

# From Mandir to Media: Virtual Pilgrimage, Online Blessings and the New Geographies of Faith

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**Abstract:** *The present research introduces and discusses the idea of how the digital environment transforms the social elements of the religion. In particular, the article focuses on the phenomenon of pilgrimage and darshan as practices subjected to transformation when the increasing use of online darshan, temple streams, virtual puja, and social networks among digital devotees is observed. The research introduces the shifts in religious rituals from the viewpoint of sociology and highlights how such phenomena as the practice of social interactions, accessibility, and the very notion of holy places may evolve. Furthermore, the study considers the questions of forming new communities within the framework of digital religiosity and how the virtual space may contribute to the development of social connections and belonging to a particular group. The paper, thus, provides theoretical arguments for the claim that social aspects of computer-mediated rituals and practices may shape new paradigms of engagement in the field of religion.*

**Keywords:** Digital religion, online darshan, virtual puja, digital pilgrimage, computer-mediated rituals, sociology of religion

## 1. Introduction

“Religion is an eminently social thing.”

Emile Durkheim

Temples and sacred sites have always been linked to religion. Through digital media, social media and digital darshan, people can experience new experiences that are not available to traditional religious experiences. Social media and virtual reality technologies have also made improvements to temples and pilgrimages.... According to sociologists, religion is a means of fostering social cohesion and community building, as evidenced by the works of Emile Durkheim. The digital realm becomes a venue for the worldwide religious community to come together and practice their faith with open hearts. Religious ritual practice is deemed necessary in social action by Max Weber's book the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Additionally, The aim of social media and the internet was to achieve something similar. Manuel Castells' network society theory is also relevant in this context, to say the least. This theory is directly related to the development of new forms and modes of religious practice on Internet, as well its role in virtual communities and the nature of religion itself. Digital space and its impact on the conception of monasteries and shrines have had an effect on centuries-long perceptions of sacred places. Overall, digital media has altered the place and space of religion in a broad sense.

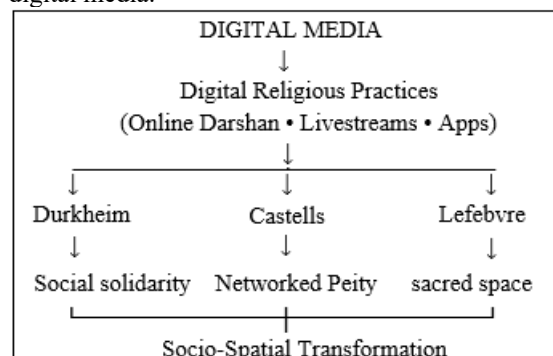
## 2. Theoretical Framework

The paper will use three sociological theories to explore how social and spatial characteristics of religious practices may change in the new age of the internet.

1) **Emile Durkheim** is a symbol of collective effervescence and social solidarity. Based on the theories of Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, religion can be considered essentially an institution of collective effervescence, which is characterized by embodied consciousness shared among members of society. A yatra and darshan are examples of religious gatherings that produce collective worship, leading to the creation of social solidarities. How might the introduction of new technologies for mass viewing and

emulating temple viewings through streaming apps and devices change the age-old social unities? Is there any variation in the social bonding that results from online fellowship?

- 2) **Manuel Castells'** book, *Networked Piety: The Network Society and Religion*, is a must-read for religious books. A feature of a networked society, according to Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells, is the connection of all social components through networks. ". To what extent did this portrayal of society influence the way people were able to engage with temples and participate in religious activities beyond the network? 'Networked piety' is believed to encompass concepts that go beyond network pedagogy, including both traditional and network-based theories
- 3) The creation of Space, Hybridity, and Sacred Geography is attributed to **Henri Lefebvre**. Henri Lefebvre, a 20th century theorist, proposed the concept of spatiality as if it were merely an aspect of human existence, which was one of the five theoretical approaches available. How would the experience of visiting temples online and experiencing religious rituals affect sacred geography? As digital viewing technology becomes more prevalent, access to settings from home can now be achieved through a cell phone or computer. This could be considered a hybridized use of sacred space. Synthesis. Among the three theoretical setups mentioned above, there are several ways in which digital mediums might affect individual and collective affiliations with organized religion. The study of the socio-spatial aspects of religious practices will examine how they have and may continue to evolve in digital media.



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### 3. Methodology

This research will seek to develop a theoretical and conceptual basis for examining the change in the ritual practices of digital media. Instead of employing primary data collection and analysis, this study will be based on sociological theories and related published works on religion, digital media, community, and space.

The three prominent sociologists whose theories will be used in this study are Durkheim with his collective effervescence and social solidarity concepts and religious participation. The second is Manuel Castells and his Network Society theory, and finally, Lefebvre's Production of Space theory will be applied to digital space.

