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Understanding the Social Cognitive Motivations for *Jihad* among Muslim Millennials in Southern Philippines: A Psychological Perspective

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Abstract

Jihad is a complex social phenomenon that profoundly impacts the personal and academic growth of Muslim millennials. However, it is often misrepresented in popular media and public discourse, leading to a negative perception. Therefore, this study focuses on *jihad al-nafs* (struggle against the self) and *jihad fi-sabilillah* (struggle in the way of God) as personal and academic struggles. It investigates the social cognitive motivations of Muslim millennials (self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and media influence) in undertaking *jihad* as self-control, striving for improvement, and acquiring knowledge. A descriptive-correlational design was used to analyze responses from 385 Muslim millennials aged 18-38, who were selected through simple random sampling from a higher education institution in Davao Oriental, Southern Philippines. Data was collected using a modified survey questionnaire and analyzed using Spearman Rho. The findings indicate that female Muslim millennials demonstrate a higher socio-cognitive motivation to engage in *jihad*. Additionally, the results show that respondents were highly motivated to perform *jihad* regarding self-efficacy and outcome expectancy but were less influenced by the media. Muslim millennials exhibit high self-control, a strong desire for improvement, and a commitment to knowledge acquisition. A narrative inquiry may explore Muslim millennials' experiences and challenges in explaining *jihad* to others.

Jihad, a multifaceted Islamic concept encompassing struggle and striving, has garnered significant attention in recent years due to its association with violent extremism. Scholars have pursued understanding why Muslims around the world are performing *jihad*. In Islam, *jihad* encompasses a wide range of meanings beyond just warfare. However, many Muslims misunderstand its true essence, believing it solely involves combat against non-believers (Yeung, 2014). In reality, *jihad* is a broader concept that extends beyond armed conflict (Hoque, Jaim, & Mohamed, 2023, p. 84).

As a religious motivation, *jihad* is viewed as a spiritual journey emphasizing personal development and proactive coping, promoting virtues like patience, gratitude, and forgiveness (Saritroprak & Exline, 2021). According to Abdul-Raheem (2015), *jihad* refers to the struggle or effort to uphold and maintain Islamic principles and values within oneself and the broader society. Ramlan, Erwinsyahbana, and Hakim (2016) state that those who pursue knowledge are recognized as individuals who strive on the path of Allah *Subhana wa ta'ala*, undertaking *jihad fi-sibililah*, while *jihad al-nafs* focus on striving against personal desires to adhere to the higher principles of God (Karipek, 2020).

The term 'motivation' has been explored in various fields of study and concepts like Business and Entrepreneurs (Ismail, Zain, & Ahmed, 2006; Osman-Gani et al., 2019) and religious coping mechanisms in mental health (Saritoprak & Exline, 2020). Among Muslim millennials, understanding the motivations behind these forms of *jihad* is essential. According to Osman-Gani et al. (2019), motivation is a force within a person that influences the direction, intensity, and determination of voluntary behavior.

Deci and Ryan (2012) emphasized the primary distinction of motivation: whether an individual feels autonomous or controlled in their actions, free or constrained, and pressured to act in a specific way when they feel compelled or controlled. If there is a lack of open and constructive dialogue, the positive understanding of the term *jihad* may be overshadowed by prevailing negative connotations.

According to Winter and Hasan (2016), Islamic scholars should be wary of intellectuals advocating a negative view of *jihad*, as such perspectives can result in perilous and possibly more violent consequences. Thus, there is a great need for scholarly research on this topic to provide a nuanced understanding of various motivations and contemporary practices. Surprisingly, the field of communication for development and social change paid less attention to conflict, armed violence, and peacebuilding despite its more than six decades of existence, in the same way that, despite the centrality of communication in the structuring and transformation of human relationships, conflict resolution, and peace studies have evolved with their backs to the field of communication for development and social change since they emerged in the 1950s (Wilkins, Tufte, & Obregon, 2014).

Although there are many factors in which *jihad* is being performed and practiced by Muslims, it was compelling to investigate the socio-cognitive motivation behind their performance of *jihad* in their personal and academic struggles. Since the concept and meaning of *jihad* have been studied, for instance, the factors associated with *jihad* that are linked to higher satisfaction with life that sacrifices desires and aspirations among students (Khan et al., 2018), struggle against one's desire (Meirison & Muzakki, 2020), and the performance of '*parang sabil*' of Tausugs of Sulu as a way of waging war against colonizers (Ingilan, 2018; Ingilan & Abdurajak, 2021).

