

THE EPISTEMIC IMPLICATIONS OF DIGITAL LITURGY IN CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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Abstract

The growing integration of digital technologies into religious life has transformed the ways in which worship, religious instruction, and communal participation are conducted in contemporary society. While existing studies have examined digital religion from sociological, theological, and communication perspectives, relatively little attention has been devoted to the epistemological implications of digitally mediated worship. This work therefore examines the epistemic implications of digital liturgy in contemporary technological society. Adopting the critical-analytic method, the study draws on insights from philosophy of technology, religious epistemology, and digital religion studies to evaluate how technological mediation influences the formation, transmission, interpretation, and justification of religious knowledge. The central argument of the article is that digital liturgy should not be understood merely as a technological extension of traditional worship but as a distinct epistemic mode through which religious understanding is increasingly formed and sustained. The analysis shows that digital liturgy expands access to religious participation and knowledge, fosters new forms of communal interaction, and broadens opportunities for spiritual formation. At the same time, it reconfigures traditional structures of authority, participation, presence, and religious knowing. The article contributes to scholarship by proposing the concept of the Digital Liturgical Episteme, a framework that explains how technological mediation becomes an active component in the production and interpretation of religious knowledge. It concludes that digital worship represents a significant epistemological development in contemporary religious life and recommends that religious communities engage digital technologies critically and responsibly while preserving the communal, theological, and formative dimensions essential to authentic religious understanding.

Keywords: Digital Liturgy, Religious Epistemology, Digital Religion, Religious Knowledge, Digital Liturgical Episteme

Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technology has transformed nearly every aspect of contemporary life, including religion. Digital platforms increasingly mediate communication, education, social interaction, and knowledge production, creating what scholars describe as digital religion—the integration of digital technologies into religious belief, practice, and communal life (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). As churches and other faith communities adopt digital tools for worship, evangelization, and religious formation, important questions arise concerning the impact of these developments on religious experience and religious knowledge.

One of the most visible expressions of this transformation is digital liturgy, understood as participation in worship through digital technologies and online platforms. Livestreamed services, virtual prayer meetings, and online devotional gatherings now enable believers to engage in religious life beyond the limitations of physical space. Although the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift, digital worship has since become an established feature of contemporary religious practice.

This question is significant because religion has traditionally functioned as an important source of knowledge and meaning. Through liturgy, sacred texts, rituals, and communal practices, believers encounter and interpret religious truths. The movement of worship into digital environments therefore raises important philosophical concerns. Can religious knowledge acquired through digital participation possess the same credibility as knowledge formed within traditional worship settings? Does technological mediation alter the conditions under which religious understanding is formed? Heidegger (1977) and Feenberg (2002) argue that technology actively shapes human experience, while Plantinga (2000) and Wolterstorff (1999) emphasize the importance of epistemic and communal contexts in the formation of belief.

Although existing studies have examined digital religion from sociological, theological, and communication perspectives, focusing on issues such as online communities, religious authority, technological mediation, embodiment, and virtual participation (Campbell, 2010; Evolvi, 2022; Irlenborn, 2023; Zaluchu, 2024); fewer studies have explicitly treated digital liturgy as an epistemological problem. This study addresses this gap by proposing that digital liturgy constitutes a distinct epistemic mode through which religious understanding is increasingly formed within contemporary technological society. This work, therefore, examines the epistemic implications of digital liturgy in contemporary technological society.

Methodology

This study uses conceptual analysis and critical interpretation of selected works in philosophy of technology, religious epistemology, and digital religion. The analysis identifies the assumptions about knowledge, authority, participation, presence, and mediation that underlie digitally mediated worship and evaluates their implications for religious knowing.

Limitations of Existing Approaches to Digital Religion

The study of digital religion has generated important insights into the relationship between technology and religious life. Scholars have examined online communities, religious authority, digital mediation, virtual participation, and the adaptation of religious practices to technological change. Campbell's work (2010; Campbell & Tsuria, 2021), for instance, demonstrates how religious communities negotiate technological innovations and how digital media reshape traditional patterns of authority and communal interaction. Similarly, Evolvi (2022) highlights the role of digital environments in shaping religious experience, identity formation, and meaning-making, while contemporary digital theologians have explored issues relating to virtual worship, online ministry, and ecclesial adaptation (Zaluchu, 2024; Akanji, 2026).

