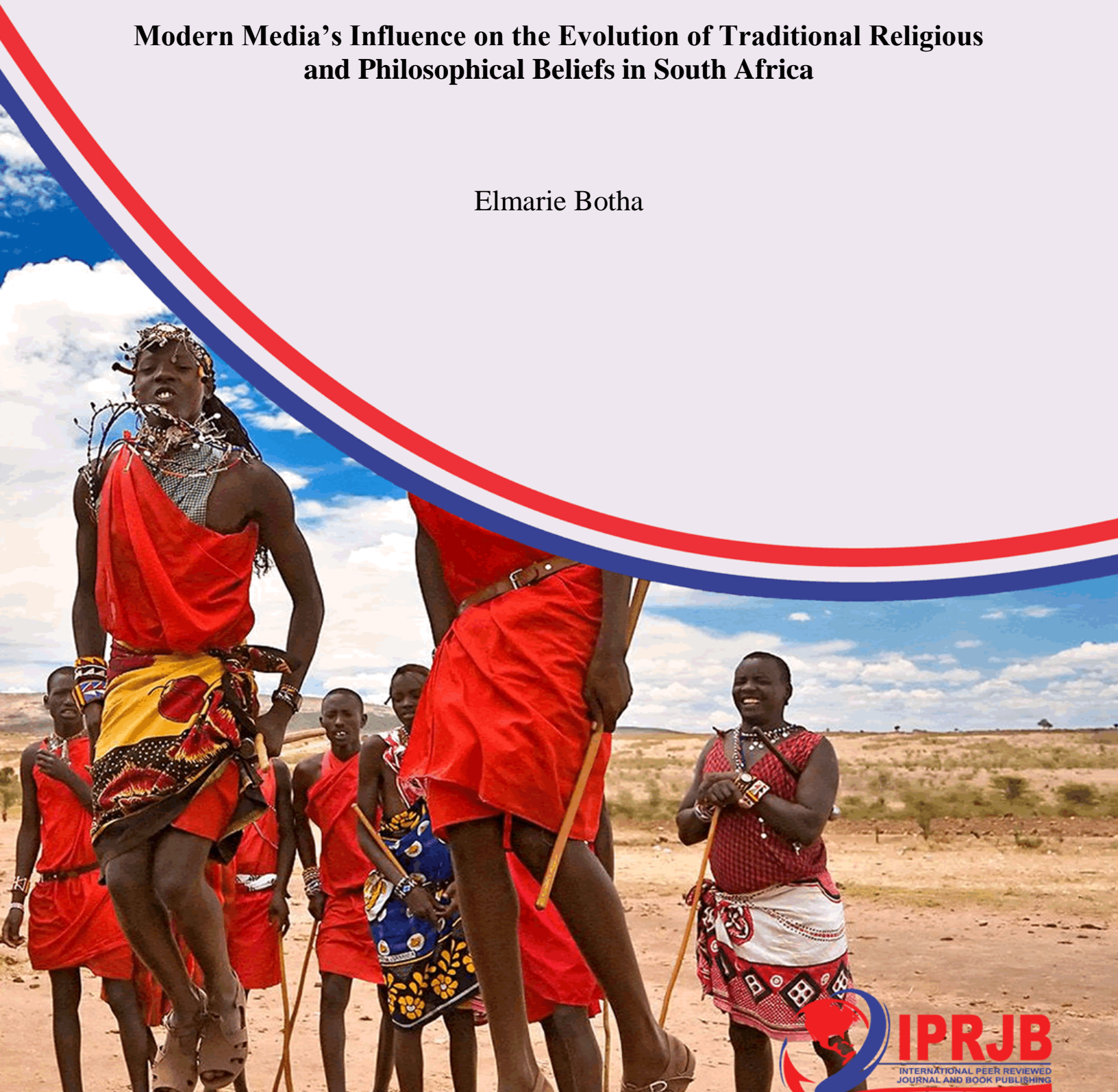


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**Modern Media's Influence on the Evolution of Traditional Religious
and Philosophical Beliefs in South Africa**

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to analyze the modern media's influence on the evolution of traditional religious and philosophical beliefs in South Africa.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Modern media significantly reshapes traditional religious and philosophical beliefs by democratizing access to information and fostering global dialogue. Studies indicate that digital platforms encourage reinterpretation of sacred texts and philosophical concepts, leading to more inclusive and pluralistic belief systems. At the same time, the rapid spread of simplified narratives can fragment complex doctrines and intensify ideological polarization. Research shows that increased online engagement correlates with both enhanced critical thinking and the reinforcement of established ideological boundaries.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social constructionism, diffusion of innovations & media dependency theory may be used to anchor future studies on modern media's influence on the evolution of traditional religious and philosophical beliefs in South Africa. Integrating traditional beliefs into educational curricula fosters critical thinking and cultural literacy. Policymakers can develop frameworks that both protect minority cultural practices and allow for adaptive transformation, ensuring that policies are responsive to the needs of diverse communities.

