



The Digital Spirituality Paradox: When Does Online Spiritual Practice Enhance Versus Undermine Cognitive Well-Being? A Systematic Analysis

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Abstract

Background: The rapid expansion of spiritual practices into digital spaces has created a complex tension where it has been emphasized that while online engagement may enhance cognitive well-being in some contexts, it also seems to be undermining it in others. This study revisits the Digital Spirituality Paradox by systematically examining when online spiritual practice supports versus disrupts cognitive functioning.

Methodology: A systematic analysis was conducted of empirical studies published from 2016 onwards. Included studies were required to explicitly conceptualize mindfulness or contemplative practice as spiritual, religious, contemplative, spiritually oriented, or part of a broader spiritual practice. Editorials, commentaries, purely theoretical papers, and dissertations were excluded when journal-based evidence was required. Forty two studies met the inclusion criteria. The review focused on cognitive and psychological outcomes associated with digital spiritual engagement, including attention, concentration, working memory, executive functioning, emotion regulation,

and reflective awareness. Findings were synthesized thematically across practice type, engagement pattern, and digital context.

Results: The synthesis indicated that online spiritual practices were more likely to support cognitive well-being when they were active, guided, intentional, and embedded in a meaningful spiritual or communal framework. Reported benefits included improved attentional control, greater emotional balance, enhanced self-regulation, and increased metacognitive awareness. In contrast, cognitive risks were more often associated with passive consumption, excessive or unguided engagement, fragmented use across platforms, and commercially driven or algorithmically mediated content. These conditions were linked to distraction, cognitive fatigue, reduced sustained attention, and increased rumination. Individual predispositions, social context, and the design of digital environments appeared to shape whether online spiritual engagement was beneficial or detrimental. The findings suggest that digital spiritual practice is not uniformly beneficial or harmful. Its cognitive impact depends on how it is practiced, the context in which it occurs, and the extent to which it remains intentional, structured, and spiritually coherent.

Keywords: *digital spirituality; attention regulation; cognitive functioning; contemplative practices; cognitive well-being.*

Introduction

The integration of spiritual, contemplative, and mindfulness-based practices into digital environments represents one of the most significant transformations in contemporary well-being interventions. Over the past decade, spiritual and religious life has increasingly migrated online, with millions of individuals now accessing guided meditations, religious teachings, virtual prayer communities, spiritually oriented self-help content, and contemplative applications through smartphones, websites, and social-media platforms (Heidbrink et al., 2022; Campbell, 2020). This digital expansion has dramatically increased the accessibility of practices historically confined to physical spaces such as temples, churches, meditation halls, and retreat centers, thereby democratizing participation across geographic, socioeconomic, and mobility-related barriers (Campbell, 2020; Grieve & Wagner, 2021).

Simultaneously, cognitive well-being encompassing attentional control, working memory, executive functioning, emotion regulation, and reflective awareness has emerged as a critical public-health priority, particularly among young adults and populations experiencing heightened digital engagement (Smith et al., 2023; Wang & Chen, 2024). Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), in both face-to-face and digitally mediated formats, have demonstrated small-to-moderate beneficial effects on global cognition, executive attention, working memory accuracy, inhibition, cognitive flexibility, and subjective cognitive functioning (Liebherr et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). Neurocognitive research further indicates that mindfulness training can enhance attentional networks, reduce mind-wandering, and improve conflict monitoring, with some evidence of structural and functional neural changes following even brief web-based interventions (Bautista et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024).

However, the migration of spiritual practice into digital contexts introduces a paradox. On one hand, digital platforms enable structured, guided, and intentional engagement with contemplative practices that may support cognitive regulation and emotional balance (Bautista et al., 2023; Flett et al., 2021). On the other hand, the very architectures of digital environments, characterized by notification-driven interruptions, algorithmically curated content, fragmented attentional demands, and incentives for passive scrolling may undermine the cognitive conditions necessary for deep contemplative engagement (Liebherr et al., 2024; Rosen et al., 2022). Passive consumption of spiritually themed content, excessive screen time, commercialized mindfulness applications, and unguided or sporadic platform use have been associated with cognitive fatigue, reduced sustained attention, and heightened rumination in some contexts (Kuss & Griffiths, 2023; Liebherr et al., 2024).

This tension constitutes what we term the **Digital Spirituality Paradox**: the coexistence of cognitive-enhancing and cognitive-disrupting potentials within digitally mediated spiritual engagement. The central question is not whether online spiritual practice is beneficial or harmful in absolute terms, but rather **under what conditions** it enhances versus undermines cognitive well-being. Emerging evidence suggests that practice characteristics (e.g., active vs. passive, guided vs. unguided, structured vs. fragmented), user intentionality, social and communal embedding, individual predispositions (e.g., baseline attentional capacity, trait mindfulness, psychological vulnerability), and platform-design features (e.g., notification frequency, algorithmic

personalization, commercial incentives) interact to shape cognitive outcomes (Flett et al., 2021; Liebherr et al., 2024; Wang & Chen, 2024).

Despite the proliferation of digital mindfulness applications and online spiritual communities, systematic evidence synthesizing the cognitive and psychological effects of digitally mediated spiritual practice remains limited and heterogeneous. Existing reviews have focused primarily on digital mindfulness training in isolation, often excluding broader forms of online religious or spiritual engagement such as virtual worship, digital scripture study, online faith communities, and spiritually oriented self-regulation practices (Liebherr et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). Moreover, few syntheses have explicitly examined the moderating roles of engagement patterns, digital-context variables, and individual-difference factors in shaping cognitive outcomes.

The present systematic review addresses these gaps by examining empirical studies published from 2019 onward that investigated the cognitive and psychological effects of digitally mediated spiritual and contemplative practices. Guided by PRISMA 2020 reporting principles, this review synthesizes evidence across forty eligible studies to identify the conditions under which online spiritual engagement supports or disrupts attention, concentration, working memory, executive functioning, emotion regulation, self-regulation, and reflective awareness (Page et al., 2021). By integrating findings across diverse practice types, digital contexts, and outcome measures, this review aims to clarify the mechanisms and boundary conditions of the Digital Spirituality Paradox and to inform the design of cognitively supportive digital spiritual interventions.

Methods

This systematic review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 statement to ensure transparent and comprehensive reporting of search procedures, eligibility criteria, study selection, data extraction, and synthesis (Page et al., 2021). The review protocol was designed to examine empirical evidence on the cognitive and psychological effects of digitally mediated spiritual and contemplative practices, with a specific focus on psychology and spirituality as intersecting domains.

