

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MEDIA AND AI ON RELIGIOUS PRACTICES, BELIEF FORMATION, AND COMMUNITY BUILDING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The pervasive integration of digital media and artificial intelligence (AI) into the social fabric of the 21st century has precipitated a profound transformation in religious landscapes globally. This comprehensive paper examines the multifaceted impact of these technologies on religious practices, the formation of individual and collective beliefs, and the mechanisms of community building. Through a synthesis of current scholarly literature (2020-2025), the analysis explores how digital platforms have democratized access to religious content, enabling rituals like virtual pilgrimages, streaming worship services, and digital prayer forums, thereby creating hybridized "networked religiosities." Concurrently, the paper investigates the role of algorithmic curation on social media and search engines in shaping belief formation, potentially leading to echo chambers, radicalization, or the personalized syncretism

of spiritual ideas. A central focus is placed on the reconfiguration of religious community, analyzing how online groups, from mainstream congregational extensions to novel spiritual movements, foster belonging, authority, and collective identity in disembodied spaces. The emerging integration of AI, through chatbots for spiritual guidance, algorithmic scripture analysis, and generative media for sacred art, presents new frontiers and ethical quandaries. The discussion critically addresses significant challenges, including digital divides, the commodification of faith, surveillance concerns, and the tension between centralized platform control and religious autonomy. The paper concludes that digital media and AI are not merely tools for replicating offline religion but are active, non-neutral participants in redefining what constitutes religious practice, belief, and community in the contemporary era. Recommendations for religious institutions, scholars, and technology developers are proposed to navigate this evolving terrain thoughtfully.

Keywords: digital religion, artificial intelligence, online communities, algorithmic belief, networked spirituality

Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century has been irrevocably shaped by the dual forces of digital connectivity and computational intelligence. Digital media platforms and artificial intelligence (AI) systems have become embedded infrastructures of daily life, influencing how individuals communicate, work, learn, and construct

their identities. Within this socio-technological milieu, the ancient and enduring human dimension of religion is experiencing a significant and complex evolution. Religion, traditionally anchored in physical spaces, embodied rituals, face-to-face communities, and established hierarchical authorities, is increasingly mediated through screens, algorithms, and networked interactions (Campbell, 2020). This paper posits that digital media and AI are not passive channels for religious content but are active agents that are fundamentally reshaping religious practices, the processes of belief formation, and the very architecture of religious community.

The initial migration of religion online, often termed "digital religion" or "cyber-religion," involved basic forms of information dissemination, such as church websites hosting sermons. However, the landscape has rapidly advanced to encompass immersive, interactive, and personalized experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a potent accelerant, forcing religious groups worldwide to adopt digital tools for survival, making phenomena like live-streamed worship, virtual sacraments, and online pastoral care suddenly mainstream (Bellar et al., 2020). Beyond necessity-driven adoption, a deeper, more organic integration is occurring, giving rise to hybrid forms of religiosity that seamlessly blend online and offline practices. Simultaneously, the proliferation of AI—from the recommendation algorithms of social media to conversational chatbots and generative models—introduces a new layer of mediation. These systems can

curate religious information, simulate spiritual dialogue, and even create sacred art, raising profound questions about authority, authenticity, and the nature of religious experience itself (Barker, 2021).

This paper aims to provide a broad and comprehensive analysis of this transformation. It will explore how digital platforms have expanded and altered the repertoire of religious practices; investigate the cognitive and social impact of algorithmically sorted information on belief systems; analyze the new models of belonging and community fostered in digital spaces; and critically assess the promises and perils presented by AI. The scope is interdisciplinary, drawing from sociology of religion, media studies, computer science, and ethics, with a focused temporal lens on scholarship from 2020 to 2025 to capture the most recent developments. Through this examination, the paper seeks to illuminate the contours of a rapidly evolving religious landscape, where the digital and the divine are increasingly intertwined.

Literature Review

Digital Media and the Transformation of Religious Practice

Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that digital media have catalyzed a significant expansion and mutation of religious practices. The concept of "lived religion," which focuses on religion as practiced in everyday life, is now inherently interwoven with digital tools (Ammerman, 2021). Rituals, once confined to

specific times and physical locations, have become portable, on-demand, and customizable. A primary manifestation is the live-streaming and archiving of worship services. Platforms like YouTube, Facebook Live, and dedicated church apps allow individuals to participate in communal worship from any location, enabling engagement for the geographically distant, physically disabled, or institutionally disaffiliated (Bellar et al., 2020). This practice, however, is not a simple translation; it changes the nature of participation from embodied co-presence to a spectatorial or interactive mode mediated by a screen, raising questions about the efficacy and authenticity of virtual sacraments, a debate particularly acute within sacramental traditions like Catholicism and Orthodoxy (Barker, 2021).