Despite their significance, these approaches remain limited in their ability to explain the epistemological implications of digital liturgy. Much of the literature focuses on the sociological, theological, and communicative dimensions of digital religion, often treating technology as the

context within which religious activity occurs. Consequently, insufficient attention has been given to the ways digital mediation may reshape the formation, interpretation, credibility, and justification of religious knowledge itself.

This limitation becomes particularly evident when digital liturgy is considered as an epistemological phenomenon. Campbell's work provides important resources for analysing authority and community, but this article extends the discussion by placing epistemological questions at the centre.. Evolvi's emphasis on mediation and digital religious spaces provides valuable insight into online religious interaction, but her focus remains largely on identity and meaning-making rather than on the conditions under which religious beliefs are validated and sustained. Likewise, Plantinga's theory of warranted belief offers a compelling account of how religious beliefs may be rationally justified within appropriate epistemic environments; however, it was developed before the emergence of contemporary digital worship and therefore provides only limited guidance for understanding how technologically mediated environments influence religious understanding.

The common challenge facing these approaches is their inability to adequately explain how digital liturgy reshapes the production, transmission, interpretation, and validation of religious knowledge. Digital worship does more than alter patterns of participation and communication; it may reshape the conditions under which believers encounter, interpret, and appropriate religious claims. It is this gap that the present study seeks to address. By approaching digital liturgy as a distinct epistemic environment, the study moves beyond questions of technological adaptation and proposes the concept of the **Digital Liturgical Episteme** as a framework for understanding how religious knowing is being reconfigured within contemporary technological society.

Conceptual Clarifications

Religious Epistemology

Religious epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature, sources, and justification of religious belief and knowledge. It examines how religious beliefs are formed, what makes them rational or credible, and the roles of faith, reason, revelation, testimony, and religious experience in the acquisition of knowledge. Plantinga (2000) argues that religious beliefs may be rationally justified even without empirical proof, while Wolterstorff (1999) emphasizes the importance of faith communities in shaping religious understanding. In the context of this study, religious epistemology provides a framework for examining how digital technologies influence the formation, transmission, and justification of religious knowledge.

Religious Knowledge

“Religious knowledge refers to forms of belief, understanding, and justified conviction concerning God, the transcendent, sacred traditions, and religious practices.” Unlike scientific knowledge, which relies largely on empirical observation, religious knowledge is commonly mediated through revelation, faith, scripture, worship, and communal religious life. It involves not only intellectual understanding but also spiritual formation and lived experience. Since worship serves as an important avenue through which believers encounter and interpret religious truths, the emergence of digital liturgy raises important questions concerning the acquisition and transmission of religious knowledge in technologically mediated environments.

Liturgy

The term *liturgy* originates from the Greek word *leitourgia*, meaning public service or communal work. Within Christianity, it refers to the formal and communal acts of worship through which believers express their faith and participate in the life of the Church. Through prayers, scriptural readings, preaching, hymns, and sacramental celebrations, liturgy communicates religious beliefs, shapes communal identity, and preserves sacred traditions. It therefore functions not only as an act of worship but also as a means through which religious knowledge and values are transmitted across generations.

Digital Liturgy

Digital liturgy refers to forms of worship and religious participation conducted through digital technologies and online platforms. It includes livestreamed services, virtual prayer meetings, online devotional gatherings, and other digitally mediated religious practices. The widespread adoption of digital worship, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, has transformed how many believers engage with religious life (Matthee, 2024). More than a simple relocation of worship into online spaces, digital liturgy creates new patterns of participation and communication that raise important questions concerning embodiment, presence, authority, and the transmission of religious knowledge (Campbell, 2010; Irlenborn, 2023).

Technological Society

A technological society is one in which technology plays a central role in shaping communication, social interaction, knowledge production, and cultural life. Digital networks and information technologies increasingly influence how individuals perceive reality and engage with one another. Heidegger (1977) and Feenberg (2002) both argue that technology is not merely a neutral tool but an influential factor in the construction of meaning and human experience. In contemporary society, religious life increasingly unfolds within technologically mediated environments, making the concept of technological society essential for understanding the epistemic implications of digital liturgy.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives: Martin Heidegger's philosophy of technology, Andrew Feenberg's critical theory of technology, and Alvin Plantinga's religious epistemology. "Heidegger explains how technology shapes the disclosure of reality; Feenberg explains the social and value-laden character of technological systems; Plantinga provides an epistemological account of warranted religious belief. Together, these perspectives allow the study to examine technology, social mediation, and religious justification."

a. Heidegger's Philosophy of Technology

Martin Heidegger offers one of the most influential philosophical reflections on technology. Rejecting the common view of technology as merely a collection of tools, Heidegger (1977) argues that technology is a way of revealing reality. It shapes how human beings perceive, interpret, and understand the world. His concept of *Gestell* (enframing) describes the tendency of modern technology to present reality as something available for organization, control, and use.

