Swipe, Click, and Pray: Mapping the Digital Religion Landscape of Singapore

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February 2026

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1 Introduction

The introduction of the Internet, social media, and other digital tools has greatly influenced the way individuals and communities engage with religion and spirituality. The Internet has enabled devotees of numerous faiths to worship their religious faiths through innovative ways such as online sermons and forums; however, concerns such as social isolation and online radicalisation, exacerbated by misleading online religious content, have emerged as part of the negative discourse of using online spaces for spiritual and religious practices.[1] There is also a perceived risk of global fragmentation of social cohesion due to the silos that could be created between religious communities as each retreats to their own communities in the digital space.

Nevertheless, the digitalisation of religion has developed significantly, accelerated by the COVID pandemic in 2019. Religions have shifted to digital platforms to disseminate their messages and practices, augment their offline rituals with online resources, and provide greater all-round support to their communities. As religious communities continue to expand their work online, it is prudent to analyse further how and why some communities in Singapore are motivated to make use of the online space whereas others feel less so. Understanding this contrast can shed light on the potentially complex relationship that religions and religious communities have with technology. This report intends to explore some of this complexity.

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1 Amanda Huan. "Regulating Foreign Religious Content in the Virtual Space", *RSIS Commentary*, January 17, 2025, CO25010, https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/regulating-foreign-religious-content-in-the-virtual-space/

1.1 Purpose and Outline of Report

The term, "digital religion", describes the field of study which looks at "how religion is enacted through digital platforms and perceived as it engages with the cultural features of living in an informative-driven society and economy."[2] Digital platforms, in this context, may be defined as the generation of media that emerges in the contemporary landscape and offers opportunities for social interaction, information sharing, and mediated communication.[3] Some examples include social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

This report seeks to fulfil two key research gaps. First, the digital religion landscape in Singapore is presently understudied even though the city-state is religiously diverse. This report aims to be the pioneer research to explore how ten religions approach the digital space. Given Singapore's hyperconnectedness as a digital nation, there is a greater need to understand how rapid digitalisation of these faiths may impact the individual's sense of spirituality and religiosity as well as the nation's social fabric.

Second, while the field of digital religion is more well-developed in the West, the discipline is much less explored in Southeast Asia, even though digital penetration has grown substantially across the region[4] and most societies are more religiously diverse. This report serves to address this gap by present a preliminary survey of the digital religion landscape in Singapore, focusing on the ten recognised religions.

The brief context and objectives of the report have been laid out in this introductory section, which would be followed by the scope and method of the study. The second major section provides an overview of Singapore's multireligious landscape, the level of digital penetration in society, as well as preliminary findings on Singaporeans' digital religion behaviours. The section after presents a short literature review on digital religion. The report then covers how the ten religions in Singapore approach the digital space with a comparative analytical section following thereon. Finally, the conclusion offers some recommendations for the future management of digital religion issues in Singapore.

2 Heidi A. Campbell and Pauline Hope Cheong. "Introduction to the Study of Digital Religion." In *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Pauline Hope Cheong (Oxford University Press, 2024).
3 Heidi. A. Campbell. *When Religion Meets New Media* (Routledge, 2010).
4 Soon Ghee Chua, Carlos Oliver Mosquera and Germaine Hoe, "Building an Internet for the Future in Southeast Asia," (2023): 2, https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/programme/special-reports-by-atxsummit-knowledge-partners/kearney.pdf

1.2 Scope and Method

This report focuses on the ten major religions recognised in Singapore (i.e., the Bahá'í faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Sikhism, Judaism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism) and their approaches to digital engagement, content creation, and online community interactions.

An exploratory, mixed-method approach was adopted to examine how the different religious communities have adapted their traditions to digital platforms. We first performed desktop research to understand how religious practices in the region were navigated in the online domain. We then ran a survey in December 2024 where we surveyed Singaporeans on their digital religion behaviours. Thereafter, we examined the various websites and social media platforms used by different faith-based organisations (FBOs) in Singapore.[5] This step involved looking at 71 Christian churches, 29 Buddhist and Taoist temples, 72 mosques, 2 synagogues, 28 Hindu temples, 7 Sikh gurdwaras, 1 Zoroastrian House, 1 Baha'i House, and 1 Jain Centre.

The various media platforms were assessed on the types of content—i.e. worship and rituals, educational content, events, community updates, volunteering, religious education, international communication—and the types of initiatives published. We chose organisations with an existing physical presence as we were interested in how these FBOs adapted their physical practices to the online space. We then supplemented our fact-finding with informal conversations with believers from the different FBOs. These conversations revolved around their motivations for and challenges in utilising digital tools to practise their faith.

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5 In this report, we use the term 'faith or religious community' to refer to the broad community of one religion (e.g. the Muslim community in Singapore), 'faith-based organisation' to refer to a specific organisation or place of worship (e.g. City Harvest Church), and 'interfaith community' to refer to the organisations that work on interfaith/interreligious issues (e.g. Centre for Interfaith Understanding).

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2 An Overview of Singapore's Multireligious Society and Digital Landscape

2.1 Singapore's Approach to Managing Religious Diversity

Singapore prides itself on being a multicultural and multireligious society. Data from the 2020 Singapore census reveals Singapore as being religiously diverse, with 10 recognised faiths, but none of them have an absolute majority. These faiths have active communities with varying presence on digital media.

Religions in Singapore

No Religion 20.0%	
Other Religions 0.6%	Buddhism 31.1%
Hinduism 5.0%	
Islam 15.6%	Taoism 8.8%
	Christianity 18.9%
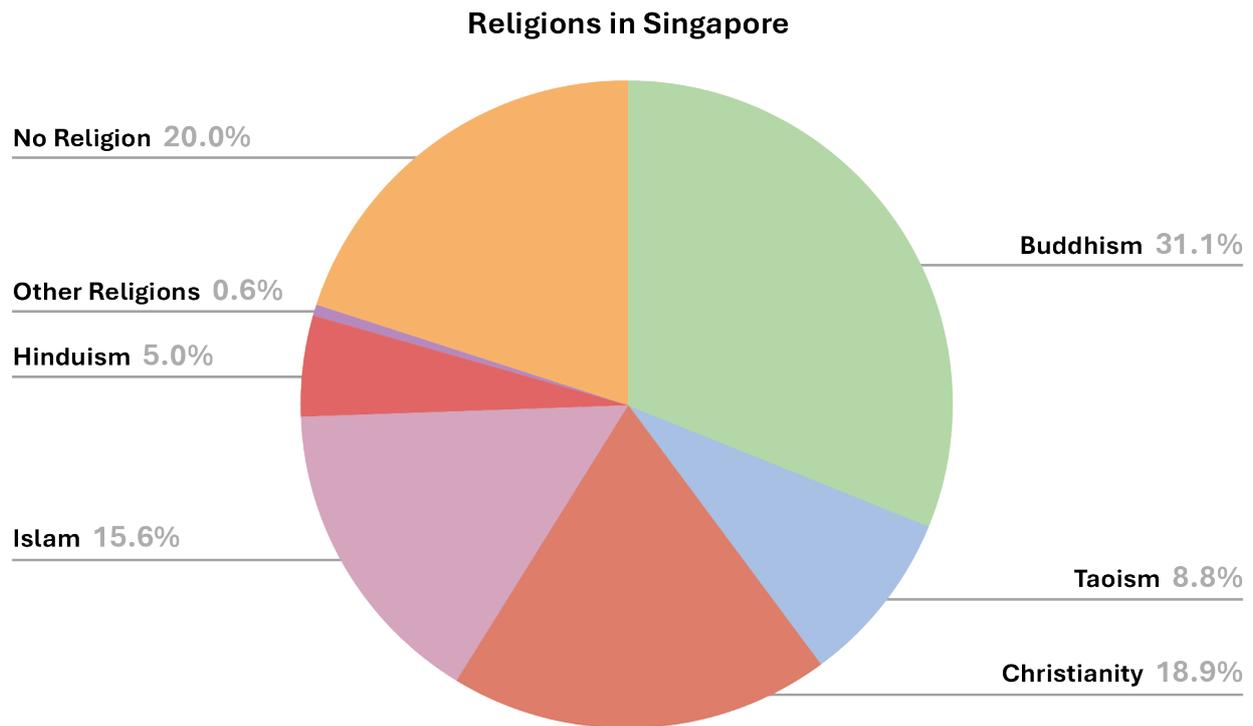
Singapore 2020 Census (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2021)

The religious space in Singapore is carefully managed via multiple means ranging from legal frameworks to community efforts. Both the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, enacted in 1990, and the Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act, enacted in 2025, aim to safeguard, respectively, religious and racial harmony in Singapore.

Singapore governs religious practices with a pragmatic approach, embracing an understanding of secularism that ensures equitable treatment of all religions, through three main principles: (i) national unity, (ii) mutual co-existence and (iii) social peace.[6] Apart from legislation and legal enforcement, the state works hand-in-hand with other public institutions, such as the Inter-Religious Organisation and Harmony Circles to maintain such principles through interfaith efforts. Initiatives by grassroot interfaith groups such as the Centre for Interfaith Understanding have also complemented these efforts to safeguard social harmony. Through a combination of these mechanisms, Singaporeans have largely understood as well as developed tolerance and acceptance towards religious differences.

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6 Mohammad Alami Musa, "Singapore's Secularism and its Pragmatic Approach to Religion." *Religions* 14, no. 2, (2023): https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020219

2.2 Singapore's Digital Landscape

With an online penetration rate of 98.4%—5.78 million out of the total population of 5.88 million are Internet users—Singapore is considered a digitally hyperconnected society. The island is home to 5.33 million social media user identities, with about 95.3% of the total population aged 18 and above using social media as of October 2025.[7] Pertaining to specific digital platform usage, there are 3.8 million Facebook users, 3.35 million Instagram users, 3.8 million TikTok users, and 5.75 million Reddit users, which suggests that a bulk of the Singapore population are active social media users and possess some level of digital savviness.[8]

When it comes to digital platform usage by FBOs, a number of religious communities in Singapore have adapted to digitalisation, though the level of sophistication varies significantly. Many FBOs maintain their own website and social media networks. For example, it is common for churches to connect with their congregants through social media and to inform them on upcoming events, and this is particularly so for the younger, more tech-savvy generation.

