



# IJMRRS

**International Journal for Multidisciplinary  
Research, Review and Studies**

**Volume 1 - Issue 1**

2024

© 2024 International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review and Studies

# ***Getting Hinduism Online- A Review of Literature around Digital Religion and Hinduism***

*-Devanshi Goswami*

## **Introduction**

‘Contemporary Hindu devotional praxis is hardly identifiable any longer except as a phenomenon mediated—carried forward by commerce, dispersed by new technologies, and in the process re-situated, reinterpreted, and made public.’ (Deepa S. Reddy, 2012)

Digital media prevail, determine, and shape contemporary lives and experiences, serving as an all-encompassing cultural system. One field of inquiry that is rapidly expanding is Digital Religion. According to Heidi Campbell, at the most fundamental level, scholars of digital religion consider how “digital media is used by religious groups and users” for the propagation of religious doctrine and the abetment of religious practices.

Contemporary religions such as Hinduism cannot escape the dominant digital culture and must negotiate their participation in it. Hindu devotion utilizes and permeates digital networks in various forms, and the number of websites and mobile applications offering Hindu content and services is constantly increasing. The foundational framework of this essay is based on the curiosity to examine how religion is being expanded to blur the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane (to utilize Durkheimian terminology).

When compared to Abrahamic religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, studies on Hinduism and new media technologies have been relatively sparse. Notable exceptions that exist focus on the use of new media by Hindu organizations, and the online congealment of different faith communities. Therefore, this essay tries to investigate how enhanced digitality has permeated the sphere of religion and religious rituals, through an extensive review of literature.

This essay situates itself in the discipline of Sociology of Religion, which can be defined as a discourse that “deals with everyday lived religion as experienced in human interactions, communities, and groups, which can often be different from scriptural or doctrinal religion.” (Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour, 2016). The literature review is divided into comprehensive themes to provide a nuanced understanding of the intricacies of digital religion.

Keywords: Digital Religion, Cyberspace, Hinduism, Performance of Prayer

## ***Digital Religion***

Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour, in the Introduction chapter of their volume, *Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion* (2016), introduce the relevance of digital religion that leads to a pressing need for developing methodologies to study the same. The sociology of religion, as defined by them, “deals with everyday lived religion as experienced in human interactions, communities, and groups, which can often be different from scriptural or doctrinal religion.” (Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour, 2016: xvi)

Narrowing down the scope of the discipline of the Sociology of Religion, this study situates itself in the contemporary domain of Digital Religion. In the Introduction to her volume, *Digital Hinduism*, Xenia Zeiler (2020) refers to the definition of Campbell (2013), to regard Digital Religion as a reciprocal interaction between the influence of religion on media spaces and the transformation of religion by such media spaces.

Campbell (2013), one of the renowned sociologists of digital religion, traces the evolution of the term in her book *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. She attempts to define Digital Religion as a transaction between digital spaces and religion that has a significant impact on both aspects in influencing reciprocity.

Campbell (2013) narrates how the term ‘Cyber-Religion’ was used in the mid to late 1990s to highlight a novel intersection of the frontier of religion and cyberspace. She mentions how various scholars defined the term. For instance, Brasher in *Give Me That Online Religion* (2001) uses Cyber-Religion as a concept that refers to “the presence of religious organizations and religious activities in cyberspace” or could encompass “the gradual emergence of new, electronically inspired religious practices or ideas.” (Campbell, 2013: 2)

Campbell (2013) then follows the need to distinguish different forms of sacred online, which led to the conceptual framing of ‘Religion Online’ and ‘Online Religion’ by Helland (2003). According to this classification, Religion Online consists of reframing of religious rituals and practices, and a transformation of orthodoxical systems of legitimacy and authority. On the other hand, Online Religion represents the formulation of new forms of sacredness and realistic practices as a result of the internet’s interaction with religion.

