Algorithmic Salvation: The Role of AI in Shaping Contemporary Spiritual Practices

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Abstract-*The Rapid development of AI is transforming the human life in many ways including spirituality and religious practices. The paper delves into the emerging phenomenon of "Algorithmic salvation" where Artificial intelligence technologies are increasingly merge into religious frameworks, personal belief system and rituals. AI driven tools offers religious counselling, customized prayers and meditation sessions, virtual sermons and rituals are reshaping the faith of individual into digital realm of religious practices. The study highlights the positive benefits, negative impacts and ethical challenges posed by integrating the technology into spirituality by examining the use of AI in virtual prayer tools, religious services, virtual religious advisors, AI powered preachers and algorithmic divination. This paper further examines whether AI really serve as a spiritual guide or not.*

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Algorithmic Salvation, Religious Practices, Spiritual Guidance, AI powered technology

1. Introduction

In the modern world, Artificial Intelligence has become an important part of human life which influences every aspect of human life such as education, commerce, communication, healthcare, finance and many more. AI replace many roles which traditionally played by a human being only. Historically, religion has been purely considered as deeply human, rooted in emotions and feelings and connection to the divine that is beyond the power of technologies. however, technology was used in the form of radio and television in those days also. People go the place of worship, read the scriptures there, touch the hardcopies of religious books on certain days of months or on special holy days, but now people are doing it online (Ty Ray, 2023) AI is now entering the world of religious experiments through virtual temple visits, virtual preachers, digital prayer tools. One can now listen a spiritual podcast or mantra any time anywhere.

The phrase "Algorithmic Salvation" refers to how can salvation be influenced by algorithms? It raises many important questions about authenticity, ethics and the future of spiritual authority (Geraci, 2010). This paper examines how AI affects spiritual practices and religion.

1.1 The rise of AI in religion

1.1.1 Historical Context

Technology innovations have played an important role in shaping spiritual practices and religious dissemination (Campbell, 2012). The introduction of sacred text and religious knowledge is started by the invention of printing press in the 15th century (Geraci, 2010). After that in 20th century radio broadcasts of sermons extends the outreach of religious contexts to the broader audience, especially in remote areas (Tsuria, 2021). The emergence of television brings a charismatic change to the world as a significant religious trend and acts a spiritual medium (Campbell, 2012). In the 21st century, with the advent of internet era transform the religious practices by giving online scriptures, enable virtual congregations (Geraci, 2010). With the rise of web 2.0, social media platform started hosting live streaming spiritual events and interactive religious forums (Tsuria, 2021). In today's time of AI, it brings latest stage of digitalization by offering personalised spiritual experiences, virtual meetings with preachers, and robotic interferences (Campbell, 2012).

2. Methodology

2.1 Statement of the Problem

The use of AI in every aspect of life is increasing day by day. AI is also using exponentially in religious practices such as spiritual advice, suggesting solution to life problems, mantras and conducting virtual rituals. This phenomenon often referred to as Algorithmic Salvation. AI powered tools now offers personalised prayers, virtual preachers, spiritual advice etc. While these changes provide easy accessibility but also raises many concerns regarding authentic use, data privacy, commercialization and replacement of human spirituals guides. Despite the exponential use of AI in religious practices, there is few research on how these technologies affects the religious practices and spiritual growth. Therefore, this study explores the impact of integrating AI into religious practices. It impacts positively as well as negatively on spiritual growth.

2.2 Objectives of the study

- To explore the various AI technologies into spiritual and religious practices
- To find out the positive and negative impact of integrating the AI powered technology into religious practices.
- To examine the ethical concerns of integrating AI into religious practices.

3. Findings

3.1 Contemporary Examples

3.1.1 Hinduism Spiritual AI Tools

- AstroTalk and similar Applications: Provide users personalized horoscopes and suggest pujas, mantras and rituals with the help of AI. It combines Vedic astrology, numerology and AI for spiritual advices to users. The major drawback is it reduces complex spiritual counsel into algorithmic predictions (Pagliarini, 2022).

