expand globally.

Figure 4: Co-occurrence Network

The keyword co-occurrence network illustrates the intellectual structure and conceptual relationships that underpin Sufism research within the Islamic world, revealing both the field's thematic density and its underlying scholarly architecture. At the centre of the network lies a

prominent core node most likely representing the principal construct of Sufism or Tasawwuf which functions as the dominant intellectual hub from which numerous conceptual threads radiate outward, signifying its role as the unifying anchor of the field. Surrounding this central node is a densely interconnected cluster of medium-sized nodes, reflecting closely related themes such as Islamic mysticism, spirituality, Tariqah, Sufi ethics, and Muslim identity, whose strong co-occurrence linkages indicate that these concepts are frequently studied in tandem and collectively shape the discursive boundaries of the discipline. The presence of multiple smaller peripheral nodes loosely connected to the main cluster suggests the existence of emerging or specialised sub-themes possibly including Sufi orders, contemporary spiritual practices, Sufi literature, or interfaith dialogue that are gradually gaining scholarly traction but remain at the periphery of mainstream discourse. Notably, the large isolated node positioned on the left of the network indicates a major thematic domain that operates relatively independently from the central cluster, which may represent a parallel scholarly tradition or a culturally distinct stream of Sufism research that has developed its own conceptual identity, such as regional Sufi traditions or philosophical Sufism. The few disconnected nodes at the bottom further reveal niche or nascent topics that have yet to be fully integrated into the broader intellectual conversation. Collectively, this network configuration demonstrates that Sufism scholarship in the Islamic world is characterized by a strong conceptual core supported by an interconnected web of complementary themes, while simultaneously branching into diverse and evolving directions, thereby reflecting the field's intellectual maturity, thematic depth, and ongoing scholarly expansion.

