

Religious Practices in Immersive Virtual Worlds: Rethinking the Direction of Digital Religion Studies

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Abstract: The rapid development of digital technology has fostered the emergence of immersive virtual worlds that enable individuals not only to communicate but also to engage in religious practices within virtual spaces. Although digital religion studies have expanded significantly, most research continues to focus on media use as a means of communication, identity formation, and the negotiation of religious authority. In contrast, relatively little attention has been given to religious practices that take place within immersive virtual worlds. This article aims to reconsider the direction of digital religion studies by positioning religious practices in immersive virtual worlds as an important area of inquiry. Using a qualitative approach and a library research method, the analysis demonstrates that immersive virtual worlds generate new forms of rituals, symbols, social interactions, and collective experiences that cannot be fully explained by the dominant paradigms in digital religion studies. Therefore, digital religion scholarship needs to move beyond its emphasis on media and communication toward an analysis of religion as a social practice and a form of collective life within virtual spaces. This article proposes the concept of *virtual collective effervescence* as an initial conceptual framework for understanding these dynamics.

Keywords: Digital Religion, Religious Practices, Immersive Virtual Worlds, *Virtual Collective Effervescence*.

Introduction

Digital religion studies have developed alongside growing scholarly interest in the relationship between religion and media in contemporary society. Hosseini (2008) provides an influential classification of this relationship through three main approaches: functionalist, essentialist, and interactive. The functionalist approach views media as a means of communicating religious messages, whereas the essentialist approach emphasizes the role of media in shaping how people understand and practice religion. The interactive approach, meanwhile, conceptualizes religion and media as two entities that mutually shape each other through ongoing interactions in digital environments (Hosseini, 2008).

The first two approaches have established relatively strong foundations in existing scholarship. The functionalist approach has encouraged research on the use of the internet for Islamic preaching, the dissemination of religious information, and online religious services (Bunt, 2003; Helland, 2005). Meanwhile, the essentialist approach has advanced through studies of mediatization, which explain how media logic influences the forms, content, and experiences of religious life (Fakhrurroji, 2015; Hjarvard, 2008). Over the past two decades, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the interactive approach, which conceptualizes digital media as social spaces where individuals and communities construct and negotiate religious identities, religious communities, and religious authority (Campbell, 2013; Cheong et al., 2012; Evolvi, 2019; Hutchings, 2017).

Nevertheless, research on digital religion continues to focus primarily on communication, identity, online communities, and religious authority. Scholars have devoted considerably more attention to how individuals and communities represent and negotiate religion in digital spaces than to how they engage in religious practices within virtual environments themselves (Campbell, 2013; Evolvi, 2019; Hutchings, 2017). Consequently, existing research has paid relatively limited attention to religious rituals, symbols, social interactions, and collective religious experiences in virtual spaces.

The emergence of immersive virtual worlds has made this limitation increasingly apparent. Unlike social media platforms, immersive virtual worlds allow users to establish a sense of presence through avatars, interact synchronously, construct symbolic spaces, and participate in collective activities within persistent three-dimensional digital environments (Bell, 2008; Castronova, 2005). These developments have encouraged new forms of religious practice, including virtual mosques, avatar-based religious study sessions, virtual religious communities, and collective ritual activities on platforms such as Roblox and VRChat (Campbell, 2021; Wagner, 2012). These phenomena demonstrate that individuals and communities no longer merely communicate religion through digital media; they also actively practice religion within virtual spaces.

These developments reveal a significant gap in digital religion studies. Although previous research has extensively examined how individuals and communities communicate, represent, and negotiate religion through digital technologies, relatively few studies have investigated how participants perform religious practices as collective social activities within immersive virtual worlds (Campbell, 2021; Wagner, 2012). This gap deserves particular attention because classical theories of religion identify rituals, symbols, social interactions, and

collective experiences as essential components of religious life.

In this context, Durkheim's theoretical perspective offers a relevant starting point. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim (1995) explains how rituals, symbols, and collective interactions shape religious life and generate collective effervescence, a shared emotional experience that provides the foundation for moral solidarity and group identity. However, Durkheim developed this concept within a theoretical framework that assumes participants share the same physical social space. The emergence of immersive virtual worlds presents a different situation, as participants can engage in rituals, exchange religious symbols, and interact collectively through avatars and virtual environments without sharing a physical location (Bell, 2008; Campbell, 2021). This development raises an important theoretical question about how participants generate collective religious experiences when they engage in technologically mediated religious practices within virtual spaces.