However, understanding the socio-cognitive motivations of Muslim millennials in their personal and academic struggles is underexplored. This study highlights the necessity of balanced Islamic education that emphasizes *jihad al-nafs* as a lifelong personal and academic struggle. Since *jihad* is a practice in Islam, it is compelling to study it from the perspective of Muslims outside the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), as there is a lack of available literature to explain

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57

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this phenomenon despite numerous related studies tackling politics on Islamic Jihadism (Heydarian, 2019), religious and cultural discourse (Bacani, 2019; Ingilan, 2018; Ingilan & Abdurajak, 2021). For this reason, exploring these variations provides a more inclusive and representative understanding of *jihad* across different Muslim communities, particularly in the Southern Philippines.

According to Alias and Samsudin (2005), from an Islamic perspective, exploration and motives are two main motivations directed towards a goal that is not more specific than simply "finding out". Bandura (1977) posited that learning occurs inactively through actual doing and vicariously observing modeled performances. Enactive learning is the process of learning from the outcomes of one's actions, which can both inform and motivate. Actions convey information about the correctness or appropriateness of one's behavior. People rewarded for their actions are usually aware that they are recognized for performing well, whereas punishments signal behavioral inappropriateness. Individuals tend to be motivated to learn and perform behaviors they believe will have desirable consequences and avoid learning behaviors they believe will be punished. The concept of giving one's best and submission to the 'will' of Allah in seeking proper sustenance is a duty demanded in Islam (Osman-Gani et al., 2019).

Bandura (2001) states that behavior is best predicted by the combined influence of one's belief in the ability to perform a task (self-efficacy) and the results one anticipates from having accomplished these tasks (outcome expectancy). Both self-efficacy and outcome expectancy are part of the cognitive process prior to one's action in analyzing Muslim millennials' social cognitive motivation (self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and media influence) associated with their *jihad* performance (self-control, striving for improvement, and knowledge acquisition), in which, unlike previous studies that broadly examined *jihad* religious, sociopolitical, and historical context, the psychological constructs there remains a gap in research exploring the psychological motivations that drive young Muslims to pursue *jihad fi-sabilillah* and *jihad al-nafs*.

For this reason, the researchers deem it essential to study the socio-cognitive motivations for *jihad* among Muslim millennials. It specifically aims to answer the following: (a) what are the socio-cognitive motivations of Muslim millennials in terms of self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and media influence and their performance of *jihad* in terms of self-control, striving for improvement, and acquisition of knowledge? and (b) what is the relationship between socio-cognitive motivations of Muslim millennials and their performance of *jihad*?

Materials and Methods

This study employed a descriptive-correlation research design. It described the profile of the respondents and their socio-cognitive motivations (self-efficacy, outcome influence, and media influence) to perform (self-control, striving for improvement, and acquisition of knowledge) *jihad*. A correlation method measures the relationship between the social-cognitive motivations of Muslim millennials and their performance of *jihad*. There were two basic criteria in selecting the locale of the study: peace and order situation and populations of Ka'gan.

A confidential list of Muslim students enrolled in the second semester of the Academic Year 2023-2024 from the University Registrar of a higher education institution in Davao Oriental was obtained. Simple random sampling was applied to identify the respondents. A few words and terms have been modified from the survey questionnaire by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), Springer et al. (2001), and Cusumano and Thompson (2001), which are terms that are relevant to the study. Due to the sensitivity of the word *jihad*, the modified survey questionnaire was consulted with the Ulama (a body of Muslim scholars) at the Provincial Sultanate Office and Muslim Community Affairs Development Office in Davao Oriental, and a permit or clearance was secured for this study. A printed

copy of informed consent was distributed to the Muslim millennials, and code names were assigned to ensure their anonymity and that the data gathered was treated with the utmost confidentiality. An endorsement from the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples stated that no Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) were needed; hence, this study did not comply with free and prior informed consent (FPIC).

Regarding the modified survey questionnaire, a 5-point Likert scale was used to determine the level of self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and media influence, as well as the level of self-control, striving for improvement, and acquisition of knowledge performance of *jihad*.

The following statistical tools were used to analyze the data: frequency count and percentages for the respondents' socio-demographic profile; weighted mean for the level of self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and media influence and the level of self-control, striving for improvement, and acquisition of knowledge among Muslim millennials; and Spearman's rho correlation for the relationship between socio-cognitive motivations (self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and media influence) and performance (self-control, striving for improvement, and acquisition of knowledge) of *jihad*.

As for the limitation of the study, this investigation relies on self-reported data, which can introduce response biases, including social desirability bias and inaccuracies in self-perception. Participants may have provided answers they believed were socially acceptable rather than accurately reflecting their motivations and behaviors.