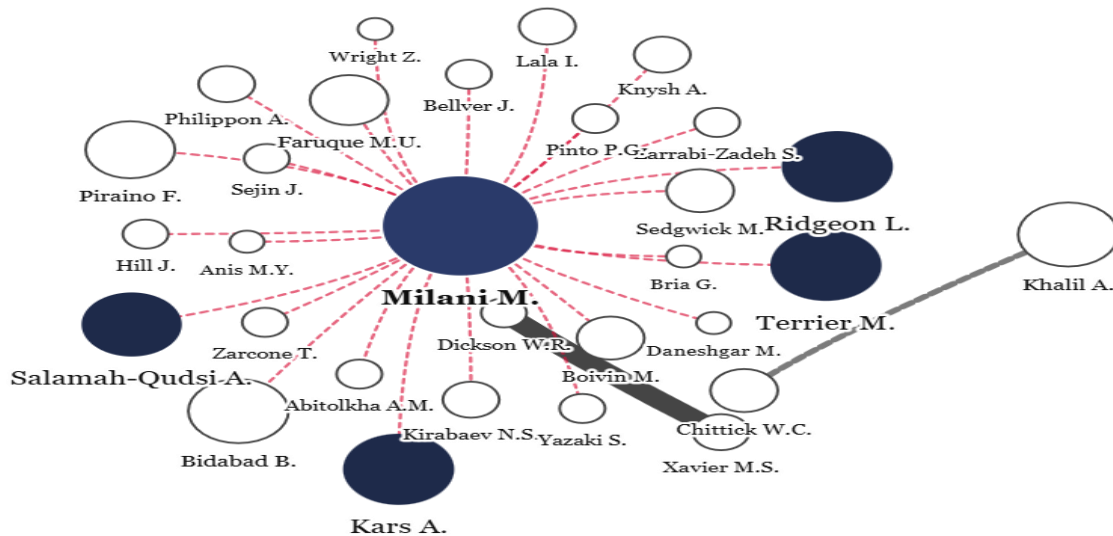
Figure 5: Top 10 Keyword Frequencies



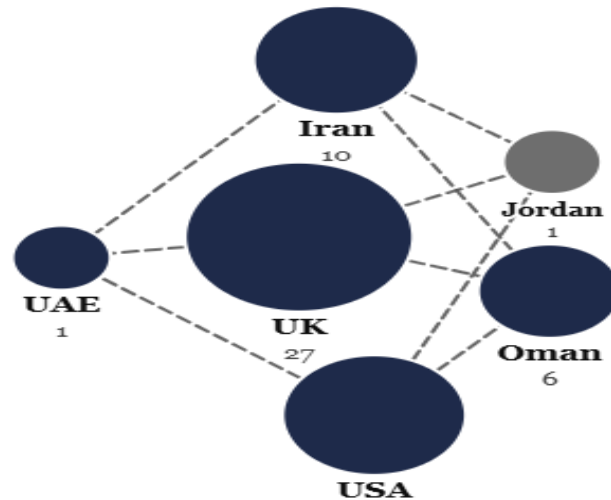
The distribution of the top 10 keywords by frequency provides a clear illustration of the conceptual hierarchy and thematic concentration within Sufism research in the Islamic world, revealing a highly skewed pattern that is consistent with the well-established Zipfian distribution commonly observed in bibliometric studies. The most dominant keyword recorded an exceptionally high frequency of 1,251 occurrences, far surpassing all other terms and unequivocally signifying its position as the central conceptual anchor of the field most likely representing the principal construct of Sufism or Tasawwuf itself, which serves as the unifying terminology underpinning the entire scholarly discourse. The second-ranked keyword, occurring 321 times, registers a substantial drop yet still maintains a prominent presence, suggesting that it functions as a major thematic pillar closely aligned with the core concept, possibly representing terms such as Islamic mysticism or Sufism studies. A further pronounced decline is observed at the third position with 112 occurrences, indicating the transition from primary to secondary thematic clusters. From the fourth keyword onwards, the frequencies stabilise within a narrow range between 30 and 43 occurrences, forming what is commonly referred to in bibliometric literature as the long tail of keywords — a cluster of supporting concepts such as Tariqah, spirituality, Sufi orders, Muslim identity, Islamic ethics, and Sufi philosophy that collectively enrich and diversify the field's intellectual landscape. This sharp inequality between the leading keyword and the remaining terms reflects a mature yet centralised research domain, wherein scholarly attention is firmly concentrated around a dominant core concept while simultaneously branching outward into a wide array of complementary themes. Collectively,

this distribution affirms that Sufism scholarship is anchored by a strong conceptual foundation, while its thematic diversity continues to expand through emerging sub-domains, signalling both the field's intellectual coherence and its capacity for interdisciplinary growth.

Figure 6: Co-Author Collaboration Network



The co-authorship network of the most productive authors in Sufism research within the Islamic world reveals a distinctive intellectual ecosystem characterised by both centralised leadership and diversified scholarly collaboration. At the heart of the network lies Milani M., who emerges as the most prominent and well-connected author, functioning as the central hub from which numerous co-authorship linkages radiate outward to a wide array of scholars including Wright Z., Lala I., Bellver J., Knysh A., Philippon A., Pinto P.G., Faruque M.U., Garrabi-Zadeh S., Piraino F., Sejin J., Hill J., Anis M.Y., Sedgwick M., Bria G., Zarcone T., Dickson W.R., Daneshgar M., Abitolkha A.M., Bidabad B., Kirabaev N.S., Yazaki S., Boivin M., and Xavier M.S. This star-like configuration signifies Milani M.'s pivotal role as a leading scholar whose extensive collaborative output has substantially shaped the contemporary discourse of Sufism studies. Surrounding this central figure are several other influential authors represented as large nodes notably Ridgeon L., Terrier M., Salamah-Qudsi A., Kars A., and Khalil A. each of whom contributes significantly to the field through their independent yet thematically connected scholarly output, reflecting the presence of multiple intellectual pillars that collectively sustain the field's productivity. The distinct sub-network linking Chittick W.C. with Khalil A. through a separate connection further highlights the existence of an autonomous collaborative cluster, possibly reflecting a specialised research stream focused on philosophical or classical Sufism that operates parallel to the main network. The differentiation between darker and lighter nodes presumably indicates varying degrees of citation impact, h-index, or thematic clustering, suggesting that while a core group of established scholars dominates the field, a broader community of emerging researchers continues to contribute meaningfully to its expansion. Collectively, this network configuration demonstrates that Sufism scholarship is sustained by a strong central figure who functions as an academic catalyst, supported by influential thematic leaders and a vibrant network of collaborating researchers, thereby reflecting both the maturity and the intellectual vitality of the field on the global academic stage.