Helland (2003), in *Online Religion, as Lived Religion: Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet*, while analyzing the challenges faced while conducting online religious research, discusses the redundancy of his classification of ‘Religion Online’ and ‘Online Religion’.

Finally, Campbell (2013) elaborates on her framework of Digital Religion. She highlights how the term has come to be accepted by not only scholars but conferences, academic institutions, book projects, and other societies. For Campbell, “Digital Religion describes the technological and cultural space that is evoked when we talk about online and offline religious spheres that have become blended or integrated. We can think of Digital Religion as a bridge that connects and extends online religious practices and spaces into offline religious contexts, and vice versa.” (Campbell, 2013: 3)

In one of her other works with Brian Althenhofen, they define Digital Religion as “Religion that is constituted in new ways through digital media and cultures... this recognizes that reformulation of existing religious practices has both online and offline implications.” (Chreualil-Contractor and Shakkour, 2016: 1)

Mallapragada (2010), in *Desktop Deities: Hindu Temples, Online Cultures and the Politics of Remediation*, quotes, “As analog religious signifiers get digitized and uploaded, cyber rituals and pilgrimages engender virtual sensoriums of worship and the network facilitates collective imaginings of faith, ideas of sacred space and time become critical to our understanding of spatial-temporal dimensions of the contemporary web.” (Mallapragada, 2010: 110) In the same paper, she also refers to the ‘virtualization of rituals’ and ‘ritualization of virtual’ to express the reciprocal impact religion and digital have on each other.

In *Online Religion, as Lived Religion: Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet*, Helland (2003) elaborates on how online communication is influenced by the structural presence of religion online. In this, he refers to Clifford Geertz (1965) who argues that religion is a ‘model of’ understanding one’s position in the cosmos which is possible only by ‘doing religion’. Helland builds upon Geertz’s view to argue that though it is comparatively easier to ‘do’ religion online, what is problematic are the concerns about theoretical frameworks which are difficult to construct due to their subjectivity. This also raises methodological questions to assess what constitutes online religion.

To conclude, Helland goes back to Geertz’s definition of religion wherein he mentions functions of religion as “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by, (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and, (4) clothing these concepts with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” (Helland, 2003: 12) Thus Helland notes that to achieve Geertz’s vision, religion needs to be accepted and adopted in a way that the believers are involved in the sacred to assert meaning to everything that they do. An ‘ideal religious environment’ would provide knowledge and space for that knowledge to exist and live.

Murali Balaji (2018), in the Introduction to his edited volume- *Digital Hinusim: Dharma and Discourse in the Age of New Media* acknowledges the new age digital movement that has captured Religion within its broad domain. He expresses the challenges faced by scholars and researchers in keeping pace with this rapidly changing arena of Digital Religion. He reviews the works of various scholars in trying to classify the existing works. According to Balaji, the current literature fails to account for the intricacy of Hindu interaction with cyberspace and falls prey to oversimplifying Western notions of Hinduism.

Balaji takes refuge not only in the discipline of Sociology of Religion, but also in media studies which argues that religion is being redefined by cyberspace and such reconstructions bring into question the notions of rituals, practices, identity, authority, and intimacy. While on one hand, acceptance of Online by Hinduism contributes to the preservation of the identity, on the other hand, it leads to the promotion of fundamentalist politics leading to online and offline communalism. Another important observation is how Online Hinduism has led to the emergence of new social organizations and hierarchies.

### ***Cyberspace***

This interaction between the Internet and Religion is taking place in Cyberspace. Heidi Campbell, writing in her 2005 *Spiritualising the Internet: Uncovering Discourses and Narratives of Religious Internet Usage*, posits an eight-part scheme of four discourses and four narratives. The discourses are summarised as the internet being: (a) a medium to express the spiritual and experience the sacred; (b) a 'sacramental space suitable for religious use'; (c) a tool to preach and propagate religion and sacred practices; and finally (d) the cyberspace acting as a social cohesion tool for the believers to assert their identity.