This article aims to reconsider the direction of digital religion studies by identifying religious practices in immersive virtual worlds as an area that deserves greater scholarly attention. It argues that the emergence of immersive virtual worlds reveals the limitations of prevailing approaches to digital religion, which continue to emphasize communication, identity, religious communities, and religious authority. As an alternative, this article proposes expanding the research agenda to examine religion as a form of social practice and collective life within virtual spaces. To advance this agenda, the article introduces the concept of virtual collective effervescence as a preliminary conceptual framework for understanding how virtual rituals, digital religious symbols, and collective interactions in virtual worlds generate shared emotional experiences and foster solidarity within religious communities.

Method

This article adopts a qualitative approach using library research as its primary method. The study draws on a critical examination of relevant literature in digital religion, media and religion, the sociology of religion, and immersive virtual world studies, including books, journal articles, research reports, and other academic publications. The analysis employs an interpretive approach to examine conceptual developments in digital religion studies, particularly Hosseini's typology of the relationship between religion and media, and to identify prevailing trends, limitations, and research gaps in the existing literature. Building on this analysis, the article engages these findings with Durkheim's sociological perspective on religion to develop a preliminary conceptual framework for understanding religious practices in immersive virtual worlds.

Results And Discussion

1. The Interactive Approach as the Dominant Paradigm in Digital Religion Studies

Digital religion studies have developed from scholarly interest in the relationship between religion and media, which Hosseini (2008) categorizes into three main approaches: functionalist, essentialist, and interactive. The functionalist approach views media as a means of disseminating religious information and facilitating religious communication (Bunt, 2003; Helland, 2005). In Indonesia, this approach manifests in the use of YouTube and Islamic online portals as platforms for *da'wah* (Islamic preaching), which extend the reach of religious messages (Akmaliah, 2020). Examples include the YouTube channels of Ustaz Adi Hidayat (@AdiHidayatOfficial) and Ustaz Abdul Somad (@ustadzabdulsomadofficial), as well as Islamic online media platforms such as NU Online (nu.or.id), Hidayatullah.com (hidayatullah.com), and Eramuslim (eramuslim.com) (see Table 1).

Meanwhile, the essentialist approach emphasizes the capacity of media to shape how individuals communicate and understand religion through distinctive media logics (Hjarvard, 2008). Fakhruroji (2015) demonstrates how Aa Gym's SMS Tauhiid service adapted the form and content of religious messages to the characteristics of SMS technology, particularly its brevity, speed, and personalized communication. Other examples include the Instagram account of Pemuda Hijrah (@pemuda_hijrah_org) and the TikTok preaching activities of Habib Husein Ja'far (@huseinjafar) (see Table 1). In the case of Pemuda Hijrah, the most significant development lies not merely in its use of Instagram for religious preaching but in how the platform's logic transforms its preaching strategies through visual design, youth-oriented language, short-form videos, and community branding. This transformation closely reflects the logic of mediatization. Similarly, Habib Husein Ja'far adapts his religious communication through short-form content, informal conversations, podcasts, humor, and references to popular culture. These adaptations reshape the presentation and delivery of religious messages according to the distinctive characteristics of digital platforms.

Both approaches have provided important foundations for the development of digital religion studies. However, subsequent scholarship has increasingly shifted toward the interactive approach, which conceptualizes religion and media as mutually constitutive forces.

The interactive approach examines the reciprocal relationship through which religion and media mutually shape religious practices in digital environments (Hosseini, 2008). Developments in the literature indicate that this approach has become the dominant paradigm in contemporary digital religion studies. Scholars have examined how individuals construct religious identities in digital spaces (Evolvi, 2019), establish online religious communities (Hutchings, 2017), and negotiate religious authority within networked environments (Cheong et al., 2012). Campbell (2013) further conceptualizes digital spaces as integral components of religious life, where religious practices develop through continuous interactions among users, technologies, and communities. These developments demonstrate a shift in scholarly attention from media as instruments of communication to media as social spaces where individuals and communities practice, interpret, and negotiate religion.

