

THE DIGITAL HINDU SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM: THE JUSTIFICATION STRATEGIES OF SADHGURU AND SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

Vatsal Tewari
Indian School of Business, Hyderabad

Arpita Mishra
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Ritika Choudhary
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

/// Introduction

Contemporary global spirituality is a complex nexus where ancient religious traditions intersect with the pervasive forces of global capitalism and the transformative influence of digital technologies. The present article investigates this intersection through the concept of the “Digital Hindu Spirit of Capitalism” (DHSC), with a focus on two highly influential global figures whose teachings draw significantly from Hindu traditions: Sadhguru (founder of the Isha Foundation) and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (founder of the Art of Living). To understand their emergence and appeal, it is first crucial to recognise Hinduism not as a monolithic entity but rather as a diverse and ancient “family of religious cultures” (Flood 2014; Frazier 2014) originating from the Indian subcontinent. Within this vast family, streams that are particularly relevant to these figures include Vedānta, especially its modern Neo-Vedānta interpretations, which emphasise universalism and

experiential knowledge (Hatcher 2016); yoga, which has evolved into globally prominent modern forms focusing on well-being, technique, and stress reduction (De Michelis 2004; Jacobsen 2014); and Shaivism, with its rich mythology, symbolism, and transformative practices (Flood 2004), which figures such as Sadhguru explicitly draw upon.

Sadhguru and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar operate within a lineage of modern guru (Warrier 2005) movements that gained prominence in the nineteenth century (Dobe, as cited in Hatcher 2016). These movements typically adapt traditional concepts derived from Hindu streams for a globalised world shaped by modernity, including phenomena such as the “turn to the self” (Taylor 2007) and the rise of a competitive “spiritual marketplace” (Heelas & Woodhead 2005). Spiritual teachings, practices, and experiences often undergo commodification within this marketplace and are packaged, marketed, and sold. The process is significantly amplified and shaped by the dynamics of “digital religion” (Campbell 2012; see also Zeiler 2018), where the architecture of “platform capitalism” (Srnicek 2017) and the norms of influencer culture (Abidin 2016) enable unprecedented global reach and community building, but also enmesh spiritual activities in commercial logics and necessitate ongoing justification.

The concept of DHSC builds upon the foundational works on the spirit of capitalism (Weber 1930 [1904–1905]; Boltanski & Chiapello 2005) and draws specific inspiration from contemporary analyses. We have particularly drawn on Huberman’s (2022) articulation of the “spirit of digital capitalism,” incorporating its insights on techno-solutionist certainty, inherent Janus-faced contradictions (e.g., competition/collaboration, liberation/surveillance), the strategic framing of “community,” and the pervasive ideology of “convenience.” Furthermore, we engage more broadly with critiques of technological “solutionism” (Nachtwey & Seidl 2023) and consider findings from literature examining the fusion of Hindu-adjacent concepts with the “new spirit of capitalism” in spiritual self-improvement contexts. Within this theoretical landscape, DHSC is conceptualised not as a radically distinct framework but as a specific *contextual manifestation*. It refers to the particular constellation of values, justifications, and ideological tensions arising when the general dynamics of digital platform capitalism (including datafication, algorithmic visibility, influencer norms, techno-*seva* (monetisation as spiritual service through technology), and the emphasis on measurable impact (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005; Campbell 2012; Zeiler 2021) intersect with, and are legitimised through, adapted concepts, narratives, and authority structures drawn explicitly from the diverse family of Hindu traditions.

These adapted elements prominently include notions of *seva* (selfless service), karma, guru authority, and the packaging of yogic or meditative techniques as potent “spiritual technologies.” DHSC thus highlights a reciprocal shaping process: how specific Hindu elements are selectively employed to morally ground and energise digital capitalist ventures, and conversely, how the affordances and logics of digital platforms reshape the understanding and practice of these traditions. Consequently, empirically delineating the operational features and legitimating mechanisms of this emergent DHSC requires a precise analysis of the justificatory strategies these figures employ to navigate the tensions between spiritual tradition and digital capitalism.