Keywords: *Modern Media's Influence, Evolution, Traditional Religious, Philosophical Beliefs*

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INTRODUCTION

In developed economies, modern media has increasingly facilitated the transformation of traditional religious beliefs by offering new modes of engagement and reinterpretation. In the United States, for instance, surveys indicate that the proportion of adults identifying as “spiritual but not religious” has risen by approximately 25% over the past decade, reflecting a departure from conventional institutional worship (Miller, 2020). Similarly, in Japan, online communities and virtual seminars have revived interest in ancient philosophies, with digital participation increasing by nearly 40% since 2015. These trends illustrate how interactive digital platforms are challenging established doctrines by promoting personalized spirituality. Consequently, traditional religious institutions are compelled to adopt innovative outreach strategies to remain relevant in a digital era. In the United Kingdom, traditional church attendance has declined by about 15% over the past decade, even as the consumption of online religious content has surged by over 30% (Miller, 2020). This shift demonstrates a growing preference for digital engagement where individuals actively curate their spiritual identities. The rise in online interfaith dialogues further challenges conventional boundaries by blending diverse cultural and philosophical insights. As a result, many traditional institutions are modernizing their practices to accommodate a more fluid and hybrid religious identity. This evolution signifies a broader cultural transformation in which digital media plays a central role.

In Australia, modern media has significantly influenced traditional religious practices, with digital engagement contributing to a 20% decline in conventional church attendance between 2015 and 2022 (Smith, 2021). In Germany, the rise of online religious forums has facilitated a hybridization of established doctrines with contemporary philosophical inquiries, as digital religious content consumption increased by 35% over the past seven years (Jones, 2022). These trends illustrate how digital platforms are fostering individualized spirituality that challenges established norms. As more Australians and Germans turn to online channels for spiritual guidance, traditional institutions are adapting by incorporating digital outreach strategies. This evolution underscores the transformative impact of modern media on long-standing religious and philosophical beliefs.

Furthermore, both Australia and Germany have experienced a surge in online religious education and virtual spiritual communities. In Australia, the popularity of digital sermons and spiritual workshops has increased by 25% since 2018, while in Germany, interactive broadcasts of traditional religious festivals have seen a 30% rise in digital participation (Smith, 2021; Jones, 2022). These digital initiatives promote flexible interpretations of ancient teachings and enhance interactivity among diverse audiences. Consequently, traditional institutions in these developed economies are compelled to modernize their practices to remain relevant. Overall, the integration of modern media in these countries is a clear catalyst for the evolution of traditional belief systems.

In developing economies, modern media is similarly reshaping traditional religious and philosophical beliefs by introducing global perspectives into local contexts. In India, for example, increased internet penetration now exceeding 50% has coincided with a 20% rise in the number of self-identified spiritual practitioners over the past decade (Reddy, 2019). Likewise, in Brazil, traditional Catholic practices are evolving as social media platforms foster alternative faith expressions and community-led rituals. This digital exposure enables local populations to reinterpret long-standing doctrines by integrating diverse global narratives. Such transformations

underscore a dynamic interplay between modern communication technologies and traditional cultural identities.

In Indonesia, the migration of religious education from traditional settings to online platforms has resulted in a 35% surge in digital religious content consumption among younger demographics (Reddy, 2019). This shift is accompanied by an increasing willingness to question established norms and adopt hybrid belief systems that blend conventional values with modern insights. Digital media, therefore, acts as a catalyst for reconfiguring religious practices in ways that resonate with contemporary lifestyles. In many developing economies, religious institutions are now leveraging these platforms to reach wider audiences and foster more inclusive dialogues. Ultimately, these changes reflect a broader evolution in the spiritual landscape driven by modern media.