Figure 7: Country Collaboration

The country collaboration network reveals the geographical distribution and international research dynamics that shape contemporary Sufism scholarship in the Islamic world, identifying the Big 5 leading contributors as the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), Iran, Oman, and United Arab Emirates (UAE). Among these, the United Kingdom emerges as the most dominant contributor with 27 publications, occupying a central position in the network and reaffirming its longstanding tradition of orientalist, religious, and Islamic studies scholarship hosted by leading institutions such as the University of Oxford, SOAS, and the University of Edinburgh. The United States follows as the second most productive country with 14 publications, reflecting its strong academic engagement through universities such as Harvard, Stony Brook, and Indiana, which have historically nurtured prominent scholars in Sufism and Islamic mysticism. Iran ranks third with 10 publications, representing the most active contribution from the Muslim world and underscoring its deep-rooted intellectual heritage in Tasawwuf, classical Sufi philosophy, and Irfan, which continues to flourish through institutions such as the University of Tehran and Imam Sadiq University. Oman contributes 6 publications, signalling its growing academic presence in Sufi scholarship within the Gulf region, while the UAE, despite its inclusion in the Big 5, records only 1 publication, suggesting an emerging but still nascent research engagement. The inclusion of Jordan, the only non-Big 5 country represented in the network with 1 publication, highlights its peripheral yet meaningful regional involvement, particularly through its collaborative links with Iran and Oman. Notably, all observed inter-country linkages are represented as implicit connections (dashed lines), indicating the absence of direct co-publication between these nations and pointing to a significant collaborative gap within the global Sufism research community. This pattern suggests that while individual countries have produced substantial scholarly output, formal international co-authorship remains limited, particularly between Western and Muslim-majority nations. Collectively, the network underscores a clear dichotomy in which Western institutions dominate in terms of publication volume, while Muslim-majority countries contribute through culturally and theologically rooted scholarship, thereby reinforcing the urgent need for stronger cross-cultural and cross-regional collaboration to enrich the intellectual diversity and global representation of Sufism research moving forward.

Figure 7: Country Collaboration Map

The world map visualisation provides a clear geographical representation of the international landscape of Sufism research, highlighting the trans-continental distribution of scholarly output across three major regions: Europe, North America, and the Middle East. The United Kingdom (27 publications) dominates the European cluster as the global leader, followed by the United States (14 publications) as the principal contributor from North America, while the Middle Eastern region is collectively represented by Iran (10), Oman (6), UAE (1), and Jordan (1), reflecting a culturally and theologically grounded research base rooted in the Muslim world. The connecting lines between these nations are predominantly weak collaboration links (light dashed lines), indicating that while individual countries demonstrate substantial scholarly productivity, formal cross-border co-authorship remains limited, particularly between Western and Muslim-majority nations. Notably, the geographical concentration of research within the Anglo-American and Middle Eastern axes points to a bipolar intellectual structure, in which Western institutions dominate methodological and theoretical discourse, while Middle Eastern scholars contribute through indigenous, classical, and Tasawwuf-rooted perspectives. Collectively, this global pattern underscores both the international relevance of Sufism scholarship and the pressing need to strengthen cross-regional collaboration, particularly with under-represented regions such as Southeast Asia, Africa, and South Asia, to foster a more inclusive and balanced global research ecosystem.