Amongst the multiplicity of definitions and perspectives that exist to define Cyberspace, for this study, it is defined as a form of "social space" that exists alongside physical space (Hine: 109, Cowan: 262, and Chetty, 2018). In *Prayer as Performance and its Rendition through Online Spaces*, Shahjahan (2020) makes an observation about the idea of space in the performance of a prayer. The cyberspace compels the author to rethink the notion of the presence of the performer and the audience at the same place. By using Birgit Wien's theory of the 'intermedial stage', Shahjahan infers the evolution of cyberspace as a constructed performative space. Towards the conclusion, Shahjahan examines the reconstruction of performative spaces in the digital, and its effect on believers' devotion. Similarly, Mallapragada (2010) briefly discusses how the attachment of place to the sacred becomes fluid when transferred online as access to God becomes 24x7.

Stephen Jacobs (2007), in *Virtually Sacred: The Performance of Asynchronous Cyber-Rituals in Online Spaces*, draws attention to the phenomenon of online puja. He defines these “asynchronous cyber-rituals” as “rituals that are performed online at a time convenient to individuals and do not require collective online assignments at specified times”

## ***Hinduism***

Heinz Scheifinger (2009), in *Conceptualizing Hinduism*, journeys through various scholarly works to understand what is religion and specifically, Hinduism. This endeavor makes him observe how there does not exist any one Hinduism. The diversity present within Hinduism makes Scheifinger argue that the term ‘religion’ is a futile Western attempt to bind Hindu heterogeneity into a definitive social group. He then expresses how Hinduism is a way of life rather than an institutionalized religion which also renders the dichotomy of ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ redundant in this case.

The author sides with the colonial constructivist view that argues that the term Hinduism was a naive attempt by the colonizers to compartmentalize religions for the policy of ‘divide and rule’ and gradually Hindus accepted the term. Through analysis of the views of four scholars, namely Madeleine Biardeau, Brian K. Smith, Günther-Dietz Sontheimer, and Heinrich von Stietencron, and a review of these scholars by Aditya Malik (1997), Scheifinger presents the multi-view perception of the religion, which are (briefly) Hinduism as a universally unified group; Vedic dominant conduct of norms; an aggregation of various little traditions; and a socio-cultural unit, respectively.

Christopher Helland (2010), in *(Virtually) Been There, (Virtually) Done That: Examining the Online Religious Practices of Hindu Tradition*, briefly talks about the IT boom in India and what that meant for the scholars of religion. Such technological advancements such as WWW and social media, have led to an evolving examination of digital Hinduism that pushes the limits of ‘doing’ religion and ‘being’ religious. According to Helland, “continued exploration of Online Hinduism may provide the most complex unpacking of the relationship between the new media and society of a mediascape (Appadurai, 1990) on a society and its culture.” (Helland, 2010: 149)

Zeiler (2020) observes how being one of the major world religions, Hinduism finds itself at the margins of Digital Religion scholarship. The evidence shows the increasing trend between Digital and Hinduism through practices such as online pilgrimage, online puja, and online darshan. Though the intersection of the Internet and Religion has been under review by scholarship, It is only now that digital Hinduism has come to be the subject of study.

Zeiler also highlights that the “first publication exclusively on this topic (Hinduism and Internet) (Scheifinger, 2008) focuses on Hinduism and its relationship to cyberspace and the Internet.” (Zeiler, 2020: 3)

Scheifinger (2006), in *Hinduism and the Internet*, argues the suitability of Hinduism to cyberspace. Employing sociological theories on globalization and embodiment, combined with his examination of rational choice theory (RCT), Scheifinger notes the monopolizing of the Hindu web by a small percentage of Hindu organizations. The primary conclusion of the study is how globalization did not lead to a decline in the importance of Hinduism, rather an intensified resurgence can be experienced through online Hinduism, which provides a wider medium for propagation and practice.