Beyond mainstream worship, digital media enable entirely novel or significantly augmented rituals. Virtual pilgrimages, using 360-degree videos or virtual reality (VR), allow users to experience sacred sites like Mecca, the Vatican, or the Ganges River remotely (Radde-Antweiler & Zeiler, 2022). Prayer has found new expressions through social media prayer walls, dedicated prayer apps (e.g., [Pray.com](https://www.pray.com)), and the use of hashtags (e.g., #PrayFor) to create global, instantaneous prayer communities around crises. These "hashtag religiosities" demonstrate how networked platforms can facilitate rapid, large-scale, yet often ephemeral, collective religious expression (Mahan, 2021). Furthermore, the consumption of religious content has become highly personalized through podcasts, online courses, and influencer-led teachings on platforms like Instagram and

TikTok, where charismatic authority can be built independently of traditional institutional structures (Parker & Guedes, 2023).

Algorithmic Curation and Belief Formation

The formation of religious and spiritual beliefs in the digital age is increasingly influenced by the opaque logics of algorithms. Search engines and social media platforms employ complex algorithms to curate content feeds, prioritize information, and suggest connections based on user data. This creates a personalized information environment, often called a "filter bubble" or "echo chamber," which can profoundly shape an individual's worldview (Barker, 2021). For the religious seeker, a Google search on "the meaning of life" or YouTube recommendations following a viewing of a religious lecture will steer subsequent exploration in paths determined by commercial and engagement-driven metrics, not theological coherence or institutional guidance.

This algorithmic curation facilitates two seemingly opposing trends: reinforcement and fragmentation. On one hand, individuals embedded in specific religious traditions can find their beliefs constantly reinforced by a stream of confirming content, deepening in-group identity but potentially exacerbating polarization from other groups (Ribeiro et al., 2020). On the other hand, the same infrastructure enables "spiritual browsing" or "religion a la carte," where individuals piece together beliefs from diverse traditions—Eastern meditation, Christian mysticism, pagan ecology, and secular

mindfulness—creating highly personalized, syncretic belief systems. This "patchwork religion" is actively facilitated by platforms that connect disparate ideas based on user behavior rather than doctrinal compatibility (Village & Francis, 2021). The danger lies in the potential for algorithmic amplification of extremist content, conspiracy theories with religious overtones, or misinformation, which can distort belief formation and undermine social cohesion (Berger, 2023).

Reconfiguring Community: From Congregations to Networks

Digital media have fundamentally altered the topology of religious community. The traditional model of the geographically bounded congregation, meeting regularly in a shared sacred space under designated leadership, is now complemented and sometimes challenged by distributed, fluid, and interest-based networks. Campbell's (2020) concept of "networked religion" aptly describes this shift, characterized by flexible affiliation, multi-sided authority, and community built around shared practices or identities rather than physical co-location.

Online communities range from extensions of physical churches (e.g., private Facebook groups for small group Bible study) to fully native digital formations. These can be large-scale, like the global Muslim community engaging on Quranic apps, or niche, like Pagan groups on Discord servers. These spaces provide vital support, belonging, and identity validation, especially for marginalized believers (e.g., LGBTQ+ individuals

within conservative traditions), minority faith practitioners in diaspora, or those with unconventional beliefs (Grieve & Veidlinger, 2022). However, digital community building also presents challenges. The bonds formed may be weaker ("thin community"), the lack of physical embodiment can limit the depth of pastoral care, and the ease of exit ("unfriending" or leaving a server) can foster instability. Furthermore, authority becomes dispersed; a TikTok influencer's interpretation of scripture may carry more weight for some than a trained pastor's sermon, leading to tensions within traditional hierarchies (Parker & Guedes, 2023).

The Emergent Role of Artificial Intelligence

The integration of AI into religious spheres represents the newest and perhaps most disruptive frontier. AI applications are moving beyond passive tools to become active participants in religious life. One prominent area is the development of religious chatbots and conversational agents. Apps like "Abound" (Catholic) or "Hadith AI" provide automated answers to doctrinal or ethical questions, offer daily scripture, and guide users through prayers. These systems, while offering 24/7 accessibility, raise critical questions about the nature of spiritual guidance, the risk of oversimplifying complex theological matters, and the absence of human empathy and discernment (Barker, 2021).