In Indonesia, studies reflecting the interactive approach have also expanded, although scholars do not always explicitly identify their analytical perspectives with this terminology. Nisa (2018), for example, demonstrates how the One Day One Juz (ODOJ) community uses social media not only as a communication tool but also as a space for cultivating religious commitment and organizing collective Quran reading practices. Akmaliah (2020) illustrates how the Pemuda Hijrah movement employs digital media to construct religious identities, establish communities, and develop a culture of *da'wah* that resonates with younger generations. Meanwhile, Fakhruroji (2021) emphasizes that the development of digital religion in Indonesia reflects increasingly dynamic interactions among religious practices, religious actors, and digital technologies in shaping contemporary religious experiences. These dynamics also characterize the *hijrah* phenomenon in Indonesia (Rahman et al., 2021; Rijal, 2025; Wati et al., 2022), which has contributed to the emergence of online *hijrah* communities, including Muslimah Hijrah Indonesia, Motivasi Hijrah, and Its Time To Hijrah (see Table 1). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that scholarly attention has moved beyond understanding media merely as communication instruments toward examining how religion and media mutually shape each other within digital social life.

Table 1. Three Main Approaches in Digital Religion Studies and Their Examples in Indonesia

Approach	Characteristics	Examples in Indonesia
Functionalist	Media serve as instruments for disseminating religious messages.	YouTube channels of Ustaz Adi Hidayat (@AdiHidayatOfficial) and Ustaz Abdul Somad (@ustadzabdulsomadofficial); Islamic online media platforms, including NU Online (nu.or.id), Hidayatullah.com (hidayatullah.com), and Eramuslim (eramuslim.com).
Essentialist	Media logics shape the content, styles, and experiences of religious life.	Aa Gym's SMS Tauhiid service; Instagram-based <i>da'wah</i> by Pemuda Hijrah (@pemuda_hijrah_org); TikTok-based <i>da'wah</i> by Habib Husein Ja'far (@huseinjafar).
Interactive	Religion and media mutually shape social practices and religious communities.	One Day One Juz (ODOJ) communities on WhatsApp and online <i>hijrah</i> communities on WhatsApp, including Muslimah Hijrah Indonesia, Motivasi Hijrah, and Its Time To Hijrah.

Nevertheless, the growing dominance of the interactive approach has not resulted in a corresponding expansion of research objects. Most studies continue to focus on religious communication, the construction of religious identities (Evolvi, 2019; Rahman et al., 2021; Rijal, 2025; Wati et al., 2022), online communities (Hutchings, 2017), and the negotiation of religious authority (Cheong et al., 2012). Although these research interests have significantly enriched scholarly understanding of religious transformations in the digital age, they have offered relatively limited explanations of how individuals and communities engage in religion as a form of social practice and collective life within digital environments themselves. Thus, despite the interactive approach's emergence as the dominant paradigm in digital religion studies, scholars have devoted relatively little attention to religious practices within immersive virtual worlds. This limitation provides the starting point for reconsidering the direction of digital religion studies amid the expansion of avatar-based immersive virtual environments, including online games and the metaverse.

2. Immersive Virtual Worlds and the Emergence of Digital Religious Practices

Advances in digital technology have given rise to immersive virtual worlds as digital environments that differ from conventional social media and online communication platforms. Immersive virtual worlds are three-dimensional digital spaces that allow users to establish a sense of presence through avatars, interact synchronously, and participate in persistent virtual environments that continue to exist even after users log out (Bell, 2008; Castronova, 2005). Various platforms, including Roblox, VRChat, Second Life, Minecraft, and virtual reality applications, provide immersive virtual environments where users interact through avatars in shared digital spaces (Bell, 2008; Campbell, 2021). These characteristics enable immersive virtual worlds to function not

only as communication platforms but also as social environments where individuals establish relationships, form communities, and engage in collective activities. Unlike social media platforms, which primarily facilitate the exchange of information, immersive virtual worlds allow users to experience social presence through direct interactions within shared digital environments.