Building upon Max Weber’s (1930 [1904–1905]) seminal work on the relationship between religious ethics and capitalism, and drawing insights from Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2005) analysis of the “spirit of capitalism,” which requires moral justifications drawn from the surrounding culture to maintain legitimacy, the present study employs Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) Orders of Worth framework. This framework allows for systematic analysis of the multiple, potentially conflicting logics (e.g., market, inspired, civic, projective) that actors mobilise to justify their actions, particularly when navigating the tensions inherent in the DHSC: the complex intertwining of spiritual aspirations with commercial enterprise, digital mediation, and global influence.

By applying a qualitative analysis methodology to the primary websites of Sadhguru and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (<https://isha.sadhguru.org/in/en>, <https://artofliving.org/in-en>, <https://gurudev.artofliving.org>) and selected, publicly available video content (including interviews and responses to controversy), this article seeks to address two primary research questions concerning the large-scale, digitally mediated, politically aligned, and commercially engaged spiritual enterprises of these individuals:

RQ1: What are the key capitalistic practices embedded in the digital presence and organisational activities of Sadhguru and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar?

RQ2: How do Sadhguru and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar mobilise distinct justificatory strategies and Orders of Worth (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) to legitimise these capitalistic practices and navigate the characteristic tensions of the DHSC?

By comparing the justificatory discourses of these two prominent figures through the lens of Orders of Worth, this study aims to illuminate the

specific ways in which contemporary spiritual leaders rooted in Hindu traditions operate within and legitimise their engagement with global capitalism and digital media, and thereby to contribute to a deeper understanding of the DHSC phenomenon.

/// Literature Review: Hinduism and Its Contemporary Forms

Scholars have long grappled with a definition of Hinduism, moving from attempts at unification towards acknowledging its inherent diversity and complexity, which is often characterised by shared concepts, ritual grammars, texts, and practices that create an interconnected religious landscape rather than a single bounded religion (Stietencron 1997; Frazier 2014; Hatcher 2016). Such complexity makes simplistic definitions difficult and necessitates understanding the structure of Hinduism through metaphors such as that of a “banyan tree” (Frazier 2014) or “network” (Prasad 2016: 16). Understanding contemporary global spiritual movements requires navigating this diversity, recognising recurring thematic structures, such as shared Indic cosmology (karma, reincarnation), diverse textual traditions (Vedas, Epics, Purāṇas, etc.), specific spiritual techniques (yoga, meditation, Tantra), common ritual patterns (*pūjā*, *samskāra*), concepts of divine embodiment (*mūrti*, *avatāra*), and intellectual habits integrating plurality and internal questioning (Frazier 2014).

Within this broad family, several streams are particularly pertinent to the modern spiritual figures examined in this study: Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (SSR) and Sadhguru. Vedānta, particularly the non-dualist school of Advaita Vedānta attributed to Śaṅkara, represents a major philosophical tradition (Jnana Yoga) focused on the identity of the individual soul (*ātman*) and ultimate reality (*brahman*) (Lawrence 2011: 146; Prasad 2016: 27). Its modern interpretation as Neo-Vedānta, which became prominent from the nineteenth century onwards through figures such as Swami Vivekananda (Frazier 2014; Sen 2016: 72; Dobe 2016: 163), often emphasises universal values, experiential knowledge, synthesis with science, and social engagement (Halbfass 1988). This resonates conceptually with SSR’s adaptation of Vedāntic ideas for a global audience through a reported emphasis on knowledge, oneness, and universal values (Sen 2016). While Yoga encompasses diverse paths within Hindu traditions – including classical Pātañjala Yoga – focused on mind-cessation (Malinar 2011: 61; Williamson 2016: 202), it has gained global prominence in a modern form that often emphasises