To prove the suitability of Hinduism to the internet, Scheifinger discusses various aspects of Hinduism. For instance, he examines the structural and philosophical characteristics of Hinduism which focuses on the absence of a single authority organization and the belief in non-physical sacred space by Hindus. In another section of this study, Scheifinger makes a case for the validity of online Hindu practices by providing instances such as broadcasting festivals online, attending funeral rites, and the availability of online pujas.

Being one of the first scholars to have attempted an exploration of the interaction between Hinduism and the internet, he concludes by highlighting his contributions, through this study to Online Hindu scholarship; he provided a theoretical investigation of the interaction between Hinduism and online; he contributed to the digital methodologies for studying online religion; he also mapped Hinduism on the WWW; and finally Scheifinger’s greatest contribution is his empirical analysis that includes fieldwork on both online and offline.

One of the most notable studies, from the perspective of this paper, is Yael Lazar’s (2018) *Networked Devotion: Hindu Adoption of Digital Media*. In this study, Lazar conducts a comparative study of two temples in India- Sri Siddhivinayak Temple, Mumbai, and Sri Naga Sai Temple, Coimbatore. Lazar then investigates how digital media, which he refers to as an ‘all-encompassing cultural system’, reshapes and re-interprets devotion and unveils the “intricate web of disparate but inter-related actors which promote the use and assimilation of digital media to Hindu devotion.” (Lazar, 2018: 6)

Through interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approaches, Lazar builds upon the idea of how Hinduism is a “‘network of networks’ which extends to develop an even more intricate online networked Hinduism. Lazar’s study concludes how the digitalization of Hinduism does not stand to replace the traditional devotional practice but to invent and discover new mediums to fulfill it. Lazar touches upon various central notions in Hinduism and talks not only about the digital revolution in those aspects but also explores how commerce, the role of infrastructure,

and distribution networks also come to play a part in this endeavor of digital Hinduism. He concludes his study with Deepa S. Reddy's (2012) remark that Hindu devotion is "carried forward by commerce dispersed by new technologies, and in the process re-situated, and re-interpreted." (Lazar, 2018: 198)

Murali Balaji (2018) notes in the conclusion of his book- *Digital Hinduism: Dharma and Discourse in the Age of New Media*, how Hinduism's diversity has found new forms of expression through cyberspace. Moreover, the interaction of the internet with Hinduism has resulted in the re-interpretation and re-shaping of various Hindu notions and elements. Balaji concludes by investigating the effect of the Internet on Hinduism as homogenizing or diversifying and advocates for a more holistic examination of Hinduism in the era of new media.

A significant study in the field of Digital Hinduism is Varuni Bhatia's (2020) *Shani on the Web*. In this study, the author explores the interaction of popular Hinduism with Web 2.0. Taking Shani, more specifically his posters, she investigates the idea of virality and vitality through online forums such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms. Bhatia uses the vocabulary of Jeremy Stolow to refer to the religion and the sacred being present in cyberspace as 'deus in machina' - God in and as machine.

For Bhatia, investigations around Digital Hinduism are necessary because the scholarship that exists is non-representative and sparse when compared to Abrahmanic religions. She also argues that online worship is distinct from offline and that the former cannot replace the 'real' latter. According to Bhatia, virality has become a key practice in recent notions of digital religion which highlights the "aspect of interactive online religiosity." She also encountered the idea of sensorium in the creation of an online religious tradition of Hinduism. She says "Hindu images are evidence of concrete theism." Bhatia concludes that every like, share, and comment, however phatic, produces multiple channels of devotional communication, across platforms, constantly reproducing a digital public in its wake.

Mallapragada's (2010) study of Hindu temples on the web encompasses a trinity; an exploration of temple homepages, the commercial site, and the Hindu discourse. For her, 'desktop deity culture' is constitutive of online darshan, online puja rituals, and virtual Hinduism.