This insight is relevant to digital liturgy because technology does more than transmit religious content. Digital platforms influence how worship is experienced and how religious realities are encountered. Livestreams, online prayer groups, and virtual worship spaces create new conditions

for religious participation and understanding. From Heidegger's perspective, digital liturgy is not simply traditional worship conducted online but a distinct context in which religious experience and knowledge are mediated and interpreted.

b. Feenberg's Critical Theory of Technology

While Heidegger emphasizes the ontological significance of technology, Feenberg (2002) approaches it from a social and critical perspective. He argues that technologies are shaped by the values, interests, and priorities of the societies that produce and use them. Technology is therefore neither neutral nor autonomous; it reflects human choices and social practices.

Feenberg's perspective is particularly useful for understanding digital liturgy. Religious communities do not simply adopt technology; they adapt it according to their theological convictions and pastoral needs. Campbell (2010) similarly argues that faith communities actively negotiate the use of technology within religious life. Digital liturgy should therefore be understood as a socially mediated practice shaped by the interaction of worshippers, religious leaders, and technological platforms. This framework highlights both the opportunities and challenges that digital mediation introduces into contemporary worship.

c. Plantinga's Religious Epistemology

The epistemological dimension of this study draws on Alvin Plantinga's theory of warranted religious belief. Challenging the view that religious beliefs require empirical proof to be rational, Plantinga (2000) argues that belief in God may be properly basic and justified under appropriate epistemic conditions. What matters is not merely whether a belief can be demonstrated but whether it is formed within an environment conducive to truth.

This perspective is particularly relevant to digital liturgy because many believers now encounter religious teachings, worship experiences, and spiritual guidance through digital platforms. The question therefore arises whether these technologically mediated environments can support the formation of warranted religious belief. Plantinga's framework shifts attention from the content of belief alone to the conditions under which belief is formed and sustained.

Taken together, the perspectives of Heidegger, Feenberg, and Plantinga provide a framework for examining digital liturgy as more than a technological innovation. They make it possible to explore how technological mediation influences religious experience, communal participation, religious authority, and the acquisition of religious knowledge in contemporary technological society.

Digital Liturgy and the Mediation of Religious Knowledge

The emergence of digital liturgy marks a significant shift in contemporary religious life. For centuries, Christian worship has been closely associated with physical gathering, shared rituals, and the embodied presence of a faith community. Today, however, digital technologies have created new spaces in which worship can occur and religious life can be sustained beyond traditional boundaries. Livestreamed services, online prayer meetings, virtual retreats, and social media-based forms of religious engagement have become familiar features of contemporary faith practice. As worship increasingly takes place within digital environments, important questions arise concerning how religious knowledge is communicated, received, and understood.

Traditionally, liturgy has served not only as an act of worship but also as a means of religious formation. Through prayers, hymns, scriptural readings, sermons, sacraments, and ritual actions, believers encounter the central narratives and teachings of their faith. In this way, liturgy functions as an important avenue through which religious knowledge is transmitted, preserved, and internalized. Worship shapes understanding, forms moral outlooks, and reinforces communal identity. It is therefore both a spiritual practice and a process of learning.

The movement of liturgy into digital spaces has not eliminated this formative role. Instead, it has changed the ways in which religious knowledge is accessed and shared. Campbell and Tsuria (2021) observe that digital technologies have opened new avenues for religious engagement, allowing believers to interact with religious content across multiple platforms and contexts. Religious participation is now characterized by unprecedented levels of accessibility and connectivity.

One important consequence of this development is the broader availability of religious knowledge. Participation in worship was once largely dependent upon physical access to a church or religious community. Digital technologies have significantly reduced these barriers. Individuals who are geographically distant, physically unable to attend services, or otherwise excluded from regular participation can now engage in worship and receive religious instruction online. As a result, religious communities increasingly operate within global digital networks rather than within exclusively local settings.

Digital media have also expanded the role of testimony in religious life. Personal stories, spiritual reflections, sermons, and theological discussions can now reach audiences far beyond their original communities. Through podcasts, blogs, livestreams, discussion forums, and social media platforms, believers share experiences and interpretations that shape how others understand religious truths. These exchanges have become an important source of religious learning in contemporary digital culture.

