

EDITOR'S COLUMN

Media and Religion & Spirituality in Asia

In today's media-saturated world, religious experience is increasingly mediated through screens, networks, and algorithms. From theological discourse to ritual performance, from community formation to ethical responsibility, digital media has become a key space where religion is lived, contested, and reimaged. This phenomenon is particularly dynamic in Asia, a region that presents a uniquely complex and fertile ground for studying media and religion. As the birthplace of major world religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, and Taoism, among others—Asia is also home to vibrant indigenous traditions and rapidly growing religious movements. These traditions intersect with one of the world's fastest-growing digital populations, where the expansion of mobile technologies, social media, and streaming platforms has profoundly transformed how religious narratives are shared, interpreted, and embodied. Whether in megacities or rural areas, digital connectivity is reshaping devotional practices, spiritual authority, and modes of belonging in ways that are distinctively Asian yet globally resonant. Many of these movements use digital media to spread their message, often challenging traditional religious institutions that perceive them as heretical and as serious threats to their authority or established order. This present issue of *Religion and Social Communication* explores this multifaceted and dynamic interplay between media, religion, and spirituality in Asia, where ancient traditions meet rapid digital transformation.

The opening article, “Anime’s Ethical Odyssey: Navigating Good and Evil in Anime through the Lens of the Old Testament” by **Sam T. Rajkumar**, sets the tone for this issue by drawing an intriguing parallel between biblical ethics and the moral universes constructed in Japanese anime. Through series like *Death Note* and *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*, Rajkumar uncovers how ancient spiritual themes—justice, sin, redemption—resonate within modern secular media, suggesting a transcultural dialogue between scripture and storytelling.

Rico Casta Jacoba’s “Re-envisioning Dulles’ Ecclesiological Models for the Digital Age” responds to the Church’s encounter with digital culture. By proposing an “Interactive Community of Disciples,” Jacoba invites us to rethink ecclesial life in digital spaces, integrating participatory and

decentralized modes of faith practice. This article contributes to the growing field of digital theology and challenges religious institutions to adapt without losing their theological moorings.

Ethical engagement in digital media is further explored in **Leonel B. Ballesta's** article on Confucian virtues and social media. Using the Confucian principle of *Ren*, Ballesta offers a philosophical framework for responsible media practices in interfaith contexts. His work calls attention to the relevance of age-old wisdom in Asian moral traditions in confronting contemporary issues such as online harassment and misinformation.

The theme of media's role in religious leadership and communication continues in **Yoel Cohen's** study of rabbis in Israel and their use of public relations and advertising. By surveying rabbinic attitudes toward media engagement, Cohen sheds light on the tensions between tradition and outreach, particularly among different streams of Judaism, and points to the strategic (if uneven) use of media to connect with secular and religious audiences alike.

In "An Ecosystemic Approach to Digital Christianity," **Wayne Choong** presents an ethnographic study of Pentecostal youth in Singapore, analyzing how digitalization transforms religious identity and community. His innovative ecosystemic framework reveals the intricate ways online and offline experiences of faith are interwoven, offering a model for understanding digital religion in Southeast Asia.

This focus on localized religious practice in digital contexts is also central to **Pia Patricia P. Tenedero's** sociolinguistic study of a Catholic parish Facebook page in the Philippines. Using the concept of the "figured world," Tenedero explores how online discourse shapes parish identity, participation, and mission. Her work highlights how digital platforms become spaces for reconstructing ecclesial purpose and belonging.

Also addressing digital media's broader societal impact, **Annapurna Sharma** and **Mahesh Kumar Meena's** "Understanding News Avoidance in Social Media" presents a systematic literature review of 23 studies, highlighting the growing trend of news avoidance—especially post-COVID-19. Key themes include the psychological and structural causes of news avoidance, its ties to social media and news overload, and the potential of trust-building, news curation, and constructive journalism as remedies. This study contributes to understanding a critical challenge in today's digital information environment.

Richmon Rey B. Jundis turns to papal teachings in "Understanding Pope Francis' Framing of Technology," comparing *Laudato Si'* and

Fratelli Tutti with Shannon Vallor's Technomoral Virtues. Through content and framing analysis, Jundis examines how Pope Francis promotes a morally grounded digital culture, advocating for discernment, ethical engagement, and social responsibility amidst rapid technological change.

Kasmir Nema and **Andrea May C. Malonzo** address user experience in "Understanding Media Consumption... on the Radio Veritas Asia Website." Their cross-regional study in South and Southeast Asia provides empirical data on online religious media preferences, reaffirming the enduring relevance of Catholic content in digital form. Despite digital diversity, textual content remains highly valued, reflecting a nuanced picture of media satisfaction among Asian audiences.

In a striking ethnographic contribution, **Isabel Weitschies** investigates Mother Goddesses worship (*Đạo Mẫu*) in Vietnam, showing how social media platforms have become vital spaces for spiritual expression, community building, and ritual innovation. Her article reveals the generational shift in mediumship practices, as digital technologies empower a once-marginalized tradition to flourish and evolve in the public sphere.

Finally, **Wesley Kim D. Soguilon** offers a theologically grounded response to a pressing social problem in the Philippines—misinformation. Drawing on Catholic social teaching and Thomistic ethics, his article proposes "charitable instruction" as both a spiritual obligation and a civic responsibility. Soguilon calls for grassroots educational initiatives that equip Catholics to engage ethically and truthfully on digital platforms.

Together, these articles demonstrate the breadth of religious and media engagement across Asia. They reveal how religious communities are not only adapting to media technologies but also reshaping them according to their spiritual traditions, ethical frameworks, and cultural narratives. As scholars, practitioners, and believers navigate the promises and perils of digital life, this issue contributes timely reflections on how religion and media co-evolve in an increasingly interconnected world—offering both caution and hope for the future of faith in the digital age.

Anthony Le Duc, SVD

Chief Editor