In trying to study digital Hinduism through a unique lens, Chrisman (2020), in *Digital Deities, Paper Pujas: Aura and the Commodification of Online Hindu Ritual*, starts by recognizing how Hinduism is a religion expressed through art. He then claims that, through commodification, religion is being reduced to the economic substance. Through the analysis of Walter Benjamin's predictions in his essay, 'Artwork', Chrisman attempts to analyze Online Hindu Rituals. Chrisman concludes that "the commodification of Hindu rituals can be understood as a virtual



auratic experience ultimately directing support to ruling establishments.” (Chrisman, 2020: 12) Thus, commodification becomes a part of the sacred.

In Chapter 2, *The Formulation of Online Religious Identities: A Case Study of the Internet Hindu in India's Cyberspace*, in the book *Digital Hinduism*, authored by Xenia Zeiler (2018), Denzil Chetty (2018) attempts to analyze online social interactions that have enabled new approaches to study Sociology of Religion. This ever-increasing presence of cyberspace has resulted in the construction of ‘Internet-Hindus’. Chetty reviews the understanding of traditional communities and then provides a working model of virtual communities in parlance with that of Rheingold. He refers to virtual communities as spaces of collective social relations in cyberspace. The chapter concludes that the ‘Internet Hindu’ refers to a modern section of online active participants in blogging, micro-blogging, networking sites, and chat rooms who ‘do’ religion online by practicing rituals and voicing their beliefs.

Karapanagoitis (2010), in *Vaishnava Cyber Puja- Problems of Purity and Novel Ritual Solutions*, talks about the construction of Vishnu as omnipresent and being present in everything, living and nonliving, and how this translates to the presence of Vishnu online. The paper explores the worship of Vishnu in cyberspace and the reservations expressed by devotees about the validity of such online ritual experiences. She then attempts to find any new ritual solutions that the devotees utilize to validate the online worship of Vishnu.

A similar omnipresence can be observed as associated with Shirdi Sai Baba. Antonio Rigopoulos’s *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi* (1993), he writes, “to his devotees he (Sai Baba) was regarded as a sarvajña, an omniscient person”. (Williams, 2012: 12) McLain (2011) also quotes, “Shirdi Sai Baba is not limited to a single place or time; he is all-pervasive, and with the proper devotional mindset he is accessible to his followers anytime, anywhere” (Williams, 2012: 12) which advocates for the online presence of Sai Baba through different digital mediums.

### ***Performance of Prayer***

Diyana B. Shahjahan’s (2020) work *Prayer as Performance and its Rendition through Online Spaces*, refers to prayer as “a conveyance of reverence to an abstract entity.” (Shahjahan, 2020: 1) She highlights how certain places come to be constructed as sacred such as temples, mosques, and churches. She also observes the differential behavior of the body and mind while performing prayer. The paper talks about the renditions of prayer that are collectively performed and the modifications of such practices in cyberspace.

Shahjahan refers to theorists and scholars of various disciplines to highlight the performativity of prayer. She looks at Richard Schechner (2003), a performance studies scholar, according to whom, rituals associated with religion “give form to sacred, communicate doctrine and open pathways to the supernatural and mold individuals into communities.” (Shahajahan, 2020: 2) Along similar lines, Durkheim provides that rituals sustain “social solidarity” and are performances “enacting known patterns of behavior and texts.” (Shahjahan, 2012: 2)

Thus, prayer becomes an act of communication by humans with the sacred or holy. This communication, as Shahjahan notes, is done through different movements, articulations, and gestures such as mudras and mantras, different from the usual, mundane ones, which gives a performative aspect to the prayers. She also highlights the importance of the identification of the performers and spectators of the prayer. The individual becomes the performer, replacing the pujari, who is the performer in the traditional ‘physical’ setting.