The promulgation of religious messages is not confined to FBOs. Interfaith groups are known to have brought the discussion of faith and interfaith relations to the online domain as well. One such organisation, Being Bridges, introduced their 'Being Guests' project where they use interactive digital tools and platforms to conduct interfaith discussions. The platform allows individuals to virtually explore places of worship and play in a gamified virtual landscape that tests their interfaith awareness.[9]

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7 "*Digital 2026: Singapore*", We Are Social & Meltwater, accessed December 24, 2025, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-singapore

8 "*Digital 2026: Singapore*", We Are Social & Meltwater, accessed December 24, 2025, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-singapore

9 "Being Guests", Being Bridges, accessed December 24, 2025, https://beingbridges.com/being-guests/

2.3 A Preliminary Look at Digital Religion Behaviours in Singapore

In December 2024, in collaboration with the Centre for Information Integrity and the Internet (IN-cube) at Nanyang Technological University, we surveyed 1,004 participants in Singapore on various aspects of digital religion. The questions pertained to their use of the Internet to access religious content; their frequency and type of religious technology usage; their perceptions towards the regulation of online religious content; and their feelings towards the impact of online religious content on their faith and beliefs. We showcase some of the findings here.

Majority have Used the Internet to Access Religious Content

About 59.5% of respondents report accessing religious content such as online worship and rituals at least sometimes, or more frequently (see Figure A).

How often do you connect to the Internet to access religious content (e.g. worship, mass, rituals)?

Category	Percentage
Very Often	12.2%
Often	20.3%
Sometimes	27.0%
Rarely	19.7%
Never	20.8%
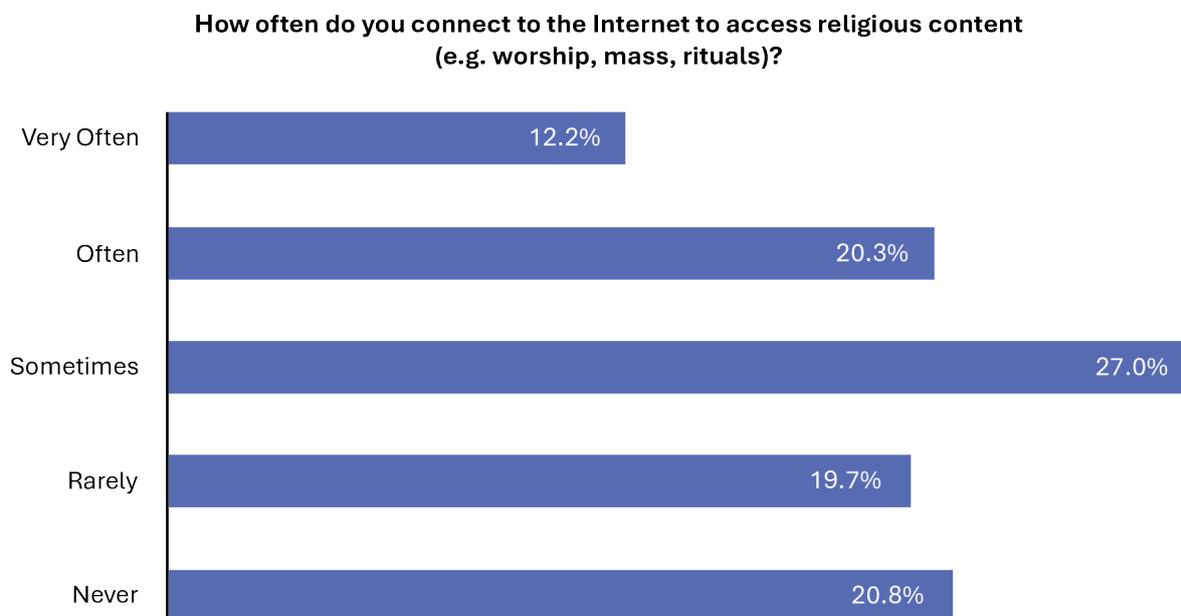
Figure A: Proportion of respondents who access online religious content by frequency

How often do you engage in the following religious technology use?
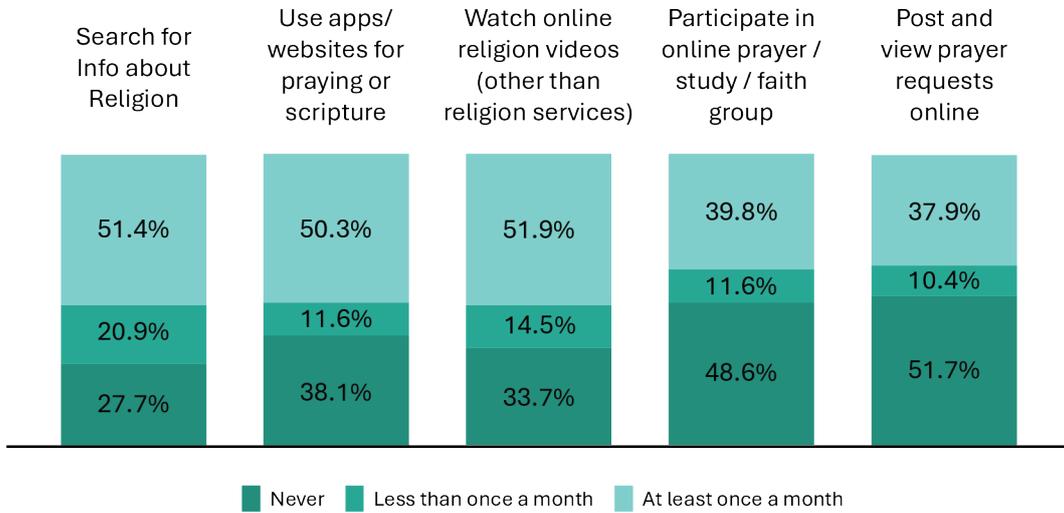
Figure B: Respondents' reported frequency and type of religious technology use

Top Religious Technology Usage Involves Searching for Information and Watching Videos

We then dug deeper to ascertain more specifically the type of content that they sought for online. Most respondents were seeking information; they used technology or the Internet to either search for information on religion, or to watch online religious content, such as videos (see Figure B). However, there were some differences found among faith groups. For instance, both Catholics (14.9%) and Protestants (15.8%) were more likely to report participating in online prayer/study/faith groups compared to the rest of respondents; respondents' average was 8.5%.

Majority Agree that People Should be Able to Access All Kinds of Religious Content Online but Want More Regulation

I believe that people should be able to access all kinds of religious content online, even if the content is not considered mainstream or widely accepted.

Category	Percentage
Not Applicable	2.9%
I Don't Know	4.9%
Strongly Agree	16.3%
Agree	34.9%
Neutral	26.5%
Disagree	9.5%
Strongly Disagree	5.1%
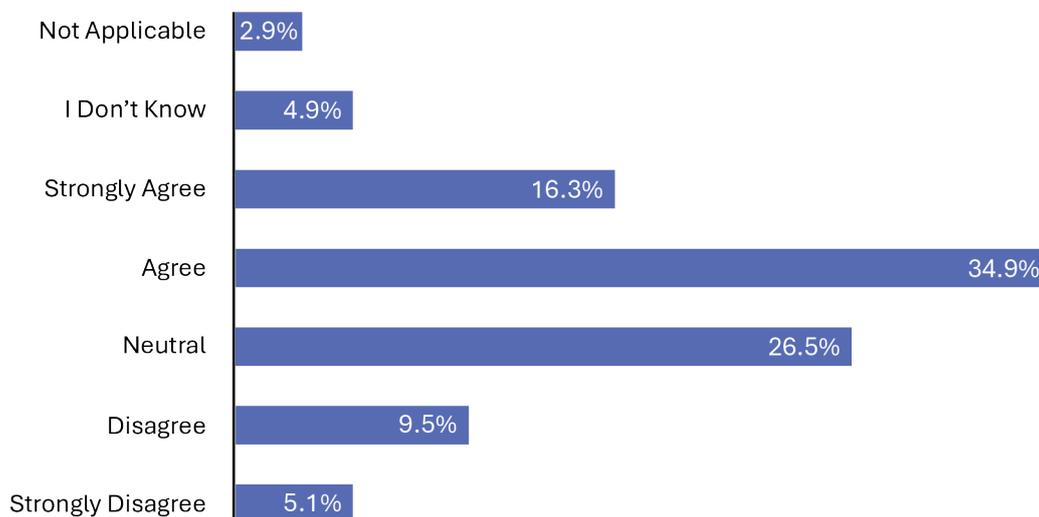
Figure C: Proportion of respondents who agree that people should be able to access all kinds of online religious content

When asked if people should be allowed to access different online religious content, even if such content were not considered mainstream nor widely accepted, slightly more than half (51.2%) agreed, while 26.5% remained neutral (see Figure C). The same survey revealed, however, that 58.9% respondents wanted more regulation (e.g. restricted access) for online religious content (see Figure D). This suggests a nuanced view that values openness and religious pluralism but also endorses prudent regulation to mitigate risks and preserve social cohesion in the digital sphere. Singapore's long-standing approach to handling religious harmony may have shaped such attitudes where respondents perceive regulation as a legitimate backstop that coexists with freedom of expression.

I feel that more regulation is required for online religious content.