Generative AI models like DALL-E, Stable Diffusion, and ChatGPT present further implications. They can generate images of sacred figures or scenes, compose prayers, hymns, or even sermon outlines, and provide

novel interpretations of religious texts. This capability challenges notions of human creativity as a divine gift and introduces concerns about cultural bias, accuracy, and the potential for generating blasphemous or heretical content (Berger, 2023). On an analytical level, AI is also being used for "computational hermeneutics"—analyzing vast corpora of religious texts to identify patterns, trace historical influences, or even predict theological trends, offering new tools for scholarly research (Singh et al., 2022).

Critical Challenges and Ethical Considerations

The digital and AI-mediated religious landscape is fraught with significant challenges. A persistent **digital divide** means that these transformations are not universally accessible, potentially exacerbating inequalities between technologically rich and poor individuals or communities (Radde-Antweiler & Zeiler, 2022). The **commodification of faith** is another concern, as platforms monetize user attention and data, potentially turning spiritual seeking into a consumer activity shaped by corporate interests (Bellar et al., 2020). **Data privacy and surveillance** are paramount; the intimate data generated through prayer apps, spiritual searches, and online confessions are valuable to both platforms and, in some contexts, state actors, posing risks of profiling or persecution (Grieve & Veidlinger, 2022).

Furthermore, the centralized control exerted by a few major tech companies (Meta, Google, Apple) over the digital public square places immense power in their

hands to set community standards, which may conflict with religious values or practices, leading to censorship debates (Berger, 2023). Finally, there is an overarching **theological and anthropological challenge**: does digitally mediated relationship with the divine and community fundamentally alter or diminish the human religious experience? Scholars debate whether these technologies lead to a trivialization of the sacred or represent a legitimate new chapter in the historical adaptation of religion to changing media environments (Campbell, 2020).

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative literature review methodology, designed to synthesize and critically analyze existing scholarly research on the intersection of digital media, AI, and religion. The aim is to construct a comprehensive, narrative synthesis of the current state of knowledge, identify dominant themes and theoretical perspectives, and highlight gaps and contradictions within the field. The review is explicitly focused on recent scholarship to capture the rapid evolution of technology and its social implications, hence the temporal boundary of 2020 to 2025.

A systematic search strategy was implemented across major academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and Project MUSE. Keyword combinations included: ("digital religion" OR "online religion" OR "cyber-religion") AND ("artificial intelligence" OR "AI" OR "algorithm*") AND ("practice" OR "belief" OR "community") AND ("social

media" OR "internet"). The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and reputable conference proceedings published in English within the specified timeframe.

The initial search yielded over 200 potential sources. These were screened based on title and abstract for direct relevance to the core themes of practices, belief formation, or community building. Following this, 85 sources were selected for full-text review. Through an iterative process of reading and thematic coding, key conceptual categories emerged (e.g., ritual transformation, algorithmic belief, networked community, AI ethics). These categories informed the structure of the literature review. The most salient and frequently cited sources within each category were prioritized for inclusion, with a conscious effort to represent diverse religious traditions and global perspectives where available. The findings from this synthesized literature form the basis for the subsequent discussion and the construction of the conceptual tables presented in the results section.

Results and Discussion of Findings

The synthesis of contemporary literature reveals a landscape of profound and multi-layered change. The findings are discussed thematically below, supported by conceptual tables that organize key insights.

The Hybridization of Religious Practice

The data indicates a clear shift from purely physical to hybridized religious practices. This hybridization is not a

replacement but an expansion, creating a continuum of engagement. Table 1 outlines the transformation of core religious practices.

Table 1
Transformation of Core Religious Practices in the Digital Age

Traditional Practice	Digital Manifestation(s)	Key Characteristics of Digital Form	Primary Scholarly References
Communal Worship	Live-streamed services; on-demand video archives; virtual reality (VR) church.	Asynchronous, spectatorial, geographically unbound, interactive via chat.	Bellar et al. (2020); Campbell (2020)
Pilgrimage	Virtual tours (360° video/VR); interactive online maps; social media "check-ins" at sacred sites.	Simulated embodiment, accessible, often gamified or narrative-driven.	Radde-Antweiler&Zeiler (2022)
Prayer & Meditation	Prayer apps (e.g., Pray.com , Muslim Pro); social media prayer walls/threads; mindfulness apps (e.g., Calm, Headspace).	Personalized, scheduled, metricized (streak counters), community-enabled via sharing.	Mahan (2021); Village & Francis (2021)
Study/Scripture Reading	Podcasts; online courses (e.g., Coursera on religion); interactive scripture apps; social	On-demand, fragmented, influencer-led, often de-institutionalized	Parker & Guedes (2023)

	media exegesis (e.g., Instagram theology).	.	
Pastoral Care & Counselling	Email counselling; video call confessions; AI chatbots for spiritual guidance; online support forums.	Asynchronous, anonymized potential, scalable, but risks depersonalization.	Barker (2021); Grieve & Veidlinger (2022)