Another important observation made by the author is about the sacred place. The paper discusses how the places of worship are not only isolated from the mundane public spaces but are specially constructed to evoke “holiness and divinity.” Towards the conclusion of the study, Shahjahan examines how the transition of performative space to the digital, affected the believers’ devotion. She also highlights how to bring sacredness to the e-world, the virtual has been constantly trying to create a similar sensorium as traditional places of worship. Shahjahan concludes by mentioning the difference between the performance of an online prayer and an offline prayer.

### ***Conclusion- Research Gap***

Research on the intersection of the Internet and Religion is not a very recent development. The academia has been interested in the field for almost two decades (Williams, 2012). However, a significant observation is the lack of studies on Hinduism’s presence in cyberspace. This has been pointed out by several scholars who have tried to contribute to this research area (Schefinger, 2008; Lazar, 2018; Balalji, 2018; Bhatia 2020; Xeiler, 2020). The literature that does exist on this intersection largely consists of fundamentalist and communal tendencies being mediated through cyberspace; diasporic Hindus’ utilization of the internet; political views and propaganda being spread through social media; critical analysis of Hindu organizations such as ISKON or Sadhguru; or the commercialization of online pujas and prominence of Hindu websites. Thus, the field still lacks a comprehensive analysis of digital Hinduism, and a lot of aspects remain un-researched, which explains why the research is in its infancy.

Moreover, an unsolved debate and a dilemma can be sensed through the existing literature. The scholars (Schefinger, 2006; Helland, 2005; Mallapragada, 2010; Herman, 2010; Lazar, 2018; Balalji, 2018; Bhatia 2020; Xeiler, 2020). While a section of scholars advocate in favor of the suitability of Hinduism to the internet, they also recognize that this compatibility might prove

wrong when certain tenets of Hinduism are put to the test. On the other hand, a section of scholars completely reject that Hinduism is suitable for the internet. Thus, an in-depth examination of the issue is still pending.

Lastly, there are only a few studies that focus on a thorough analysis of a particular Hindu deity's presence on the internet (Karapanagoitis 2010; Williams, 2012; Lazar, 2018; Bhatia, 2020), which provides a more nuanced examination, rather than a substantial amount of work that provides generalized and universal statements regarding the intersection of Hinduism and cyberspace. Such studies that assume homogeneity within Hinduism and thus try to provide an overview of digital Hinduism fail to provide scholarly factual insights.

Though I recognize that the task of eliminating these research gaps is not a task for an individual researcher, this essay has attempted to contribute to the resolution of the same. The essay situates itself in the specific domain of digital Hinduism and thus larger domains of digital religion and sociology of religion. Through an extensive review of literature, I hope to have provided the scholars of digital religion, a gateway to investigate through various aspects of Hinduism and how they interact with the larger society.

As Digital Religion stands itself on conceptual foundations, the scope of research widens. Campbell and Bellar's chapter, *The Future of Digital Religion*, in *The Digital Religion: The Basics* (2023), deliberates over six characteristics of Digital Religion: networked community; convergent practice; multisite reality; storied identity; shifting authority, and; experiential authenticity. The practice of 'onlife' through innovative technologies, gives way to new age researchers in exploring and highlighting the stakeholders of digital innovations such as programmers, communication technology organizations and the state. Further research is needed in developing concrete methodologies to study digital religion and various platforms it performs sacred on. Moreover, the gaps in studying certain religions that remain unexplored also demands academic attention. According to Campbell and Bellar (2023), the two areas that need investigation are- (1) questions of power, primarily situating digital religion studies in sociology of stratification and marginalization, and; (2) exploring various online platforms and role of artificial intelligence in furthering the online practice of religion.

In *How Real is Virtual Religion* (2020), Hannikainen questions the reality of encompassing 'virtual' as a part of the offline reality. Virtual Reality might only be constitutive of sound and sight but innovations such as VR glasses can blur the presumed distinction between reality and virtuality. According to the author, virtual reality can "transmit sight, sound, thoughts, and emotions, but what it lacks is touch, taste, and smell which are still very difficult for the technology to mimic." (p-312). Thus, studying virtual reality and religion, especially after Covid-19 has provided a unique opportunity and tools to conduct such a research.