Response	Percentage
Not Applicable	3.7%
I Don't Know	6.4%
Strongly Agree	23.1%
Agree	35.8%
Neutral	23.1%
Disagree	4.5%
Strongly Disagree	3.5%
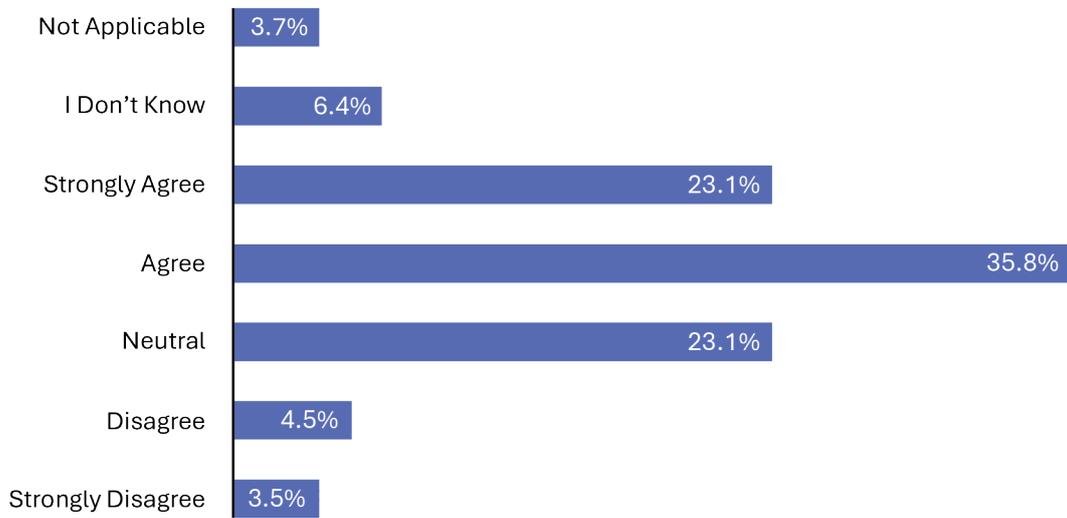
Figure D: Proportion of respondents who agree that more regulation is required for online religious content

Who should be responsible for regulating online religious content?
Select all that apply.

Stakeholder	Percentage
Government	67.8%
Big Tech Companies	26.9%
Religious Organisations	59.8%
No Regulation (Individual should decide for themselves)	10.4%

Figure E: Percentage of respondents who agree that a specific stakeholder is responsible for regulating online religious content

Respondents Place Onus of Online Religious Content Regulation on the Government and Religious Organisations

67.8% of respondents felt that government bodies such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, and Ministry of Digital Development and Information are primarily responsible for regulating online religious content (see Figure E). This diverges from the Singapore government's current light-touch approach to regulating the online space, which emphasises self-regulation by content providers and adherence to the Internet Code of Practice. This could be due to citizens' high trust in the government to regulate matters concerning religious harmony. As the regulation of such content directly impacts social cohesion, the Singapore government may be perceived as needing to take on an expanded role in managing online content, much as it has already done so in managing religious harmony 'offline'.[10]
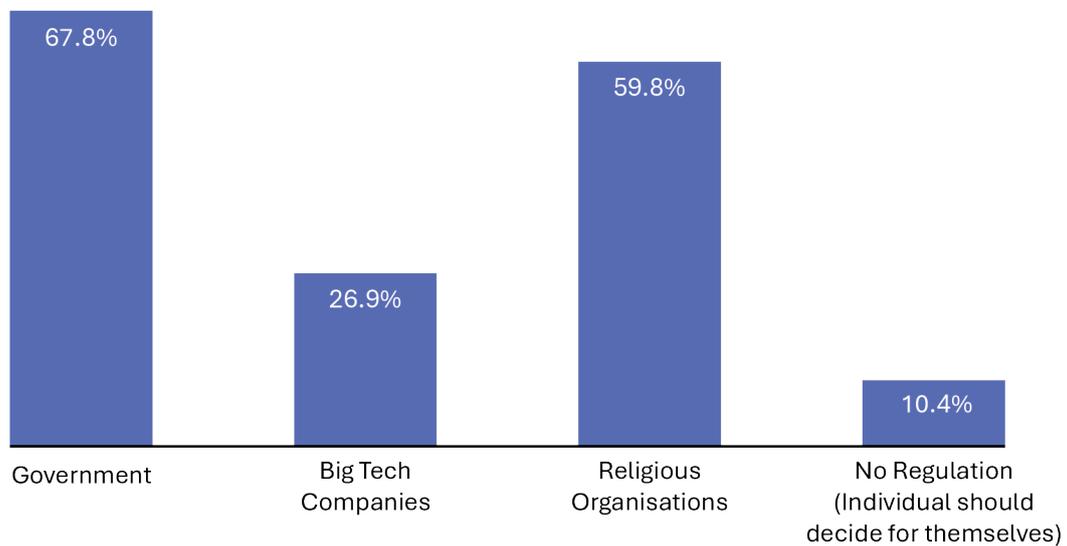
Apart from the state, 59.8% also felt that religious organisations (i.e. churches, mosques, etc.) should be primarily responsible, but fewer respondents felt that Big Tech companies (26.9%) or the individual (10.4%) were primarily responsible. These findings suggest that many respondents may feel that they lack the sufficient know-how or knowledge to verify the authenticity or appropriateness of online religious content.

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10 Amanda Huan. "Regulating Foreign Religious Content in the Virtual Space", *RSIS Commentary*, January 17, 2025, CO25010, https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/regulating-foreign-religious-content-in-the-virtual-space/

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Slight Majority Unconvinced that Online Religious Experiences were just as Real as Attending in Person, though Similar Proportion felt that Online Religious Engagement had Positively Impacted their Personal Faith

I feel that online religious experiences are just as real as attending/interacting in person.

Category	Percentage
Not Applicable	4.0%
I Don't Know	5.8%
Strongly Agree	14.7%
Agree	29.8%
Neutral	28.0%
Disagree	11.4%
Strongly Disagree	6.4%
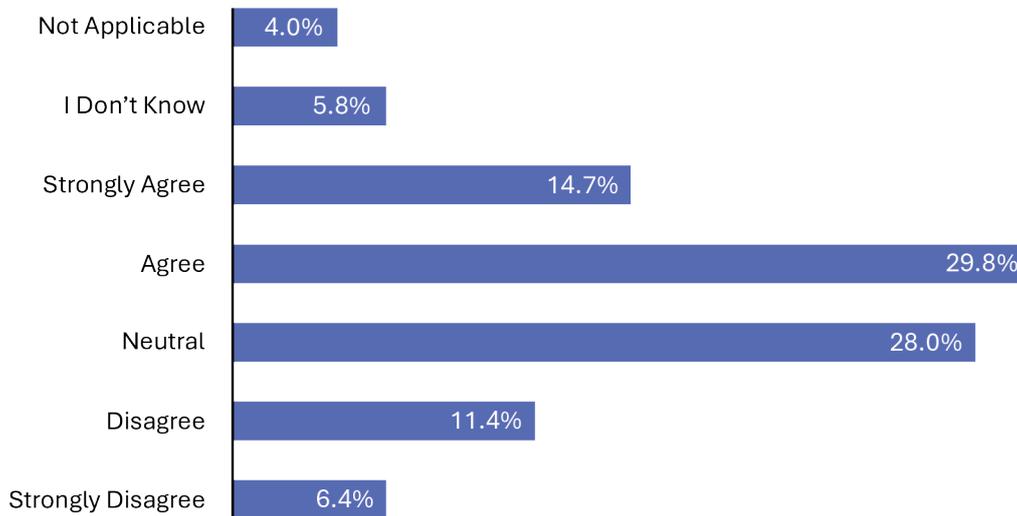
Figure F: Proportion of respondents who agree that online religious experiences are just as real as attending/interacting in person

I feel that engagement with online religious content has positively impacted my personal faith and beliefs.

Category	Percentage
Not Applicable	8.9%
I Don't Know	5.2%
Strongly Agree	15.4%
Agree	31.8%
Neutral	28.0%
Disagree	6.0%
Strongly Disagree	4.8%
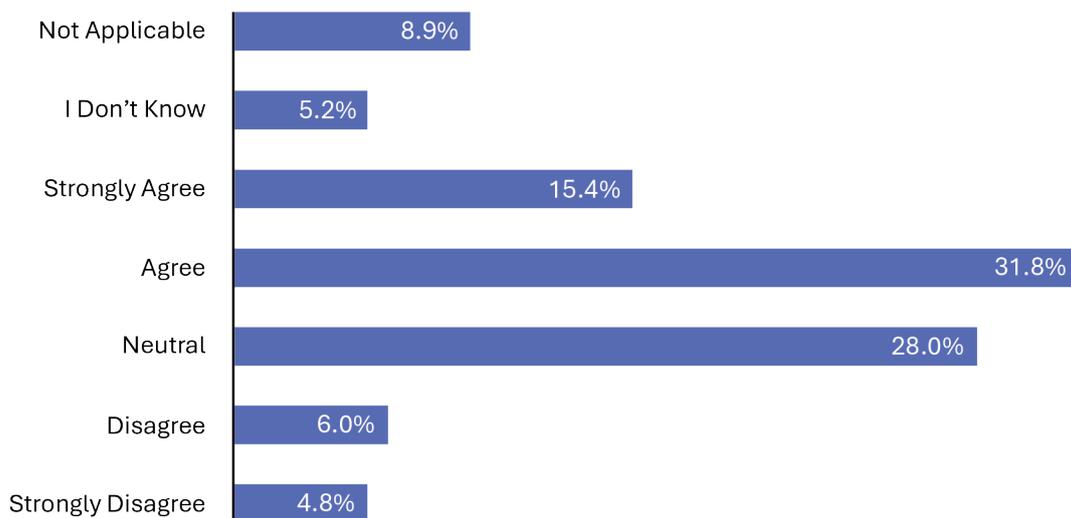
Figure G: Proportion of respondents who agree that online religious content has positively impacted their personal faith and beliefs

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The survey further revealed that respondents perceived online religious experiences as distinctly different from traditional offline practices; 44.5% of respondents were in agreement that online religious experiences were just as real as offline experiences while slightly more (45.8%) either disagreed or were ambivalent (see Figure F). Notwithstanding the perceived mirrored authenticity, or lack thereof, of online religious experiences, a slight majority of 47.2% of respondents felt that engaging with online religious content had positively impacted their personal faith and beliefs while 38.8% disagreed or felt neutral about the impact (see Figure G). This suggests that digital religion can play a complementary role to an individual's sense of spirituality and religiosity.

