مطالعات عرفانی (مجله علمی)
دانشکده ادبیات و زبان‌های خارجی دانشگاه کاشان
شمارهٔ چهل‌وسوم، بهار وتابستان ۱۴۰۵، ص۸۹ـ۱۱۰

10.22052/se.2026.255746.1183

Comparative Study of the Vision of God in Islamic Mysticism and Augmented Reality Experiences: An Epistemological and Ontological Analysis

Seyed Ali Mostajaboldavati
Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism, Faculty of Religions and Islamic Teachings, International University of Islamic Denominations, Tehran, Iran; Email: mostajab@mazaheb.ac.ir
Majid Sadeghi Hasanabadi
Associate Professor, Department of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Faculty of Theology and Ahl al-Bayt Studies, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran (Corresponding Author); Email: majd@ltr.ui.ac.ir

Received: ۱٤۰۳/۱۱/۱۵
Accepted: ۱٤۰٤/۰٤/۳۱

Introduction
With the expansion of digital technologies, and augmented reality (AR) in particular, the question of whether mystical experiences—most notably the vision of God (ru'yat Allah) in Islamic mysticism—can be technologically recreated has acquired new significance. AR technology overlays digital elements onto the physical world, generating sensory and interactive experiences that some researchers have likened to spiritual experience. In Islamic mysticism, the vision of God is a central concept referring to an intuitive, heart-based apprehension of divine reality, examined extensively in Sufi texts (Ibn al-'Arabi, al-Qushayri, Ruzbihan Baqli) and in Qur'anic exegesis (Q. ۷:۱٤۳; Q. ۵۳:۱۱–۱۸). Unlike this mystical experience, which is rooted in a realm of authentic presence and unmediated encounter with the Transcendent, digital technology remains confined to material and sensory simulation.

Although Islamic mysticism and the philosophy of technology have each been studied extensively, no comparative study has examined the vision of God and AR experiences together from an epistemological and ontological standpoint. This gap defines the central problem of the present study: how can the epistemological and ontological differences between the mystical experience of the vision of God and AR's attempts to simulate it be explained? The article accordingly asks: What is the concept of the vision of God in Islamic mysticism, and how has it been articulated in Sufi commentary? What epistemic and ontological differences separate the mystical vision of God from AR experiences? Can AR simulate spiritual and mystical experience? Can digital technology offer an authentic experience of the vision of God?

Research findings

10.22052/se.2026.255746.1183

Employing qualitative and comparative content analysis, and drawing on Baudrillard's theory of simulation and Heidegger's phenomenology, the study analyzes Sufi texts (Ibn al-'Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* and *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, al-Qushayri's *Lata'if al-Isharat*, Ruzbihan Baqli's *'Ara'is al-Bayan*) alongside sources in the philosophy of technology (Baudrillard, Heidegger, Lanier, Boellstorff). From the mystical corpus, four core components of the vision of God are extracted: heart-based intuition (shuhud-i qalbi), rooted in purification of the heart; divine self-disclosure (tajalli), the perception of God's presence in the manifestations of the world; mystical love, which draws the wayfarer toward witnessing divine epiphanies; and annihilation in God (fana' fi Allah), the culmination of the mystical path. From the digital corpus, four corresponding features of AR spiritual experience are identified: immersion, visual simulation, reconstruction of sacred sites, and digital interaction—evident in digital meditation applications, virtual pilgrimage to sacred places such as Mecca and Medina, and religious rituals staged in the metaverse.

The comparative analysis shows that, despite surface similarities—both experiences can alter awareness, demand presence "in the moment," and evoke intense emotion—the two remain fundamentally distinct in origin, nature, purpose, and effect. The vision of God originates in an inward, unmediated relation to divine reality, is personal and non-transferable, aims at spiritual perfection and union with God, and produces deep, lasting transformation. AR experience, by contrast, originates in technological instruments, is shareable and transferable, is typically oriented toward entertainment, education, or engagement, and produces effects that are comparatively superficial and short-lived. Applying Baudrillard's account of simulation and Heidegger's emphasis on authentic, unmediated presence, the study argues that AR—however sophisticated—cannot replicate the vision of God, owing to (۱) the absence of the self-purification (tazkiyat al-nafs) that mystical vision presupposes, (۲) the inherently mediated character of AR experience as against the unmediated character of mystical vision, (۳) AR's lack of the epistemic depth carried by mystical love and annihilation in God, and (٤) AR's confinement to visual and auditory representation, which cannot reach transcendent, supra-sensory disclosure.

Conclusion

Building on these findings, the study proposes a new theoretical framework, "the distinction between the realm of authentic presence and the realm of artificial simulation," as its principal contribution. The realm of authentic presence, rooted in Islamic mysticism and Heideggerian phenomenology, comprises heart-based intuition, divine self-disclosure, mystical love, and annihilation in God, and is characterized epistemically as unmediated, transformative, and transcendent, and ontologically as direct engagement with transcendent reality. The realm of artificial simulation, rooted in AR technology and Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, comprises immersion, visual simulation, reconstruction, and digital interaction, and is characterized epistemically as mediated, sensory, and inauthentic, and ontologically as artificial representation without access to real truth.

The study concludes that the vision of God, by virtue of its unmediated and transcendent nature within the realm of authentic presence, cannot be simulated by augmented reality, which remains confined to the realm of artificial simulation—

10.22052/se.2026.255746.1183

though AR may still serve as a useful pedagogical tool for teaching mystical concepts. As the first comparative study in this field, the proposed framework offers a lens for examining the broader interaction between religion and technology, including in other mystical traditions (e.g., Christian or Buddhist mysticism) and in emerging technologies such as the metaverse. The findings have practical relevance for the design of AR-based educational tools for Islamic mysticism and for a more precise understanding of technology's impact on spirituality. Future research is recommended to examine the psychological effects of digital experiences on mystical practice (suluk) and the potential integration of technology into mystical pedagogy.

Keywords: Vision of God, Islamic mysticism, Augmented reality, Epistemology, Simulation, Realm of authentic presence.