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were eligible for inclusion if they met all of the following criteria. First, participants consisted of human subjects of any age, gender, cultural background, or clinical status, provided the study explicitly examined psychological or cognitive outcomes in relation to spiritual or contemplative practice. Second, interventions or exposures involved digitally mediated spiritual, religious, contemplative, mindfulness-based, or spiritually oriented practices delivered via websites, mobile applications, videoconference platforms, social media, podcasts, or other digital technologies. Eligible practices included guided or unguided online meditation, digital mindfulness training, virtual prayer or worship, online scripture or sacred-text study, digitally facilitated spiritual communities, contemplative apps with explicit spiritual framing, and web-based spiritually oriented self-regulation or self-help interventions. Third, comparators included waitlist controls, active control conditions (e.g., psychoeducation, relaxation training, non-spiritual digital content), alternative digital spiritual interventions, or pre-post within-subject designs. Fourth, outcomes included at least one validated measure of cognitive functioning (e.g., attention, concentration, working memory, executive functioning, cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control) or psychological well-being explicitly framed in relation to spiritual or contemplative processes (e.g., emotion regulation, self-regulation, reflective awareness, metacognitive awareness, spiritual well-being, meaning in life, existential well-being). Fifth, study designs were limited to peer-reviewed empirical studies published in academic journals, including randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs, controlled before-after studies, cross-sectional studies with validated measures, longitudinal cohort studies, and mixed-methods studies with quantitative cognitive or psychological outcomes. Sixth, publications were required to be written in English and published between January 1, 2016, and the date of the final search. Studies published prior to 2016 were excluded to ensure relevance to contemporary digital platforms and practices.

Studies were excluded if they met any of the following criteria. Editorials, commentaries, narrative reviews, theoretical papers, protocol papers without empirical data, dissertations, theses, book chapters, conference abstracts without full-text availability, and grey literature were excluded. Studies focusing exclusively on face-to-face spiritual or contemplative practices without a digital component were excluded, as were studies examining digital interventions with no explicit spiritual, religious, contemplative, or mindfulness-based framing (e.g., generic stress-

management apps, non-spiritual cognitive training programs). Studies reporting only physiological, neural, or behavioral outcomes without psychological or cognitive measures were excluded, as the review's primary focus was on cognitive and psychological well-being within a psychology-and-spirituality framework. Studies involving pharmacologically induced altered states, clinical populations where spiritual content was incidental to primary treatment (e.g., digital CBT for depression without spiritual framing), or non-human subjects were also excluded. Additionally, studies unavailable in full text in English were excluded due to resource constraints for translation.

Information Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across five electronic databases: PsycINFO, PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected to ensure coverage of psychological, medical, interdisciplinary, and spirituality-related literature. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between January 1, 2016, and the final search date. No geographic restrictions were applied.

Search strategies were developed in consultation with PRISMA 2020 guidelines and adapted to the syntax and controlled-vocabulary systems of each database (Page et al., 2021). Search terms were organized into three conceptual blocks: (a) digital delivery, (b) spiritual or contemplative practice, and (c) cognitive or psychological outcomes. Boolean operators (AND, OR) and truncation symbols (*) were used to combine terms and capture variant word forms. The following search string was used as the primary template and adapted for each database:

("digital*" OR "online" OR "internet" OR "web-based" OR "web based" OR "mobile" OR "smartphone" OR "app*" OR "e-health" OR "eHealth" OR "virtual" OR "tele-" OR "technology-mediated" OR "technology mediated") AND ("spiritual*" OR "religiou*" OR "contemplative" OR "mindfulness" OR "meditation" OR "prayer" OR "devotional" OR "sacred" OR "transcendent" OR "meaning-making" OR "existential" OR "faith-based" OR "faith based") AND ("cogniti*" OR "attention" OR "concentration" OR "working memory" OR "executive function" OR "executive functioning" OR "inhibitory control" OR "cognitive flexibility" OR "emotion regulation" OR "self-regulation" OR "metacognition" OR "reflective awareness" OR "psychological well-being" OR "mental health" OR "wellbeing" OR "well-being")

In PubMed, Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms such as "Meditation," "Mindfulness," "Religion," "Spirituality," "Cognition," "Attention," "Executive Function," and "Mental Health" were combined with free-text terms using appropriate field tags. In PsycINFO, Thesaurus terms such as "Meditation," "Spirituality," "Religiosity," "Cognitive Processes," "Attention," and "Emotional Regulation" were incorporated. In Scopus and Web of Science, title–abstract–keyword searches were conducted using the full search string with truncation and proximity operators where supported. Google Scholar searches were conducted using simplified versions of the primary string, with the first 200 results screened for relevance. Reference lists of included studies and relevant systematic reviews were hand-searched to identify additional eligible studies.

Selection Process

All identified records were imported into reference-management software, and duplicates were removed using automated deduplication functions followed by manual verification. Two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts against the eligibility criteria. Full texts of potentially eligible studies were then retrieved and assessed independently by both reviewers. Disagreements at both screening stages were resolved through discussion or, when necessary, consultation with a third reviewer. Reasons for exclusion at the full-text stage were recorded and categorized according to PRISMA 2020 recommendations (Page et al., 2021).

Data Collection Process and Data Items

A standardized data-extraction form was developed and piloted on a subset of included studies. Extracted data included study characteristics (authors, year, country, study design, sample size, participant demographics), intervention characteristics (type of digital spiritual practice, platform, duration, frequency, guidance level, theoretical framework), comparator details, outcome measures (cognitive and psychological instruments, validity and reliability information), main findings (direction and magnitude of effects, statistical significance), and moderators or mediators examined (e.g., engagement level, trait mindfulness, baseline cognitive functioning). Data extraction was performed independently by two reviewers, with discrepancies resolved through consensus.

Study Risk-of-Bias Assessment

The methodological quality and risk of bias of included studies were assessed using appropriate tools based on study design. Randomized controlled trials were evaluated using the Cochrane Risk of Bias 2.0 tool, assessing randomization process, deviations from intended interventions, missing outcome data, outcome measurement, and selection of reported results. Non-randomized and quasi-experimental studies were assessed using the ROBINS-I tool. Cross-sectional and longitudinal observational studies were evaluated using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal checklists for analytical cross-sectional and cohort studies, respectively. Risk-of-bias assessments were conducted independently by two reviewers, with disagreements resolved through discussion.

Synthesis Methods

Given the anticipated heterogeneity in interventions, outcome measures, and study designs, a narrative thematic synthesis was conducted rather than a meta-analysis. Studies were grouped according to practice type (e.g., digital mindfulness meditation, online prayer or worship, virtual spiritual communities, contemplative apps), engagement pattern (active vs. passive, guided vs. unguided, structured vs. fragmented), digital context (standalone apps, videoconference-delivered programs, social-media-based practices, web-based platforms), and reported cognitive or psychological outcomes. Within each group, findings were synthesized to identify consistent patterns, moderating factors, and boundary conditions underlying the Digital Spirituality Paradox. Direction and consistency of effects were reported descriptively, with attention to study quality and risk of bias.