Having outlined Singapore's religious and digital context, the next section presents a brief review of the existing literature on digital religion.

3 Digitalisation and Religion

With so much of our lives spent navigating digital spaces, it is no wonder that many religions have adapted to the online spaces. Indeed, the emergence of digital spaces have transformed religions along several dimensions, namely ritual, embodiment, identity, community, and authority among others. Digital religion, as a field of study, has gradually emerged to document and examine these evolving developments.

While scholars focus on the ways religion is practised in the online spaces, they are nonetheless cognisant that "online and offline manifestations of religion are increasingly interconnected with and interdependent on one another".[11] In other words, interactions online do influence offline religious practices and vice versa. This area of work can be examined through the typology of digital religion, typology of online communities, concept of identity (re)negotiation, digitisation of rituals, and challenges to religious authority.

3.1 Typology and Waves: Mapping the Field of Digital Religion

In the mapping the diversity of digital religious practices, Piotr Siuda proposed a fourfold typology that captures the ways offline and online worlds interact.[12] Specifically, the four types include: (1) religion online, (2) online religion, (3) traditional religion and (4) innovative religion. The first two categories build upon the classification developed by Christopher Helland.[13] 'Religion online' denotes the provision of "information without interactivity",[14] such as churches, mosques and temples publishing information about services on their webpages where information is relayed in a one-way fashion. 'Online religion', on the other hand, involves participation and interaction amongst users and is typically seen in the formation of online communities.

Scholarship on digital religion has broadly evolved through four waves: the descriptive, the categorical, the theoretical, and the convergent. The first wave involves documenting and describing religious phenomena arising in what were then relatively new digital spaces. The second wave focuses on categorisation to analyse common religious practices online. The third wave is characterised by the development of theoretical and methodological frameworks (e.g. ritual, community, identity) for the systematic interpretation of religious communities' engagement with digital platforms. The fourth wave pays attention to the mediums of digital media, their corresponding affordances and how they have been utilised by religious groups, with embodiment being the prominent theme. The rise of new forms of technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), is driving a fifth wave of research that adopts an interdisciplinary lens, including the use of race and feminist studies, to account for the increasingly complex ways religion interacts with and within digital spaces.[15]

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11 Campbell and Cheong, "Introduction to the Study of Digital Religion", 2.
12 Piotr Siuda, "Mapping Digital Religion: Exploring the Need for New Typologies," *Religions* 12, no. 6 (2022): 373, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060373.
13 Christopher Helland, "Digital Religion," in *Handbook of Religion and Society*, ed. David Yamane (Springer, 2016), 178.
14 Siuda, "Mapping Digital Religion".
15 Ruth Tsuria and Heidi A. Campbell, "Introduction to the Study of Digital Religion," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media (2nd Edition)*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (Routledge, 2022), 8-10.

3.2 Hybrid and Hidden Communities

The study of the formation of online religious communities has been prevalent since the early beginnings of the Internet. The first two waves of research on online religious communities were primarily centred on ethnographic descriptions of the formation of these communities as well as their effect on members' identities and practices.[16] Recent research, however, has started to explore how the World Wide Web facilitated the flourishing of hidden communities that would otherwise find it challenging to thrive. Groups that are traditionally decentralised—such as atheists who have no guiding ideology apart from an absence of belief in religion—have relied on online spaces to establish networks.[17] Scholars are also now examining the ways online religious communities shape offline religious practices, communities and institutions. For example, as the Internet becomes our primary source of information, newcomers to churches typically decide to attend a particular church based on the information they had gathered online first. Online interactions and networks therefore do influence offline communities.[18]

3.3 Negotiation and Shifting of Identities

As the formation of identity is heavily influenced by rituals, beliefs and symbols, the adaptation of religion to digital spaces has shifted the ways religious identities are formed and perceived as well. The study of "how religious identities are enacted and structured by the affordances of digital media"[19] has therefore been a core theme in digital religion research. Of specific interest to scholars is the anonymity and disembodiment afforded by the internet, which enables individuals to challenge and circumvent existing status or hierarchies framed based on age, gender and/or ethnicity; this is now made possible as users can invent alternative personas in the online world.[20] Studies in this area have examined how users are able to draw upon a variety of resources available online in their construction of self which may differ significantly from their offline personas.[21]

The affordances of online platforms also allow religious adherents to navigate and negotiate their own religious identities beyond the constraints of traditional hierarchies.[22] For example, a young woman might find it easier to share her opinions online when she would otherwise shy away from doing during her in-person interactions with others in her religious community. The intersections between identity formation and digital religion remain just as salient today. With the rise of AI, new questions would perhaps emerge about how engagement with this new technology would shift present understanding and ongoing negotiation of identities.

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16 Heidi A. Campbell and Zachary Sheldon, "Community," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media (2nd Edition)*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (Routledge, 2022), 77-78.
17 Campbell and Sheldon, "Community," 81-82.
18 Campbell and Sheldon, "Community," 82-83.
19 Mia Lövheim and Evelina Lundmark, "Identity," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media (2nd Edition)*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (Routledge, 2022), 57.
20 Lövheim and Lundmark, "Identity,", 58.
21 Lövheim and Lundmark, "Identity,", 62-65.
22 Lövheim and Lundmark, "Identity,", 57.

3.4 Changing Forms and Practices of Rituals

As digital platforms gained traction, rituals were the first domain of religion to be transformed as believers sought to adapt them to online spaces. Since rituals often necessitate physical participation, the practice of rituals online challenges both religious communities as well as scholars' understanding of rituals and its associated meanings.[23] For example, prayer sessions can now be livestreamed, making it more accessible to those who would otherwise not be able to attend these rituals. However, questions continue to linger. If one were not physically present at these prayer sessions, would or could they be considered as having fully participated in or engaged with the ritual? This becomes especially pertinent or even controversial if the ritual is communal in nature. Similar questions arise in relation to pilgrimages. Could one still be considered a pilgrim if one only viewed the sacred site virtually from one's home?[24] Given that pilgrimages are premised upon movement through physical spaces to reach particular sacred sites, the replication of significant places of worships in digital spaces challenges conventional understandings of pilgrimages.

Relatedly, perceptions surrounding rituals cannot be disentangled from the notion of embodiment or disembodiment. Oftentimes, whether an online ritual is seen as 'authentic' or similar to its offline version is contingent on whether the practice can be embodied when practised online.[25] Again, such debates are prevalent surrounding rituals such as pilgrimages, which has traditionally required believers and devotees to traverse distances physically. The performance of pilgrimages online— which would not involve extensive use or movement of devotees' bodies—raises questions about the ways pilgrimages have been defined and what they actually constitute.

3.5 Shifting Grounds of Religious Authority

Digitalisation has also called into question the centrality of religious authority. Initially, with online platforms often thought of and understood as a great equaliser, research on digital religion during earlier waves of technological innovation had tended to stress the disconnect brought upon by online innovations where existing hierarchies were disrupted.[26] This logic prioritises the view that the construction of online communities is seen as threatening to religious leaders and their authority.

Given that authority is constituted through everyday discourse, any developments and "[c]hanges to the communication web upon which any religion is built invariably create struggles by individuals or groups, old and new, to maintain or establish their authority by repositioning or realigning themselves

23 Christopher Helland and Lisa Kienzl, "Ritual," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media (2nd Edition)*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (Routledge, 2022), 43.
24 Helland and Kienzl, "Ritual,", 43.
25 Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, "Embodiment," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media (2nd Edition)*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (Routledge, 2022), 104.
26 Pauline Hope Cheong, "Authority," in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media (2nd Edition)*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria (Routledge, 2022), 90-91; Pauline Hope Cheong, "Authority and Communication: Dialectical Tensions and Paradoxes in Religious Organizing," in *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Pauline Hope Cheong (Oxford University Press, 2024), 325.

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strategically on the new web."[27] However, some scholars have challenged this notion by examining the ways in which religious organisations and leaders have framed the emergence of online spaces as positive and indeed, beneficial to their work. This was termed the "logic of continuity and complementarity".[28] This is evident in how some religious leaders, such as Buddhist monastics and Christian pastors, have strategically made use of social media platforms to reach and connect with the masses in a way that they were not able to before.[29]

These two dichotomous perspectives gradually amalgamated to form a logic that acknowledges the possibility that the countervailing forces of displacement and complementarity can occur at once. As such, later research began to explore the paradoxes and dialectics inherent in the array of religious practices online. A survey of religious memes reveals how they can at once reinforce religious authority by disseminating and popularising official stances yet also introduce alternative meanings that challenge existing norms.[30]

The recent advent and increased usage of AI has introduced yet another new dimension, as well as additional ethical dilemmas, to the study of religious authority. For example, the emergence of religious chatbots, such as AI Buddha and Jesus AI,[31] alongside smart churches and temples, has challenged existing norms surrounding religious communication and authority. How should the content generated by these chatbots be interpreted? Should these chatbots, which mimic sacred religious figures, be regarded as equivalent to their namesakes? Such questions underscore some of the new ethical challenges confronting religious authority. Future developments and research could illuminate how these tensions are navigated.

3.6 Lacuna of Findings on Southeast Asia

Most of the extant literature on digital religion has remained Western-centric, often examining practices and communities of the Western world in the Global North.[32] While work on digital religion in Southeast Asia has gradually emerged, the phenomenon is still relatively understudied in this region.[33] This lack of research does not imply that the phenomena in itself does not manifest here. In Indonesia, for example, social media and other digital platforms are heavily used in the practice of Islam. The Internet has played a key role in building relationships between preachers and followers through establishing religious authority.[34] Social media has also been used as a forum and for *da'wa*, which is a way to spread Islamic knowledge, especially among youths. Examples of such digital presence

27 Peter Horsfield, "The Media and Religious Authority from Ancient to Modern," in *The Media and Religious Authority*, ed. Stewart Hoover (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 54-55.