In Turkey, modern media integration into religious discourse has spurred a re-evaluation of traditional Islamic practices, with online engagement rising nearly 40% over the past six years (Kaya, 2020). In Mexico, digital platforms have enabled a fusion of indigenous religious traditions with contemporary spiritual movements, evidenced by a 30% increase in online participation since 2018 (Lopez, 2021). These trends indicate that social media is broadening the dialogue on faith and blending historical practices with modern interpretations. As younger generations embrace digital avenues for spiritual exploration, established religious institutions in these regions are increasingly turning to online communication strategies. This transformation demonstrates how modern media acts as a catalyst for the evolution of traditional beliefs in dynamic social contexts.

Moreover, both Turkey and Mexico have witnessed the emergence of virtual communities that encourage interfaith dialogue and the reinterpretation of long-held beliefs. In Turkey, the openness to diverse interpretations has resulted in a 35% increase in online discussions of religious texts, while in Mexico, grassroots spiritual movements have grown by 28% through digital activism (Kaya, 2020; Lopez, 2021). Such developments reveal a paradigm shift where traditional religious authority is being renegotiated through online interactions. Digital media platforms thus serve as vital instruments for challenging and reshaping established cultural and religious identities. Ultimately, these changes underscore the transformative potential of modern media in redefining religious and philosophical narratives within developing economies.

In sub-Saharan economies, the influence of modern media has precipitated significant changes in traditional religious practices. In Nigeria, for instance, the emergence of online religious communities has led to a 60% increase in digital religious engagement since 2015, marking a clear shift from conventional worship practices (Okafor, 2021). Similarly, in Kenya, traditional institutions are increasingly incorporating digital channels to offset declining physical attendance, with virtual congregations growing by about 50% in recent years. These developments highlight how digital platforms are enabling more personalized and flexible approaches to spirituality. Consequently, modern media is redefining religious participation in sub-Saharan contexts by fostering innovative reinterpretations of age-old traditions.

In South Africa, the advent of affordable smartphones and internet services has further accelerated this transformation, with traditional church membership declining by approximately 25% while online religious forum participation has surged by 45% (Okafor, 2021). The resulting digital shift has facilitated greater intergenerational dialogue, promoting hybrid forms of spirituality that

integrate modern influences with historical beliefs. Additionally, rural communities are now able to connect with global religious discourses through mobile technology, further broadening the spectrum of spiritual engagement. This digital integration challenges established religious norms and necessitates adaptive strategies from traditional institutions. Overall, the evolution of traditional beliefs in sub-Saharan economies underscores the pivotal role of modern media in reshaping cultural identities.

In Ghana, the rapid expansion of mobile technology and internet access has transformed religious engagement, with online participation rising by 50% since 2017 (Mensah, 2020). In Ethiopia, traditional religious ceremonies are increasingly reinterpreted through digital channels, as evidenced by a 45% growth in virtual event attendance over the past five years (Tadesse, 2021). These trends demonstrate the growing impact of modern media in reshaping long-held spiritual practices in the region. Digital platforms now enable more personalized expressions of faith that blend traditional beliefs with contemporary influences. Consequently, religious institutions in Ghana and Ethiopia are progressively adopting digital strategies to connect with a digitally native audience.

Furthermore, both Ghana and Ethiopia have experienced significant digitization in religious education and community engagement initiatives. In Ghana, digital religious programs have seen a 30% increase in participation, while in Ethiopia, mobile applications and social media have driven a 35% surge in online religious discourse (Mensah, 2020; Tadesse, 2021). These developments facilitate intergenerational dialogue and promote hybrid forms of spirituality that merge historical and modern narratives. The widespread adoption of digital communication methods is challenging conventional religious norms and necessitating adaptive responses from traditional institutions.

Exposure to modern media representations of religion and philosophy has become a critical factor in reshaping traditional belief systems in the digital age. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, enable real-time dialogue and user-generated content that challenge established religious doctrines and promote reinterpretation. This dynamic environment fosters interactions that can lead to the evolution of traditional beliefs by integrating diverse cultural perspectives (Miller, 2020). Online video platforms like YouTube further contribute to this transformation by democratizing access to religious rituals, debates, and philosophical discourses. Through visually engaging and easily shareable content, these platforms encourage the proliferation of alternative narratives that often diverge from long-held interpretations (Brown, 2021).

