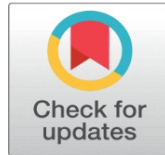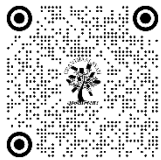# SOCIAL MEDIA AND RISE OF SPIRITUALITY IN INDIA: A MCLUHAN'S APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically analyses social media's impact on spirituality in India, using Marshall McLuhan's media theories as a framework. It explores how platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have transformed the dissemination of spiritual teachings, enabling spiritual leaders to reach a global audience and create interactive communities that transcend geographic boundaries. Drawing on McLuhan's concepts of "the medium is the message" and the "global village," the study delves into how digital media technologies mediate spiritual practices, commodify religious experiences, and give rise to a form of "spiritual branding" that merges tradition with contemporary consumer culture. Additionally, the paper investigates subcategories such as spiritual consumerism, digital spirituality, spiritual marketing strategies, and the commercialization of spirituality, highlighting how Indian spiritual leaders leverage social media to promote their teachings and products associated with their practices. This fusion of spiritual messages with marketing strategies underscores the evolving landscape of spirituality in the digital era, positioning spiritual content as a consumable product and a vehicle for socio-cultural influence in a globalized, interconnected world. The paper has been written using content analysis as a research tool. A systematic and in-depth analysis of social media posts from prominent Indian spiritual leaders has provided structured insights into the types of spiritual content that resonate most with online audiences.

Keywords: Mcluhan's Media Theory, Global Village Concept. Digital Spirituality, Spiritual Branding, - Spiritual Consumerism, Media and Interconnectedness, Spiritual Marketing Strategies, Global Spiritual Movements

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an essential tool for spiritual leaders and their organizations in modern India, greatly expanding their reach and branding. These celebrities have a worldwide presence thanks to social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, which enable them to conduct events, spread teachings, and create communities across geographic boundaries. To promote a sense of community and active engagement, these platforms also allow users to interact with spiritual content in various media, including live streaming, podcasts, and inspirational postings.

Spiritual leaders use various content types, including blogs, podcasts, live broadcasts, and motivational films, to reach a wide range of people seeking spiritual instruction. They develop thought leadership and win followers' credibility and trust by providing regular, genuine material. Social media can be a powerful tool for spiritual events, retreats, and workshops to promote and increase attendance as well as reach a wider audience with their teachings.

Social media's real-time feedback systems facilitate close interaction between spiritual leaders and their followers through live Q&A sessions and other interactive interactions. This makes it easier to create content that is specifically suited to the audience and helps leaders establish stronger connections with them. In addition, social media plays a crucial role in advancing humanitarian endeavours and social causes by increasing public awareness, gaining backing, and coordinating resources. All things considered, social media has become an essential tool for modern Indian spiritual

leaders and their groups, allowing for broad distribution, a variety of interactions, and the upkeep of close relationships with their followers.

The rise of digital media resonates with Marshall McLuhan's theories of "the medium is the message" and the "global village," (Mcluhan M. , 1964) where communication technology reshapes societal interactions. McLuhan predicted that electronic media would revolutionize communication, creating interconnectedness and altering educational and cultural dynamics. In the digital age, information is readily accessible, merging cultural boundaries and changing how individuals engage with spiritual practices.

The rest of the paper is structured and explores various dimensions of McLuhan and Digital Media's Influence, Spiritual Content and Global Interconnectedness, Spiritual Marketing, and the Global Village, each addressing different aspects of digital media's impact on spirituality, consumerism, and global interconnectedness in the Indian context.

MCLUHAN AND DIGITAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE

Decades ago, McLuhan, with his theories of "the medium is the message" and the "global village," foresaw an era of automation that would profoundly alter communication dynamics across all fields. His research emphasized how electricity redefines inventories by focusing on continuous processes rather than stored goods, enabling energy sources to operate independently of the process's location. (Mcluhan M. , 1964)

The term "global village" has its origins which can be traced back to McLuhan's use of it in his work in the early 1960s, when he first mentioned in The Gutenberg Galaxy that "the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village" (Mcluhan M. , The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man, 1962) Another early iteration of this idea can be found in his best-known work, Understanding Media: "As electronically contracted, the globe is no more than a village". (Mcluhan M. , 1964)

Marshall McLuhan's theories, particularly "the medium is the message" and the "global village," are mirrored in entertainment media, where programs and experiences occur simultaneously but in different spaces.

In the electric age, leisure is found in intense involvement, contrasting the prior era where leisure equated to idleness. This shift parallels artists' engagement throughout history, highlighting how the information age demands the simultaneous use of all faculties. McLuhan's insights into media evolution emphasize that the content of any new medium is essentially the format of the preceding medium. For instance, film's content embodies photography, sound recording, and narrative structures from books and plays. Television's content reflects film, while the Internet amalgamates television, photography, and text.