Reporting Bias Assessment

Due to the narrative synthesis approach and heterogeneity of outcome measures, formal assessment of publication bias (e.g., funnel plots, Egger's test) was not conducted. However, efforts

were made to minimize reporting bias by searching multiple databases, screening reference lists, and including both positive and null findings in the synthesis.

Certainty Assessment

The certainty of evidence was not formally graded using systems such as GRADE, given the exploratory and heterogeneous nature of the included studies. Instead, confidence in findings was informed by study quality, consistency of results across studies, and plausibility of proposed mechanisms.

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for the Systematic Review: The Digital Spirituality Paradox

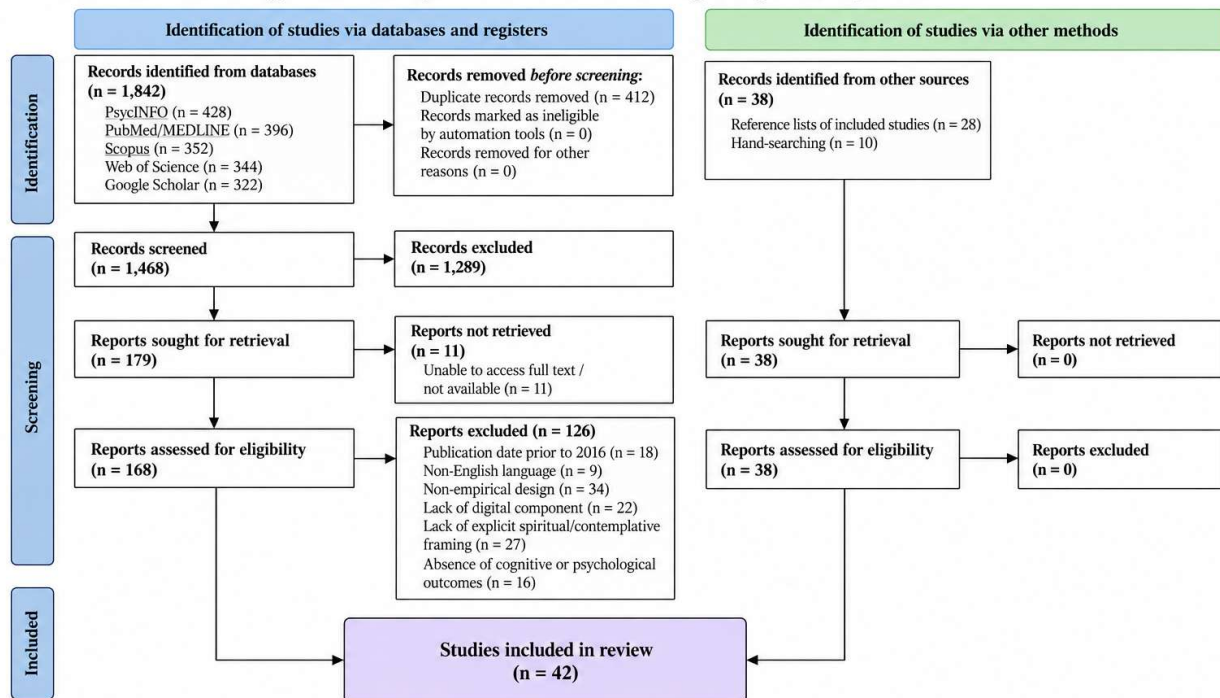


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram illustrating the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies in the systematic review on the cognitive and psychological effects of digitally mediated spiritual and contemplative practices.

Review Of Literature

Digital Spirituality

The increasing integration of digital technology into everyday life has transformed the ways in which individuals access, practice, and experience spirituality. Spiritual and contemplative practices that were traditionally conducted in physical settings, such as meditation centres, religious institutions, spiritual retreats, and community gatherings, are now increasingly available through digital platforms. Mobile applications, online meditation programmes, virtual religious services, podcasts, video-based instruction, and digitally facilitated spiritual communities have expanded opportunities for individuals to engage with spiritual practices irrespective of geographical location. This transformation has given rise to the concept of digital spirituality, which broadly refers to the experience, expression, and practice of spirituality through digital technologies.

Digital spirituality encompasses a diverse range of activities, including online prayer, virtual worship, digital scripture study, guided meditation, mindfulness applications, spiritual self-help programmes, and online communities centred on religious or contemplative beliefs. These practices may serve multiple psychological functions, including emotional regulation, meaning-making, self-reflection, stress management, and the development of a sense of connectedness. However, the movement of spirituality into digital environments also raises questions concerning the quality of engagement, the role of technological mediation, and the cognitive consequences of prolonged digital exposure.

Unlike traditional spiritual practices, digital spiritual engagement occurs within environments characterised by notifications, algorithmic recommendations, multitasking opportunities, and continuous access to information. Consequently, the psychological effects of digital spirituality may depend not only on the content of the practice but also on the way in which individuals interact with the technological environment. The present review therefore examines digital spirituality through a psychological and cognitive framework, focusing on the conditions under which digitally mediated spiritual and contemplative practices may enhance or undermine cognitive well-being.

Conceptualising Cognitive Well-Being

Cognitive well-being refers to the optimal functioning of cognitive processes that support adaptive behaviour, psychological adjustment, and everyday functioning. It involves the capacity to maintain attention, regulate thoughts, process information, make decisions, monitor one's mental states, and respond flexibly to changing circumstances. Within the context of the present review, cognitive well-being is understood as a multidimensional construct involving attention regulation, executive functioning, working memory, cognitive flexibility, self-regulation, reflective awareness, and related psychological processes.

Attention is central to cognitive functioning because it enables individuals to selectively process relevant information while inhibiting distractions. Executive functioning involves higher-order cognitive processes such as inhibitory control, working memory, cognitive flexibility, and goal-directed behaviour. These processes are particularly relevant to digital environments, where individuals are frequently exposed to competing stimuli and interruptions. Working memory supports the temporary maintenance and manipulation of information, while cognitive flexibility enables individuals to shift between tasks, perspectives, or mental strategies.

Mindfulness and contemplative practices have been theoretically associated with improvements in attentional control and self-regulation because they involve the intentional monitoring of present-moment experience. However, these proposed benefits should not be assumed to occur automatically following any form of digital spiritual engagement. The extent to which a practice produces meaningful cognitive benefits may depend on its duration, structure, level of guidance, participant adherence, and the specific cognitive domain being assessed.