physical postures (*asana*), breathing techniques (*pranayama*), meditation (*dhyaana*), and methods, such as Kriya Yoga, aimed at personal well-being, stress reduction, and experiential transformation (Williamson 2016: 201, 210). This “Modern Yoga” (De Michelis 2004, as cited in Williamson 2016: 181) exists in a complex relationship with traditional goals, such as liberation (*kaivalya* or *mokṣa*), versus modern therapeutic or self-improvement aims (Williamson 2016: 210). Yoga’s roots also intertwine with ascetic traditions (Khandelwal 2016) and potentially Tantric influences emphasising the subtle body (*kuṇḍalinī*, *chakras*) (Williamson 2016: 182). Shaivism, a major devotional and philosophical stream centred on the deity Shiva, encompasses a vast range of traditions, from pan-Indian temple worship and pilgrimage (Prasad 2016) to sophisticated philosophical schools (Kashmir Shaivism) and esoteric Tantric iconography (Goodall & Isaacson 2011: 129; Lawrence 2011). Its rich mythology (e.g., Śiva as Adiyogi or original yogi), symbolism (*liṅga*, Naṭarāja), and emphasis on transformative experience provide a deep wellspring for contemporary interpretations (Flood 2004). Sadhguru, for instance, explicitly draws upon Shaivite narratives (Adiyogi) and symbolism, integrating elements potentially linked to devotional (*bhakti*), yogic, and Tantric currents within Shaivism.

/// The Rise of Modern Gurus

Figures such as SSR and Sadhguru, who often emerge from the aforementioned Hindu streams, frequently blend traditional teachings (Vedānta, Yoga, Tantra) with modern concerns, such as psychology, science, personal development, social reform, environmentalism, and universalism, to create large, often transnational organisations (Warrier 2005: 1; Lucia 2014; Kim 2016; Williamson 2016: 188; Copeman et al. 2023). Figures such as Ram-mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, and Paramahansa Yogananda pioneered aspects of this model, adapting Hindu ideas for both Indian and global audiences in response to colonialism and modernity (Dobe 2016: 163; Williamson 2016: 189–191). SSR and Sadhguru represent contemporary manifestations of this lineage, operating as influential global spiritual leaders whose authority and appeal are built on interpretations of Indic traditions tailored for modern seekers (Dobe 2016: 165; Pennington 2016: 42).

The space in which modern gurus act has been veritably shaped by key facets of modernity. Globalisation has interconnected cultures and economies, while trends like reflexive individualism, the “turn to the self,” and the rise of a “therapeutic culture” have shifted focus towards

personal experience, well-being, and self-improvement (Taylor 2007; Heelas & Woodhead 2005). Debates around secularisation, disenchantment, and re-enchantment highlight how traditional religious authority has waned in some areas, creating space for new forms of spirituality that are often detached from institutional religion (Hatcher 2016). Furthermore, the irreversible integration of digital technology into nearly every aspect of life fundamentally alters human existence, social structures, and potentially even cognitive processes and empathy (Bingaman 2023: 2, 8–9). These modern conditions create fertile ground for spiritualities such as those offered by SSR and Sadhguru, which emphasise personal experience, tangible improvements in health, stress reduction (Bingaman 2023: 6), practical techniques, and universal applicability, while often leveraging technology and media to reach global audiences (DeNapoli 2017; Hatcher, 2016).

These socio-cultural shifts, coupled with economic liberalisation, particularly in a context such as that of India, contribute to the formation of a “spiritual marketplace,” where diverse spiritual options compete for adherents and often resemble commodities (Heelas & Woodhead 2005). This leads to the commodification of spirituality, where teachings (yoga classes, meditation courses), practices (initiation into techniques), experiences (retreats), and even enlightenment are packaged, branded, marketed, and sold through sometimes sophisticated organisational structures and entrepreneurial strategies (Pennington 2016; Williamson 2016: 190) that are increasingly shaped by state ideologies and specific political-economic conditions. The phenomenon contrasts sharply with idealised traditional models, such as the non-commercial guru-*shishya* relationship, which is focused primarily on liberation (*mokṣa*) and detachment (*vairāgya*) rather than worldly success or packaged well-being (Hausner 2007: 119; Khandelwal 2016: 198). While traditional renunciants (*sādhus*) also navigate complex social and economic relationships involving patronage and exchange (DeNapoli 2017; Hausner 2007: 78; Khandelwal 2016: 198), the scale, logic, and explicit marketing of commodification in the contemporary spiritual marketplace exemplified by the global yoga industry (Williamson 2016: 191) and pilgrimage tourism (Pennington 2016: 36) represent a significant shift.