Yet the expansion of access brings its own challenges. Unlike traditional worship settings, where religious teachings are often mediated through recognized authorities and established structures, digital environments allow a wide range of voices to compete for attention. Religious ideas can spread rapidly without undergoing theological scrutiny or communal evaluation. The result is a more open but also more uncertain environment in which questions of credibility and reliability become increasingly significant.

For this reason, the issue of religious authority occupies a central place in discussions of digital liturgy. Campbell (2010) notes that digital technologies have altered traditional patterns of authority by decentralizing access to religious knowledge. Believers can now consult multiple sources of interpretation and guidance beyond their immediate religious communities. This development encourages participation and dialogue, but it can also generate confusion regarding the legitimacy of competing religious claims.

Digital mediation also changes the character of religious learning itself. In traditional worship, learning occurs through shared participation in communal practices. Worshippers do not simply receive information; they become part of a community whose rituals, symbols, and experiences

shape understanding. Digital participation introduces different patterns of engagement. Individuals may worship remotely, access religious content at their convenience, or engage with faith communities without sustained physical interaction. Such developments raise legitimate questions about whether digital participation can foster the same depth of formation traditionally associated with communal worship.

From the perspective of the philosophy of technology, these changes suggest that digital media are far more than neutral channels of communication. Heidegger's (1977) understanding of technology as a mode of revealing reminds us that the medium through which knowledge is communicated influences how that knowledge is experienced. A sermon encountered through a livestream is not experienced in exactly the same way as one delivered within a physically gathered congregation. The technological setting shapes attention, interaction, and perception, thereby influencing religious understanding.

Feenberg's critical theory reinforces this insight by emphasizing that technologies are embedded within social and cultural contexts. Digital liturgy is therefore not simply traditional worship transferred onto technological platforms. Rather, it represents an evolving form of religious practice shaped by the possibilities and constraints of digital communication. Religious communities continually negotiate these realities as they adapt inherited traditions to contemporary technological conditions.

For this reason, digital liturgy should neither be dismissed as a deficient substitute for physical worship nor accepted uncritically as its equivalent. It is better understood as a distinct epistemic environment in which religious knowledge is formed, communicated, and interpreted under new conditions. The crucial philosophical question is not whether digital worship can convey religious information, but how technological mediation reshapes the processes through which believers encounter, understand, and appropriate religious truth. This issue becomes even more apparent when questions of embodiment, presence, and religious experience are brought into focus.

Presence, Embodiment, and Knowing in Digital Liturgy

Few issues have generated as much debate in discussions of digital worship as the question of presence. Christian worship has traditionally been associated with the gathering of believers in a shared sacred space where prayer, ritual, sacramental participation, and communal interaction take place. Such gatherings have long been regarded as important expressions of ecclesial life. The rise of digital liturgy, however, has made it possible for believers to participate in worship while separated by distance, raising important questions about the relationship between participation, community, and religious understanding.

For analytical purposes, presence in digital liturgy should be distinguished from physical co-presence. Digital participation may provide interaction, attention, and communal engagement without reproducing every dimension of embodied and sacramental presence.

At the centre of this discussion is the recognition that Christian worship involves more than intellectual reflection. Through prayer, singing, listening, ritual actions, and sacramental participation, believers encounter and express their faith in ways that engage both mind and body. Religious understanding therefore develops not only through doctrine and instruction but also

through shared practices, relationships, and experiences that shape how faith is lived and understood.

For this reason, scholars have questioned whether online worship can preserve the character of liturgical participation. Irlenborn (2023) identifies authenticity and presence among the major concerns surrounding digital liturgy. The issue is not simply that worship takes place through technological media, but whether participation itself is altered when believers are connected through screens rather than gathered in one location.

Supporters of digital worship argue that meaningful religious participation has never depended exclusively on geographical proximity. Throughout Christian history, believers have maintained spiritual communion across distances through prayer, correspondence, and shared devotion. Contemporary technologies extend these possibilities by enabling real-time interaction among worshippers regardless of location. Livestreamed services, online prayer groups, and interactive worship platforms have allowed many individuals to remain connected to religious life when attendance would otherwise be impossible.