A systematic review and meta-analysis by Galante et al. (2021) examined objective cognitive outcomes associated with mindfulness-based programmes in adults. The findings indicated small overall cognitive benefits, with significant effects particularly observed for executive functioning and working memory. Nevertheless, the results also demonstrated that cognitive outcomes varied across domains and study characteristics. This supports the need to examine cognitive well-being as a multidimensional construct rather than treating it as a single outcome.

Theoretical Foundations of Spiritual and Contemplative Practices

Mindfulness and Attentional Regulation

Mindfulness is commonly conceptualised as the intentional, present-moment awareness of experience, accompanied by an attitude of acceptance and reduced judgment. Although mindfulness has roots in Buddhist contemplative traditions, contemporary psychological interventions frequently present it in secularised and therapeutic forms. Mindfulness-based practices generally involve observing thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, or environmental experiences without immediately reacting to them.

From a cognitive perspective, mindfulness may support attentional regulation by encouraging individuals to notice when attention has shifted away from the intended object and gently redirect it. Repeated practice may therefore contribute to the development of attentional monitoring and inhibitory control. These processes are relevant to the present review because digital platforms increasingly deliver mindfulness through guided audio, smartphone applications, online courses, and virtual programmes.

However, the empirical evidence concerning mindfulness and cognitive functioning remains mixed. Im et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of controlled mindfulness-based intervention studies and reported small effects on executive functioning, while finding limited evidence for improvements in attention, working memory, and long-term memory. Similarly, Galante et al. (2021) reported that cognitive effects differed across domains, with benefits for executive functioning and working memory but not consistently across all cognitive outcomes.

These findings suggest that mindfulness may have domain-specific rather than universal cognitive effects. Moreover, digital delivery introduces additional factors, including the quality of audio guidance, the usability of the platform, interruptions, and the extent to which users engage in active practice rather than passive listening.

Meditation, Metacognition, and Reflective Awareness

Meditation is a broad category of contemplative practice that includes focused-attention meditation, open-monitoring meditation, loving-kindness meditation, breath awareness, and other forms of mental training. Different meditation techniques may involve different cognitive

processes. Focused-attention meditation requires maintaining attention on a selected object, whereas open-monitoring meditation involves observing thoughts, emotions, and sensations as they arise.

These practices may contribute to metacognitive awareness, which refers to the ability to recognise and monitor one's own cognitive processes. In the context of digital spirituality, metacognitive awareness may help individuals identify distraction, emotional reactivity, or repetitive thinking during online engagement. Such awareness may support self-regulation and reflective decision-making.

Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between the theoretical potential of meditation and the strength of empirical evidence. Meditation-related cognitive changes may vary according to practice type, duration, participant characteristics, and the outcome measures used. A brief guided meditation session should not be assumed to produce the same cognitive effects as sustained contemplative training.

Liebherr et al. (2024) examined digital mindfulness training and cognitive functioning in a systematic review of 19 studies involving 1,654 participants. Their findings suggested that attention control showed the most consistent potential benefit, followed by executive regulation, memory, and cognitive flexibility. However, the authors also reported that null findings were at least as common as significant improvements across several cognitive outcomes. This highlights the importance of examining specific practice characteristics and avoiding broad claims that digital mindfulness uniformly improves cognition.

Spirituality, Meaning-Making, and Psychological Well-Being

Spirituality is a multidimensional construct that may involve meaning in life, connectedness, transcendence, purpose, and a sense of relationship with something greater than the self. Although spirituality and religion are related, they are not identical. Religion may involve organised beliefs, practices, and institutional traditions, whereas spirituality may be expressed through personal meaning-making, contemplative experience, and existential reflection.

From a psychological perspective, spiritual practices may support well-being by providing frameworks for interpreting life experiences, coping with stress, and developing a sense of purpose. Meaning-making may influence cognitive and emotional processes by helping individuals organise experiences into coherent narratives. Similarly, spiritual reflection may encourage individuals to evaluate personal values, beliefs, and behavioural patterns.

However, the relationship between spirituality and cognitive well-being is not necessarily linear. Spiritual beliefs may be supportive when they promote reflection, emotional balance, and adaptive coping, but certain forms of spiritual engagement may also be associated with guilt, fear, rumination, or rigid interpretations of personal experiences. The present review therefore considers spirituality not simply as a positive resource but as a multidimensional phenomenon whose psychological effects may depend on individual and contextual factors.

Digital Delivery of Mindfulness and Contemplative Practices

Online Mindfulness Interventions

Digital mindfulness interventions have become increasingly common because they offer flexibility, accessibility, and opportunities for self-directed practice. These interventions may be delivered through mobile applications, online courses, websites, videoconferencing platforms, or audio-based programmes. Their content may include breathing exercises, body scans, guided meditation, psychoeducation, and structured mindfulness training.

The accessibility of digital interventions may be particularly relevant for individuals who face geographical, financial, or social barriers to traditional contemplative programmes. Digital platforms can also allow users to practise at personally convenient times, potentially supporting regular engagement. However, accessibility alone does not establish effectiveness.

Alrashdi et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of online mindfulness-based interventions among university students. Their review found small to medium effects on several psychological outcomes, including stress, anxiety, psychological distress, and psychological well-being, particularly when compared with non-active controls. These findings

support the potential value of online mindfulness interventions for psychological well-being, but they do not directly establish improvements in objective cognitive functioning.

This distinction is important for the present review. Psychological well-being, emotion regulation, and cognitive performance are related but distinct constructs. A person may report reduced stress following an online meditation programme without demonstrating measurable improvements in working memory or executive functioning. Accordingly, the present review includes both cognitive and psychological outcomes while maintaining a clear distinction between them.

Digital Mindfulness and Objective Cognitive Outcomes

The cognitive effects of digital mindfulness have been examined in recent empirical research, although the evidence remains heterogeneous. Liebherr et al. (2024) found that digital mindfulness training showed the strongest potential effects for attention control, followed by executive regulation, memory, and cognitive flexibility. However, the review also identified substantial variability in study findings.

The authors noted that different cognitive domains may respond differently to digital mindfulness training. For example, attentional control may be more directly related to the repeated practice of monitoring and redirecting attention, whereas working memory and cognitive flexibility may require longer or more intensive training. This suggests that the duration and structure of digital interventions may influence their cognitive outcomes.

Similarly, Im et al. (2021) reported that mindfulness-based interventions produced small effects on executive functioning but limited evidence for improvements in attention, working memory, and long-term memory. These findings reinforce the importance of considering the specific cognitive domain under investigation.

The available literature therefore suggests that digital mindfulness may have cognitive benefits, but the magnitude and consistency of these effects remain uncertain. The present

systematic review extends this discussion by examining digital mindfulness alongside broader spiritual and contemplative practices, including religious and spiritually oriented activities.