The development of these virtual environments has also encouraged the emergence of various forms of religious practice within digital spaces. Previous studies have documented the emergence of virtual mosques, avatar-based religious study sessions, religious communities on platforms such as Roblox and VRChat, and collective virtual pilgrimages and rituals within digital environments (Campbell, 2021; Wagner, 2012). These phenomena demonstrate that religion no longer exists merely as information, representation, or identity mediated by technology. Instead, individuals and communities increasingly practice religion as a form of social activity within virtual spaces. In this context, users do not merely consume religious content but actively participate in rituals, social interactions, and collective activities that shape their religious experiences.

International scholarship has increasingly examined these developments. Dawson (2004) was among the early scholars who demonstrated that virtual communities could provide important spaces for the development of religious life. Subsequent studies by Grieve (2014), Wagner (2012), and Campbell (2021) illustrate how virtual worlds such as Second Life, virtual reality environments, and other immersive platforms facilitate the formation of religious rituals, communities, and experiences that do not depend entirely on physical presence. Collectively, these studies mark an expansion of digital religion research beyond questions of communication and representation toward greater scholarly attention to religious practices within virtual environments.

However, research in Indonesia has not demonstrated a comparable level of development. Most studies on digital religion in Indonesia continue to focus on digital *da'wah*, social media, religious influencers, religious authority, and online communities that develop through digital communication platforms (Akmaliah, 2020; Nisa, 2018; Rahman et al., 2021; Rijal, 2025; Wati et al., 2022). Research examining religious practices within avatar-based immersive virtual worlds, including Roblox, VRChat, virtual mosques, and various forms of virtual rituals, remains relatively limited. Meanwhile, the growing use of online games and virtual platforms in Indonesia has made these environments an increasingly important part of young people's digital lives. According to Larasati (2025), Roblox had an estimated 7 million monthly active users in Indonesia, highlighting the growing significance of immersive virtual platforms in the country's digital landscape. Roblox has also facilitated the emergence of religious communities in Indonesia, including Majelis Roblox Indonesia and Roblox Muslim Community. These developments indicate that religious practices within immersive virtual worlds remain a relatively neglected area of digital religion research in Indonesia.

Thus, immersive virtual worlds not only introduce new media for religious expression but also create new social environments in which individuals and communities engage in religious practices. These developments require conceptual frameworks that can explain the rituals, symbols, social interactions, and collective experiences that emerge within virtual spaces. Understanding how participants construct religious experiences in these environments becomes particularly important when religious practices no longer require participants to share the same physical space.

3. Rituals, Symbols, and Collective Interaction in Virtual Worlds: The Relevance of Durkheim

The emergence of religious practices in immersive virtual worlds demonstrates that religion no longer exists merely as information or identity mediated by technology but also takes shape as a form of social activity within virtual spaces. This phenomenon manifests in various forms of avatar-based religious study sessions, virtual religious communities, and the use of digital spaces for collective religious activities. Although these developments require further empirical investigation, they resonate with Émile Durkheim's classical understanding of religion as a social fact that emerges through the relationships among rituals, symbols, and collective interactions. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim (1995) argues that religion rests not only on systems of belief but also on social practices through which shared experiences generate collective consciousness and moral solidarity.

Within a Durkheimian framework, rituals play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining social bonds. Rituals bring community members together through shared activities that generate collective consciousness and strengthen group identity (Durkheim, 1995, p. 117). Similar characteristics appear in emerging religious activities within immersive virtual worlds, including avatar-based religious study sessions, virtual religious community gatherings, and activities that encourage collective participation in digital spaces. For example, the VR MMO Church community organizes religious gatherings on the VRChat platform (see Figure 1), where congregants gather and interact in real time. Although researchers cannot automatically equate these activities with rituals in the Durkheimian sense, the phenomenon suggests that virtual worlds may provide social environments in which collective practices perform comparable social functions.