28 Cheong, "Authority," 92-93.

29 Cheong, "Authority," 94.

30 Cheong, "Authority," 96.

31 Thomas Urbain and Julie Jammot, "Virtual Jesus? People of faith divided as AI enters religion," *AFP*, October 3, 2025, https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20251003-virtual-jesus-people-of-faith-divided-as-ai-enters-religion

32 Shengju Xu and Heidi A. Campbell, "Surveying digital religion in China: Characteristics of religion on the Internet in Mainland China," *The Communication Review* 21, no. 4 (2018): 254, https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2018.1535729.

33 Tan Meng Yoe, "Mosques, Churches, and Technology in Southeast Asia," in *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Pauline Hope Cheong (Oxford University Press, 2024), 169.

34 Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic learning practices in Indonesia: Social media, religious populism, and religious authority". *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2020), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019

in Indonesia include YouTube channels started by prominent religious scholars or influencers that provides lessons as well as study groups where subscribers and viewers can gain Islamic knowledge and interact with the community.

Similarly, we see how spiritual practices in Thailand have been affected by digitalisation. Thailand has experienced a shift in how faith is practised, particularly among youth.[35] Although Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand, digital platforms have facilitated the rise in other forms of spiritual practices, such as fortune telling. Such spiritual beliefs are understood as movements that blend traditional practices and modern culture. With the increasing popularity of digital platforms such as Tumblr, Pinterest and TikTok, these platforms have become a gateway for alternative forms of beliefs and traditions to spread among communities.

Apart from the dearth of digital religion research in Southeast Asia, there also appears to be a heavier slant towards the study of the Abrahamic religions over others, which has then inadvertently given the field somewhat of a monotheistic lens.[36] This implies not just a relative lack of studies of other religions, but also that the existing theoretical orientation of the field might not be as rigorous and the explanatory power of existing theories or findings not as wide as thought. It is envisioned, therefore, that the findings gathered from this systematic study would contribute to addressing this gap and in the process, shed light on the nuanced ways through which religious communities in Singapore have adapted to the rise of digital technology.

3.7 The Road Ahead for Digital Religion Research

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic—which had people confined in their homes for months on end—elevated the status of digital spaces as the world collectively flocked to virtual platforms to connect with one another. Many religions had to adapt their rituals to digital spaces in a bid to engage their believers and devotees during extended lockdowns. These developments afforded the study of digital religion more prominence as scholars in fields such as theology, sociology of religion and media studies witnessed the ways digital practices kept religious engagement alive.[37]

Furthermore, the advent of AI has introduced yet another dimension and phase for digital religion. Its singularity and distinct differences from its predecessors are likely to raise a new set of ethical and theoretical questions for religious communities, faith leaders and scholars alike. As such, it is expected that religious practices, beliefs and communities will continue to evolve and be confronted with new questions, challenges and possibly controversies as AI becomes more widely adopted.

Having broadly covered the discipline of digital religion and some of the key aspects in the literature, the next section delves into how the ten religions in Singapore have approached the digital space.

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35 Suriyaporn Eamvijit. "From Ong to Idols: Hyper-Real Religions, Spiritual Practices, and Popular Culture Among Thai Youth," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 25, no. 5 (2024): 784–798, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2024.2389714
36 Xu and Campbell, "Surveying Digital Religion in China", 254.
37 Heidi S. Campbell, personal communication to authors, November 2025.

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4 How Each Religion Approaches the Digital Space in Singapore

This section explores how the ten religions in Singapore approach the digital space. For each religion, we describe their varying levels of engagement with the digital sphere by examining the platforms that various FBOs are active on and outline some of the present challenges and opportunities.

Bahá'í Faith

As of 2020, the Bahá'í community in Singapore had approximately 2,000 followers, making up about 0.03% of the Singapore population.[38] Members of the local Bahá'í community believe strongly in grassroots education and working with the youth to build and serve the community's needs. Technology is thus perceived by the Bahá'í community as a platform where followers can instil mindfulness and reflectiveness within the community and beyond.

The Bahá'í community hopes to inspire conversations that reflect the concerns of the people. Digital spaces such as the Bahá'í website and social media platforms are therefore channels for such conversations. These avenues are not limited to only those in the Bahá'í community; they also function as a space for the broader community to share their thoughts on the foundations and goals which the faith hopes society can achieve in the future. During the COVID pandemic, the local Bahá'í community utilised webinars as a way to engage the community although they have since mostly returned to in-person events.

Currently, the use of social media and AI is still relatively new to the faith. Their presence on social media in Singapore is limited to Facebook, with their content revolving around media recordings of recent faith-based and community service events. Importantly, regulations and norms that influence the community are often guided by the global Bahá'í office. The local Bahá'í community takes guidance from the global office on a range of matters pertaining to scriptural reasoning, strategic communication, and online engagement.

The local Bahá'í volunteers are cognisant of their manpower and resource limitations in managing social media accounts. However, they remain determined to harness the good of digitalisation in building a healthy connection with the world. The community believes that it has become increasingly challenging to separate online and offline activities. Social media is regarded as an extension to day-to-day lived experiences, and thus, social cohesion in the digital and physical spheres go hand in hand together.

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38 "Bahá'í Faith: A Belief in the Oneness of Religion and Humanity", Racial & Religious Harmony Circle, accessed December 24, 2025 https://www.harmonycircle.sg/resources/bahai-faith/

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Buddhism

Followers of the Buddhist faith make up the largest religious community in Singapore comprising 31.1% of the population.[39] Despite the size, they are one of the least digitally present. After analysing the digital footprints—including some of the larger ones—we found only less than 5 have a digital and/or social media presence with most limited to Facebook and their website, which are mainly used for sharing educational content on their faith and/or promoting religious classes such as monkhood classes.[40]

A key factor contributing to the relatively limited online presence lies in the emphasis on physical presence as an integral component for Buddhist religious practice. Worship within the sacred space of the temple is widely regarded as irreplaceable by online alternatives. Rituals such as offering incense and making special offerings are understood to require in-person participation as expressions of sincerity and devotion. Nonetheless, there have been efforts to digitalise certain aspects of these practices, or at least elements of the associated processes, to complement—rather than replace—embodied worship. For instance, instead of heading physically to a temple to make an offering, followers may now purchase the offerings online instead (e.g. BW Monastery's offering of flowers, fruits, and food to Buddha), after which a temple representative would make the physical offering on their behalf.

Another contributing factor to the limited adoption of technology is the perception that technology itself may represent a form of material desire, which sits uneasily with certain tenets of the Buddhist

39 Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, *Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion*, (2021), 32, https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx

40 We acknowledge that the low incidence rate could also be due to sampling issues. This is further complicated by the difficulty in differentiating between Singapore Buddhist and Taoist temples online as some temples host multiple deities including Buddha.

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faith. One Buddhist follower observed that encountering religious texts or learning about Buddhism online can feel emotionally detached, especially in contrast to the sense of awe and reverence experienced when one is physically present in a temple. Nevertheless, there is room for potential digital innovation within Buddhist practices and rituals. Online Buddhist classes remain valuable and could continue as a means of learning and outreach, especially for those who encounter difficulties in physically accessing the classes. At the same time, the clear emphasis on the importance of physical visits to shrines and temples would likely remain, so that followers can fully experience the embodied dimensions of worship.

Christianity

The 2020 census found that 18.9% of the population are Christians, making them the second largest religious community in Singapore.[41] The umbrella term of Christianity includes various denominations such as the Catholics and Protestants, among others. In Singapore, Protestants make up the largest proportion of Christians.

Christians in Singapore are tech-savvy on digital platforms. Their overall digital presence is one of the highest, with almost all churches studied in this report having their own website and social media presence. Instagram appears to be the most popular social media platform, as a random sample of 71 churches showed that about 38 have their own Instagram accounts. Additionally, some churches also have their own Spotify podcasts where they share about their faith. Several 'mega-churches' such as New Creation Church and City Harvest Church also host online webcasts—both live and recorded—to reach out to more congregants.

Churches mainly use digital platforms to showcase the myriad of events they host, such as their Sunday sessions, baptisms, masses, etc. They also promote the different types of religious classes, ranging from beginner-friendly classes to bible study sessions. Most churches tend to publish their content in English, with several also posting in other vernaculars—e.g. Mandarin, Tamil, Russian, Tagalog—to cater to specific communities.

For the local Christian community, technology's primary value lies in its affordances which enable churches to expand access and reach a wider audience. Through digital platforms, followers hope to foster greater inclusivity within the faith community. Some also see technology as offering a broader social benefit: by increasing visibility and understanding across religious groups, digital tools are viewed as having the potential to facilitate deeper interfaith dialogue, as communities become more familiar with one another's beliefs and practices.

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41 Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, *Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion*, (2021), 32, https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx

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Hinduism

Based on the 2020 Census, the Hindu community in Singapore comprises about 5% of the Singapore population.[42] Digitally, the Hindus in Singapore has a strong presence online, with most temples having their own dedicated website and social media presence. Out of 28 Hindu temples in Singapore, 23 have a social media account, with Facebook being the most popular (18 out of 23 temples use Facebook). Some temples also have their own YouTube or Instagram account. One such temple is the Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple, which website contains contact information for the temple and a listing of its service. The temple also has a Facebook page and YouTube channel, where they post videos of their rituals and do livestreaming of their sessions for the convenience of those who are unable to physically attend. Most temples would post content in multiple languages, typically English and Tamil.