Akanji (2026) therefore cautions against dismissing digital worship as inherently inauthentic. From a theological standpoint, divine activity is not confined to a particular place. If God is not restricted by space, meaningful encounters with the sacred may also occur within digitally mediated environments. This conviction has encouraged many religious communities to embrace digital platforms as legitimate spaces for prayer, teaching, and spiritual growth.

At the same time, important differences remain between online participation and gathered worship. Shared rituals, spontaneous encounters, collective responses, and the sensory dimensions of worship contribute significantly to communal identity and religious formation. Matthee (2024) observes that the growth of digital worship has challenged traditional assumptions about what it means to be present in religious life. Rather than choosing between online and offline forms of worship, the task is to understand how both contribute to contemporary religious experience.

These concerns become particularly important when religious knowledge is understood as more than the acquisition of information. Believers learn through participation in practices that shape perception, character, and interpretation. Liturgy is one of the primary settings in which this formation occurs. Digital worship changes the conditions under which such formation takes place by introducing new possibilities for access and engagement while also creating risks of distraction, fragmentation, and passive consumption.

Nevertheless, digital worship should not be judged solely by comparison with traditional forms of gathering. For many individuals affected by illness, disability, geographical isolation, or other constraints, digital platforms provide meaningful opportunities for spiritual growth and theological learning. Their value lies not simply in convenience but in their capacity to sustain participation in religious life.

Plantinga's theory of warranted belief offers a useful lens for understanding this issue. If beliefs acquire warrant within appropriate epistemic environments, then the crucial question becomes whether digital worship can foster the experiences, relationships, and forms of engagement

necessary for religious understanding. The answer depends less on the technology itself than on how it is integrated into communal worship and faith formation.

The debate ultimately reveals that digital liturgy is neither a replacement for traditional worship nor merely an inadequate substitute. Rather, it represents a distinct mode of religious participation shaped by the possibilities and limitations of technological mediation. The real challenge is not whether digital worship should be accepted or rejected, but how it influences the ways believers encounter, interpret, and appropriate religious truth in contemporary society.

Epistemic Implications of Digital Liturgy

Digital technology has transformed access to religious information, teaching, testimony, and forms of religious participation. Worship services, theological teachings, devotional materials, and spiritual discussions that were once limited to particular congregations or geographical locations are now available to global audiences. Campbell and Tsuria (2021) note that digital media have enabled religious communities to extend worship and religious instruction far beyond the physical boundaries of churches and religious institutions. In a similar vein, Bingaman (2023) argues that digitalisation has become an enduring feature of contemporary religious life. As a result, individuals who are geographically isolated, physically challenged, or otherwise unable to attend conventional worship services can now access religious information, participate in religious activities, and remain connected to faith communities through digital platforms.

However, access to religious information should not be equated with the acquisition of religious knowledge. Although digital platforms make religious teachings, testimonies, sermons, and theological discussions readily available, the availability of such content does not automatically mean that users understand, critically evaluate, or justifiably accept what they encounter. Religious information becomes knowledge through processes of interpretation, reflection, experience, communal verification, and justification. Consequently, the epistemological significance of digital liturgy lies not simply in the quantity of religious information made available but also in the conditions under which that information is understood, evaluated, and incorporated into religious life.

The expansion of digital worship has also transformed how religious information is communicated and received. Livestreamed services, podcasts, online forums, and social media platforms have created new channels through which religious ideas circulate. What is particularly striking is the speed and scale at which such communication now occurs. Religious teachings that once reached a local congregation can now engage audiences across continents within moments. Campbell (2024) observes that contemporary religious communication increasingly operates through networked forms of interaction, while Evolvi (2022) describes digital religion as existing within highly mediated environments where meanings are continually negotiated and reinterpreted.

Nevertheless, the circulation of religious information does not guarantee its credibility or proper interpretation. Believers must assess the reliability of sources, examine the theological content of messages, and consider how particular interpretations relate to established religious traditions. Interpretation is therefore essential to the movement from information to knowledge. A sermon viewed online, for instance, may provide information about a biblical passage, but understanding its theological significance requires reflection on its context, meaning, and implications for faith

and practice. Digital mediation thus creates opportunities for religious learning while placing greater demands on the interpretive judgement of individual believers.

Another important consequence of this development is the increased exposure of believers to diverse theological viewpoints and religious experiences. Digital environments make it easier to encounter traditions, interpretations, and perspectives that may lie beyond one's immediate religious community. Müller and Friemel (2024) argue that digital media have become central to the formation of contemporary religious communities, creating new patterns of interaction among believers. Similarly, Cheong and Nord (2026) maintain that digital religion fosters an ongoing dialogue between tradition and innovation, opening new possibilities for religious learning and reflection. In many respects, digital platforms have expanded the horizons of religious engagement.