Figure 1. Religious Activities of the VR MMO Church Community on VRChat



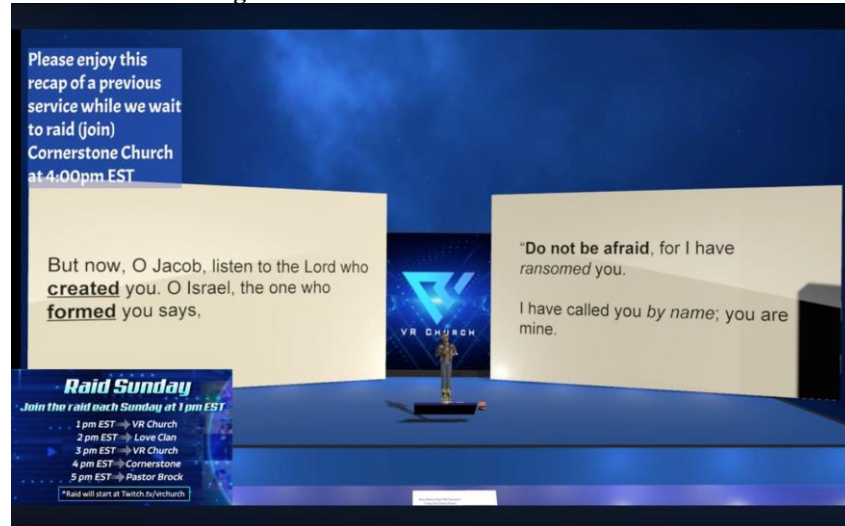
Source. VR MMO Church, YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsPr5OgYplA&t=3251s>

Beyond rituals, Durkheim identifies symbols as essential elements of religious life. Symbols enable community members to recognize and share collective values, identities, and meanings (Durkheim, 1995). In immersive virtual worlds, users increasingly create and engage with various forms of digital religious symbolism, including virtual religious buildings, religious attributes displayed on avatars, and representations of spaces designed to express particular religious identities (see Figure 2). These symbols demonstrate that virtual worlds provide not only communication platforms but also social environments in which participants produce and reproduce religious meanings. Nevertheless, further research needs to examine how participants interpret these digital symbols, attribute meaning to them, and incorporate them into the formation of virtual religious life.

Figure 2. A Virtual Mosque in the Immersive World of Roblox



Source. Personal documentation, 2026.

Figure 3. A Virtual Church on VRChat

Source. VR MMO Church, YouTube (2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsPr5OgYplA>

The relationship among rituals, symbols, and collective interactions provides the foundation for the concept of collective effervescence, which Durkheim uses to describe shared emotional experiences that foster moral solidarity and reinforce the distinction between the sacred and the profane. Such experiences emerge when individuals participate in collective activities within a shared physical space, as illustrated by the Corroboree ceremonies, which generate collective emotional intensity (Durkheim, 1995, p. 122). At present, researchers lack sufficient empirical evidence to conclude that comparable experiences occur within immersive virtual worlds. Nevertheless, the capacity of virtual environments to facilitate synchronous interactions, collective participation, and symbolic engagement offers a promising conceptual basis for investigating how shared religious experiences might emerge in digital environments.

However, a fundamental distinction separates the social context that Durkheim examined from contemporary immersive virtual worlds. Durkheim developed his theoretical arguments primarily through his analysis of Aboriginal Australian societies, in which rituals, symbols, and collective interactions involved participants who shared the same physical social space. In contrast, immersive virtual worlds enable individuals to engage in various forms of social interaction through avatars and digital representations without requiring their direct bodily presence in a shared physical location. This distinction creates an opportunity to recontextualize the concept of collective effervescence within virtual environments and establishes an important research agenda for the future development of digital religion studies.

4. Toward the Concept of Virtual Collective Effervescence

The preceding discussion demonstrates that immersive virtual worlds facilitate forms of social interaction that do not fully correspond to the fundamental assumptions underlying Durkheim's explanation of religious life. Within a Durkheimian framework, rituals, symbols, and collective interactions involve the physical presence of participants in a shared social space. Through these gatherings, individuals develop shared emotional experiences that foster moral solidarity and collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1995). However, the emergence of immersive virtual worlds demonstrates that individuals can engage in various forms of social interaction through avatars, virtual spaces, and synchronous communication without sharing the same physical location. This development raises a conceptual question: Can religious collective experiences comparable to collective effervescence emerge within virtual environments?