Additionally, the study was conducted among Muslim millennials from a specific university population in Davao Oriental, Southern Philippines, which may not fully represent Muslim millennials' diverse experiences and perspectives across various cultural, socio-economic, and geographical backgrounds. While simple random sampling was utilized within this identified population, the findings may not apply to broader Muslim communities, particularly those outside the study region. Another limitation is that external influences, such as religious upbringing, community dynamics, and socio-political contexts, were not directly measured but may have shaped participants' motivations for *jihad*. Factors like religious education, familial beliefs, and media portrayals of *jihad* could have influenced the responses in ways this study did not explicitly control.

Results and Discussion

The *jihad* discussed in this study was based on *jihad fi-sabilillah* (individuals striving on the path of Allah *Subhana wa ta'ala* and *jihad al-nafs* (the focus on resisting personal desires to uphold the higher principles of God). This study aims to understand the social-cognitive motivations of Muslim millennials as they navigate personal and academic challenges related to *jihad*.

As observed in Table 1, female Muslim millennials dominated the student population, consisting of 260 (67%), compared to male Muslim millennials, who only comprised 125 (33%).

Table 1

The Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

Profiles	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-20	184	48
21-23	181	47
24-26	17	4
27-29	3	1
Total	**385**	**100**
Sex		
Male	125	33
Female	260	67
Total	**385**	**100**
Ethnicity		
Maguindanaon	1	0
Maranao	3	1
Tausug	1	0
Sama	1	0
Ka'gan	379	99
Total	**385**	**100**

Age

Statistically, this finding surprisingly does not reflect the population in the data from Philippine Statistics Authority XI (2020), where most are males. From this finding, females were more active in terms of education than males. As Villegas et al. (2022) postulated, females are more likely to succeed in tertiary education than males, who are gradually falling behind. This is consistent with the study of Paqueo and Orbeta (2019), who found that the males had now become lagging behind the females in terms of education.

The result shows that female Muslim millennials display a level of motivation, are educated, and are equipped with high values. Cainkar (2009), as cited in Eckert et al. (2018), corroborates that Muslim women are carriers of morale and beliefs. This result also shows that the mean age of 20 years old indicates that female Muslim millennials are more likely to become a symbol of motivation because of their innate behavior and skills to cope with the challenges in life. A study by Margolin (2019) explained that women are celebrated as embodiments of virtue and crucial agents of socialization for children. A similar study by Mir-Hosseini (2006) posited that women are symbols of cultural integrity and bearers of religious heritage and lifestyle.

Ethnicity

While examining the ethnicity of Muslim millennials, 379 (99%) belonged to the Ka'gan group. Other ethnolinguistic groups included Maranao, with only three (1%), and one from Tausug, Sama, and Maguindanaon. The results indicated that most Muslim female millennials were from the Ka'gan

group. A significant population of the Ka'gan in Southern Mindanao, particularly along the east coast, is a consequence of early Spanish colonialism in the Davao region. In contrast, the northern and western parts of Mindanao contain the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, which comprises five provinces (Tiu, 2004).

Ka'gan is recognized as a Muslim community that covers a considerable portion of the province of Davao Oriental's territory apart from the Mandaya natives, the Indigenous People.

The study of Macapagal, Montiel, and Canuday (2018) suggested that religious identity plays a crucial role in fostering a collective sense of belonging and acting as a unifying factor in shaping psychological diversity. Ka'gan is known for its attitude as hospitable and accommodating (Sultio & Gomez, 2022). The results can be interpreted as the Muslim millennials imbibing the cultural traditions and customs of Ka'gan.

Socio-Cognitive Motivation of Muslim Millennials
Self-Efficacy
The results revealed in Table 2 that Muslim millennials' self-efficacy (level of self-confidence) is fairly confident, with the overall mean being 4.09.

Table 2

Socio-Cognitive Motivation of Muslim Millennials in Terms of Self-Efficacy

Statements	Mean	Description
I can learn how to perform *jihad al-nafs* and *jihad fisabillah* from Ustad at *Madrasah*.	4.78	Completely confident
I would do anything that would bring honor and glory to Allah.	4.84	Completely confident
I can handle any problem that comes along my way.	4.07	Fairly confident
Once I've decided to accomplish something that's important to me, I keep trying to accomplish it, even if it is harder than I thought.	4.22	Completely confident
I am confident in achieving the goals that I set for myself.	3.89	Fairly confident
When I'm struggling to accomplish something difficult, I focus on my goals instead of feeling discouraged.	4.46	Completely confident
I can handle the difficulties that are associated with *Jihad*.	4.05	Fairly confident
I am capable of explaining *Jihad* to others.	2.73	Somewhat confident
I don't find *Jihad* difficult to perform.	3.83	Fairly confident
Overall	**4.09**	**Fairly confident**