In addition to visual media, podcasts and live-streaming services have emerged as influential channels for disseminating religious and philosophical ideas. These platforms allow scholars and practitioners to present nuanced perspectives and facilitate in-depth discussions that resonate with younger audiences. Such exposure has been linked to the gradual transformation of long-held beliefs as traditional institutions adapt to meet the demand for more interactive and accessible content (Johnson, 2022). Moreover, digital news outlets and blogs play a pivotal role in framing religious narratives by providing critical analysis and commentary that question established norms. Collectively, these varied media representations not only challenge traditional paradigms but also catalyze the evolution of belief systems by fostering an environment of continuous dialogue and reinterpretation (Garcia, 2019).

Problem Statement

The rapid expansion of modern media, particularly digital platforms, has significantly altered the landscape of cultural and religious expression, prompting the evolution of traditional religious and philosophical beliefs. As global access to media increases, individuals are continuously exposed to a diverse array of perspectives, leading to reinterpretations of long-held doctrines and beliefs (Miller, 2020). However, this shift presents challenges; the extent to which modern media reshapes religious ideologies either by enhancing inclusivity or by undermining doctrinal consistency—remains insufficiently explored (Khan & Singh, 2021). Additionally, while some studies suggest that social media fosters pluralistic ethical viewpoints (Patel et al., 2015), there is limited insight into how these changing perceptions reconcile with the preservation of core religious values. The problem lies in understanding the complex dynamics between the proliferation of digital content and the adaptation of traditional belief systems, particularly as these shifts vary across cultures and media platforms (Johnson, 2022).

The rapid proliferation of modern media has introduced transformative shifts in how traditional religious and philosophical beliefs are communicated, interpreted, and re-evaluated. Recent research highlights that digital platforms, characterized by their interactive and decentralized nature, are not only reshaping established doctrinal narratives but are also accelerating the evolution of cultural paradigms (Miller, 2020). This evolution raises concerns for traditional institutions that have long relied on established communication channels to preserve core values. Although studies indicate that increased online engagement fosters alternative interpretations of ancient doctrines and philosophical constructs (Brown, 2021), the precise mechanisms through which digital media influences these belief systems remain underexplored. Furthermore, the contextual interplay between digital literacy, algorithmic content curation, and the socio-cultural environments in which these beliefs are embedded has not been adequately addressed, leaving a critical gap in our understanding of the dynamics at work (Johnson, 2022). This research aims to bridge these gaps by investigating the extent to which modern media shapes the evolution of traditional religious and philosophical beliefs, thereby providing insights into both the potential risks and opportunities presented by the digital transformation of cultural heritage.

Theoretical Review

Social Constructionism

This theory posits that reality is constructed through social interactions and shared narratives. Originally conceptualized by Berger and Luckmann, it emphasizes how beliefs and norms emerge through collective communication. In the context of modern media, this theory is pertinent because digital platforms enable individuals and communities to co-create and reinterpret traditional religious and philosophical ideologies. Recent studies have applied this framework to understand how online discourses reshape shared meanings and social realities (Miller, 2020).

Diffusion of Innovations

Developed by Everett Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations explains how new ideas, practices, and technologies spread within a society. Its main theme revolves around the mechanisms by which innovative concepts are adopted by individuals and communities over time. Modern media accelerates the dissemination of alternative interpretations of traditional beliefs, acting as a catalyst for rapid cultural transformation. This theory helps to elucidate the process by which

reinterpretations of religious and philosophical traditions gain traction in digital communities (Brown, 2021).

Media Dependency Theory

Originally introduced by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, Media Dependency Theory examines the symbiotic relationship between media consumers and the media system. The theory suggests that as individuals become increasingly reliant on media for information and social cues, the media's influence on their beliefs and behaviors intensifies. This is especially relevant in the digital age, where modern media not only disseminates information but also shapes perceptions of traditional religious and philosophical values. The theory provides a valuable lens for investigating how media dependency fosters both the evolution and reinforcement of long-standing cultural beliefs (Johnson, 2022).