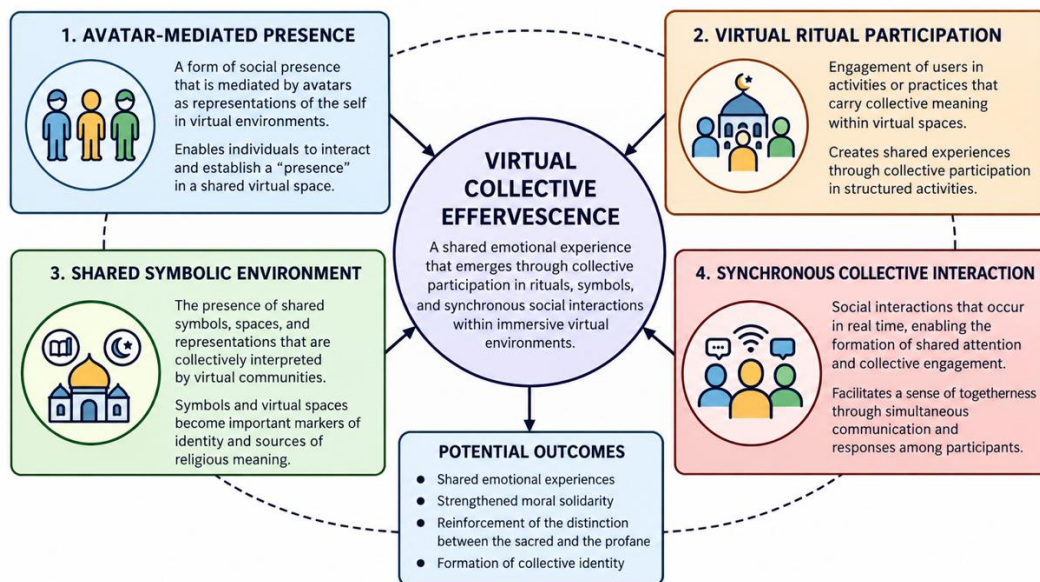
This question becomes particularly relevant because immersive virtual worlds provide several elements that scholars have traditionally considered essential to the formation of collective experiences. Users can participate in shared activities, interact synchronously, engage with common symbols, and direct their attention toward particular objects or collective activities within virtual spaces. Although these interactions differ from face-to-face encounters, their characteristics suggest that virtual environments do not entirely eliminate the social elements that Durkheim emphasized. Therefore, immersive virtual worlds offer an opportunity to reconsider how participants might generate collective religious experiences when digital technologies mediate their social presence.

Based on these considerations, this article proposes the concept of virtual collective effervescence as a preliminary conceptual framework for understanding the potential emergence of shared emotional experiences through religious practices in immersive virtual worlds. This concept refers to the possibility that participants may

develop collective religious experiences through their shared engagement in rituals, symbols, and synchronous social interactions within virtual environments. Unlike Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, which emphasizes physical co-presence, this proposed framework identifies avatars, virtual spaces, and digital connectivity as elements that may facilitate collective social experiences under different conditions.

As a preliminary conceptual framework, virtual collective effervescence comprises four main components that emerge from a dialogue between Durkheim's theory of rituals, symbols, and collective experiences and scholarship on virtual worlds and digital religious practices (Bell, 2008; Campbell, 2021; Castronova, 2005; Durkheim, 1995; Wagner, 2012). The first component, avatar-mediated presence, refers to the social presence that users establish through avatars as representations of themselves within virtual environments. The second component, virtual ritual participation, describes users' engagement in activities or practices that carry collective meaning within virtual spaces. The third component, shared symbolic environment, refers to the symbols, spaces, and representations through which members of virtual communities construct and share collective meanings. The fourth component, synchronous collective interaction, describes real-time social interactions that enable participants to develop shared attention and collective engagement in common activities. These four components do not represent empirically verified categories. Instead, they provide a conceptual starting point for investigating the dynamics of religious life within immersive virtual worlds.

Figure 4. Conceptual Framework of Virtual Collective Effervescence



Source: Adapted from Bell (2008), Campbell (2021), Castronova (2005), Durkheim (1995), and Wagner (2012).

Thus, the concept of virtual collective effervescence does not seek to replace Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence. Instead, it seeks to extend Durkheim's analytical framework to address developments in contemporary digital environments. In this context, virtual collective effervescence functions as a conceptual hypothesis that establishes a foundation for future empirical research into how participants construct and interpret virtual rituals, digital symbols, avatar-mediated interactions, and collective religious experiences within immersive virtual worlds.