Legend: 1.00-1.79 (Not confident at all), 1.80-2.59 (Slightly confident), 2.60-3.39 (Somewhat confident),
3.40-4.19 (Fairly confident), 4.20-5.00 (Completely confident)

The study by Bacani (2019) established that Muslim youth generally align with the mainstream interpretation of *jihad* as a daily struggle for self-improvement. Saritoprak, Exline, and Stauner (2018) explained that individuals who embrace a spiritual *jihad* are more likely to use positive religious coping mechanisms when faced with challenges. This finding suggests that *jihad* is considered a sacred duty in Islam and is viewed as a means of serving and glorifying Allah (*Subhana wa ta'ala*). While it is a challenging endeavor, it can be achieved with determination and faith. There is an internal struggle against personal shortcomings, with millennials emphasizing self-improvement and ethical living

(Aminnuddin, 2022; Denham & Gadbow, 2002).

According to Bandura (1977), individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to persevere in facing challenges, maintain their focus on their goals, and ultimately achieve successful outcomes. In the study of Yusof (2009), cited in Jaafar et al. (2012), having a strong sense of self-efficacy will help them utilize their full potential to meet the expectations that have been established, while Zadugisti et al. (2017) noted that religious sentiment that influences students' perception promotes a peaceful and constructive interpretation of *jihad*. The interplay between self-efficacy and motivation is also evident in the broader context of Islamic education, where self-efficacy is crucial for personal development and navigating modern challenges while maintaining religious integrity (Chaer, 2016; Minarni, Ahmad, & Ali, 2023). Self-efficacy is closely connected to spiritual and cultural dimensions, where academic efforts are frequently viewed as acts of worship, blending Islamic values with contemporary educational demands (Romadhon, 2025).

Outcome Expectancy

The responses show that Muslim millennials generally are certain that Allah *(Subhana wa ta'ala)* will grant their prayers when *jihad* is performed. These findings are indicated in Table 3, with an overall mean of 4.09.

Table 3

The Socio-Cognitive Motivation of Muslim Millennials in Terms of Outcome Expectancy

Statements	Mean	Description
I believe I could be a good Muslim if I perform *Jihad*.	4.22	Very certain
If I perform *Jihad* every day I could be rewarded by *Allah* (*Subhanahu wa Ta'ala* or The Most Glorified, The Most High).	4.17	Certain
I believe I will be guided by *Allah* (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala* or The Most Glorified, The Most High) if I perform *Jihad*.	4.31	Very certain
I believe my parents will be happy if I tell them that I perform *Jihad*.	4.28	Very certain
I believe *Allah* (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala* or The Most Glorified, The Most High) will grant my prayers if I perform *Jihad*.	4.77	Very certain
I believe my friends will support me if I perform *Jihad*.	4.09	Certain
I will be a better person and a good member of society if I perform *Jihad*.	3.65	Certain
Jihad is the surest way of a Muslim to get to heaven.	3.66	Certain
I will be a good example to other Muslim if I perform *Jihad*.	3.67	Certain
Overall	**4.09**	**Certain**

Legend: 1.00-1.79 (Very unlikely, 1.80-2.59 (Unlikely), 2.60-3.39 (Unsure), 3.40-4.19 (Certain), 4.20-5.00 (Very certain)

This suggests that an individual's motivation to engage in a specific behavior is determined by the expectation of achieving a desirable outcome. The study by Skinner (2007), as cited in Alawneh (1999), proposed that an individual's behavior is influenced by the consequences that follow it. Kawi and Kole (1991) explained that Muslims have three expectancies for each activity. A key factor shaping their performance-oriented approach is their religious beliefs. Islam emphasizes the idea that rewards are granted for even the smallest good deeds. This fosters a mindset in which every action contributes to a positive outcome, regardless of its perceived magnitude. This belief in divinely acknowledged effort

serves as a powerful motivator, driving individuals to consistently strive for excellence in all their endeavors and cultivating a culture of continuous improvement (Zaduqisti et al., 2017). Additionally, they expect their performance to be rewarded for their righteous actions. Finally, they hold the conviction that effort and performance will be rewarded in the hereafter, a fundamental principle in Islamic ideology supported by abundant evidence in Islamic literature.

These outcome expectancies, or behavioral beliefs, are believed to shape individuals' attitudes toward engaging in the behavior— specifically, their positive or negative assessment of it (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, p. 20, as cited in Vroom, 2017). A study by Saritoprak and Exline (2021) found that Muslims who approached moral struggles with a spiritual *jihad* mindset experienced greater levels of spiritual growth and post-traumatic growth, indicating that this mindset can promote positive outcomes in the face of adversity.

