



# How Online Religious Engagement Shapes Personal Well-Being

*Chye Sze Yie and Amanda Huan*



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### SYNOPSIS

*When it comes to discussions on online religious engagement, more focus has been paid to the negative aspects, such as online radicalisation and social isolation. Findings from a nationally representative study in Singapore highlight its potential as a force for good; engaging with religion online is positively associated with better overall well-being. Digital religion can serve as a viable psychological support system. Policymakers and faith-based organisations alike may leverage these online spaces to foster greater individual resilience and stronger societal cohesion.*

### COMMENTARY

Digital technology is well-embedded in our everyday lives, reshaping not only how we work, communicate, and socialise, but also how we practice religion. From livestreamed worship services to prayer and meditation apps and faith-based online communities, online religious engagement is very much a feature of contemporary spiritual life.

While the discourse thus far has tended to focus on the negative effects of digital religion, such as [online radicalisation](#), [social isolation](#), and the [strengthening of existing cognitive biases](#), there is much to unpack vis-à-vis the positives of online religious engagement. These include the potential formation of online support groups and the increased accessibility of religious services, particularly for those unable to attend in person.

## How Engaging with Religion Online Relates to Well-Being

As more people integrate spiritual practices with digital spaces, a key question arises: How does engaging with religion online relate to overall well-being? A recent analysis of nationally representative data in Singapore provides timely insight into this question. It highlights the research and policy relevance of understanding these digital practices and their direct implications for individual and societal well-being, interfaith harmony, and digital cultural governance.

Scholars have long noted that traditional religious participation correlates with [higher life satisfaction, stronger emotional well-being](#), and deeper social connectedness. Online religious engagement, be it viewing sermons, participating in prayer groups, joining religious discussion groups, or consuming faith content on platforms like YouTube or TikTok, allows individuals to access spiritual resources regardless of geography or schedule.

These digital environments often mirror the core functions of physical religious communities, including meaning-making, emotional comfort, social bonding, and moral guidance. In a plural yet highly networked society such as Singapore, the digital turn thus raises the possibility that online forms of faith engagement may help amplify the efficacy of these functions.

Data from the Singapore Digital Media and Information Survey (wave 9, 2024) carried out by the Centre for Information Integrity and the Internet, and the Social Cohesion Research Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (both constituent units of Nanyang Technological University), collected responses from 1,004 adults aged between 21 and 77 years residing in Singapore on questions related to their online religious engagement and well-being indicators. From the data, three key findings related to emotional, psychological and social well-being emerged.

### Key Findings of the Survey

The data showed that more frequent participation in online religious activities was positively associated with higher levels of emotional well-being, including greater happiness and life satisfaction. Digital religious content provides a form of emotional regulation, offering reassurance, hope, and grounding, particularly during periods of stress or uncertainty. This is consistent with existing psychological theories that view religious coping as a key mechanism by which individuals reduce negative emotions and strengthen individual resilience.

Although the effect is modest, it is consistent and meaningful. It suggests that in an increasingly complex, fast-paced, and uncertain environment, digital faith spaces can offer accessible emotional support to a wide range of individuals, regardless of their pre-existing levels of institutional religious involvement.

It is important to note, however, that the effects were not felt evenly across all survey participants. While online religious engagement improves emotional well-being across all age groups, younger adults seem to gain more emotional benefits than older adults. This may be due to youths' higher levels of digital fluency and increased

comfort with seeking and expressing spirituality online. Digital religion may also fit more seamlessly into the lifestyle habits of younger individuals. Conversely, older adults may still prefer offline religious interactions due to their familiarity.

The data also found that online religious engagement was positively associated with an individual's psychological well-being, defined as self-acceptance, a sense of purpose, and autonomy. Unlike emotional well-being, which addresses feelings and happiness, psychological well-being covers deeper issues of identity and self-worth.

Online religious engagement may contribute to this aspect by providing individuals with more alternative avenues to reflect on values, participate in meaningful practices and articulate their beliefs. This reinforces the notion that online religious engagement is not simply passive content consumption but an active, iterative process. Engagement with online religious content can facilitate personal growth, introspection, and the strengthening of moral frameworks that support individual well-being and mental health.

The third finding concerns social well-being, which involves feelings of belonging and contribution to a community, and belief in a positive society. Online religious engagement had the most significant positive effect in this aspect. In online environments, religious communities may form naturally through group chats, discussions, and shared digital rituals. These online spaces offer a sense of shared identity and belonging, emotional and mental support, and opportunities to serve or support others.

In an increasingly time-pressed society like Singapore, where lifestyle changes may limit in-person interactions, these online communities serve as a key supplementary avenue for social integration. This is especially relevant in multicultural Singapore, where fostering positive connections directly contributes to social cohesion.

While the data indicate positive associations between online religious engagement with all three types of well-being, these relationships should not be interpreted as causal. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that online spaces reinforce existing levels of positive well-being and contribute to greater resilience and harmony.

### **Implications of the Survey Findings**

The findings indicate that digital religion can serve as a viable psychological support system. Policymakers and faith-based organisations alike may leverage these online spaces. The former may incorporate these insights into digital well-being and mental health strategies, while the latter may supplement existing offline programmes with digital equivalents that further foster belonging and emotional resilience. These digital spaces can also help sustain social cohesion through interfaith digital initiatives, online dialogue platforms, and collaborative community service, facilitated by digital mobilisation. These, in turn, will foster greater inter-group trust and cooperation.

While the findings have been positive, one should still not neglect the potential negative consequences of online religious engagement. To address this, religious

digital literacy should be strengthened as more religious conversations take place online. Such digital literacy could focus on navigating online religious content safely, identifying harmful or inappropriate narratives, and engaging constructively in multireligious online environments. This supports Singapore's broader goals of preventing online harms while fostering a healthy digital civic culture.

## **Conclusion**

The survey findings demonstrate clearly that online religious engagement is not a peripheral or trivial activity, nor is it a diminished version of traditional religious life. It has evolved and continues to develop as a meaningful source of emotional, psychological, and social well-being for Singaporeans.

As Singapore continues to advance its smart-nation agenda, recognising the potential of digital religious participation as a force for good can help strengthen individual and community resilience and foster better overall well-being. Digital religion, when nurtured and guided appropriately, can be a valuable asset in building a more connected and cohesive society.

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