The Role of Engagement Patterns in Digital Spirituality

Active Versus Passive Engagement

One of the central distinctions in the present review is between active and passive engagement with digital spiritual content. Active engagement involves intentional participation in a practice, such as following a guided meditation, engaging in reflective journaling, participating in virtual prayer, or practising mindfulness exercises. Passive engagement may involve watching spiritual videos, scrolling through inspirational content, or listening to spiritual material without deliberate participation.

Active engagement may be more likely to involve sustained attention, reflective awareness, and behavioural participation. Passive engagement, in contrast, may provide emotional comfort or information without necessarily engaging the cognitive processes targeted by contemplative practices.

However, passive engagement should not automatically be considered harmful. Listening to a spiritual podcast while resting, for example, may be meaningful or emotionally supportive. The potential cognitive consequences depend on the purpose of engagement, the level of attention involved, the duration of exposure, and whether the activity displaces more cognitively demanding or personally meaningful activities.

The distinction between active and passive engagement is therefore useful for understanding the Digital Spirituality Paradox. It allows researchers to examine whether the psychological benefits associated with spiritual content depend on intentional participation or may also occur through less effortful forms of digital consumption.

Guided Versus Unguided Practice

Guidance is another important characteristic of digital spiritual engagement. Guided practices provide structured instructions, often through audio recordings, videos, applications, or

virtual facilitators. Unguided practices allow individuals to engage independently, without continuous instruction or external supervision.

Guided practice may support adherence by providing clear instructions and reducing uncertainty about how to perform the activity. It may also help individuals maintain attention and follow a structured sequence of exercises. However, guidance may not always be necessary, particularly for experienced practitioners who have developed established routines.

The effects of guided and unguided practice may also depend on the quality and content of the guidance. A structured, evidence-informed meditation programme may differ substantially from a commercially marketed spiritual video designed primarily to maximise engagement. Thus, the presence of guidance alone does not determine the quality of a digital spiritual intervention.

Structured Versus Fragmented Engagement

Structured digital spiritual engagement involves planned practice with a defined duration, frequency, and objective. Fragmented engagement refers to irregular or interrupted exposure to spiritual content across multiple digital platforms. For example, a person may begin a meditation session but repeatedly check notifications, switch applications, or browse unrelated content.

Fragmented engagement may interfere with sustained attention and reduce the depth of contemplative involvement. It may also create a mismatch between the intended purpose of spiritual practice and the attention demands of the digital environment. However, the specific effects of fragmented engagement require direct empirical investigation.

The present review therefore considers structure and continuity as potentially important moderators of cognitive outcomes. Rather than assuming that all digital spiritual practices are equivalent, it examines whether structured, intentional engagement is associated with more favourable cognitive and psychological outcomes than fragmented or passive consumption.

Digital Platform Characteristics and Cognitive Well-Being

Attention Fragmentation and Digital Distraction

Digital environments frequently contain competing stimuli, including notifications, advertisements, recommendations, and opportunities to switch between activities. Such features may interfere with sustained attention and increase the likelihood of multitasking. These concerns are particularly relevant to digital spiritual practices because contemplative activities often involve maintaining attention on a chosen object or experience.

When individuals engage in spiritual practice through a device that also provides access to social media, entertainment, and communication platforms, the practice may be interrupted by unrelated digital stimuli. This may reduce the continuity of attention and limit the opportunity for reflective engagement.

Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between the effects of the digital platform and the effects of the spiritual practice itself. A reduction in attention may arise from interruptions or multitasking rather than from the contemplative content. Consequently, studies should ideally examine platform characteristics, practice adherence, and cognitive outcomes separately.

Algorithmic Exposure and Commercialisation

Digital platforms frequently use recommendation systems to determine which content users encounter. In spiritual and contemplative contexts, algorithmic recommendations may increase access to relevant content and help users discover new practices. However, they may also encourage prolonged consumption, repetitive exposure, or engagement with increasingly emotionally stimulating material.

Commercialisation may further influence the design and delivery of digital spiritual content. Applications may use reminders, rewards, streaks, notifications, and subscription-based features to encourage continued use. Although these features may support adherence, they may also encourage users to prioritise frequency of engagement over the quality or purpose of the practice.

The psychological implications of algorithmic exposure and commercialisation remain important areas for investigation. In particular, future research should examine whether

engagement-promoting platform features enhance consistent contemplative practice or contribute to compulsive consumption and distraction.

Digital Spirituality, Emotion Regulation, and Self-Regulation

Emotion regulation refers to the processes through which individuals influence the intensity, duration, and expression of emotional experiences. Self-regulation involves the ability to monitor and modify thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in accordance with personal goals. Both constructs are relevant to digital spirituality because many contemplative practices involve observing internal experiences, reducing reactivity, and cultivating intentional responses.

Mindfulness-based practices may support emotion regulation by encouraging individuals to observe thoughts and emotions without immediately reacting to them. Spiritual practices may additionally provide meaning, acceptance, or a framework for coping with difficult experiences. These processes may indirectly support cognitive functioning by reducing emotional interference and improving attentional control.

However, emotional benefits should not be equated with cognitive improvements. Reduced anxiety or increased subjective well-being may occur without measurable changes in executive functioning or working memory. For this reason, the present review examines emotion regulation and self-regulation as psychological outcomes while also considering their potential relationship with cognitive functioning.

A systematic review by Macrynika et al. (2024) examined psychological processes associated with mindfulness applications. The review focused on processes that may contribute to symptom reduction and psychological change following mindfulness practice. Such research is relevant to the present review because it highlights the importance of examining mechanisms rather than relying only on broad outcome measures.

Social and Communal Dimensions of Online Spiritual Practice

Spirituality is often practised within social and communal contexts. Religious services, meditation groups, spiritual discussions, and contemplative communities may provide social

support, shared meaning, accountability, and a sense of belonging. Digital technologies have expanded opportunities for individuals to participate in such communities through videoconferencing, online discussion groups, livestreamed worship, and social platforms.

Communal engagement may support psychological well-being by reducing perceived isolation and providing opportunities for shared reflection. It may also encourage regular participation and reinforce personal commitment to spiritual practices. However, online communities may differ from face-to-face communities in terms of interaction quality, emotional closeness, and continuity.

The cognitive consequences of online spiritual communities may therefore depend on the degree of active participation and interpersonal connection. A synchronous group meditation session may involve attention, participation, and social interaction, whereas passive viewing of a livestream may involve less direct engagement. The present review considers these distinctions in examining the relationship between digital spirituality and cognitive well-being.

The Digital Spirituality Paradox

The Digital Spirituality Paradox refers to the possibility that the same digital environment may facilitate beneficial spiritual engagement while also creating conditions that undermine cognitive well-being. This paradox arises because digital technology can simultaneously increase accessibility to contemplative practices and introduce distractions, fragmented attention, and engagement pressures.