The digital platforms adopted by Hindu temples serve as important channels through which devotees can connect and access prayer resources, as well as information on festivals, rituals, and community events. These platforms are particularly valuable for younger Hindus, many of whom are curious about their faith and find that digital spaces provide an accessible entry point for learning. Despite ongoing efforts to expand online engagement, the community widely recognises that the human element of religious practice cannot be fully replicated in digital form. Core rituals such as carrying the *kavadi* or participating in firewalking are inherently embodied and cannot be meaningfully digitalised. As one Hindu follower observed, when it comes to religious instruction, face-to-face learning and personal interaction with fellow devotees remain crucial for ensuring proper understanding and avoiding misinterpretation.

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42 Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, *Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion*, (2021), 32, https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx

Islam

According to the Singapore 2020 Census, the Muslim community represents the third-largest community comprising about 15.6% of the population with the majority belonging to the Sunni tradition.[43] The Muslim community is quite digitally connected with nearly every mosque having its own website and social media presence. Out of 72 mosques in Singapore, 67 have their own social media accounts, with Facebook and Instagram being the top two platforms, which 66 and 59 mosques have pages on respectively. Most of these mosques publish posts in both Malay and English, with most of the content centred on event and community updates. Many also use their platforms to call for specific actions, such as donations or sign-ups for volunteering opportunities and religious classes. Examples include Masjid Moulana Mohamed Ali's website and Masjid Malabar's Facebook page.

Another digital tool that has been widely explored by the local Muslim community, but less so by other religions, is podcasts. The Talking Dome, helmed by three religious teachers, is one such prominent example. Local Muslims use these podcasts, which are heavily promoted on Instagram, to connect with the younger generation, as youth tend to use Instagram more than Facebook. Contributing factors to the popularity of podcasts include the sizable Muslim community in Singapore, and the desire for more knowledge as local Muslims find it important to be kept up to date on current affairs and trends; podcasts are deemed an accessible and efficient channel for acquiring up-to-date information. Local religious scholars or teachers also make use of their own social media accounts to spread word about specific tenets of the Islamic faith and correct societal misperceptions about the religion.

Despite the local Muslim community's high level of digital savviness, physical connections and presence remain deeply valued. Many still see in-person learning as offering forms of knowledge transmission that cannot be fully replicated online; within the Islamic tradition, proximity to the teacher continues to be regarded as an essential and proper mode of seeking knowledge. While the digital domain has broadened religious awareness and enhanced connectivity across the community, physical gatherings retain importance among believers. Community members remain mindful of online risks—such as misinterpretation, misinformation, and radicalisation—and thus continue to view embodied, face-to-face engagement as a critical anchor for safe and authentic learning.

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43 Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, *Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion*, (2021), 32, https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx

Jainism

In Singapore, the Jain community remains one of the smallest religious groups in Singapore with approximately 2,000 members as of 2024.[44] The local Jain community is managed by the Singapore Jain Religious Society (SJRS). In terms of its physical presence, the Jains have a single place of worship on the island but have a considerably active and diverse online presence. In addition to a website, the Jains also have a Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube account. They also have their own closed, by-invite only WhatsApp membership channel. The Youth Wing of SJRS—known as the Young Jains of Singapore—also has their own dedicated social media accounts (e.g. Instagram) where they share youth-oriented activities and initiatives.

Despite its small size, the Jain community is among the more active religious communities in the digital domain. Its digital presence is geared primarily at sharing information about the Jain faith in Singapore, highlighting its activities, and articulating the values the community upholds. According to the SJRS managing committee, there was some initial reluctance to engage online, driven by concerns that digital interactions could give rise to misunderstanding or disharmony, whether intentional or otherwise. Over time, however, the committee became more confident in its ability to moderate and manage such challenges, enabling the community to establish a more visible and sustained online presence.[45]

As AI becomes increasingly embedded in everyday life, the Jain community recognises that the gap in producing content that is both informative and engaging for the public has widened. In response, the community hopes to build its capacity to work with AI in order to better communicate its values

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44 Yifan Zhang, "Navigating Religious Hybridity: Dimensions of Jain Identity and Practice in Singapore's Pluralistic Society", *Religions* 15, no. 12 (2024), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121522
45 Local Jain follower, personal communication to authors, April 2025

and teachings. The Jain community remains optimistic that technology and online platforms can continue to bridge gaps and strengthen relationships—across generations and beyond national borders—much as they did during the pandemic.

Judaism

Singapore is home to a close-knit community of about 2,500 Jews, with two main synagogues.[46] In terms of their digital approach, both synagogues have their own website and one has its own Facebook page. Their online efforts focus mainly on publicising events, providing educational content, as well as offering resources for the local Jewish community. For example, the Chesed-El Synagogue uses it website to list several resources including meal reservations, facts about Jewish life, and information about its history. The Synagogue also uses its Facebook page to post updates about its community newsletter. Both synagogues' digital approaches are largely a one-way communication, with an emphasis on information dissemination rather than active engagement with either their congregations or the broader society.

Their relatively restrained engagement within the digital sphere may be attributed to perceptions of societal hostility towards the wider Jewish community, especially after the Israel-Hamas conflict. Members of the local Jewish community have reported unpleasant online and offline incidents that have led to concerns about their personal safety and well-being.[47] According to discussions with those familiar with the Jewish community, concerns over safety have been an on-going concern that predates even the Israel-Hamas conflict and can be traced to other incidents and planned attacks against the local Jewish community. For instance, in 2021, a former full-time National Serviceman in the Singapore Armed Forces had been detained for wanting to carry out a knife attack against Jews at the Maghain Aboth Synagogue.[48] Against this backdrop, the local Jewish community continues to function as a close-knit and inwardly supportive group, choosing to carefully augment the ways they engage with digital platforms.

Sikhism

In Singapore, the Sikh faith remains a minority, with about 12,500 followers and comprising approximately 0.3% of the population.[49] Though they are often categorised as part of the larger Indian community, the community's history and faith is rich with its own distinctive culture and practices. In terms of their digital approach, all seven gurdwaras—or Sikh temples—in Singapore have their own social media presence, of which five have their own websites, and a handful have other social media channels such as YouTube and Instagram. The Central Sikh Gurdwara, Singapore's largest Sikh

46 "Singapore," World Jewish Congress, accessed December 28, 2025, https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/SG
47 Abigail Ng, "Singapore's Jewish community facing acts of hostility linked to Middle East conflict, says Shanmugam", *CNA*, November 7, 2025, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/shanmugam-israel-palestine-jewish-community-5450406
48 "Update on Cases Under the Internal Security Act - 10 March", Ministry of Home Affairs, accessed December 24, 2025, https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/media-detail/update-on-cases-under-the-internal-security-act---10-march/
49 Shee Siew Ying and Orlando Woods, "Rethinking the Inclusionary Potential of Religious Institutions: the Case of Gurdwaras in Singapore," *Interreligious Relations* 30 (July-December 2022): 1, https://rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/IRR-Issue-30-July-Dec-2022.pdf

temple, for instance, has its own website, Facebook page, and Instagram account. They use these various channels to post information about events as well as volunteer and career opportunities. Across all gurdwaras' social media channels, content is posted in English and is largely focused on events, community updates, and specific information on worship and rituals.

Social media serves another unique function for the local Sikh community. It was observed in our study that a large number of Sikh youths encounter difficulties following the prayers and hymns that are sung during religious services. The online resources thus serve as an avenue for them to better understand the rituals and hymns. Additionally, the online domain is perceived as an alternate venue for *sangat* (congregation), as it allows Sikhs to come together to pray, sing or listen to scripture readings without having to be in the same physical premise. To facilitate this, the local Sikh community had already been livestreaming their services which started even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, followers of the Sikh faith have expressed concerns regarding the use of technology. Fears of misinformation and radicalisation remain salient, particularly given the risk that religious scriptures may be taken out of context or misconstrued in digital spaces. There is also concern that issues affecting Sikh diasporic communities abroad could gain traction locally through algorithm-driven content that amplifies such narratives. As a result, there is recognition of the need to navigate these technologies thoughtfully and discerningly as they continue to engage with digital platforms.

Taoism

According to the Singapore 2020 Census, followers of Taoism make up 8.8% of the Singapore population.[50] In assessing the digital presence of Taoist temples/organisations, it was challenging to differentiate Buddhist and Taoist temples online as it is a common sight in Singapore to find temples

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50 Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, *Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion*, (2021), 32, https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx

featuring statues of Buddhas alongside Taoist deities. For the purpose of our analysis, we focused on temples that were clearly Taoist. We found that the digital approach of those from the Taoist faith seemed parallel to that of Buddhism; that is, there is considerably less presence on digital platforms.

Of the Taoist temples examined, many did not have their own website and at best have a Facebook page. Their posts were published in English and Mandarin and the content was limited to community updates. Some temples, like the Wei Wu Zhen Tian Gong would also publish content explaining the significance of some festivals such as the Seventh Lunar Month—also commonly known as the Ghost Month—while other temples, such as the Bukit Timah Tua Pek Kong Temple livestreamed their rituals.

A likely reason for the lack of digital presence by Taoist temples is due to the highly performative nature and the seemingly personal relationships that followers have with their deities which are almost impossible to replicate in the online space. One such example is that of the Chinese spirit-medium, or *tangki* worship, in which an individual becomes a vessel for the gods to descend to the mortal realm to help the people. Aspects of *tangki* worship such as self-mortification and entering a trance-like state are very much physical aspects of Taoist rituals. These forms of worship—which involve substantial embodiment—are still practised almost exclusively in physical spaces, which explains the faith's relative lower engagement online.

Zoroastrianism

In Singapore, the Zoroastrianism community numbers about 300 to 400 members as of 2025, making it one of the smallest communities comprising less than 0.01% of the population.[51] The Zoroastrians believe in the value of connectivity that the digital spaces provide, and this is especially so in Singapore where the community remains very small. Digital platforms are thus important for two main reasons. First, digital tools such as WhatsApp chat groups help maintain updates within the local community. Being a small group means that the faith does not perceive a strong need to expand beyond methods of connections that are already in place, such as their main WhatsApp group or phone calls. Second, it helps connect Zoroastrians in Singapore to the global Zoroastrian community. One such platform that connects the Zoroastrian diaspora is the XYZ, or 'Xtremely Young Zoroastrians'. XYZ is an organisation established with the aim of strengthening the youth Zoroastrian community as well as inculcate values of the faith through community service and fellowship.