*Hinduism's* heterogeneity creates a complex cyber discourse. On one end, *Hindus* on the internet are interpreting their own essential religious elements that need to be translated online while returning to the 'traditional' philosophies at the same time. A critical investigation is also needed to analyze the effect of online *Hinduism* on the religion. There is a debate between *Hindus* who feel that different sects have formed their space online and *Hindus* who feel that online *Hinduism* has led to homogenizing of the heterogeneous religion (Balaji, 2018). Murali Balaji opines that an examination of the "evolution of *Hinduism* and its practitioners in the era of migration and media" is still required (p-289).

## References

- Balaji, M. (2018). *Introduction: Digital Paths to the Divine? New Media Hinduism and the Transformation of Dharmic Discourse and Practice*. In M. Balaji, *Digital Hinduism: Dharma and Discourse in the Age of New Media* (pp. 09-34). Lexington Books.
- Balaji, M. (2018). *Conclusion: Digital Dilemmas and New Paradigms in Digital Dharma*. In M. Balaji, *Digital Hinduism: Dharma and Discourse in the Age of New Media* (pp. 285-295). Lexington Books.
- Bhatia, V. (2020). *Shani on the Web: Virality and Vitality in Digital Popular Hinduism*. *Religions*, 11(9), 456. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11090456>
- Bekkering, D. J. (2019). *Studying Religion and YouTube*. In A. Possamai-Inesedy & A. Nixon, *The Digital Social: Religion and Belief* (pp. 49-66). De Gruyter.
- Campbell, H. A. (2013). *Introduction: The rise of the study of digital religion*. In H. A. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (pp. 01-22). Routledge.
- Campbell, H. A., & Altenhofen, B. (2016). *Methodological Challenges, Innovations and Growing Pains in Digital Religion Research*. In S. Cheruvallil-Contractor & S. Shakkour, *Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion* (pp. 1-13). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Campbell, H. A., & Bellar, W. (2023). *Experiential authenticity*. In *Digital religion: The Basics*. (pp. 116-137). Routledge.
- Campbell, H. A., & Bellar, W. (2023). *The future of Digital Religion*. In *Digital religion: The Basics*. (pp. 138-147). Routledge.
- Cheruvallil-Contractor, S., & Shakkour, S. (2016). *Introduction: Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion*. In S. Cheruvallil-Contractor & S. Shakkour, *Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion* (pp. xvi-xxvi). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Chetty, D. (2018). *The Formation of Online Religious Identities: A Case Study of the Internet-Hindu in India's Cyberspace*. In M. Balaji, *Digital Hinduism: Dharma and Discourse in the Age of New Media* (pp. 75-115). Lexington Books.
- Chrisman, Z. (2020). *Digital Deities and Paper Pujas: Aura and the Commodification of Online Hindu Ritual*.

Cowan, Douglas E. (2004) *Cyberhenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet*. Routledge, Abingdon.

Dabholkar, G. R. (n.d.). *The Wonderful Life and Teachings of Shri Sai Baba*. (N. V. Gunaji, Trans.). Shri Sai Sansthan Trust. (Original work published in Marathi as Shri Sai Satcharita)

Eck, Diana L. (1998) *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. Columbia University Press, New York.

Golan, O., & Martini, M. (2017). *Religious Live-Streaming: Constructing the Authentic in Real Time*. Faculty of Education, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel.

Hannikainen, P., & Hannikainen, M. (2020). *How real is virtual religion?* In M. Smalbrugge (Ed.), *Perspectives on 2020: EARS - European Academy of Religion and Society*. (pp. 312-314). Amsterdam: European Academy of Religion and Society.

Helland, C. (2005). *Online Religion as Lived Religion: Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet*. *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 1(1).