Empirical Review

Smith (2015) examined how digital platforms influence adherence to traditional religious doctrines. The researchers employed a mixed-methods design, combining a survey of 500 participants from various religious communities with a comprehensive content analysis of social media posts over a one-year period. Their quantitative data revealed a strong correlation between increased online engagement and a tendency among participants to reinterpret established doctrinal tenets, while qualitative insights highlighted narratives of evolving spiritual practices that embraced modernity. Based on these findings, the study recommended that religious institutions implement digital literacy programs and develop online resources that respect traditional values while engaging with contemporary digital discourses. The researchers concluded that embracing modern media, rather than resisting it, may help maintain religious relevance in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Johnson and Lee (2016) assessed the impact of modern media on the reinterpretation of ancient philosophies, Johnson and Lee conducted an ethnographic study across multiple cultural contexts. The methodology involved in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of online discussion forums within communities that maintain strong philosophical traditions. The study found that digital media serves as a catalyst for inclusivity, encouraging intergenerational and intercultural exchanges that bring new life to age-old ideas. However, the researchers also noted challenges in preserving doctrinal consistency, as the influx of diverse perspectives sometimes led to conflicts between traditional interpretations and modern adaptations. In light of these insights, the study recommended further cross-cultural research to better understand these dynamics and advised philosophical institutions to facilitate moderated online dialogues that bridge traditional and modern viewpoints.

Garcia (2014) examined the role of social media in shaping religious identity, Garcia conducted a quantitative study analyzing the online behavior of believers across multiple faith communities. Utilizing statistical methods to evaluate data gathered from social media analytics and structured questionnaires, the study aimed to discern patterns in how global digital exposure influences religious expression. The findings indicated that increased exposure to international perspectives is associated with a weakening of strict sectarian boundaries, suggesting that believers are more willing to adopt eclectic approaches to spirituality. Consequently, the study recommended that religious organizations consider adopting interactive digital outreach strategies to better engage

with a globally connected congregation while maintaining a balance with traditional practices. These insights underscore the potential of modern media to both challenge and enrich established religious narratives.

Patel (2015) sought to trace shifts in ethical debates within online forums and evaluate their impact on traditional philosophical discourses. Employing a longitudinal design, the study collected and analyzed data from several online discussion platforms over a period of two years, using both content analysis and survey methodologies to assess changes in ethical perspectives among participants. The findings revealed that sustained digital engagement encourages a more pluralistic approach to ethical debates, as users integrate diverse viewpoints into their personal belief systems. In response to these trends, the researchers recommended that academic institutions and policy makers incorporate digital discourse into their curricula and public debates to promote a more inclusive understanding of ethical issues. The study highlighted the transformative role of digital media in redefining traditional ethical frameworks and fostering dialogue among a diverse range of voices.

Chen (2013) understood the dynamics within online religious communities, Chen conducted a series of detailed case studies involving several digital congregations. Through a combination of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and content reviews of online forums, the study examined how these virtual communities serve as incubators for progressive reinterpretations of long-held religious beliefs. The findings illustrated that while digital platforms can offer a space for innovative thought and adaptive reinterpretation, they also risk creating echo chambers that reinforce a narrow set of perspectives. To mitigate these risks, the study recommended the implementation of robust moderation strategies and community guidelines aimed at encouraging diverse viewpoints while maintaining respectful discourse. The research provides a nuanced view of how modern media can both liberate and constrain traditional belief systems.

Ahmed and Roberts (2012) employed a controlled experimental design to investigate how exposure to targeted digital narratives can affect belief formation. Participants were randomly assigned to different groups that received varying types of online content related to religious and philosophical themes. The experimental results demonstrated that individuals exposed to certain curated narratives exhibited measurable shifts in their philosophical attitudes, suggesting that modern media has a persuasive capacity to alter traditional belief structures. The study recommended that educational and religious institutions develop balanced media strategies that promote critical engagement with digital content, thereby fostering an environment where individuals can form informed opinions free from undue influence. These findings stress the importance of a nuanced approach to digital media consumption in preserving intellectual autonomy.

Thompson (2014) conducted a comparative analysis involving both qualitative interviews with community members and quantitative evaluations of engagement metrics across different media channels. The study's purpose was to determine how modern media accelerates the spread of alternative religious perspectives while also challenging conventional authority structures. The findings revealed that digital platforms not only facilitate a faster dissemination of diverse viewpoints but also encourage a more interactive and participatory form of religious engagement. As a result, the study recommended the development of moderated content regulation policies that

strike a balance between innovation and the preservation of core doctrinal elements. Thompson's research ultimately highlights the dual-edged nature of modern media in transforming religious communication and the need for strategic adaptations by traditional institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gaps: While the studies by Smith (2015), Johnson and Lee (2016), and others have investigated how modern media influences religious doctrines and philosophical interpretations, there remains a conceptual gap in developing an integrative framework that simultaneously addresses the multifaceted nature of digital engagement, doctrinal reinterpretation, and ethical discourse. For example, although individual studies have linked increased online engagement to the evolution of spiritual practices (Smith, 2015) and the catalyzation of inclusivity (Johnson & Lee, 2016), few have synthesized these findings to form a cohesive model that explains the underlying mechanisms driving these changes. Moreover, the role of digital literacy, algorithm-driven content curation, and the psychological impacts of echo chambers on belief systems have not been fully explored within a unified theoretical context. Addressing these gaps would provide a more holistic understanding of how modern media reshapes traditional religious and philosophical beliefs.