3.1.2 Sikhism AI Tools

- Khalsa GPT: Khalsa GPT is a pioneering AI tool tailored specifically for Sikh Community. It is developed by Daljit Singh from Kapurthala. This tool functions as a digital scholar. It provides instant response to the queries about Sikhism. The main aim of this app is easy and worldwide access to the teachings the holy scriptures.
- Sikh GPT: Another app is Sikh GPT which offers in-depth knowledge of Sikhism. It helps users to deepen their understanding of Sikh practices. It not just provides the translation of a particular verse but also a detailed explanation and relevance.
- Hazoor app: this app is designed to provide personalized spiritual guidance to the users by connecting their questions to Gurbani passages.
- GPT Sahib: This is a AI Chatbot with the help of which users can learn and understand the teachings of all the gurus of Sikhism. It also helps in providing insights about historical events, biographies of all the Gurus and location of all Gurudwara Sahibs.

3.1.2 Christian AI Tools

- Bible AI: It provides detailed explanations, summaries and interpretation of bible using AI. It offers chatbots also where users can ask questions. It supports sermon preparations and devotional readings. It helps users to understand the sacred texts without a pastor (campbell & Tsuria, 2021).
- Abide AI: Basically, it is a meditation app which provides meditations and prayers on the basis of moods or user input. It also tracks the growth of users with data insights. The major concern is that it encourages individualism and commodified faith (Zaleski, 2019).

3.1.3 Buddhist AI tools

- Wysa AI: It is an AI Chatbot for meditation and emotional wellness of users. It offers mental health support, meditations and mindfulness exercises. But it lacks cultural context of Buddhist teachings (Noble, 2018).
- Headspace AI: It is also a meditation tool which provides personalized meditation sessions on the basis of behavioural data of users. The major drawback is that the spiritual roots are diluted (Knuttila, 2020).

3.1.4 Islamic AI tools

- Muslim Pro AI: It is a prayer tool which helps users with accurate prayer time predictions and Qibla directions. It offers AI generated daily Islamic reminders. There was an issue that it sold user data to third party (O'Donnell, 2021).
- QuranGPT: This is a tool like ChatGPT which trained specifically for Quranic text and Tafsir interpretations.

3.2 Positive impact of AI driven technology of religious practices

On the basis of literature, AI is positively affecting the religious practices in many ways.

3.2.1 Accessibility

First and foremost, benefit of AI driven technology is accessibility. AI offers many applications and software which provides accessibility to all religious books and scriptures anytime anywhere. There is not constraint of time and space. AI brings all data in seconds to the users. People in remote area can access spiritual resources. The visually impaired people can also access religious books by AI voice assistant. Even everyone can access religious books of another religion in their own language by translated versions (Greshake, 2017).

3.2.2 Personalized Spiritual Guidance

with the help of AI, one can customized the spiritual content of the basis of individual user behaviour, preferences and needs. It helps users to deepen their spiritual journey with meditation or spiritual teachings (Singler, 2019). For example, Buddhist meditation apps like waking up and Insight timer suggest practices to users based on mood.

3.2.3 Facilitate meditation practices

AI powered meditation tools help users to maintain regular meditation and mindfulness practices which can combat the emotional stress and enhance users' spiritual well being (Anderson & Rainie, 2018).

3.2.4 Digital rituals and worship

Nowadays, AI helps users to perform various rituals and prayers digitally such as lighting virtual candles, conducting funerals via avatars, chanting prayers. These tools enhancing the faith of users especially in isolated environment (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

3.2.5 Preservation and Digitization of sacred texts

AI powered tools can translate, analyse and preserve the sacred texts. The spiritual leaders and theologians draw new insights by comparing or analysing cross religious texts (O'Callaghan, 2020). For example, The Vatican Library Digitization Project.