Table 1: Top 10 Most Cited Documents

Rank	Title	Author	Year	Citation
1	Eastern Conceptualizations of Happiness: Fundamental Differences with Western Views	Joshanloo M.	2014	278
2	Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism	Knysh A.	2017	140
3	The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past	Laffan M.	2011	134
4	Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabī, Gender, and Sexuality	Shaikh S.	2012	119
5	The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival	Seesemann R.	2011	115

6	Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond	Ernst C.W. et al.	2016	113
7	Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India	Green N.	2012	94
8	Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town	Soares B.F.	2020	90
9	Islam in Pakistan: A History	Zaman M.Q.	2018	83
10	The Mystics of al-Andalus: Ibn Barraĵān and Islamic Thought in the Twelfth Century	Casewit Y.	2017	72

The ranking of the top 10 most globally cited documents offers profound insight into the intellectual foundations and the most influential scholarly contributions that have shaped contemporary Sufism research in the Islamic world. Leading the list is Joshanloo M. (2014) with 278 citations for “Eastern Conceptualizations of Happiness: Fundamental Differences with Western Views,” a remarkable cross-disciplinary work that bridges Sufi philosophy with positive psychology, underscoring the field’s growing relevance beyond traditional religious studies and into broader humanistic and behavioural sciences. Following closely are two seminal monographs that anchor the field’s intellectual core Knysh A. (2017) with 140 citations for “Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism,” widely regarded as a definitive contemporary reference on Sufi historiography, and Laffan M. (2011) with 134 citations for “The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past,” which has significantly shaped scholarly understanding of Sufism within the Southeast Asian Muslim world. The strong representation of works addressing gender and mysticism notably Shaikh S. (2012) with 119 citations on Ibn ‘Arabī, gender, and sexuality alongside studies of regional Sufi traditions such as Seesemann R. (2011) on Ibrahim Niasse and the African Tijaniyya revival, Ernst C.W. et al. (2016) on the South Asian Chishti order, and Green N. (2012) on early modern Indian Sufism, collectively reflects the field’s strong inclination toward area studies, historical ethnography, and socio-religious analysis. Further reinforcing this diversity, contributions from Soares B.F. (2020) on Malian Islam, Zaman M.Q. (2018) on Pakistan, and Casewit Y. (2017) on the Andalusian mystic Ibn Barraĵān illustrate the geographically expansive nature of Sufism scholarship, spanning West Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Iberian-Andalusian heritage. Collectively, these ten most cited works reveal that contemporary Sufism research is firmly grounded in historical, philosophical, regional, and gender-based perspectives, while increasingly extending into psychological, cultural, and interdisciplinary domains affirming both the intellectual depth and global resonance of Sufism as a vibrant field of scholarly inquiry.

Table 2: Top 10 Journal

Rank	Journal	Publication	Citation	Avg Citation
1	Turk Kulturu ve Haci Bektas Veli - Arastirma Dergisi	99	103	1.04
2	Religions	98	211	2.15
3	Journal of Sufi Studies	79	399	5.05
4	Routledge Handbook on Sufism	29	72	2.48
5	Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 1, The Near and Middle East	25	32	1.28
6	Cumhuriyet Ilahiyat Dergisi	24	22	0.92
7	Arabica	18	118	6.56

8	Afkar	17	30	1.76
9	Voprosy Filosofii	17	10	0.59
10	Contemporary Islam	17	174	10.24

The distribution of the top 10 most relevant journals provides a comprehensive view of the publication outlets that have most significantly contributed to the dissemination of Sufism scholarship within the Islamic world, revealing a diverse and intellectually rich publishing landscape. Leading the ranking in terms of productivity is the *Turk Kulturu ve Haci Bektas Veli Arastirma Dergisi* with 99 publications, which reflects Turkey's deep-rooted scholarly engagement with Sufi heritage, particularly the Bektashi tradition, although its average citation per article (1.04) suggests a predominantly regional readership. Closely following is *Religions* (an MDPI open-access journal) with 98 publications and 211 citations (avg. 2.15), serving as a major interdisciplinary outlet that bridges Sufism studies with broader religious and theological discourses. Notably, the *Journal of Sufi Studies*, the field's flagship specialised journal published by Brill, ranks third with 79 publications but the highest total citations of 399 (avg. 5.05), underscoring its position as the most authoritative and citation-impactful venue dedicated exclusively to Sufism research. The presence of established academic handbooks such as the *Routledge Handbook on Sufism* (29 chapters, 72 citations) and the *Handbook of Oriental Studies: Section 1, The Near and Middle East* (25 chapters, 32 citations) further reinforces the field's scholarly maturity through comprehensive reference works. Among the most striking findings is the exceptionally high average citation per article recorded by *Contemporary Islam* (Springer) at 10.24, alongside *Arabica* (Brill) at 6.56, both of which despite their relatively modest publication counts of 17 and 18 respectively emerge as the most citation-efficient and high-impact outlets within the field. The inclusion of regional and culturally significant journals such as the *Cumhuriyet Ilahiyat Dergisi* (Turkish theology), *Afkar* (Malaysia's leading Islamic studies journal published by Universiti Malaya), and *Voprosy Filosofii* (Russian philosophy) reflects the truly global and multilingual reach of Sufism scholarship, spanning the Anglo-American, Turkish, Arab, Malay, and Slavic academic traditions. Collectively, this distribution demonstrates that contemporary Sufism research is sustained by a balanced ecosystem of specialised flagship journals, interdisciplinary religious studies platforms, authoritative handbooks, and regional scholarly outlets collectively forming a robust publishing infrastructure that supports both the depth and the global diversity of the discipline.