Meanwhile, Vroom's (1964) study suggests that motivation is influenced by three key components: expectancy (the belief that effort will lead to performance), instrumentality (the belief that performance will lead to outcomes), and valence (the desirability of the outcome). Findings regarding outcome expectancy reveal that Muslim millennials are highly motivated to engage in *jihad* fi sabilillah and *jihad al-nafs* because they believe their efforts will result in spiritual rewards and personal growth.

Media Influence

Table 4 shows the overall mean of 3.28, revealing that Muslim millennials' motivation in terms of media influence is neutral or not known.

Table 4

Socio-Cognitive Motivation of Muslim Millennials in Terms of Media Influence

Statements	Mean	Description
Mass media offers comprehensive information in terms the meaning of *jihad*.	3.12	Neutral or do not know
Mass media is an effective and efficient source of information about *jihad*.	3.20	Neutral or do not know
Mass media improves my perception of *jihad*.	3.11	Neutral or do not know
Mass media dictates my decisions and, eventually, my actions.	3.43	Influential
Mass media reporters are highly credible and reports unbiased news about *jihad*.	3.47	Influential
Mass media influences my behavior/practices in life.	3.95	Influential
Mass media is appropriate and practical to use as a source of information.	3.23	Neutral or do not know
Mass media is better than the personal forms of communication.	2.69	Neutral or do not know
Overall	**3.28**	**Neutral or do not know**

Legend: 1.00-1.79 (Not influential), 1.80-2.59 (Uninfluential), 2.60-3.39 (Neutral or do not know), 3.40-4.19 (Influential), 4.20-5.00 (Very influential)

This suggests that they may have mixed feelings about the relationship between mass media, Islam, and *jihad*. The neutral perception of media as an information source on *jihad* aligns with Baugut and Neumann (2019), who found that religious individuals are often skeptical of mass media's

portrayal of Islamic concepts, perceiving it as biased or agenda-driven. This approach caters to the audience's preference for dramatic and emotionally resonant stories, potentially leading to a distorted perception of *jihad* as inherently violent (Afsaruddin, 2022; Camphuijsen & Vissers, 2012; Nesser, 2004). Similarly, Setiawati, Tiara, and Mustika (2023) reported that Filipino students distrust mass media for religious and political topics, emphasizing the need for direct religious guidance.

However, it can be understood that the way Muslim millennials consume information through mass media shapes their understanding of *jihad*. For example, suppose they hold negative or positive views about it. In that case, this can either motivate or discourage them from engaging with it. Mahliza, Nugrogo, and Ali (2020) note that the millennial generation believes that mass media, whether online or offline, provides ample information. Unlike Bolanle (2020), who found that media strongly influences religious understanding among Muslim youth, this study shows that Muslim millennials remain neutral (mean = 3.12) on whether media provides comprehensive and practical knowledge about *jihad*. This discrepancy may stem from differences in media exposure, cultural contexts, and the presence of alternative religious education sources (e.g., *madrasahs* and religious organizations).

Social media, on the other hand, offers a diverse and decentralized range of perspectives (Khalilullah et al., 2023). Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok enable users to generate content, allowing audiences to access multiple viewpoints on *jihad*. While this can encourage greater engagement and accessibility, it also risks misinterpretation, sensationalism, or exposure to distorted narratives. Unlike traditional media, social media lacks centralized regulation, which means religious concepts may be presented in ways that reinforce or challenge mainstream interpretations (Maulana, 2022; Bermingham et al., 2009).

Summary of Socio-Cognitive Motivations of Muslim Millennials

The results shown in Table 5 indicate a mean score of 4.11 for self-efficacy and 4.09 for outcome expectancy. This implies that Muslim millennials are highly motivated in their performance of *jihad*. According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy and outcome expectancy are vital psychological factors that significantly influence an individual's motivation to engage in specific performance. Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to set ambitious goals, persist through challenges, and ultimately achieve successful outcomes.

Table 5

The Socio-Cognitive Motivations on Muslim Millennials (Self-Efficacy, Outcome Expectancy, and Media Influence)

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Self-Efficacy	4.11	Highly motivated
Outcome Expectancy	4.09	Highly motivated
Media Influence	3.28	Less motivated
Overall	**3.82**	**Highly motivated**

Legend: 1.00-1.79 (Not motivated); 1.80-2.59 (Seldom motivated); 2.60-3.39 (Less motivated); 3.40-4.19 (Highly motivated); 4.20-5.00 (Very highly motivated)

On the other hand, the results also reveal the lowest mean score of 3.28, indicating that they are less motivated to engage in *jihad* concerning media influence. The findings suggest that media portrayals of *jihad* often emphasize acts of violence and extremism, creating a negative and

stigmatized image. Muslim millennials, when exposed to these representations through news outlets and social media platforms, may develop a distorted understanding of *jihad* (Shaver et al., 2017). Social media influencers, especially in the Muslim world, have played a significant role in reimagining religious authority and Islamic practices. They challenge traditional religious structures and offer new interpretations of Islam that resonate with younger audiences (Zaid et al., 2022).