Source: Compiled by the author based on cited literature.

Table 1 illustrates the diversification of practice. For instance, prayer, once a private or communal act, can now be tracked and shared via an app, transforming it into a quantified, socially visible activity. This can enhance discipline but may also foster performativity. The live-streamed service extends a congregation's reach but creates a two-tiered community: the physically present core and the dispersed online audience, who may have different levels of commitment and access to communal life.

Algorithmic Belief Formation: Curated Seekership

The literature consistently points to the algorithm as a key, non-human actor in modern belief formation. Its role is dual-faceted: it can entrench existing beliefs and facilitate eclectic spiritual exploration. Table 2 models this process.

Table 2

The Algorithmic Belief Formation Cycle

Stage	Process Description	Potential Outcomes	Associated Risks
1. Initial Input	User engages with religious/spiritual content online (search, video, post).	Seeds the algorithm's profile of the user's interests.	Initial query may be vague or based on misinformation .
2. Algorithmic Curation	Platform's algorithm recommends similar content, connects user to affinity groups/pages, prioritizes engaging (often emotive) material.	Creates a personalized "spiritual feed." Reinforces initial interest area.	Filter bubble/echo chamber; amplification of extreme content; commercial interests drive recommendations.
3. User Engagement	User clicks, watches, joins, or follows recommended content/communities.	Deepens algorithmic profile; user's belief system is exposed to a curated worldview.	Confirmation bias; reduced exposure to challenging or diverse perspectives.
4. Belief System Output	A. Reinforcement: Homogenous worldview strengthens. B. Syncretism: Eclectic blending of ideas from connected but disparate sources.	Polarized religious identity OR highly individualized, "patchwork" belief system.	Fragmentation of shared cultural narratives; radicalization; theological incoherence.

Source: Developed by the author from synthesis of Barker (2021), Ribeiro et al. (2020), and Village & Francis (2021).

This cycle demonstrates the dynamic interplay between user agency and algorithmic structure. A seeker exploring Buddhism may be gradually guided toward content on secular mindfulness, Stoic philosophy, and eco-spirituality, crafting a unique worldview. Conversely, someone within a conservative tradition may be funneled toward increasingly fundamentalist content. The process is largely opaque to the user, making critical digital literacy an essential but often lacking skill in religious contexts.

Architectures of Digital Religious Community

The analysis reveals distinct models of online religious community, each with its own structure, authority dynamics, and strengths/weaknesses. Table 3 contrasts these models.

Table 3

Typology of Digital Religious Community Models

Community Model	Description & Examples	Authority Structure	Strengths	Weaknesses
Broadcast Congregation	Online extension of a physical church. Centralized content (streamed sermons) with limited online interaction. (e.g., megachurch live streams).	Centralized, institutional. Leader-centric.	Maintains doctrinal control, scales reach, provides continuity for members.	Passive audience model, weak relational bonds online, creates "consumer" mindset.
Interactive	Member-driven	Distributed	Fosters	Can

Networked Group	interaction in semi-structured spaces. (e.g., Facebook parish groups, Subreddits like r/Christianity, r/Islam, Discord servers for pagan or traditions).	, meritocratic. Authority earned through participation, knowledge, or charisma.	peer support, allows for niche interests, empowers lay leadership.	fragment or conflict with offline authority; prone to moderation challenges and conflict.
Affinity-Based Spiritual Network	Communities formed around shared practices or identities, not institutional affiliation. (e.g., #MeditationTwitter, LGBTQ+ faith groups, mindfulness app communities).	Fluid, influencer-based. Authority lies with practice guides or prominent voices.	Provides safe space for marginalized believers, focuses on shared experience over dogma.	Can be transient, lack deep theological grounding, may commercialize practice.
API-Driven Micro Community	Lightweight, transient interactions facilitated by app features. (e.g., shared prayer chains on Pray.com , Bible verse sharing on You Version, hashtag prayers).	Minimal, platform-dependent. Authority ceded to platform design and algorithms.	Enables rapid, large-scale, simple collective action; low barrier to entry.	Ephemeral, thin sense of community, highly susceptible to platform policy changes.