Discussion

The findings of this bibliometric review collectively illuminate a vibrant, intellectually mature, and globally expanding field of Sufism scholarship in the Islamic world. The overall trajectory of annual scientific production, evolving from 56 publications in the earliest year to a peak of 259 publications, mirrors a broader pattern observed in other rapidly growing subfields of Islamic studies (Hassan & Aliyu, 2018; Mohamad et al., 2022). The steady consolidation of output during the early years, followed by a sustained period of high productivity, reflects the increasing institutionalisation of Sufism as a recognised research domain across both Western and Muslim-majority academic environments. The sharp decline in the final year is methodologically attributable to the incomplete indexing of recent publications rather than to any genuine attenuation of scholarly interest (Donthu et al., 2021).

The keyword evolution and co-occurrence network analyses reveal an intellectually coherent yet thematically diversifying field. The dominance of the core construct of Sufism / *tasawwuf*, with a frequency of 1,251 occurrences, affirms the existence of a strong conceptual anchor consistent with the Zipfian distribution commonly observed in bibliometric studies (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Surrounding this central node are closely related themes such as Islamic mysticism, *Tariqah*, spirituality, Sufi ethics, and Muslim identity, reflecting the field's intellectual breadth and its capacity to engage diverse but interconnected scholarly conversations (Ridgeon, 2015; Milani,

2018). The presence of peripheral and emerging sub-themes including Sufi orders, contemporary spiritual practices, Sufi literature, and interfaith dialogue signals the field's ongoing capacity for renewal and interdisciplinary expansion.

The citation impact analysis offers further nuance to the field's intellectual development. The high average citations during the earlier years, peaking at 13.77, indicate that foundational works such as Joshanloo (2014), Knysh (2017), Laffan (2011), and Shaikh (2012) have established durable scholarly references that continue to shape contemporary discourse. The gradual downward trend in later years, declining to 0.06 in the most recent year, is best understood as a manifestation of the well-documented citation lag effect rather than a measure of declining quality (Donthu et al., 2021). This pattern is particularly significant for emerging scholars, as it suggests that recent contributions hold substantial potential for citation growth as the field continues to mature. The diversity of the top ten most cited documents, spanning historical, philosophical, gender, regional, and psychological perspectives, further confirms that contemporary Sufism scholarship is multi-dimensional and internationally resonant (Green, 2012; Seesemann, 2011; Soares, 2020; Casewit, 2017).

The co-authorship network analysis reveals a distinctive intellectual ecosystem in which a central figure Milani M. functions as a global academic hub, supported by influential thematic leaders such as Ridgeon L., Terrier M., Salamah-Qudsi A., Kars A., and Khalil A. The presence of a sub-network linking Chittick W.C. with Khalil A. indicates the persistence of specialised intellectual clusters, particularly within philosophical and classical Sufism (Chittick, 2013). This structure is consistent with patterns observed in other mature academic fields, where centralised leadership coexists with thematically autonomous research communities (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Such a configuration is generally productive but also signals the importance of cultivating a broader and more inclusive author base, particularly through the mentorship of early-career scholars from under-represented regions.