Beyond a WhatsApp group chat and phone calls, the local Zoroastrian community currently has a website and Facebook page as their main digital presence. The content on their social media platforms revolve around showcasing the events that they organise as a community. There is, however, little content related to their faith practices or rituals.

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51 The Smart Local SG (@thesmartlocalsg), "Have you ever heard of this religion in Singapore before? Our series Can Go In? is back with even more stories that explore lesser-known religions in Singapore. In this episode, we take an inside look at one of the world's oldest religions, Zoroastrianism.", Instagram, August 28, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/reel/DN5c-Gdkxnb/

Apart from the small size of the community, the local Zoroastrian community's limited digital presence is partly attributable to their belief in the significance of physical connection. Nonetheless, the community does see the value in building networks online, and they are continuously seeking ways to build on these networks. This is especially critical as the faith is observing a decline in its numbers in Singapore; as such, they hope that digital platforms can protect the religion from being completely lost and ensure its continuity.

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5   Analysis

Having examined how the ten religions in Singapore engage with the digital domain, this section identifies several key trends emerging from our survey and analysis. These include the role of digital religion in Singapore, primary drivers of digital adoption, factors explaining variation in uptake across religious communities, diversification of digital tools employed, and prevailing technology-related apprehensions and perceived risks.

5.1 Digital Engagement as a Supplement to Physical Religious Practice

First, our examination of the digital engagement of religious communities in Singapore suggests that the impact of digitalisation remains largely concentrated within the domains of information provision and knowledge-seeking, rather than the transformation of core religious rituals or worship practices. In the context of Singapore FBOs, digital platforms are primarily used to disseminate information, provide religious education, and maintain community awareness. Far fewer religious communities rely on digital tools to substitute for embodied rituals or acts of worship. This pattern reflects the continued centrality of physical presence, sacred space, and embodied practice in religious life in Singapore, underscoring the limits of digitalisation in reshaping devotional practices.

At the individual level, digital platforms have significantly lowered barriers to accessing religious information. Individuals interested in learning about different faiths can easily obtain resources on religious tenets, rituals, festivals, and places of worship through websites, social media platforms, and online repositories. Such accessibility has enabled both adherents and non-adherents to explore religions in a relatively low-cost and low-commitment manner.

Recent developments in AI have further enhanced this information-seeking function. AI-driven chatbots and applications offer users rapid and personalised access to religious knowledge. However, while these tools enhance convenience and reach, they have not substantially altered pathways to deeper religious integration or devotion. Our conversations with various followers across faith communities suggest persistent scepticism towards AI as an authoritative source of religious knowledge, particularly given the risks of hallucination, misinterpretation, and the lack of contextual or doctrinal nuance. These concerns are compounded by the fact that many AI systems are trained predominantly on English-language and Western-centric datasets, which may capture Asian religious traditions inadequately.

Moreover, deeper engagement with a faith often requires trust, mentorship, and embodied participation that cannot be or are difficult to be digitally replicated. In smaller religious communities, access to advanced teachings or communal life may still depend on personal networks rather than public-facing digital platforms. As such, while digitalisation has expanded access to information, it has not necessarily translated into sustained religious commitment or integration. This is further supported by our survey results where individuals in Singapore primarily use online resources for knowledge than

for worship or ritual purposes. Knowledge availability alone remains insufficient for cultivating religious identity or devotion.

As such, we observed that a recurring theme across faith traditions is the enduring physicality of religious practice. Worship, rituals, and communal gatherings are widely understood as embodied experiences that require presence in sacred spaces. Even among communities with relatively strong digital engagement, digital tools are generally viewed as supplementary rather than substitutive. This reinforces the observation that religion in Singapore remains fundamentally physical, with digital platforms serving supportive or administrative functions rather than redefining worship itself.

5.2 Maintaining Connections is Primary Driver of Digital Adoption Amid Risks of Digital Siloing

Second, among FBOs that have chosen to have a digital presence, the common objective is the maintenance and strengthening of connections among followers. Across religious traditions, respondents highlighted the importance of online platforms in sustaining ties within communities both locally and globally. This underscores the degree of interconnectivity enabled by digital technologies; these connections would otherwise be significantly more difficult to establish and maintain through physical means alone, particularly in the case of transnational religious communities. Such dynamics are evident in diasporic faith communities that utilise digital platforms to connect adherents across borders. A clear example of such a platform is the Zoroastrian XYZ community, which connects Zoroastrians all over the world.

At the local level, the experience of large congregations further illustrates the value of digital tools. For example, City Harvest Church demonstrates how sustained engagement can be achieved through an active and multi-platform digital strategy. By maintaining a presence across a range of social media platforms, each catering to different demographic groups—such as Facebook for older followers and Instagram or TikTok for younger audiences—the church is able to keep its congregation informed, engaged, and connected, while also reaching beyond its immediate membership to forge new ties with the wider public. Similarly, some mosques in Singapore, such as Al-Falah Mosque, maintain an active and regularly updated presence on social media and have even launched initiatives such as podcasts. Through such innovative digital efforts, these mosques seek to keep the faith relevant and accessible, not only for their immediate congregations, but also for wider audiences interested in learning more about Islam.

Ultimately, digital platforms play an important role in maintaining connections among followers. Digital tools enable FBOs to communicate efficiently with their congregations, share updates, and sustain a sense of belonging, particularly for diasporic communities. These platforms can strengthen intra-community cohesion by reinforcing shared identities and maintaining regular contact among members. However, this strengthening of internal ties also carries the risk of reinforcing silos.

Digital religious engagement in Singapore remains largely inward-facing, with limited use of online platforms for sustained interfaith or interreligious dialogue. Existing interfaith efforts tend to be institutional, episodic, and offline—such as through physical formal dialogues and events—rather than organically embedded within digital spaces. Online interfaith engagement, where it occurs, is often limited to symbolic gestures such as festive greetings, rather than substantive exchanges of beliefs, values, or concerns.

This siloed digital landscape may inadvertently constrain broader social cohesion. While digital platforms have the potential to facilitate interreligious understanding at scale, this potential remains underutilised. Expanding digital spaces for constructive interfaith engagement could help foster curiosity, reduce misperceptions, and mitigate misinformation, particularly in a multi-religious society like Singapore.

5.3 Variations in Digital Adoption across Faiths

Third, while all faiths in Singapore have engaged with digitalisation to some extent, there remains a clear disparity in the level and manner of digital adoption across religious communities. FBOs within the Islamic and Christian traditions, for example, tend to maintain a comparatively larger digital footprint, with more than 90% of mosques and churches sampled having at least one form of digital or social media presence. Although this pattern may be partially explained by the size of these communities, population alone does not fully account for observed differences, particularly in the case of Buddhism. Despite being the largest religious group in Singapore, fewer than 10% of Buddhist temples surveyed maintain any form of digital or social media presence.

These variations suggest that while community size may influence the need to go online, other factors, particularly religious beliefs, core values, and the perceived utility of digital tools by the respective communities, play a more decisive role in shaping adoption. Across faiths, digital engagement is therefore not simply a function of scale, but of how technology is understood within each religious worldview.

For some religious communities, digitalisation is viewed as complementary to core religious objectives. Islamic organisations, for instance, often regard digital tools as facilitating knowledge-seeking and enabling the wider dissemination of religious teachings, an outlook that is aligned with the faith's emphasis on learning. Some have also taken cues from the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), which has played a leading role in advancing digital innovation within the religious domain. In 2024, MUIS introduced the Fatwa Lab, an initiative tasked, among other objectives, with examining how AI can be leveraged to optimise key stages of *fatwa* formulation, including research processes. At the organisational level, this has translated into active experimentation with digital prayer lessons, podcasts, and short-form video content designed to reach different demographic groups.

Christian organisations similarly demonstrate a strong and diversified digital presence. Despite Christianity being a minority faith in Singapore, many churches maintain regular activity across multiple social media platforms and have expanded into other digital formats such as livestreams and podcasts. This proactive engagement can be linked to the faith's orientation and emphasis on outreach, encouraging the use of digital tools to spread religious messages and invite broader participation.

In contrast, some faith communities approach digital adoption more cautiously, reflecting different theological priorities. Among Buddhist communities, technology and digital engagement are sometimes viewed as forms of material attachment that could impede spiritual cultivation or enlightenment. Conversations with Buddhist leaders underscore this perspective, with one leader noting a general scepticism towards digitalisation within the community. He highlighted concerns surrounding emerging AI technologies—such as large language models (LLMs), which are predominantly trained on English-language sources—and questioned their reliability in conveying nuanced and contextually accurate Buddhist teachings. As a result, digital adoption within Buddhist FBOs tends to remain limited and functional, focused primarily on administrative needs such as donation requests or sign-ups, rather than religious instruction or engagement.

Nevertheless, this caution is not absolute. A small number of Buddhist FBOs have begun experimenting with digital platforms to support selected practices, such as facilitating the provision of offerings online, particularly for devotees who are unable to visit temples physically. These initiatives, however, remain contested within the community, reflecting ongoing tensions between accessibility and the perceived sanctity of embodied religious practice.

Beyond theology, practical considerations also shape digital uptake. Smaller religious communities, such as the Zoroastrian community in Singapore, tend to rely on simpler and more contained digital tools, most notably private messaging applications like WhatsApp and Telegram, to manage internal communication efficiently. For these communities, the primary motivation for going online is not scale or outreach, but coordination and visibility, with limited need for expansive public-facing platforms.

Collectively, these cases illustrate that while similar factors such as community size, organisational capacity, and perceived value influence all religious communities' choices, their relative importance differs across traditions. Ultimately, core religious values and interpretations of technology exert a stronger influence on digital adoption than population size alone, shaping not only whether communities go online, but how and to what extent they do so.