/// The Political Economy of Spirituality: Hindutva and Crony Capitalism

The emergence and extraordinary success of the large-scale enterprises led by Sadhguru and SSR cannot be fully understood by analysing the “spir-

itual marketplace” (Heelas & Woodhead 2005) in isolation. This market should be conceptualised not as an impartial arena for competition but rather as a field of practice that is deeply structured by and integrated with the dominant politico-economic order of contemporary India. The formation is increasingly defined by two interconnected forces: the ideological hegemony of Hindutva and the structural dynamics of crony capitalism.

The transition of Hindu nationalist movements from the cultural fringe to the centre of political power has reshaped India’s patron–client dynamics, creating a political and economic environment conducive to ideologically aligned enterprises. The shift was the result of a long-term strategy of constructing a parallel public sphere, an endeavour Hansen identifies as the core of the Sangh Parivar’s project to remould Indian public culture (Hansen 1999: 4). The strategy was institutionalised through organisations such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), which was explicitly designed to bring diverse Hindu sects and gurus into the Sangh’s fold, creating an interdependent alliance of political patronage and spiritual legitimacy (Kanungo 2019: 121). Such long-term organisational work has, in the contemporary era, accelerated into a system of “national-populist” crony capitalism, where commercial success is deeply intertwined with political patronage (Jaffrelot 2021). Within this formation, the networks through which patronage and legitimacy flow are not abstract but material and technological. As Brian Larkin argues, infrastructures are the built networks that facilitate and shape the circulation of goods, people, and ideas, thereby forming the very architecture of political life (Larkin 2013: 328). The large-scale spiritual and commercial organisations led by figures such as Sadhguru and SSR operate and thrive within this ecosystem by building and controlling their own vast infrastructures, both digital (apps, social media networks, websites) and physical (ashrams, global events). These infrastructures serve as modern conduits for a patron–client relationship in which privileged access and the appearance of legitimacy are exchanged and rapid expansion under political protection is made possible. Such organisations demonstrate a potent fusion of spiritual authority, infrastructural power, and commercial enterprise (Hansen 1999; Jaffrelot 2021).

A symbiotic relationship has thus emerged between the Hindutva-led state and certain spiritual and commercial enterprises. In this unspoken pact, the state offers patronage, legitimacy, and protection from regulatory scrutiny to ideologically aligned figures. In return, these gurus lend their immense public platforms, mass appeal, and global reach to the Hindutva project of redefining India as a Hindu nation, thereby granting it a veneer of spiritual and cultural legitimacy that transcends partisan politics.

Hindutva, as a modern political ideology, must be distinguished from the diverse theological and philosophical traditions of Hinduism itself. The primary goal of the former is the “ethnoreligious mobilization” (Jaffrelot 2017: 52) of the Hindu majority to establish a Hindu Rashtra. This political project often works in tandem with an economic system described as crony capitalism, in which commercial success is contingent not on market efficiency but on “close relationships between business people and government officials” (Rubin 2016: 105). This manifests in “favoritism in the distribution of legal permits, government grants, and special tax breaks” (Rubin 2016: 105) and creates a politicised market where ideological alignment becomes a significant asset. The DHSC, therefore, thrives at this intersection where spiritual authority is leveraged for commercial success, which is in turn enabled and protected by political patronage.

/// Justifying Spirituality in the Age of Digital Capitalism

The intersection of spirituality and commerce (Balog et al. 2014) necessitates examining the broader sociology of capitalism. While Max Weber (1930 [1904–1905]) explored the historical connection between Protestant ethics and the rise of capitalism, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) argue in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* that capitalism requires ongoing justifications – moral and ethical rationales drawn from surrounding culture – to maintain legitimacy, motivate participants, and neutralise critiques (e.g., regarding alienation, inequality, or environmental impact). These justifications evolve over time, forming different “spirits” of capitalism. Understanding how contemporary spiritual organisations operate within capitalist structures and how they utilise them requires analysing the specific justifications the organisations employ to reconcile potentially conflicting values, such as spiritual detachment and commercial enterprise, or service (*sewa*) and profit.