Digital media, as a product of the electric age, continue to reshape societal structures, work dynamics, and education paradigms. They facilitate instant access to information, redefining the nature of work and demanding a more interconnected, adaptable approach to education and societal structures, aligning with McLuhan's concepts of an electric age characterized by automation and instant interdependence. (Mcluhan M. , 1964)

SPIRITUAL CONTENT AND GLOBAL INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Marshall McLuhan's concept of the global village, which highlights the interconnectedness of the world through communication technologies, finds resonance in the phenomenon of "New spirituality" and its alignment with modern communication channels. The idea of a global village, as proposed by McLuhan, emphasizes the shrinking of distances and the creation of a unified, interconnected world through communication. Similarly, the "New Spirituality" movement, particularly in the West, prioritizes the autonomous individual and inner consciousness, resonating with McLuhan's notion of a global village where individuals are connected regardless of physical boundaries. The demand for embracing spiritual practices emphasizes individual agency and personal empowerment, reflecting the values of self-governance and autonomy, mirroring the empowered citizen envisioned in a modernizing nation within the global village framework. Moreover, the Hindu versions of this new spirituality in India merge religious traditions with a narrative that emphasizes people-centric spirituality, aligning with the democratic zeitgeist and the interconnectedness fostered by the global village. Therefore, McLuhan's concept of the global village aptly parallels the emergence of "New spirituality," underscoring the interconnectedness of individuals, their focus on inner experiences, and the construction of spiritual narratives through modern communication channels. (Gooptu, 2016)

The concept of spiritual content traveling and reaching across the globe, transcending diverse cultures and ethnicities, aligns with McLuhan's idea of global interconnectedness. His work discusses the historical transition from nomadic to specialized tasks, emphasizing how electricity and automation merge technology with human interaction.

McLuhan highlights how electric technology revolutionizes industries, enabling efficient management of both large and small units. Automation reflects societal changes driven by this technology, fostering interdependence while allowing diverse choices in design and goals. Electric energy facilitates decentralization and diverse work patterns, contrasting the limitations of firelight with the freedom of electric light. Automation's impact on society leans toward self-employment and artistic autonomy, dispelling fears of global uniformity rooted in past mechanical standardization.

McLuhan's insights into media evolution emphasize that the content of any new medium is essentially the format of the preceding medium. For instance, film's content embodies photography, sound recording, and narrative structures from books and plays. Television's content reflects film, while the Internet amalgamates television, photography, and text. These innovations, particularly the rise of Internet 2.0 and social networking, have brought about a surge in "cool media," allowing for increased audience participation and interaction.

The contemporary world struggles with electronic media, recognizing McLuhan's comparison of the confusion caused by electric media's overabundance in Western civilization to that of isolated Indians learning to read and write. Despite initial confusion, advancement is emphasized by the fact that computers and interactive media have supplanted radio and television as the primary formats, revolutionizing accessibility, and media consumption. Traditional broadcast formats have given way to satellite and internet-based programming, signalling the beginning of the digital age, in which media forms will continue to change quickly. In the end, McLuhan's singular insight into analysing media before the emergence of its replacement is still unmatched.

SPIRITUAL MARKETING AND THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

The concept of spirituality has roots that stretch back centuries, while communication methods have been continuously evolving for decades, as discussed earlier. Here, the notion advocated by McLuhan in his work on the "Global Village" deeply strikes a chord, depicting our perpetual motion both forward and backward simultaneously. As articulated by McLuhan in "Understanding Media," he asserts that "we currently inhabit a fundamentally transformed reality, yet our thought processes often linger in the mental frameworks of our ancestors before the advent of electricity. Our way of living has shifted into a more holistic and mythic realm, but our thought patterns remain entrenched in the fragmented concepts of space and time from the pre-electric era." (Mcluhan M. , 1964)

The traditional medium of print and television ignited to popularize the new religion and movements across the globe and in India, the serialization of the Hindu epic Ramayana on Doordarshan, the national television, started in January 1987, which marked the beginning of the transformation of the texture of modern Hinduism. Not only the electronic media, but even newspapers provide us with "sacred space" and "sacred chants", "inner light", and "religious values", she observes.

In the contemporary era, the commercialization of spirituality, entertainment, and leisure has become increasingly pervasive. (Nagla, 2018) Corporations have recognized the significance of spiritual inclinations in consumer behaviour and have thus begun to emphasize the fulfilment of these needs alongside material ones. Within Indian culture, spiritual leaders command great reverence and play a fundamental role in serving as intermediaries between consumers and spiritualism. Marketers strategically design their advertising campaigns to align with regional cultures and leveraging spiritual leaders for product promotion facilitates more effective consumer engagement and market penetration.