Muslim Millennials' Level of Performance of *Jihad*
Self-control

In terms of self-control, the results revealed that *jihad* is very much performed among Muslim millennials. This implies that their self-control is high. According to Nana, Hairina, and Parhani (2021), self-control significantly influences behavior and achieves positive outcomes. Individuals who possess a high level of self-control exhibit the ability to effectively modify and regulate their behavior that aligns with their goals and values. In the study of Khan, Watson, and Cothran (2008), self-control can predict religious and psychological adjustments.

Table 6

Level of Performance of Muslim Millennials in Terms of Self-Control

Statements	Mean	Description
I pray five times a day.	4.71	Very much like me
I am good at resisting temptation.	4.31	Very much like me
I practice fasting every Ramadan.	4.72	Very much like me
I have a hard time breaking bad habit.	4.16	Mostly like me
I often act without thinking.	4.25	Very much like me
Overall	**4.43**	**Very much like me**

Legend: 1.00-1.79 – (Not at all like me); 1.80-2.59 – (A little like me); 2.60.-3.39 – (Somewhat like me); 3.40-4.19 (Mostly like me); 4.20-5.00 (Very much like me)

In Islam, self-control is the foundation and driving force for all forms of motivation. Its function goes beyond just activating and maintaining behavior, as it also acts as a filter in purifying behavior from all forms of impurities, thus representing a powerful Islamic principle called *iman* (Alawneh, 1999).

Striving for Improvement

In terms of striving for improvement, the data in Table 7 show that Muslim millennials are constantly striving for improvement, with a mean of 4.76. Osman-Gani et al. (2019) explained that *jihad* in an Islamic context is perceived as a manifestation of self-discipline, determination, and consistently striving towards betterment. Khair, Ahmad, and Hamid (2016) opined that the ultimate goal of a human being in Islam is to enter paradise, which serves as the expectancy component of motivation. To achieve this goal, Muslims must strive to comply with the commands of Allah *(Subhana wa ta'ala)* and avoid disobedience by adhering to the teachings of Islam.

Table 7

Level of Performance of Muslim Millennials in Terms of Striving for Improvement

Statements	Mean	Description
I look forward to going to *Madrasah.*	4.77	Always
I focus on my own improvement instead of worrying about whether other people are doing better than me.	4.79	Always
I seek Allah's *(Subhana wa ta'ala)* forgiveness when mistakes are committed.	4.76	Always
I follow the teachings of Qur'an.	4.83	Always
I face problems and challenges in life with confidence.	4.66	Always
Overall	**4.76**	**Always**

Legend: 1.00-1.79 – (Never); 1.80-2.59 – (Rarely); 2.60.-3.39 – (Sometimes); 3.40-4.19 (Often); 4.20-5.00 (Always)

Bandura (1977) explained that individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to persist in facing obstacles, maintain focus on their goals, and achieve successful outcomes. The Qur'an (2021, 29:70) states:

"And as for those who strive in Our path – We will surely guide them in Our ways. An verily Allah is with those who do good."

Muslim millennials face unique challenges and circumstances that shape their motivations. This sense of purpose can guide their choices, actions, and interactions with others, and that is essential for a better life where a positive outlook is pursued energetically despite the struggle. They surrender to Allah *(Subhana wa ta'ala)* (Ali, Gibbs, & Camps, 2023). The pursuit of knowledge and self-improvement are highly valued in Islam as forms of striving for the pleasure of God (Hoque et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2018).

Acquisition of Knowledge

In terms of acquisition of knowledge, the results in Table 8 show that the Muslim millennials were open to learning new things that are not against Islam, with a mean score of 4.72. With a mean of 4.61, the Muslim millennials respect other religious opinions. This could be interpreted as the respondents' knowledge of the etymological definition of *jihad*.