5.4 Emerging Digital Tools in Faith-Based Engagement

Additionally, we observe that some religious communities have moved beyond 'traditional' social media platforms to adopt a wider range of digital tools, including private messaging applications,

podcasts, and, in some cases, digitalised rituals. Private messaging platforms—such as dedicated WhatsApp chat groups or Telegram channels—are increasingly utilised by certain FBOs. The immediacy of instant messaging is particularly attractive, as it allows communities to disseminate information efficiently while enabling limited forms of internal engagement. Many of these groups are invitation-only, with access typically restricted to members or followers of a specific FBO or faith community. Such controlled access helps FBOs manage challenges associated with online interaction, including concerns over misinformation, trolling, and hostile messaging. By curating participation within these digital spaces, FBOs find it easier to moderate discussions and maintain a safe and orderly environment for engagement.

Beyond messaging platforms, some religious communities have also experimented with other innovative digital tools to deepen engagement. As noted earlier, organisations within the Islamic community have, in particular, leveraged podcasts as an extension of religious outreach, using them to raise awareness of religious issues and disseminate knowledge with considerable success. Meanwhile, a small number of Buddhist FBOs have explored the digitalisation of selected ritual practices, such as enabling the provision of e-offerings online. While such initiatives offer an alternative for individuals who are unable to physically visit temples, they remain contested. Critics argue that digital substitutes may diminish the sacred intent associated with embodied acts of devotion, particularly the act of physically entering the temple space to perform rituals.

To an extent, the move towards adopting a wider range of digital tools is increasingly shaped by demographic considerations. Many religious communities recognise the need to expand on their use of digital tools to reach younger audiences, particularly in light of declining congregation numbers and the rising numbers of individuals identifying as non-religious in Singapore. Social media platforms, podcasts, and short-form video content are increasingly viewed as essential channels for becoming visible and relevant to younger generations. However, this push towards digital diversification is tempered by concerns over authenticity, doctrinal integrity, and the potential dilution of religious meaning.

5.5 Technology-Related Apprehensions and Perceived Risks

With the partial exception of Islamic organisations, most religious communities express reservations towards newer technologies, particularly AI. These apprehensions stem not only from theological concerns, but also from broader uncertainties surrounding the misuse of technology. Across conversations with religious leaders and followers, three interrelated challenges consistently emerged: radicalisation, misinformation, and the misuse of digital tools.

Concerns over online self-radicalisation are especially salient, given global precedents where extremists have exploited digital platforms for recruitment and dissemination. Misinformation, amplified by algorithm-driven content curation, was similarly highlighted as a growing risk. Algorithms

that prioritise engagement over accuracy may inadvertently promote sensational or controversial religious content, thereby deepening misunderstandings and reinforcing biases.

The integration of AI into everyday digital life further complicates these challenges. While AI tools promise efficiency and accessibility, their potential to reproduce cultural, religious, or racial biases raises significant concerns. Without appropriate safeguards, AI-generated religious content risks misrepresenting scriptures and doctrines, perpetuating stereotypes, or eroding trust between religious communities. These risks underpin the nuanced and cautious public attitudes towards online religious content in Singapore, as demonstrated in the results of our survey.

Beyond AI, other emerging digital tools, such as virtual and augmented reality, also raise questions about the authenticity of religious experiences. Proponents argue that such technologies can help bridge physical barriers for individuals who are unable to access sacred sites in person. Initiatives like the Being Bridges Being Guests initiative, which invite users to explore virtual replicas of places of worship, illustrate this potential. While these projects may enhance religious literacy and exposure, they also prompt deeper questions about whether the significance of sacred spaces is diminished in digital form, and whether virtual encounters can meaningfully replicate the sense of awe and reverence experienced through physical presence.

Taken together, the digital presence of religious communities in Singapore is best characterised as cautious, selective, and predominantly informational. Digital platforms have expanded access, strengthened internal connections, and enabled outreach—especially to younger demographics—but have not fundamentally altered the embodied nature of religious practice. While digitalisation holds promise for enhancing cohesion and engagement, the risks to social harmony arising from factors such as misinformation, radicalisation, and technological misuse, continue to shape how religious communities negotiate their presence online. We conclude the report in the next section with implications and recommendations arising from our analysis.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations:
Governing Digital Religion in a Hyperconnected Singapore

In the previous section, we explored how various religious communities in Singapore engage with digital platforms, and what these patterns reveal about religious life, authority, and social cohesion in a highly connected and religiously diverse society. Rather than signalling a wholesale transformation of religion, the findings point to a more calibrated reality: digital technologies are being incorporated selectively, cautiously, and unevenly, in ways that reflect enduring religious norms, institutional constraints, and social priorities.

On the whole, our findings suggest that digital religion in Singapore functions less as a disruptive force and more as an adaptive extension of existing religious ecosystems. Digital platforms have expanded access to information, lowered barriers to initial engagement, and strengthened internal community ties, but they have not displaced the embodied, place-based, and relational foundations of religious practice. This hybrid equilibrium—where online tools complement but do not replace physical worship—appears likely to persist.

At the same time, the findings identified in this study should be understood as indicative rather than exhaustive. The report focuses on observable forms of digital engagement among FBOs with an established physical presence, and prioritises breadth over depth in mapping the landscape across the ten religions. As such, the analysis does not extend to close examination of theological or doctrinal content circulated online, nor does it capture religious communities or initiatives that operate primarily or exclusively in digital spaces. In addition, the findings are situated within Singapore's distinctive regulatory and socio-political context, where religious life is closely governed offline and lightly regulated online; approaches to digital religion observed here may therefore differ from those in other national settings.

These boundaries notwithstanding, the study offers a foundational overview of how digital technologies are currently being navigated by religious communities in Singapore and highlights key dynamics that merit attention as digitalisation continues to evolve. In this section, we present the broad implications of the study as well as outline some recommendations for the future governance of digital religion in Singapore.

Key Implications

Three broader implications emerge from this study.

First, digital presence has become unavoidable, even for communities that remain theologically or culturally cautious. The pervasiveness of online religious content means that opting out of the digital domain does not insulate a faith community from its effects. Instead, it increases the risk that religious narratives about a tradition will be shaped by external, decontextualised, or fringe voices. The challenge for FBOs is therefore not whether to engage digitally, but how to do so in ways that are contextually grounded, doctrinally responsible, and socially constructive.

Second, connectivity—not ritual substitution—has emerged as the primary driver of digital adoption. Across faiths, digital tools are valued most for their ability to maintain relationships: between leaders and followers, across generations, and with other diasporic communities. While this strengthens intra-community cohesion, it also carries the risk of digital siloing. Without intentional design, religious digital spaces may reinforce inward-looking engagement and limit opportunities for interreligious understanding in the online domain.

Third, technological anxiety is not resistance to modernity, but a rational response to perceived risks. Concerns about misinformation, radicalisation, and AI-generated religious content are widespread and cut across religious traditions. These anxieties reflect a sophisticated public awareness of the social consequences of digital technologies, rather than technophobia. They also help explain why trust, authority, and moderation remain central considerations in religious digital engagement.

Strategic Directions and Recommendations

Against this backdrop, the future governance of digital religion in Singapore should be guided by principles of complementarity, capacity-building, and co-responsibility. To begin with, digital engagement should be explicitly framed as complementary to physical religious life, not as its substitute. Policy messaging, institutional support, and community strategies should reinforce the idea that online platforms extend learning and connection, while embodied worship and face-to-face interaction remain central to religious authenticity.

Second, youth engagement should be treated as a strategic priority rather than a tactical add-on. As younger Singaporeans increasingly encounter religion first through digital channels, faith communities will need credible, values-anchored voices that can empower youths to engage meaningfully in these spaces. Youth-centred interfaith digital ambassador initiatives could help promote respectful online engagement, counter misinformation, and model constructive cross-faith interactions, especially on fast-moving platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and podcasts.

Third, credible religious voices must be present online to prevent narrative vacuums. Where mainstream religious organisations are absent or hesitant, digital spaces are more likely to be populated by fringe interpretations, sensationalist content, or external actors unfamiliar with local context. Supporting religious leaders, educators, and influencers who are grounded in their traditions and fluent in digital communication will be essential to sustaining balanced and trustworthy online religious ecosystems.

Fourth, religious communities' self-regulation and positive norm-setting should be prioritised alongside formal regulation. While survey respondents place considerable trust in government oversight, long-term resilience in the digital religious sphere will depend on the respective communities' ability to model ethical online behaviour, encourage discernment, and cultivate internal norms against misinformation and hostility. Guidance from trusted religious actors often carries greater legitimacy than external enforcement alone.

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Finally, there is a strong case for interfaith digital capacity-building. The unevenness of digital adoption across faiths presents an opportunity rather than a deficit. Structured platforms, whether facilitated by interfaith organisations, educational institutions, or supported by the government, can enable faith communities to share best practices in digital communication, content moderation, youth outreach, and risk management. Such collaboration would not only reduce digital inequality but also build mutual understanding of the ways different religious traditions navigate technology. Moving beyond symbolic gestures or one-off dialogues, carefully moderated digitally-mediated interfaith interactions can support continuity, openness and harmonious everyday encounters. Such spaces can complement existing offline initiatives and help future-proof Singapore's interreligious social fabric in an increasingly digital public sphere.

Looking Ahead

Digital religion in Singapore is neither a passing trend nor a revolutionary rupture. It is an evolving domain shaped by theology, technology, governance, and social norms. The task ahead is not to accelerate digital adoption indiscriminately, nor to resist it reflexively, but to shape it intentionally. With sustained collaboration between religious communities, civil society, and the government, digital platforms can be harnessed as tools for accessibility, learning, and cohesion, while guarding against the risks of fragmentation and misuse. In doing so, Singapore can continue to demonstrate how religious diversity and digital modernity can coexist in a manner that is resilient, inclusive, and socially constructive.

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