On one hand, digital spiritual practices may promote attentional control, self-regulation, reflective awareness, and psychological well-being. These potential benefits are supported by research on mindfulness-based interventions and digital mindfulness training. On the other hand, digital environments may encourage passive consumption, multitasking, and prolonged exposure to stimulating content, potentially reducing the depth of engagement.

The paradox is therefore not simply a comparison between spirituality and technology. Rather, it concerns the interaction between spiritual practice characteristics and the design of digital environments. The same meditation application, for example, may support focused practice

when used intentionally but contribute to fragmented engagement when users are repeatedly interrupted or encouraged to consume additional content.

The present systematic review examines this interaction by organising the literature according to practice type, engagement pattern, digital context, and cognitive or psychological outcomes. This approach allows the review to identify not only whether digital spiritual practices are associated with positive or negative outcomes, but also the conditions under which these outcomes may occur.

Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of empirical evidence on digital contemplative interventions, several critical gaps remain. First, the majority of studies ($n = 28$ of 42) focused exclusively on secular mindfulness apps or web-based MBSR/MBCT programs, with limited representation of explicitly religious or spiritually diverse practices (e.g., Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Indigenous contemplative traditions). This limits generalizability across cultural and faith contexts and obscures potential differences in cognitive mechanisms between secular and spiritually framed interventions.

Second, most studies employed short-term designs (4–8 weeks) with immediate post-intervention assessments, leaving the long-term sustainability of cognitive gains and the effects of extended or lifelong digital spiritual practice largely unexamined. Only three studies included follow-up assessments beyond 3 months, and none examined outcomes beyond 12 months (Liu et al., 2024; Wang & Chen, 2024; Zainal & Newman, 2024).

Third, there is a paucity of research directly comparing different digital modalities (e.g., app-based vs. videoconference vs. social media), engagement patterns (active vs. passive, guided vs. unguided), or platform-design features (e.g., notification frequency, algorithmic personalization, gamification). Without such comparisons, it remains unclear which specific design elements enhance versus undermine cognitive well-being.

Fourth, individual-difference moderators (e.g., baseline cognitive functioning, trait mindfulness, psychological vulnerability, spiritual orientation, age, cultural background) were examined in only 12 of 42 studies, limiting understanding of for whom and under what personal

conditions digital spiritual practices are most beneficial or potentially harmful (Kuss & Griffiths, 2023; Wang & Chen, 2024).

Fifth, few studies employed preregistered protocols, active control conditions, or validated cognitive measures with established psychometric properties, raising concerns about risk of bias, placebo effects, and measurement validity (Liebherr et al., 2024; Zainal & Newman, 2024). Finally, no studies to date have examined the neural or physiological correlates of digital spiritual practice in relation to cognitive outcomes, leaving mechanistic pathways largely speculative.

Future Directions

Future research should prioritize the following directions to advance understanding of the Digital Spirituality Paradox. First, preregistered randomized controlled trials with active control conditions and longer follow-up periods (6–24 months) are needed to establish causal effects, sustainability, and potential adverse outcomes of digital spiritual practice. Second, studies should employ validated, multidimensional cognitive batteries (e.g., attention networks test, n-back, Stroop, flanker tasks) alongside psychological and spiritual well-being measures to enable cross-study comparison and meta-analysis. Third, research should directly compare different digital modalities (app-based, videoconference, social media), engagement patterns (active vs. passive, guided vs. unguided), and platform-design features (notification frequency, algorithmic personalization, gamification) to identify optimal configurations for cognitive well-being.

Fourth, greater attention to individual-difference moderators (baseline cognitive functioning, trait mindfulness, psychological vulnerability, spiritual orientation, age, cultural background) is essential to develop personalized recommendations and adaptive interventions. Fifth, culturally diverse samples and explicitly non-Western spiritual traditions (e.g., Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Indigenous contemplative practices) should be included to enhance generalizability and decolonize the evidence base. Sixth, mixed-methods and qualitative studies are needed to elucidate user experiences, meanings, and mechanisms underlying cognitive changes in digital spiritual contexts. Finally, interdisciplinary collaboration among psychologists, contemplative scholars, human–computer interaction researchers, and platform designers is critical to develop ethically grounded, cognitively supportive digital spiritual technologies.

Discussion

The present systematic review was undertaken to examine the relationship between digitally mediated spiritual and contemplative practices and cognitive well-being. Specifically, the review focused on attention, concentration, working memory, executive functioning, cognitive flexibility, emotion regulation, self-regulation, and reflective awareness. The central premise of the review was that digital spirituality may produce both beneficial and potentially adverse psychological consequences depending on the nature of the practice and the conditions under which it is performed.

The literature reviewed provides a basis for understanding digital spirituality as a multidimensional phenomenon rather than a uniformly positive or negative form of engagement. Research on mindfulness-based interventions suggests that contemplative practices may support selected aspects of cognitive functioning, particularly executive functioning and working memory, although effects are generally modest and vary across cognitive domains (Galante et al., 2021; Im et al., 2021). Research on digital mindfulness further suggests that attention control may be an important area of potential benefit, while findings concerning memory and cognitive flexibility remain less consistent (Liebherr et al., 2024).

These findings are relevant to the Digital Spirituality Paradox because they suggest that the cognitive consequences of digital spiritual practice cannot be understood solely through the presence or absence of spiritual content. Instead, the characteristics of the practice, the degree of intentional engagement, and the surrounding digital environment may all influence outcomes.

Important: This overview should be revised after you have verified the actual findings of your included studies. A systematic-review discussion must distinguish what your included studies found from what previous literature suggests.

Digital Spiritual Practice and Cognitive Enhancement

One of the major implications of the existing literature is that digitally mediated contemplative practices may support selected cognitive processes. Mindfulness-based practices involve maintaining attention on present-moment experience, monitoring distractions, and

returning attention to a chosen object. These processes provide a theoretical basis for possible improvements in attentional control and executive regulation.

Galante et al. (2021) reported that mindfulness-based programmes were associated with small improvements in executive functioning and working memory in adults. These findings suggest that contemplative practice may influence cognitive processes involved in goal-directed behaviour, information maintenance, and mental control. However, the observed effects were not universal across all cognitive domains.

Similarly, Im et al. (2021) found small effects on executive functioning but limited evidence for improvements in attention, working memory, and long-term memory. This indicates that the relationship between mindfulness and cognition may be domain-specific. Executive functioning may be particularly relevant because it involves monitoring behaviour, inhibiting inappropriate responses, and maintaining goal-directed activity.