Table 8

The Level of Performance of Muslim Millennials in Terms of Acquisition of Knowledge

Statements	Mean	Description
I read the Qur'an.	3.98	Always
I research the important information to improve my knowledge about Islam.	4.46	Always
I respect other religions' opinions towards Islam.	4.61	Always
I believe *Jihad* is not synonymous with violence and extremism.	4.41	Always
I open to learning things that are not against Islam.	4.72	Always

Statements	Mean	Description
Overall	4.44	Always

Legend: 1.00-1.79 (Never), 2.60-3.39 (Sometimes), 4.20-5.00 (Always),1.80-2.59 (Rarely), 3.40-4.19 (Often)

The findings align with Ashimi's (2018) explanation that knowledge acquisition transcends mere information gathering. It becomes a noble duty, a way to deepen our understanding of the world and Allah's (SWT) creation. This pursuit of knowledge ultimately empowers individuals to live righteous and fulfilling lives. Alawneh (1999) emphasized that "without the necessary knowledge, it is difficult for man to behave, for knowledge enhances man's behavior". A Muslim plays an important role in acquiring and sharing knowledge by encouraging people to avoid haram or sin. Karim, Abidin, and Ali (2016) state that a core belief driving their actions appears to be the responsibility to contribute to society, adhering only to lawful methods. Each Muslim is encouraged to engage in various forms of *jihad* according to their abilities, emphasizing the importance of seeking knowledge as a vital component of *jihad* (Hoque et al., 2023).

Summary of *Jihad* Performance among Muslim Millennials
The summary in Table 9 shows that *jihad* is very highly performed among Muslim millennials, with an overall mean of 4.54.

Table 9

Summary of Jihad Performance among Muslim Millennials

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Self-control	4.43	Very highly performed
Striving for improvement	4.76	Very highly performed
Acquisition of knowledge	4.44	Very highly performed
Overall	4.54	Very highly performed

Legend: 1.00-1.79 (Not performed), 1.80-2.59 (Seldom performed), 2.60-3.39 (Less performed), 3.40-4.19 (Highly performed),
4.20-5.00 (Very highly performed)

This indicates that Muslim millennials engaged in *jihad* understand the importance of balancing personal growth, intellectual pursuits, and societal contributions to maintain a holistic approach that incorporates self-control, continuous improvement, and the acquisition of knowledge aligned with Islamic teachings.

These practices are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. It is to say that the Muslim millennials believed that through striving for improvement, they can focus on self-control and acquiring knowledge for excellence. This, in turn, provides them with the tools and understanding to practice self-control effectively, make informed decisions, dispel misconceptions, and combat ignorance (Zahira et al., 2024). This nonviolent interpretation of *jihad* emphasizes personal development and the fight against internal struggles, such as lust and moral challenges, which can lead to spiritual growth and enhanced well-being (Saritropak & Exline, 2021).

The Relationship Between Socio-Cognitive Motivations and Performance of *Jihad*
Table 10 presents the data indicating a moderate positive correlation between self-efficacy and

Binocal, M. A. & Dinampo-Lunzaga, E. / Southeastern Philippines Journal of Research and Development, Vol. 30, No. 1 (March 2025) 55-75

DOI: 10.53899/spjrd.v30i1.761

67

self-control (r = .334, p = .000) and knowledge acquisition (r = .365, p = .000).

Table 10

Relationship between Motivations and Performance of Jihad

Socio-Cognitive Motivations	Performance for *jihad*			
	Self-Control	Striving for Improvement	Acquisition of Knowledge	Overall Motivation in Performing *Jihad*
Self-Efficacy				
r-value	.334**	.048	.365**	.345**
p-value	.000	.348	.000	.000
Outcome Expectancy				
r-value	.118*	-.169**	.337**	.134**
p-value	.020	.001	.000	.008
Media Influence				
r-value	.371**	.337**	.033	.342**
p-value	.000	.000	.523	.000
Overall Socio-Cognitive Motivations				
r-value	.417**	.185**	.277**	.407**
p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This suggests that individuals who are more confident in their ability to perform in *jihad* are more likely to regulate their actions and seek knowledge. However, the relationship between self-efficacy and striving for improvement (r = .048, p = .348) is not statistically significant. This contradicts the study of Schunk and Dibenedetto (2020), which states that self-efficacy has contributed significantly to the understanding of human motivation by highlighting processes that influence choices, effort, persistence, and achievement. This finding implies that while belief in one's capabilities plays a role in certain aspects of *jihad* performance, it may not be the sole determinant of personal growth efforts. Other factors, such as intrinsic motivation, mentorship, or religious education, may strongly influence an individual's continuous self-improvement.

The findings further suggest that as the confidence of Muslim millennials increases, the socio-cognitive motivations to perform *jihad* also increase. These results are similar to the study of Rezai and Rahsepar (2009), which found that people who possess high levels of self-control and focus on their goals tend to approach challenges confidently and potentially increase success in various areas of life. In addition, a similar study by Zarbakhsh et al. (2015) found that individuals with high self-efficacy can have a sense of self-control over the environment and their behavior.