The internet and social media have dramatically reshaped the religious and spiritual landscape, giving rise to the field of Digital Religion studies (Campbell 2012: 1; Zeiler 2018). Digital technologies are not merely neutral tools. They actively shape communication, community formation, visibility, economic models, and potentially even theological conceptions (Bingaman 2023: 6–7; DeNapoli 2017). The dominance of large digital platforms (YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, X, etc.) constitutes a form of “Platform Capitalism” (Srnicek 2017; van Dijck et al. 2018) where platforms structure interactions, algorithmically curate visibility, commodify user data and attention, and create new economies (Gillespie 2010; Athique & Parthasarathi 2020).

For figures such as SSR and Sadhguru, these platforms enable unprecedented global reach, direct communication with followers while bypassing traditional intermediaries, personalised content delivery, online community building (e.g., through apps and forums), and new avenues for disseminating teachings and practices, albeit within the algorithmic and commercial logic of the platforms (Bingaman 2023: 6; Prasad 2016: 15). Even traditional figures such as North Indian *sādhus* are increasingly integrating digital tools into their activities – sometimes framing them theologically as extensions of *dharm* or divine networks (DeNapoli 2017: 11).

The rise of digital platforms coincides with the emergence of influencer culture, which is characterised by practices such as self-branding (Senft 2013), the performance of authenticity, monetisation strategies (sponsorships, merchandise, direct appeals), reliance on metrics (likes, followers), and constant “visibility labour” (Abidin 2016; Duffy et al. 2021). Modern gurus increasingly adopt or adapt these influencer tactics, blurring the lines between spiritual leader, media personality, and digital content creator/brand (Copeman et al. 2023b). Modern gurus need to carefully manage their online persona, use platforms for teaching, outreach, and mobilisation, and leverage their charisma within the attention economy. The phenomenon builds upon earlier instances of media-savvy monks using photography and print to manage their image and disseminate their message globally (Dobe 2016: 165). The concept of “Guru–Media Imbrications” or “Guru, Inc.” captures this fusion of spiritual authority with media and market logics (Copeman et al. 2023a: 5).

The inherent tensions in blending spirituality with commerce, celebrity, and digital platforms make justification a crucial activity for modern spiritual organisations and leaders. To analyse such justifications systematically, this paper will primarily employ Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) Orders of Worth (also known as Economies of Worth or Justification Theory) framework. This framework posits that actors in society draw upon multiple, potentially conflicting logics or “orders” of value to justify their actions and resolve disputes, especially when facing criticism or navigating contradictory demands. Key orders relevant to this study may include the Market order (emphasising competition, price, profit, efficiency), the Inspired order (valuing creativity, grace, intuition, spiritual experience, charisma), the Domestic order (prioritising tradition, hierarchy, trust, personal relationships, lineage), the Civic order (appealing to the collective good, equality, solidarity), the Fame order (based on public opinion, recognition, visibility), the Industrial order (focused on efficiency, planning, technical

competence), the Projective order (valuing networks, flexibility, adaptability, projects), and potentially newer logics, such as a Solutionist order (emphasising technological fixes and measurable results). Actors mobilise these different logics in specific situations or “tests” (*épreuves*) to make their actions appear legitimate and worthy.

While the existing literature explores these elements, there remains a need for in-depth, comparative analyses of how leading contemporary global figures such as SSR and Sadhguru, who represent distinct yet overlapping modern interpretations drawing from Neo-Vedānta/Kriya Yoga and Shaivite/Yogic/Tantric streams respectively, specifically mobilise diverse justificatory logics (Orders of Worth) to navigate the inherent tensions within their globalised, commercialised, and digitally mediated spiritual enterprises. The existing works often focus on one figure or one aspect (e.g., digital presence, commodification), or use different theoretical frameworks. This article addresses the gap by systematically employing Boltanski and Thévenot’s Orders of Worth framework to compare the justificatory strategies used by SSR and Sadhguru across various domains (e.g., commercial activities, social projects, environmental initiatives, responses to criticism) within the context of the DHSC.