Yet exposure to diverse viewpoints must be accompanied by critical reflection and communal verification. Religious claims encountered online may be incomplete, misleading, or inconsistent with the theological traditions in which believers are formed. Faith communities therefore remain important spaces in which religious interpretations can be discussed, tested, and evaluated. Through dialogue with religious leaders and fellow believers, individuals can examine competing claims, clarify misunderstandings, and assess the credibility of religious teachings. Such communal engagement does not eliminate disagreement, but it provides an important context for evaluating religious information and determining whether particular interpretations are adequately supported.

Religious experience also plays an important role in the acquisition of religious knowledge. Religious understanding is not formed exclusively through the reception of information or intellectual analysis; it also develops through prayer, worship, personal reflection, and participation in the life of a faith community. Digital liturgy may facilitate these experiences by enabling believers to join prayers, listen to scriptural readings, participate in devotional gatherings, and engage with religious testimonies. Nevertheless, the epistemic value of these experiences depends on how they are interpreted and integrated into the believer's wider religious life. Access to a digital worship service may initiate reflection or strengthen religious commitment, but it does not automatically establish the truth or justification of every claim presented during that service. These considerations become particularly significant in a digital environment characterised by an abundance of information. Floridi's (2014) notion of the *infosphere* captures this reality well. Believers today navigate an environment saturated with information, opinions, and competing truth claims. Within such a setting, distinguishing credible religious teaching from misinformation becomes increasingly difficult. Hoover (2006) therefore reminds us that religious messages now compete with numerous alternative sources of authority and meaning, making discernment more important than ever. The challenge is not merely to access information but to establish which claims are credible, how they should be interpreted, and what reasons support their acceptance. Questions of authority are particularly significant in this regard. Digital culture has altered traditional patterns of religious communication by enabling ordinary users to become creators, interpreters, and distributors of religious content. Campbell (2010) shows that religious communities actively negotiate technological innovation according to their values and traditions, while her later work acknowledges that digital culture has contributed to a decentralisation of religious authority (Campbell, 2020). While this development encourages broader participation

and inclusivity, it may also weaken established mechanisms of doctrinal accountability and theological oversight. The democratisation of religious communication therefore presents both opportunities and risks for the acquisition and justification of religious knowledge.

Concerns about authenticity further complicate the discussion. Debates surrounding online worship frequently return to questions of presence, embodiment, and genuine participation (Irlenborn, 2023). At the same time, it would be misleading to assume that technological mediation automatically diminishes religious experience. Leitzke (2023) argues that meaningful spiritual engagement can occur within digitally mediated worship when participants remain actively involved in the liturgical process. The epistemological significance of digital liturgy therefore depends not simply on the presence of technology but on the quality of engagement, reflection, experience, and communal participation that technology makes possible. Ultimately, digital worship expands access to religious knowledge while simultaneously reshaping the conditions under which that knowledge is evaluated, trusted, and appropriated

Towards an Epistemology of Digital Liturgy

Any attempt to develop an epistemology of digital liturgy must begin with the recognition that digital worship is more than a new method of conducting religious activities. It has created a distinctive environment within which religious understanding is formed and expressed. As Campbell and Tsuria (2021) demonstrate, digital religious practices emerge through the interaction of technological systems, religious traditions, and communal participation. Likewise, Zaluchu (2024) argues that digital theology reflects ongoing efforts to reinterpret faith within an increasingly technological culture. Taken together, these developments suggest that digital liturgy should be understood not merely as a medium for transmitting religious content but as a context that shapes how religious knowledge is encountered, interpreted, and lived.

In this context, religious knowledge cannot be reduced to the simple acquisition of information. Religious understanding is fundamentally relational. It develops through participation in communities, engagement with traditions, and lived encounters with religious realities. Alston (1991) emphasises that religious knowledge often emerges from experience and practice rather than abstract reasoning alone. In a similar way, Wolterstorff (1999) argues that faith communities play a crucial role in shaping the judgments, interpretations, and convictions of believers. Religious knowing therefore involves belonging, participation, and shared meaning as much as it involves doctrinal instruction.