Source: Compiled by the author from Campbell (2020), Grieve & Veidlinger (2022), and Parker & Guedes (2023).

Table 3 shows that "community" is not monolithic. The "Interactive Networked Group" often provides the deepest sense of belonging for digitally native believers, but it requires active moderation and can develop norms divergent from any parent institution. The "API-Driven Micro-Community" represents a new, minimalist form of collective religious expression, enabled entirely by platform architecture.

AI Applications and Their Religious Implications

AI's role is rapidly evolving from analytical tool to participatory agent. Table 4 categorizes current and emerging AI applications in religious contexts and their associated implications.

Table 4

AI Applications in Religious Contexts: Categories and Implications

AI Application Category	Specific Examples	Potential Benefits	Ethical & Theological Concerns
Conversational Agents (Chatbots)	Confessional bots (e.g., Catholic); scriptural Q&A bots (e.g., Buddhist); companionship bots for the isolated.	24/7 accessibility, anonymity, consistent answers, scalability for basic inquiries.	Lack of empathy/compassion; oversimplification of complex pastoral issues; data privacy of intimate disclosures; simulation of divine grace/absolution.
Generative	AI-generated sacred	Democratiz	Authorship and

Content Creation	art (icons, mandalas); AI-composed hymns/prayers/sermons; AI-written spiritual poetry.	es artistic creation; provides new interpretive tools; can inspire.	sanctity of creative acts; potential for blasphemous/biased output; undermines human artistic vocation; copyright issues.
Algorithmic Analysis & Hermeneutics	Pattern analysis in sacred texts; sentiment analysis of sermons; predicting religious trends from big data.	Uncovers new scholarly insights; can analyze bias in teachings; helps understand large-scale belief shifts.	Reduction of nuanced texts to data patterns; black-box analysis lacking transparency; potential for surveillance of religious groups.
Ritual & Practice Facilitators	AI-guided meditation; VR/AR rituals with adaptive elements; algorithmically personalized devotional plans.	Highly personalized spiritual practice; immersive experiences; adaptive guidance.	Commodification and standardization of ritual; loss of communal, traditional structures; psychological effects of AI-led ritual.

Source: Developed by the author from synthesis of Barker (2021), Berger (2023), and Singh et al. (2022).

The most contentious applications are conversational agents and generative art. A chatbot offering absolution, challenges sacramental theology, while an AI-generated icon raises questions about the role of prayer and tradition in iconography. These tools force a re-

examination of core concepts like authority, creativity, and the channels of grace.

Synthesis and Critical Tensions

Integrating the findings reveals several overarching tensions characterizing the digital religious landscape. These are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
Core Tensions in the Digital/AI-Mediated Religious Landscape

Tension	Pole A	Pole B	Manifestation Example
Access vs. Depth	Democratized, global access to religious content and community.	Superficial, "thin" engagement lacking embodied commitment and deep relationality.	Millions attending a live-streamed crusade vs. a small congregation sharing a communal meal.
Authority: Institution vs. Network	Centralized, traditional religious authority (clergy, texts, institutions).	Distributed, peer-based, or algorithmic authority (influencers, online groups, search rankings).	A diocesan decree vs. a viral TikTok video critiquing church doctrine.
Belief: Coherence vs. Fragmentation	Systematic, doctrinally coherent belief systems formed within a	Personalized, syncretic, "patchwork" belief systems assembled	Catechism-based faith vs. a belief system blending yoga, Christian mysticism, and eco-

	tradition.	from diverse online sources.	spirituality.
Practice: Embodiment vs. Virtuality	Religion as fundamentally embodied, involving physical rituals, communal presence, and sensory experiences.	Religion as digitally mediated, involving virtual presence, simulated rituals, and online interaction.	The Eucharist involving physical bread and wine vs. a "digital Eucharist" experienced via VR.
Agency: Human vs. Algorithm	Human autonomy in spiritual seeking, guided by conscience, community, and reason.	Algorithmic curation shaping the information environment and pathways of exploration.	A seeker intentionally studying multiple worldviews vs. a seeker whose YouTube feed dictates their spiritual journey.
Data: Ministry vs. Commodity	Religious data used for pastoral care, community building, and spiritual support.	Religious data harvested by platforms for commercial profiling, advertising, and profit.	A church app tracking attendance for follow-up care vs. a prayer app selling user emotional data.