In the realm of marketing academia, brands rooted in spiritual foundations and faith-based principles are accorded significant importance and esteem. In India, spiritual organizations leverage socio-cultural programs to promote fast-moving consumer goods. (Joshi & Nema, 2017) Present-day spiritual leaders and their organizations have wielded substantial influence within their communities of followers. Through their extensive global presence on social media platforms, these leaders have orchestrated large-scale yoga camps, inspiring individuals worldwide to embrace holistic practices. Notably, Swami Ramdev is renowned for his yoga sessions and Ayurvedic teachings, while Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudeva has garnered acclaim for his inner engineering programs. These figures have propelled the popularization of various products, including vitamins, minerals, supplements, grocery and gourmet foods, shampoos, cough and cold remedies, diverse toothpaste variants, perfumes, and toners. Furthermore, the development of the Sudarshan Kriya

technique by Sri Sri Ravishankar has contributed to fostering a positive brand image. Their influence extends beyond their teachings to encompass the products affiliated with their brands

This evolution signifies not just the dissemination of spiritual ideologies but also the transformation of these beliefs into consumable products within the contemporary cultural landscape. An interesting phenomenon is observed in India's spiritual landscape, (Milton , 1972) Milton Singer's 'compartmentalization' framework, initially used to understand the coexistence of secular and sacred aspects, needs revaluation due to the proliferation of gurus, cults, and spiritual figures. There is a call for analysing how individuals compartmentalize various shades of the sacred in their daily lives, especially with the rise of these spiritual movements. Consequently, there is a need for an indigenous framework, attuned to Indian culture and dynamics, to comprehensively analyse how people balance and integrate different sacred categories within the context of modern India. When considering the impact of social media on spiritual and religious movements in India, this context underscores the evolving ways in which individuals perceive, compartmentalize, and integrate various spiritual elements in their lives amid the proliferation of spiritual leaders and movements, showcasing a complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and technology-mediated communication platforms.

In the context of spiritual communication, the global reach of gurus has led to the creation of a new market segment in society that is increasingly significant in the economy. Spiritual marketing, considered to be ethical marketing, is grounded in honesty. Initially, combining spirituality and marketing was challenging, especially in India where spirituality is deeply connected to God. However, in today's highly globalized and competitive markets, marketing requires a strategic competitive advantage that can differentiate one marketer's offering from others.

Modern gurus, with their sophisticated appearance and style, manage enormous empires and spread their message through the latest technology. They offer spiritual services such as stress relief, meditation techniques, relaxation methods, and Hindu scriptural teachings. These gurus are visible in journals, magazines, television, online social media campaigns, and influencer collaborations. They maintain spiritual websites connected with their devotees, announcing prayer session details and other events. Organizations run by these gurus use pamphlets, video cassettes, posters, newspapers, and social media for promotion, distributing widely to reach potential devotees.

Hence, as the spiritual leaders create their unique brands, they navigate the complexities of spiritual marketing. The intertwining of spirituality with consumerism necessitates a revaluation of traditional frameworks, recognizing how spiritual leaders integrate diverse practices to cater to the evolving needs of their followers. This dynamic landscape reveals a blend of old and new, where individuals comfortably mix various spiritual teachings and practices, reflecting a hybrid approach to spirituality.

The proliferation of spiritual channels and the rise of digital influencers exemplify the ongoing transformation within the spiritual domain. The categorization of gurus into types—miracle-making, philosophical, and yoga-alternative medicine—demonstrates the diversity of offerings available to consumers. This spectrum allows devotees to explore and adopt multiple practices, enriching their spiritual journeys while simultaneously navigating the complexities of modern consumer culture.

CONCLUSION

In contemporary times, social media has become an indispensable tool for Indian spiritual leaders, enabling them to reach a diverse audience, engage in varied interactions, and foster intimate connections with their followers. Marshall McLuhan's theories about the impact of new media and technology on society offer insights into these changes. His concepts of the "global village" and the transformative power of electronic media closely resonate with the modern use of social media by spiritual leaders to reach a global audience and cultivate community engagement.

The emergence of spiritual marketing, driven by social media, exemplifies the fusion of spirituality and marketing in a manner that resonates with McLuhan's predictions regarding the interconnectedness and retribalization of the global village. As spiritual beliefs increasingly transform into marketable products, they maintain a complex interplay with tradition, modernity, and technology. The advent of social media as a catalyst for these changes has empowered spiritual leaders to redefine their roles and influence, ultimately shaping a new landscape where spirituality is both a personal journey and a marketable commodity. This commercialization of spirituality has become an integral part of consumer culture, as spiritual leaders bridge the gap between spiritualism and materialism. The marketing strategies employed by these leaders often prioritize ethical considerations, emphasizing authenticity and community engagement.

This convergence of spirituality and consumerism reflects broader societal shifts, highlighting the intricate relationship between culture, technology, and individual experience in contemporary India.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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