This perspective becomes even more significant in digital environments where technological mediation is unavoidable. Ihde (2009) reminds us that technologies influence how human beings perceive and interpret the world, while Verbeek (2011) argues that technological artifacts actively shape experience and moral understanding. The implication is that religious knowledge is never entirely independent of the means through which it is communicated. Digital technologies do not simply carry religious messages from one person to another; they influence how those messages are received, interpreted, and integrated into religious life. Nevertheless, the influence of technology should not be confused with the production of religious knowledge itself. The acquisition of religious knowledge also depends on the interpretive capacities, experiences, judgments, and communal relationships of believers.

Such observations resonate strongly with Heidegger's (1977) claim that technology is a mode of revealing rather than a neutral instrument. Feenberg (2002) likewise rejects the idea of technological neutrality, insisting that technologies shape social practices and patterns of interaction. Applied to digital liturgy, these insights suggest that online worship environments influence the conditions within which religious understanding develops. They do not merely facilitate religious experience; they help structure the conditions under which that experience becomes meaningful. However, these conditions do not independently determine what believers know or whether particular religious claims are justified.

At the same time, an adequate epistemology of digital liturgy cannot ignore the importance of communal accountability. Religious beliefs do not develop in isolation. Plantinga (2000) argues that beliefs acquire warrant within appropriate epistemic environments, while Wolterstorff (1999) highlights the role of faith communities in sustaining and evaluating religious convictions. For this reason, digital worship communities must cultivate forms of dialogue, discernment, and theological accountability that enable religious teachings to be examined within the broader traditions of faith to which they belong. Such practices are important for distinguishing mere exposure to religious information from a more considered understanding of religious claims.

The research proposes that digital liturgy should be understood as a distinct epistemic mode rather than merely a new medium of religious communication. Existing studies on digital religion have largely focused on questions of authority, participation, community formation, and technological adaptation. While these contributions are valuable, they often treat digital technologies as contexts within which religious activities occur. This work advances the discussion by arguing that digital liturgy reshapes the conditions under which religious knowledge is interpreted, justified, and sustained. In other words, digital worship is not simply a technological extension of traditional liturgy; technological mediation becomes an integral condition within which some forms of religious knowing take place. The concept of digital liturgy as a distinct epistemic mode therefore provides a philosophical framework for understanding how religious knowledge is encountered and interpreted within contemporary technological society.

From this perspective, religious knowledge in digital environments emerges through the interaction of technological mediation, communal participation, religious testimony, and personal engagement with faith traditions. Campbell and Garner (2016) identify such interaction as a defining feature of networked religious life, while Evolvi (2022) and Bingaman (2023) show how digital environments increasingly influence contemporary religious identity and practice. However, this work contends that these factors do more than support religious communication; they help establish the conditions within which religious understanding is formed and evaluated. Digital liturgy should therefore be understood neither as a departure from traditional religious knowing nor as its simple continuation. Rather, it represents the emergence of a distinct epistemic mode in which faith, technology, community, and interpretation converge to shape contemporary religious understanding. Recognising this transformation is essential for any adequate philosophical account of religious knowledge in the digital age.

The Digital Liturgical Episteme

This research proposes the concept of the *Digital Liturgical Episteme* as a framework for understanding the distinctive epistemological character of digitally mediated worship. The term

episteme is used here to denote the underlying conditions, structures, and processes through which knowledge is produced, interpreted, validated, and sustained within a particular context. In digital liturgy, religious knowledge no longer emerges solely through physical participation in worship, direct communal interaction, or traditional institutional structures. Rather, it increasingly develops within technologically mediated environments where digital platforms, networked communication, online participation, and virtual religious communities shape the experience of faith.

The *Digital Liturgical Episteme* is constituted by four interrelated components. The first is technological mediation, which refers to the role of digital infrastructures in shaping how religious messages are communicated and received. The second is communal participation, through which believers interact, share testimonies, and construct religious meaning within networked communities. The third is religious authority, which concerns the ways traditional structures of guidance, interpretation, and doctrinal oversight are reconfigured within digital environments. The fourth is interpretive engagement, whereby individual believers actively negotiate, evaluate, and internalise religious teachings encountered through digital media. Together, these elements establish the conditions within which religious understanding develops and is sustained in contemporary digital culture.