These theories will be used to provide a conceptual analysis of how the yatra darshan online worship and temple livestreams fit into the modern digital society. Hence, a deductive research design is considered appropriate for this study. The study will focus on theoretical foundations and their practical implications. Therefore, the methodology will emphasize the theorization of the research question and will conclude with a conceptual set of religion, technology, space, and society.

#### From Physical Pilgrimage to Virtual Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage (yatra) traditionally consisted of a trip experienced by believers to holy sites where they would receive darshan and experience fulfillment and a religious community. With the advent of online media new affordances have become available and provide new ways of engaging, like through virtual darshan, temple broadcasts, virtual day trips and virtual services applications.

These innovations establish a move from the corporeal to the mediated where holy places and practices can be experienced in new ways that are not limited by pre-established parameters within the boundaries of the faith. As a result, virtual pilgrimage can be viewed as a supplement to traditional pilgrimage or as an evolution towards a more digital religion.

This transition from mandir to media could be viewed as a specific illustration of this much broader development, with significant consequences for how both society and religious operation can be viewed:

#### Digital Religion and Changing forms of Religion participation

Digital media is a powerful instrument in transforming the way people practice their religion. It has become an occurrence in the practice of religion in the form of online darshan, online streaming of religious ritual, online pujas, and religious networking. Technology has facilitated the worshiper to practice their religion in the comfort of their home.

Based on the theory, those kinds of online activities could be seen as collective participation with Durkheim and social capital. They facilitate community participation of users individually regardless of physical location. As well as the network society theory examined by Castells can be used to

explain people's integration into the system and the empowerment for individuals as a network forming through internet-enabled communication.

Because of this, digital religion is a new domain in which old rituals are restructured and reconstructed to adapt to and fulfill the needs of modern society.

#### Sacred Space in the Digital Age

Digital media and the modification of space: digital media have extended the meanings and borders of sacred space. Dom, or the place where the traditional ritual, darshan, and religious sensations and feelings used to be practiced, has been elevated to a new level with online darshan, livestreaming, and digital devices. This is a new form of experience of the everyday life space, like the home and digital devices.

In terms that Henri Lefebvre, a concept of space, this event is describes the formation of new sacredness space with physical and technological exist together. Those spaces are generated by society via their activities and spatial practices. In the sense that digital media is compensated to those already existing (faith and religion) dimensions of space. It constructs a semiotic space which mixes physical and virtual spaces to further alter their relation to their practice of the religion.

#### Digital Media, Religious Authority and Accessibility

The other intervening influence in the interaction of the religious institutions and the devotees is digital media. Institutions and figures may now intervene not only through the use of the digital tools but also through such means as live streaming, etc., which allow them to reach out to larger audiences of the religious believers.

Firstly, this can be interpreted as the opportunity provided to those seeking religious guidance and alternatives to the traditional religious practice, while digital religion can facilitate greater inauthenticity and extravagance in terms of commercialization and globalization. Thus, the digital can both democratize and re-establish the hegemonic position of certain religious ideologies.

### 4. Discussion

Data shows, I have done all in all, digital media is transforming the practices of religion. With online darshan, the use of livestreaming, and digitally based religious communities as new ways of doing rituals with no restriction of time, and place digital media provide us alternative ways of doing religion.

It could be argued that, per Durkheim's perspective of religion, online religion practices enable the practice of new collective and social bonds, given a feeling of belonging to a community. But it could also be maintained that, for the Network Society theory of Castells, online religion practices explain the improved integration of religious community into the network society, given their dependence on technology and their improved integration with temple practices. Based on Lefebvre's logic of the production of religious spaces, it can be suggested that, since the practices

explain a new form of providing sacred space by combining physical and digital, one can assume online religion practices to be a new form of the production of sacred space. Because of this, we can argue that digital religion practices exist as independently, modifying some of the dimensions of the existing religion practices, all while existing in the network society with new collective and social practices.

## 5. Conclusion

As time changes, the rapid growth of media has been seen where the devotees are able to engage and interact. Online darshan streamed temple services, and virtual puja have changed the style of religious practice. Durkheim, Castells, and Lefebvre's conceptions can be applied to explore processes of the digital age on the transformation of solidarity, religious engagement in the context of a networked setting, and production of new sacred geography. Digital media do not replace traditional pilgrimage but are used to create new hybrid forms of practices. Which has resulted from the mandir to media, which has become an important transition in the practices and experiences of the religion.

## 6. Limitations and Future Research

Mainly this is a theoretical study since there is no such data as interviews with respondents, surveys and other fieldwork observations, meaning that it concentrated more on conceptualization rather than exploring devotees experiences in practice through measurements. Also this study was not meant to evaluate effects on different categories of visitors like age gender social class or digitization level.

And, other means of study may be employed to explore this doomain of belief online utilizing survey methods, involving surveys, interviews, or electronic ethnography. And, a comparison of various temples or religions may be completed to observe how online darshan and virtual practice impact or affect the digitalization of practice authority community, or sacred space.

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