3.2.6 Assist in religious education

AI powered tools such as AI tutors or educational bots assist users by providing interactive sessions, quizzes, explanations

and real time feedback, especially to younger generation who are interested in religious education (Campbell, 2020)

3.2.7 Spiritual companionship and emotional support

Some AI powered tools offer guidance, comfort, emotional support, prayers, condolence when people suffering with loneliness, grief or anxiety (Herbert, 2021).

3.3 Negative impacts AI powered tools of Religious Practices

As AI powered tools of religious practices has positive impacts, it has negative points as well. On the basis of literature, we found some drawbacks such as:

3.3.1 Commercialization of Spirituality

AI powered tools has led to commercialization of every religious practice which reduced personal beliefs and convert the sacred rituals into consumer-oriented products. Traditionally, spiritual experiences include mentorship, discipline, guidance are now packaged with subscription-based applications. This will lead to profit-based market activity which dilutes the authenticity of spiritual life (Zaleski, 2019).

3.3.2 Misuse of Sacred Texts

AI tools simply extract contents from various religious books, spiritual traditions such as chants, mantras, rituals and symbols and present them in a commercialized form without proper acknowledgement, or permission from the originating religion or community. Such kind of activities leads to misuse of sacred texts which disrespect the deeper meaning of rituals and religious practices (Pagliarini, 2022).

3.3.2 Privacy Concerns

AI Powered tools collect large amount of personal data from users under the guise of customization or personalization, which include prefences, timings and duration of meditation, voice recordings. These are the pitfalls of AI technology (O'Donnell, 2021).

3.3.3 Replace Human Religious Preachers

While AI provide immediate advice or solution which can replace the human religious preachers. Younger generation choose technology over human religious leaders, which poses a threat to Human Religious preachers and traditional mentorship. However, AI cannot take place of human religious leaders who have real experience. Another drawback is that excessive reliance on AIpowered tools may reduce the emotional support and real human bonds which may reduce the chances of actual guidance and mentorship (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021)

3.3.4 Detraditionalization

Historically, Religious practices has been grown within communities through religious gatherings, shared rituals & customs, collective prayers and group worship. As AI offered more customized spiritual experiences, which received in isolation through applications and chat bots, results in spiritual privatization. This change leads to weaken the role of society in build up religious practices (Smith, 2019)

3.3.5 Lack of genuine spiritual guidance and understanding

While AI is trained to stimulate religious conversations, but it cannot understand the human emotions and struggles, divine mystery or the aspects of spiritual life. AI response to the users on the basis of logics only without considering the emotions, true wisdom or spiritual depth (Coeckelbergh, 2020)

3.4 Ethical Considerations of AI in religious practices

While AI powered tools offers easy accessibility, individualization and personalization, it raises many ethical concerns especially in religious context.

3.4.1 Authenticity

AI lacks traditionally essential qualities of religious life such as consciousness, intentionality and religious awareness. By the use of AI, users may perceive the simulated spiritual guidance as authentic, but in reality, it has no divine connection or theological depth. Another critical point is that AI can misuse the voice of pastors, that can mislead users about the nature of spiritual truth (Coeckelbergh, 2020).

"AI system may simulate empathy and sacred authority, but they cannot experience or transit spiritual transcendence". (Turkle, 2011)

3.4.2 Data Privacy concerns

Many religious AI tools may collect personal data of users such as voice, prayer habits and timings, preferences, needs, beliefs and location via permissions. Even users are not aware about this and they don't know how this data can be stored in the application. In religious context, this type of violation may raise the concern of ethical and spiritual harm (O'Donnell, 2021).