5. Implications for New Directions in Digital Religion Studies

The discussion in this article demonstrates that digital religion studies have increasingly adopted an interactive approach over the past two decades, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship through which religion and media mutually shape each other (Hosseini, 2008). Previous research has significantly advanced scholarly understanding of how individuals and communities use digital spaces to construct religious identities, establish religious communities, and negotiate religious authority within networked environments (Campbell, 2013; Cheong et al., 2012; Evolvi, 2019; Hutchings, 2017; Rahman et al., 2021; Rijal, 2025; Wati et al., 2022). Nevertheless, digital religion scholarship continues to concentrate primarily on communication, identity, religious communities, and religious authority. Consequently, researchers have devoted relatively limited attention to religious practices within immersive virtual worlds despite the emergence and development of these practices.

The emergence of immersive virtual worlds demonstrates that digital spaces no longer function solely as communication media but also serve as social environments where individuals interact, establish communities,

and participate in various collective activities through avatars and shared virtual spaces. These developments create opportunities for new forms of religious practice that existing frameworks centered on communication, identity, and authority cannot fully explain. Therefore, the expansion of immersive virtual worlds calls for a broader research agenda that examines religion as a form of social practice within virtual environments.

In this context, this article proposes a more sustained dialogue between digital religion studies and classical traditions in the sociology of religion, particularly Durkheim's theoretical perspectives on rituals, symbols, collective interactions, and collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1995). Although Durkheim developed these concepts within social contexts that emphasized physical presence, developments in immersive virtual worlds invite scholars to reconsider their relevance for understanding contemporary religious life. Accordingly, this article introduces the concept of virtual collective effervescence as a preliminary conceptual framework that connects digital religion studies with sociological analyses of collective religious experiences in virtual environments.

The concept of virtual collective effervescence does not constitute an empirical conclusion about the existence of collective religious experiences within immersive virtual worlds. Rather, it serves as a conceptual hypothesis and research agenda that provides a foundation for future empirical investigations. Further research should examine how participants construct and interpret virtual rituals, digital symbols, avatar-mediated interactions, and collective emotional experiences across virtual platforms such as Roblox, VRChat, and other immersive virtual environments. Thus, a new direction in digital religion studies should move beyond examining how individuals communicate religion through technology to investigate how they practice, experience, and live religion as a form of social life within virtual worlds.

Conclusion

The development of digital religion studies demonstrates that the interactive approach has become the dominant paradigm for understanding the relationship between religion and media in the digital age. Previous studies have demonstrated how individuals and communities use digital spaces to construct religious identities, establish religious communities, and negotiate religious authority within networked environments. Nevertheless, the dominance of these research interests also reveals certain limitations. Scholars continue to focus primarily on communication, identity, communities, and religious authority, while religious practices within immersive virtual worlds have received relatively limited academic attention.

This article demonstrates that the emergence of immersive virtual worlds presents both new challenges and opportunities for digital religion studies. Avatars, three-dimensional virtual spaces, and synchronous interactions enable individuals and communities not only to communicate religion through digital media but also potentially to engage in religious practices within virtual environments themselves. These developments expand the scope of digital religious phenomena and call for analytical frameworks that examine not only the relationship between religion and media but also the social practices, rituals, symbols, collective interactions, and religious experiences that emerge within virtual spaces.

In this context, Durkheim's theoretical perspective remains a relevant starting point because it identifies rituals, symbols, and collective interactions as essential elements in the formation of religious life. However, the emergence of religious practices through avatars and digital interactions invites scholars to reconsider Durkheim's underlying assumption that collective experiences require the physical co-presence of participants. Therefore, this article proposes the concept of virtual collective effervescence as a preliminary conceptual framework for understanding how shared emotional experiences and collective solidarity might emerge within immersive virtual worlds.

Furthermore, the primary contribution of this article lies not in empirically demonstrating the existence of virtual collective effervescence but in proposing a new direction for digital religion studies. Scholars should understand immersive virtual worlds not merely as new media for religious communication but also as emerging social environments that may foster forms of religious life that differ from conventional religious experiences. Accordingly, future research should empirically investigate how participants construct, perform, experience, and interpret virtual rituals, digital symbols, avatar-mediated interactions, and collective religious experiences across various immersive virtual platforms. By pursuing this research agenda, digital religion studies can move beyond their prevailing emphasis on mediation and communication toward a deeper understanding of religion as a form of social practice and collective life within virtual worlds.

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