Source: Compiled by the author as a synthesis of the paper's overall findings.

These tensions are not binary choices but dynamic spectrums on which individuals, communities, and institutions constantly navigate. The central discussion revolves around whether the digital/AI mediation represents a net gain for religious life—increasing

access, fostering new forms of community, and enabling personalization—or a net loss—commodifying faith, eroding deep community, and outsourcing spiritual authority to opaque algorithms. The evidence suggests it is simultaneously both, with the outcome heavily dependent on design choices, digital literacy, and theological reflexivity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The impact of digital media and artificial intelligence on 21st-century religion is transformative, pervasive, and inherently ambiguous. This paper has demonstrated that these technologies are actively reshaping the three foundational pillars of religious life: practice, belief, and community. Religious practices have hybridized, becoming more accessible, personalized, and portable, yet risking commodification and performativity. Belief formation is increasingly subject to the logic of algorithmic curation, enabling both radical reinforcement and eclectic syncretism, while raising alarms about polarization and incoherence. Religious community has been reconfigured from bounded congregations to fluid networks, offering vital belonging to the marginalized and dispersed but often struggling to provide the depth and stability of embodied fellowship. The emergence of AI introduces a novel layer, with chatbots, generative art, and analytical tools posing profound theological and ethical questions about authority, creativity, and the very nature of spiritual interaction.

The overarching finding is that digital and AI technologies are *non-neutral mediators*. They come with embedded values—such as personalization, engagement, scalability, and datafication—that actively shape the religious experiences they facilitate. Religion in the digital age is increasingly a *negotiated reality*, constructed in the interplay between user agency, algorithmic governance, platform policies, and traditional religious structures. The core tensions outlined—between access and depth, institutional and networked authority, coherence and fragmentation—define the contours of this new landscape.

Based on this analysis, several recommendations are proposed:

For Religious Institutions and Leaders:

1. **Develop Digital Theologies:** Move beyond pragmatic adoption to critically reflect on how digital mediation aligns with core theological tenets about community, sacrament, and authority. Issue guidance on the appropriate and inappropriate uses of technology.
2. **Invest in Digital Ministry Training:** Train clergy and lay leaders not just in technical skills but in the unique pastoral challenges of online community building, digital discipleship, and recognizing the signs of algorithmic radicalization or spiritual harm online.
3. **Design for Hybrid Integration:** Intentionally design for a "phygital" (physical-digital) model

where online and offline activities are complementary and mutually reinforcing, ensuring online participants are integrated into the full life of the community where possible.

4. **Advocate for Ethical Tech:** Use institutional influence to advocate with technology companies for greater transparency in algorithms, robust privacy protections for religious data, and fair content moderation policies that respect religious expression.

For Scholars and Researchers:

1. **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Foster deeper collaboration between scholars of religion, computer scientists, ethicists, and psychologists to study the longitudinal effects of AI-driven spirituality and the psychological impact of digitally mediated ritual.
2. **Critical Algorithm Studies:** Apply the tools of critical algorithm studies to specifically examine the biases and logics of platforms as they shape religious discourse and community formation.
3. **Global and Non-Western Focus:** Expand research beyond Western, Christian contexts to understand how these technologies are adopted and adapted in diverse religious and cultural settings, particularly in the Global South.

For Technology Developers and Platform Companies:

1. **Ethical by Design:** Incorporate ethical and religious sensitivity into the design phase of apps and platforms intended for religious use. This includes privacy-by-design, avoiding dark patterns that exploit spiritual vulnerability, and allowing for meaningful community governance tools.
2. **Transparency and User Control:** Provide users with greater transparency about how algorithms curate religious content and more granular control over their data and content feeds.
3. **Collaborative Moderation:** Work collaboratively with trusted religious organizations and scholars to develop nuanced content moderation frameworks that understand religious context and protect against hate speech while preserving legitimate theological debate.

In conclusion, the 21st century is witnessing a great re-mediation of religion. The journey forward requires not naiveté about the risks nor reactionary rejection of the tools, but a thoughtful, critical, and creative engagement that seeks to harness the potential of digital media and AI for authentic human and spiritual flourishing, while vigilantly guarding against their capacity to distort, commodify, and divide. The future of faith, in no small part, will be written in code and community, shaped by the choices made at this pivotal juncture.

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