"Spiritual surveillance through apps poses ethical concerns that go beyond typical consumer data collection". (Nobel, 2018)

3.4.3 Illusion of Divine Interaction

Users of AI powered tools may mistake AI generated responses for divine messages and spiritual insights, especially emotionally vulnerable individuals or those who have little religious knowledge. This creates a illusion of actually connecting to the higher power, which can be very dangerous or psychologically or manipulative for users (Turkle, 2011)

"The ethical lines blurs when users interpret artificial responses as messages for divine". (Hess, 2021)

3.4.4 Replacement of Pastoral roles

AI Tools replace the human spiritual leaders with AI interface which can erode interpersonal care, empathy, emotional support, community bond. The role of pastor is not only the transferring of religious knowledge but involves emotional

support, empathy, compassion, experience and human existence that cannot replace by a robot (Campbell and Tsuria, 2021)

"Replacing religious leaders with AI compromises the relational essence of pastoral care". (Campbell, 2020)

3.4.5 Biasness and data problem

AI powered tools may have limited religious datasets, which results in biased promotion of ideologies or interpretations. This technical issue may arise a ethical concern and may dilute the sacred texts.

"The algorithmic curation of religious knowledge can reinforce dogma and suppress diversity". (Zaleski, 2019)

3.5.6 Accountability and Ethical Responsibility

AI tools are not accountable when it gives harmful or incorrect advice. Then, who is responsible- developers, data trainers or hosts? This is not clear which leads to an unethical gap in religious AI. It can harm the emotions, faith, belief of users (Campbell, 2020)

"Accountability for AI in religion is complex, as spiritual harm is not easily measurable or reversible" (Coeckelbergh, 2020)

3.5.7 Commercialization

Many AI powered tools are selling premium contents, ads, paid content under the guise of spiritual guidance. When religious apps or platform which provide spiritual advice are integrated with profit driven models such as subscriptions, advertisements or paid contents, this phenomenon is called commercial exploitation of faith. Religious content or products are become marketable with which there is a risk of loss of sacredness and depth of religious contents.

"When AI mediates spiritual experiences for profit, it risks exploiting users' vulnerabilities and beliefs". (Pagliarini, 2022).

4. Can AI really Serves as a Spiritual Guide?

This question remains deeply contested whether AI really serve as a spiritual guide or not. While AI driven tools such as chatbots, virtual preachers or religious advisors and meditation apps are exponentially increasing for spiritual guidance, but it cannot replace the human spiritual leaders.

Firstly, AI lacks spiritual live experience, emotions, empathy, consciousness and moral empathy. These qualities are essential for traditional authentic spiritual guide. Spiritual guidance is not just providing directions on the basis of knowledge or experience, it often involves connecting with the emotions of a user, empathetic behaviour and deeper understandings. AI operates on algorithmic logic and metadata, but spiritual guidance is grounded with lived experience and real interpretation of sacred texts, religious books (Coekelbergh, 2020).

Secondly, AI can generate responses on the basis of data patterns, it does not have the moral inclusion or spiritual depth to deal with the existential questions such as the meaning of suffering, pain or death. These are shaped by the emotional nuances, spiritual depth and cultural context (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

Moreover, AI driven religious tools answers on the basis of preprogramed data without understanding the situation and emotions of individuals, which dilutes the communal aspect of spiritual growth. AI cannot play the relational, dynamic and confrontational character of traditional human being spiritual leaders (Zaleski, 2019).

Therefore, AI can be a complementary function not a replacement of spiritual guidance. It offers support to the users in tough times, but overreliance on these tools can dilute the real connection with the divine. With these tools users can engage regularly in some activities such as prayers and meditation.

Conclusion

The inclusion of Artificial intelligence into the realm of religious practices is a remarkable moment in the history of religious practices. As explored in the study, this phenomenon is known as Algorithmic Salvation. On the one hand, AI affects positively via providing easy access to spiritual knowledge, customized or personalised advice to users. However, the digital inclusion is not without ethical concerns, challenges and issues such as authenticity, loss of human experienced preachers, increases commodification and the illusion of divine connection.

While AI tools complement the growth of spiritual and religious practices by enhancing the accessibility and engagement, it may not replace the human religious guides who have life experiences of emotions of people. It lacks the capacity of genuine and real human experience, moral accountability and connectivity. Future integration should be focused more on human dignity and uphold the sacred content of religions.

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