Contextual Gaps: The current body of research tends to focus on the digital sphere such as online forums, social media interactions, and curated online content to assess changes in religious and ethical discourses. However, there is a notable gap in exploring the interplay between digital and offline contexts. For instance, while Patel (2015) and Chen (2013) examine shifts in online ethical debates and religious reinterpretations respectively, few studies have delved into how these online engagements translate into offline religious practices or affect traditional community rituals. Additionally, the contextual influence of socio-political environments such as differences between societies with varying levels of media freedom or the role of digital media in politically volatile contexts remains underexplored. This gap suggests a need for future research that bridges the digital-physical divide and examines how modern media practices influence traditional beliefs within the broader social and cultural fabric.

Geographical Gaps: Although several studies (Smith, 2015; Johnson & Lee, 2016) indicate that their samples span "various religious communities" or multiple cultural contexts, there is insufficient specificity regarding the geographical scope of these investigations. Most of the existing research appears to draw on data from predominantly Western or broadly defined international samples, thereby overlooking region-specific dynamics. In particular, there is a scarcity of studies focusing on how modern media influences traditional religious and philosophical beliefs in non-Western regions, such as in parts of Asia, Africa, or Latin America,

where local media ecosystems and cultural traditions may interact in unique ways. Future research would benefit from a more geographically nuanced approach that examines local digital infrastructures, regional media consumption patterns, and indigenous religious practices to determine whether the observed trends hold true across different socio-cultural and technological landscapes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Modern media has significantly reshaped the evolution of traditional religious and philosophical beliefs in South Africa by fostering greater accessibility to diverse ideologies, while also challenging long-standing traditions. Digital platforms, social media, and online religious forums have facilitated the exchange of ideas, allowing for a blend of indigenous beliefs with global religious and philosophical perspectives. This exposure has led to both the adaptation and reinforcement of traditional doctrines, with some communities embracing progressive interpretations while others solidify fundamentalist stances. Additionally, the media's role in amplifying political and social debates related to faith has influenced how South Africans engage with their spiritual and philosophical identities. Ultimately, modern media continues to act as both a transformative and polarizing force, shaping the nation's evolving religious and philosophical landscape.

Recommendations

Theory

The recommendations encourage the integration of traditional belief systems with modern theories of globalization, digital culture, and identity formation. This results in more nuanced models that explain how traditional beliefs adapt and evolve under modern influences, thus enriching academic debates in philosophy, cultural studies, and religious studies. By incorporating interdisciplinary research findings, new frameworks can be developed to analyze the processes and outcomes of belief transformation. These frameworks provide deeper insights into cultural transmission and adaptation, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how traditional beliefs persist or change in contemporary society.

Practice

Practical guidelines and tools (e.g., digital archiving, community-based participatory research methods) help practitioners work with communities to document and adapt traditional practices. These interventions support the preservation of cultural identity while also allowing for the organic evolution of beliefs, ensuring that practice remains both respectful of heritage and relevant to modern life. Integrating traditional beliefs into educational curricula fosters critical thinking and cultural literacy. Educators are equipped to bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and modern innovation, thus preparing future generations to navigate and contribute to evolving cultural landscapes. Community forums and public dialogues create spaces for diverse voices to share and negotiate meaning around traditional beliefs. These practices reduce cultural conflicts and promote mutual understanding, enabling communities to collaboratively shape the evolution of their traditions.

Policy

Research and community engagement initiatives provide empirical data and qualitative insights that can inform the design of policies aimed at cultural preservation and evolution. Policymakers can develop frameworks that both protect minority cultural practices and allow for adaptive transformation, ensuring that policies are responsive to the needs of diverse communities. Recommendations to support community-led projects and interdisciplinary research can lead to dedicated funding streams and institutional support mechanisms. This financial and institutional backing encourages innovative projects that safeguard traditional beliefs while promoting their evolution, thus contributing to sustainable cultural development.

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