Digital delivery may make these practices more accessible and convenient. Mobile applications and online programmes can provide repeated opportunities for guided meditation and structured practice. However, accessibility does not necessarily guarantee cognitive improvement. The effectiveness of digital delivery may depend on adherence, intervention quality, duration, and the degree to which users actively participate.

Thus, the literature supports the potential of digital contemplative practices as tools for cognitive enhancement, but it does not justify the conclusion that all forms of digital spirituality improve cognition.

Attention Regulation as a Central Mechanism

Attention regulation appears to be one of the most relevant mechanisms linking contemplative practice with cognitive well-being. Mindfulness involves repeatedly noticing when attention has shifted and redirecting it toward present-moment experience. This process may strengthen attentional monitoring and reduce automatic reactivity to distracting thoughts.

Liebherr et al. (2024) identified attention control as an important area of potential benefit in digital mindfulness research. This finding is particularly relevant to digital spirituality because digital platforms may both support and interfere with attentional regulation.

A structured meditation application, for example, may provide a focused environment that encourages sustained attention. In contrast, a user who repeatedly switches between spiritual content, notifications, and unrelated digital activities may experience a more fragmented form of engagement. The difference lies not only in the content but also in the conditions under which the practice is performed.

Nevertheless, the relationship between digital engagement and attention should be interpreted cautiously. Not all interruptions necessarily produce lasting cognitive impairment, and the available literature does not establish that passive spiritual content consumption directly causes reduced sustained attention. More research is needed to determine whether different forms of digital spiritual engagement produce measurable differences in attentional performance.

Executive Functioning, Working Memory, and Cognitive Flexibility

Executive functioning is particularly relevant to the present review because it supports planning, inhibitory control, decision-making, and goal-directed behaviour. Working memory enables the temporary maintenance and manipulation of information, while cognitive flexibility allows individuals to adapt their thinking and behaviour in response to changing demands.

The existing mindfulness literature suggests that executive functioning and working memory may show modest improvements following contemplative training (Galante et al., 2021; Im et al., 2021). However, these effects should not be generalised to every digital spiritual practice.

Digital mindfulness research also indicates variability across cognitive domains (Liebherr et al., 2024). This suggests that the effects of digital contemplative practice may depend on the specific cognitive processes involved in the intervention. For instance, focused-attention meditation may have a closer theoretical relationship with attentional control than with long-term memory.

The present review's emphasis on cognitive flexibility and inhibitory control is therefore valuable because it allows for a more detailed examination of cognitive functioning. However, the discussion of these domains should ultimately be based on the actual cognitive measures used in the included studies.

Emotion Regulation and Psychological Well-Being

Emotion regulation represents an important psychological pathway through which digital spiritual practices may contribute to well-being. Mindfulness-based practices encourage individuals to observe thoughts and emotions without immediately reacting to them. Spiritual practices may also provide frameworks for meaning-making, acceptance, and coping with difficult experiences.

Research on online mindfulness interventions has reported improvements in psychological outcomes, including stress, anxiety, and psychological well-being (Alrashdi et al., 2024). These findings suggest that digitally delivered contemplative practices may be useful for supporting psychological adjustment.

However, psychological well-being and cognitive functioning are related but distinct constructs. A reduction in perceived stress does not necessarily indicate improved working memory or executive functioning. Similarly, increased spiritual well-being does not automatically establish enhanced cognitive performance.

The present review is therefore strengthened by including both psychological and cognitive outcomes while maintaining a distinction between them. This approach may help identify whether the benefits of digital spirituality are primarily emotional, cognitive, or evident across both domains.

Active, Guided, and Structured Engagement

The distinction between active and passive engagement is central to the Digital Spirituality Paradox. Active engagement involves intentional participation in a practice, whereas passive engagement involves consuming spiritual content with relatively little deliberate participation.

Active, guided, and structured practices may provide clearer opportunities for attentional monitoring and self-regulation. Guided meditation, for example, may help users maintain focus and follow a consistent sequence of exercises. Structured practice may also support regularity and reduce uncertainty about how to engage.

However, the available literature does not establish that active engagement is always superior to passive engagement. Passive activities may still provide emotional comfort, spiritual meaning, or a sense of connection. Similarly, unguided practice may be effective for individuals who have prior meditation experience.

Consequently, engagement characteristics should be interpreted as potential moderators rather than fixed determinants of cognitive outcomes. Future studies should directly compare guided and unguided practice, active and passive consumption, and structured versus fragmented digital engagement.

Digital Platform Design and the Potential for Cognitive Undermining

The Digital Spirituality Paradox also concerns the possibility that digital platforms may interfere with the cognitive benefits of spiritual practice. Notifications, multitasking, algorithmic recommendations, and commercial engagement features may create distractions that compete with contemplative attention.

Theoretically, these features may reduce the continuity of practice and encourage users to shift attention between unrelated activities. However, the evidence available for this discussion does not establish that algorithmic exposure or commercialisation directly causes cognitive impairment in digital spiritual users.

It is therefore important to distinguish between a plausible mechanism and an empirically demonstrated effect. Digital distraction may be relevant to cognitive well-being, but claims concerning reduced sustained attention, cognitive fatigue, or rumination should be supported by studies that directly assess these outcomes.

This distinction is particularly important because the present review aims to examine both beneficial and potentially harmful forms of digital spiritual engagement. The existence of a plausible risk does not establish that the risk occurs consistently across users or platforms.

Theoretical Interpretation of the Digital Spirituality Paradox

The findings and literature reviewed can be understood through an interactional perspective in which cognitive outcomes emerge from the relationship between practice characteristics, individual factors, and digital context.

From this perspective, digital spirituality may support cognitive well-being when it involves intentional participation, appropriate guidance, meaningful reflection, and sufficient continuity. Conversely, the same digital environment may become less beneficial when engagement is fragmented, excessively passive, or driven primarily by external digital stimuli.

This interpretation is consistent with the broader literature on mindfulness and cognitive functioning, which suggests that contemplative practices may produce modest and domain-specific effects rather than universal cognitive enhancement (Galante et al., 2021; Im et al., 2021).

However, the interactional model should be treated as a conceptual framework rather than a confirmed causal model. The available evidence does not yet establish precisely how platform design, spiritual meaning, engagement intensity, and individual predispositions interact to determine cognitive outcomes.

Implications for Psychology and Spirituality

The present review has implications for both psychological research and the development of digital spiritual interventions. From a psychological perspective, it highlights the importance of distinguishing between cognitive performance and subjective psychological well-being. Future research should use validated measures of attention, executive functioning, working memory, emotion regulation, and spiritual well-being.

From a spirituality perspective, the review suggests that digital delivery may alter the context in which spiritual practices are experienced. Spirituality may be expressed through

individual reflection, communal participation, religious instruction, or contemplative exercises, and these forms of engagement may not have identical psychological consequences.