Further, the results show a significant correlation between outcome expectancy and knowledge acquisition (r = .337, p = .000), indicating that those who believe in the long-term benefits of *jihad* (e.g., spiritual rewards and personal growth) are more likely to engage in learning. However, the negative correlation between outcome expectancy and striving for improvement (r = -.169, p = .001) suggests that expecting rewards alone does not necessarily translate into proactive efforts to improve

oneself. Kawi and Kole (1991) emphasized that human performance and use is a consistent process to direct individuals to achieve desired behavioral goals. Vroom (1964) states that to optimize the motivation to perform, increasing both the expectancy of a specific outcome and the value placed on each outcome is essential. This statement implies two subjective expectancies. The first is the expectancy that their effort will result in performance, while the second is that their performance will be rewarded. This could indicate that external incentives (such as divine rewards or social recognition) may not always be the primary motivators for personal development and that internal drive, discipline, or social influences might play a more significant role (Zahira et al., 2024).

On the other hand, results show that media influence is significantly correlated with self-control (r = .371, p = .000) and striving for improvement (r = .337, p = .000), suggesting that exposure to media— whether religious content, self-improvement materials, or moral narratives— can shape an individual's motivation for performing *jihad*. This indicates that media exposure may affect self-control development, even though Muslim millennials remain neutral about its influence. This contradicts the study of House (2011), which found that increased media exposure was associated with lower levels of self-control. Purba, Istiana, and Wahyuni (2020) found that lower levels of self-control in adolescents are linked to higher social media addiction.

However, the non-significant relationship (r =.033, p =.523) between media influence and the acquisition of knowledge indicates that media may not play a significant role in influencing the acquisition of knowledge about *jihad* among Muslim millennials. This highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of media influence on youth. For instance, while media is a pervasive tool in modern education, it often serves as a source of unreliable or manipulative information, particularly during periods of social instability, which can mislead young people rather than educate them effectively (Nazarov, Gorbunov, & Kalegova, 2021). Other factors, such as personal experiences, educational resources, and interpersonal interactions, may influence their knowledge acquisition, and traditional media may provide structured, authoritative interpretations of *jihad*. In contrast, social media platforms often present diverse, user-driven content that can either reinforce or distort religious concepts. Social media is a significant part of millennials' lives and can influence social change. Its role in fostering knowledge acquisition, particularly regarding complex topics like *jihad*, is not straightforward. Social media can both positively and negatively affect religious understanding, depending on the content and context of its use (Khalilullah et al., 2023).

Overall, there was a significant relationship between socio-cognitive motivations among Muslim millennials' and their performance of *jihad*. This indicates that the hypothesis was rejected.

Conclusion

The results revealed that Muslim millennials were dominated by female Muslim Millennials who actively pursued tertiary education and belonged to the Ka'gan group. Muslim millennials have a positive outlook on *jihad* and view it as a daily personal struggle for self-improvement and are highly motivated to perform *jihad* as a personal and academic struggle.

The findings revealed significant correlations between these socio-cognitive motivations and *jihad* performance. While self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and media influence shape *jihad* performance, they are not the sole determinants of an individual's commitment to personal and religious striving. Meanwhile, self-efficacy was significantly correlated with self-control and knowledge acquisition but showed no strong relationship with striving for improvement. Although self-efficacy is an important psychological factor, it should be understood as a contributing influence rather than the sole driver of *jihad* performance. This suggests that Muslim millennials who are confident in their abilities are more likely to regulate their actions and seek knowledge. Meanwhile, confidence alone does not necessarily

drive continuous self-improvement. Factors like intrinsic motivation, mentorship, and personal values can significantly impact a person's lasting commitment to self-improvement. Therefore, this study highlights the need for a well-rounded and informed perspective on *jihad*, especially within educational, religious, and community environments. Hence, highlighting the concept of *jihad-fisabililah* and *jihad al-nafs* can promote efforts that foster self-discipline, learning, and meaningful engagement with religious teachings.

The findings suggest several directions for future research. Comparative studies are necessary to explore similarities and differences concerning ethnicity between Muslim millennials in the southern and northern regions of Mindanao. Additionally, it is crucial to examine the factors affecting the environment of Muslim millennials that significantly influence their motivation to engage in *jihad*. Such information would provide insight and understanding of the complexities surrounding the term. A qualitative research study can be conducted to explore Muslim millennials' experiences, perspectives, and challenges in explaining *jihad* to others. The findings offer valuable insights for designing educational programs, interfaith dialogues, and communication campaigns that promote a nuanced understanding of *jihad* among diverse audiences. Lastly, for the spiritual and academic dimensions of *jihad*, policymakers can design educational campaigns and public messaging strategies that counteract extremist narratives and prevent misconceptions that link *jihad* solely to armed struggle.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

AI Disclosure

We declare that this manuscript was prepared without the assistance of artificial intelligence. Hence, the content of this paper is original.

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71

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73

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