The relationship among these four components is best understood as an interconnected process rather than a collection of independent features. Technological mediation structures access to religious information, worship, and testimony by determining how and under what conditions believers encounter religious content. Communal participation then provides the social and relational context within which this content is discussed, shared, and understood. Religious authority influences the credibility attributed to particular teachings by shaping how claims are assessed against recognised sources of guidance, doctrinal traditions, and communal expectations. Finally, interpretive engagement involves the believer's active examination, appropriation, and integration of these teachings into personal understanding and religious practice. This process is not necessarily linear: individual interpretations may influence communal discussions, challenge established authority, and shape how digital platforms are subsequently used. The *Digital Liturgical Episteme* therefore describes a dynamic relationship among technological conditions, communal relationships, structures of credibility, and individual interpretation through which religious knowing takes place.

The concept differs from digital religion, which primarily describes the interaction between religion and digital technologies. While digital religion focuses on religious practices, identities, and communities in online environments, the Digital Liturgical Episteme specifically examines the conditions and processes through which religious knowledge is encountered, interpreted, and justified. Its focus is therefore epistemological rather than merely sociological or descriptive. It asks not only how religion is practised online but also how believers come to understand and assess the religious claims they encounter through digital worship.

It also differs from networked theology, which examines how theological reflection and discourse are shaped within digital networks. Campbell and Garner (2016) explore the negotiation of faith within digital culture, highlighting the interaction between theological traditions and networked forms of communication. Whereas networked theology is primarily concerned with theological

communication, reflection, and engagement, the Digital Liturgical Episteme investigates the conditions under which such communication may contribute to religious understanding and justified belief. It therefore extends the discussion from the circulation and negotiation of theological ideas to the epistemological processes through which believers interpret and evaluate them.

Similarly, mediated worship draws attention to the role of communication media in facilitating or shaping religious participation. The Digital Liturgical Episteme goes beyond the observation that worship is conducted through technological platforms. It provides a conceptual framework for examining how technological mediation interacts with communal participation, religious authority, and interpretive engagement to shape the conditions of religious knowing. The distinction is not that digital religion, networked theology, or mediated worship ignore knowledge entirely, but that the proposed concept brings the formation, interpretation, credibility, and justification of religious understanding into explicit analytical focus.

The significance of this concept lies in its ability to explain an important transformation occurring in contemporary religious life. Digital liturgy does more than change the location of worship; it reshapes the epistemic environment within which believers encounter, interpret, and appropriate religious claims. However, technological mediation does not independently produce or guarantee religious knowledge. Rather, it establishes some of the conditions within which religious information is received, communal meanings are negotiated, authority is assessed, and individual understanding develops. The Digital Liturgical Episteme therefore provides a philosophical framework for understanding how faith, technology, community, and interpretation converge to shape religious knowing in the digital age.

Conclusion

The principal argument of this study is that digital liturgy should be understood not merely as the transfer of traditional worship to online platforms but as a distinct context that shapes how believers encounter, interpret, and evaluate religious claims. Digital technologies expand access to worship, theological instruction, and religious testimony while introducing new conditions for participation, interpretation, and the assessment of religious authority. However, access to religious information does not automatically constitute religious knowledge. Understanding develops through critical interpretation, personal experience, communal participation, and the evaluation of religious claims within appropriate theological and epistemic contexts. Digital liturgy is therefore reshaping the conditions through which many believers encounter, interpret, and evaluate religious claims.

The study's principal conceptual contribution is the *Digital Liturgical Episteme*, a framework for explaining the relationship among technological mediation, communal participation, religious authority, and interpretive engagement. These four components interact to establish the conditions within which religious understanding develops and is assessed in digitally mediated environments. Unlike approaches concerned primarily with online religious practices, networked theological communication, or the technological facilitation of worship, this framework places the processes of religious knowing at the centre of analysis. It demonstrates that technology does not independently produce or guarantee religious knowledge but influences the conditions under which religious information is received, interpreted, and evaluated. In this way, the study

contributes to philosophical discussions of knowledge by clarifying the relationship between technological environments and religious understanding.

For religious communities, these findings highlight the need to engage digital platforms critically and responsibly while preserving the importance of communal accountability, theological discernment, embodied participation, and appropriate sacramental practice. Religious leaders should encourage believers to evaluate online teachings carefully, distinguish credible instruction from misinformation, and integrate digital participation into broader processes of faith formation. Further research should examine how different religious traditions negotiate authority and credibility online, how believers assess competing religious claims, and how digital participation influences religious understanding in practice. Empirical studies could complement the present philosophical analysis by investigating these questions across different faith communities and technological contexts. Such research would deepen understanding of the opportunities and limitations of digital worship in contemporary religious life.

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