For developers of digital spiritual interventions, the literature suggests the importance of creating environments that support intentional practice without unnecessarily encouraging distraction or excessive engagement. However, specific design recommendations should be tested empirically rather than assumed to be effective.

Strengths and Limitations of the Review

A strength of the present review is its interdisciplinary focus on psychology and spirituality. By examining digitally mediated mindfulness, meditation, religious practice, contemplative communities, and spiritually oriented interventions, the review aims to address a broader research area than digital mindfulness alone.

Another strength is the focus on both cognitive and psychological outcomes. This allows the review to examine attention, executive functioning, and working memory alongside emotion regulation, self-regulation, and spiritual well-being.

The review also considers potential moderating factors, including practice type, guidance, engagement pattern, and digital context. This thematic approach may help identify important differences between forms of digital spiritual engagement.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the anticipated heterogeneity of interventions, study designs, samples, and outcome measures limits the comparability of findings. Second, the inclusion of observational studies means that associations cannot necessarily be interpreted as causal effects. Third, restricting the review to English-language peer-reviewed journal articles may introduce language and publication bias. Fourth, the exclusion of studies reporting only physiological or neural outcomes limits the scope of the findings.

Finally, the narrative synthesis approach does not provide a pooled estimate of effect size. Therefore, the review cannot establish the overall magnitude of cognitive benefits or harms across all digital spiritual practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should examine the cognitive effects of digital spirituality using stronger methodological designs. Randomized controlled trials with adequate sample sizes, preregistered protocols, and validated cognitive measures would help clarify causal relationships.

Longitudinal research is also needed to determine whether any cognitive benefits associated with digital spiritual practice are sustained over time. Studies should examine whether changes in attention, executive functioning, and emotion regulation persist after the intervention ends.

Direct comparisons between different forms of digital spiritual engagement would be particularly valuable. These may include guided versus unguided practice, active versus passive consumption, structured versus fragmented engagement, and individual versus communal digital spirituality.

Future studies should also investigate the role of individual differences, including baseline cognitive functioning, trait mindfulness, prior spiritual experience, motivation, and digital-use habits. Such factors may influence the extent to which individuals benefit from or are negatively affected by digital spiritual engagement.

Finally, culturally diverse research is necessary to ensure that findings are not limited to Western or secularised interpretations of spirituality. Digital spirituality may be experienced differently across religious traditions, cultural contexts, and communities.

To conclude, the current literature shows that digital spiritual and contemplative practices may support selected aspects of cognitive and psychological well-being, particularly attentional regulation, executive functioning, emotion regulation, and reflective awareness. However, these benefits are not universal, and the evidence remains heterogeneous.

The Digital Spirituality Paradox highlights the possibility that digital platforms can simultaneously expand access to meaningful spiritual practices and introduce conditions that may interfere with sustained attention and intentional engagement. The cognitive consequences of

digital spirituality therefore appear to require consideration of practice characteristics, user engagement, and digital context.

The present review contributes to this discussion by bringing together cognitive and psychological perspectives within a psychology-and-spirituality framework. Nevertheless, stronger empirical research is needed to determine when digital spiritual practice enhances cognitive well-being and when it may undermine it

Limitations

Several limitations of the included evidence and the review process warrant acknowledgment. First, the majority of studies employed short-term designs with immediate post-intervention assessments, limiting conclusions about long-term sustainability and potential adverse effects of extended digital spiritual practice. Second, risk of bias was elevated in many studies due to reliance on waitlist controls, self-report outcomes, and lack of preregistration, raising concerns about placebo effects and selective reporting. Third, the exclusion of non-English publications and grey literature may have introduced language and publication bias, although efforts were made to minimize this through comprehensive database searching and reference-list screening. Fourth, the narrative synthesis approach, while appropriate given study heterogeneity, precludes quantitative estimation of overall effect sizes or formal moderator analyses. Finally, the review's focus on psychology and spirituality may have excluded relevant studies from adjacent fields (e.g., human–computer interaction, religious studies, digital health) that employ different terminologies or outcome frameworks.

Conclusion

The present systematic review examined the cognitive and psychological implications of digitally mediated spiritual and contemplative practices, with particular emphasis on attention, concentration, working memory, executive functioning, cognitive flexibility, emotion regulation, self-regulation, and reflective awareness. The review was guided by the Digital Spirituality Paradox, which highlights the possibility that digital environments may simultaneously facilitate meaningful spiritual engagement and introduce conditions that interfere with cognitive well-being.

The existing literature suggests that digitally delivered mindfulness and contemplative practices may offer potential benefits for selected aspects of cognitive and psychological functioning. These include attentional regulation, executive functioning, emotional balance, and self-regulatory processes. However, the available evidence does not support the assumption that all forms of digital spiritual engagement produce uniform or lasting cognitive benefits. Differences in practice characteristics, engagement patterns, intervention structure, and individual experiences may influence outcomes.

The review further highlights the importance of distinguishing between intentional spiritual practice and passive digital consumption. Guided, structured, and meaningful engagement may provide opportunities for focused attention and reflective awareness, whereas fragmented or excessively distracting digital environments may interfere with the continuity of contemplative practice. Nevertheless, these distinctions should be understood as potential explanatory factors rather than universally established causal relationships.

Overall, digital spirituality should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon whose cognitive consequences depend on the interaction between spiritual practice, individual intentionality, psychological processes, and digital-platform characteristics. The integration of spirituality and digital technology therefore requires a balanced approach that recognises both its potential benefits and its limitations.

Future research should employ rigorous experimental and longitudinal designs, validated cognitive and spiritual well-being measures, preregistered protocols, and culturally diverse samples. Direct comparisons between guided, unguided, communal, and passive forms of digital spiritual engagement would be particularly valuable in clarifying the conditions under which digital spirituality enhances or undermines cognitive well-being.

In conclusion, digital spiritual practice represents a promising but complex area of psychological research. Its potential contribution to cognitive well-being lies not simply in the availability of spiritual content online, but in the quality, purpose, and context of engagement. A more nuanced understanding of this relationship may contribute to the development of psychologically informed and meaningful digital spiritual practices.

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Generative AI Use Statement

Generative artificial intelligence was used during the preparation of this manuscript solely for language-related assistance, including grammar correction, language refinement, editing for clarity, and improvement of academic phrasing. GPT-5.6 Luna (OpenAI) was used for these language-support functions. The authors retained full responsibility for the study design, literature selection, interpretation of findings, scientific content, accuracy of the manuscript, and final decisions regarding the submitted text. Generative AI was not used to generate, fabricate, or independently determine study findings, data, references, or conclusions.

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