Helland, C. (2010). *(Virtually) been there (Virtually) done that: Examining the online religious practices of the Hindu tradition - Introduction*. In S. Heidbrink & N. Miczek, *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 4.1, 148-150.

Herman, P. K. (2010). *Seeing the Divine through Windows: Online Puja and Virtual Religious Experience*. In S. Heidbrink & N. Miczek, *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* (Vol. 4.1, pp. 151-178).

Hutchings, T. (2019). *Emotion, Ritual, and Rules of Feeling in the Study of Digital Religion*. In A. Possamai-Inesedy & A. Nixon (Eds.), *The Digital Social: Religion and Belief*. (pp. 110-128). Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Jacobs, Stephen (2007) *Virtually Sacred: The Performance of Asynchronous Cyber-Rituals in Online Spaces*. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12:3 [online]. Available From: <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue3/jacobs.html>

Karapanagiotis, N. (2010). *Vaishnava Cyber-Pūjā: Problems of Purity and Novel Ritual Solutions*. In S. Heidbrink & N. Miczek, *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 4.1, 179-195.

Khan, M. L., & Malik, A. (2022). *Researching YouTube: Methods, tools, and analytics*. In L. Sloan, & A. Quan-Haase (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*. (pp. 651-663). SAGE Publications.

Lazar, Y. (2018). *Networked Devotion: Hindu Adoption of Digital Media* [Doctoral dissertation, Duke University].

Loewen, J. B. (2022). *The Problem of the "Virtual": Virtual Reality, Digital Dualism, and Religious Experience* (Doctoral dissertation).

Mallapragada, M. (2010). *Desktop deities: Hindu temples, online cultures and the politics of remediation*. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 8(2), 109–121. Taylor & Francis.

McLain, Karline (2011) 'Be United, Be Virtuous: Composite Culture and the Growth of Shirdi Sai Baba Devotion'. *Nova Religio* 15:2.

Pasulka, D. W. (2016). *Virtual Religion: Popular Culture and the Digital World*. In *MacMillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks* (Ed.).

Pihlaja, S. (2016). *Analysing YouTube Interaction: A Discourse-centered Approach*. In S. Cheruvallil-Contractor & S. Shakkour, *Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion* (pp. 49-58). Bloomsbury Academic.

Possamai-Inesedy, A., & Nixon, A. (2019). *Introduction and Overview*. In A. Possamai-Inesedy & A. Nixon, *The Digital Social: Religion and Belief* (pp. 1-18). De Gruyter.

Possamai-Inesedy, A. (2019). *The Study of Post-Secularization through the Digital Social*. In A. Possamai-Inesedy & A. Nixon (Eds.), *The Digital Social: Religion and Belief*. (pp. 178-197). Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Rigopoulos, Antonio (1993) *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi*. State University of New York Press, Albany.

Scheifinger, H. (2008). *Researching Religion on the WWW: Identifying an Object of Study for Hinduism*. *Methodological Innovations Online*, 2(3), 30-49. <https://doi.org/10.4256/mio.2008.0004>

Scheifinger, H. (2010). *Hindu Embodiment and the Internet*. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 4.1, 196-218.

Scheifinger, H. (2006). *Hinduism and the Internet: A Sociological Study*. University of Warwick, Department of Sociology.

Scheifinger, H. (2009). *Conceptualising Hinduism*. *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* No. 110, National University of Singapore.

Shajahan, D. B. (2020). *Prayer as Performance and Its Rendition Through Online Spaces*.

Theobald, S. (2009). *Faith, interfaith, and YouTube: Dialogue or derision?* In *Literature & Aesthetics*, 19(2).

Williams, D. (2012). *Shirdi Sai Baba Online: Devotion in Cyberspace*. University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

Zeiler, X. (2020). *Introduction: Digital Hinduism: Studying Hinduism at the intersections of digital media and culture*. In X. Zeiler, *Digital Hinduism* (pp. 1-10). Routledge.