The country collaboration analysis reveals a clear geographic concentration of Sufism research within an Anglo-American–Middle Eastern axis, with the United Kingdom (27 publications), the United States (14), Iran (10), Oman (6), and the UAE (1) emerging as the Big 5 contributors. This pattern reaffirms the longstanding scholarly leadership of Western institutions, alongside the continued vitality of Iran's classical tasawwuf and 'irfān tradition (Bidabad, 2019; Sedgwick, 2017). However, the predominance of weak, implicit collaboration links between countries points to a persistent structural gap in formal cross-border co-authorship. This finding echoes Voloder and Kirpitchenko's (2014) observation that academic engagement with Islamic traditions often remains regionally siloed despite shared intellectual interests. The relative under-representation of Southeast Asia, Africa, and South Asia, despite their rich Sufi heritage, further underscores the need for more inclusive collaborative networks (Laffan, 2011; Soares, 2020).

Finally, the journal analysis demonstrates that contemporary Sufism scholarship is sustained by a balanced ecosystem of specialised, interdisciplinary, and regionally significant outlets. The flagship *Journal of Sufi Studies* (Brill) emerges as the most citation-impactful dedicated venue, while *Contemporary Islam* (Springer) and *Arabica* (Brill) record the highest average citations per article, indicating their strong scholarly influence despite modest output volumes. The inclusion of regional and multilingual journals such as *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli*, *Afkar* (Malaysia), *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* (Turkey), and *Voprosy Filosofii* (Russia) highlights the genuinely global and multilingual character of the field. This pluralistic publishing infrastructure reflects the intellectual depth and cultural diversity of contemporary Sufism research, while also reinforcing the urgent need to support open-access, cross-regional, and bilingual scholarly platforms to enhance global visibility (Donthu et al., 2021; Mohamad et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This bibliometric review of 2,673 publications, conducted using BiblioPro, has provided a comprehensive empirical mapping of Sufism scholarship in the Islamic world between 2010 and 2026. The findings demonstrate that the field has experienced sustained expansion, anchored by a robust conceptual core centred on Sufism and tasawwuf, while simultaneously diversifying into a wide range of thematic, regional, and interdisciplinary directions. The intellectual structure of the field is characterised by a strong central conceptual anchor, supported by closely related themes such as Islamic mysticism, Tariqah, spirituality, Sufi ethics, and Muslim identity, alongside emerging sub-themes that signal the field's continuing capacity for innovation. The citation patterns affirm the enduring influence of foundational works while also indicating considerable potential for the citation growth of recent scholarship.

The co-authorship and country collaboration analyses reveal a globally distributed yet structurally uneven scholarly ecosystem, in which Western institutions and a small number of central scholars play dominant roles, while Muslim-majority countries contribute through theologically and culturally rooted scholarship. The relative scarcity of formal cross-border co-authorship, particularly between Western and Muslim-majority institutions, represents one of the most pressing structural limitations of the contemporary field. Equally, the under-representation of Southeast Asia, Africa, and South Asia despite their rich and historically significant Sufi traditions highlights the urgent need to broaden the geographic base of the field through more inclusive collaborative networks.

Like all bibliometric studies, the present review is subject to several methodological limitations, including its reliance on a single database (Scopus), its dependence on indexing completeness, and its quantitative focus, which inevitably underplays the interpretive depth of individual works (Donthu et al., 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Future research is therefore encouraged to (i) integrate multiple databases such as Web of Science, Dimensions, and regional indices; (ii) conduct comparative bibliometric analyses across specific Sufi traditions, regions, and historical periods; (iii) examine the interplay between Sufism scholarship and adjacent fields such as Islamic education, Islamic ethics, and Muslim well-being; and (iv) explore qualitative meta-syntheses that complement bibliometric findings with deeper hermeneutical engagement. By doing so, future scholarship can build upon the empirical foundations established in the present study to advance a more inclusive, interdisciplinary, and globally representative agenda for the future development of Sufism research.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the manuscript and its [Supporting Information](#) files.