The DHSC framework, which emerges from the interconnected types of literature discussed above, conceptualises the contemporary phenomenon where spiritual leaders rooted in Hindu traditions leverage digital platforms and market logics to build global influence, commodify practices, and engage in large-scale projects, while simultaneously needing to justify these activities through various moral and spiritual logics.

/// Methodology

We will first outline the methodological approach we employed to investigate the DHSC as manifested in the digital presence of Sadhguru (the Isha Foundation) and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (the Art of Living) (Tøllefsen 2011; Jacobs 2015; Pandya 2015). We adopted a qualitative comparative research design and applied thematic analysis techniques to the primary websites and selected video content associated with these two spiritual influencers. Thematic Analysis (TA) is a widely used qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and reporting on patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke 2006: 79). It is particularly suited for research that involves a large and varied data corpus, including the contents of websites,

videos, and news articles, and that integrates multiple theoretical frameworks, as this paper does. We specifically designed our methodology so that we could systematically gather and analyse data for the purpose of understanding how each influencer utilises digital platforms within the context of modern globalised spirituality, engages in capitalistic practices, employs justification strategies based on Orders of Worth, and embodies distinct forms of DHSC. Our methodology thereby addressed our core research objectives.

Our study focused on two prominent global spiritual figures who draw from Hindu traditions: Sadhguru (Jaggi Vasudev) and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. These influencers were selected due to their significant global reach, their prominent online presence, their operation of large-scale organisations with commercial aspects, their acknowledged roots in Hindu traditions yet simultaneous appeal to a universal audience, and their representation as key figures within contemporary, digitally-mediated spirituality, which makes them relevant examples for investigating DHSC.

The primary data sources included the official primary websites for each influencer's main organisation: the Isha Foundation website for Sadhguru (specifically <https://isha.sadhguru.org/in/en>) and the Art of Living website for SSR (specifically <https://www.artofliving.org/in-en>). Additionally, the personal website for SSR (<https://gurudev.artofliving.org/>) was analysed to capture strategies related to the persona construction of the founder. These websites were selected as they represent the official, central digital nodes through which the organisations and influencers present themselves and conduct activities relevant to DHSC.

To supplement the website data with dynamic examples of public discourse, the articulation of justifications (especially in response to challenges), and persona performance, a selection of publicly available YouTube videos featuring these two influencers was considered. For each influencer, we analysed newspaper articles, four exposé-style or controversy-addressing videos, and five in-depth interview videos. This specific composition was chosen purposefully: the exposé/controversy videos offered crucial insights into public scrutiny, and into how influencers manage challenges or *épreuves* and defend themselves when facing criticism regarding their practices, finances, or legitimacy. Conversely, the interview videos provided a key site for examining the influencers' proactive construction of justificatory frameworks, self-presentation strategies, and articulation of the rationale behind their organisational activities and commercial elements in

a more controlled conversational setting, shedding light on their preferred narratives and justifications (RQ2). Both video types also provided data on how capitalistic practices are presented or referenced (RQ1).

Data analysis was guided by a theoretical framework integrating concepts from the Digital Spirit of Capitalism (Huberman 2022); Boltanski and Thévenot's Orders of Worth (specifically Market, Industrial, Civic, Domestic, Inspired, Fame/Opinion, and Projective logics); and relevant concepts for analysing tensions in contemporary spirituality, such as Doublespeak, Hybrid Spirit, Techno-Solutionist Certainty, and Ideological Battleground (Habermas 1970). To ensure systematic analysis, two distinct analytical instruments were utilised. For video analysis, a "Content Identification Checklist" was employed. This checklist facilitated the systematic coding of video transcripts for capitalistic elements (RQ1), explicit justification strategies and defensive tactics (RQ2), language/discourse features, authority indicators, Projective City indicators, preliminary Orders of Worth identification, and specific conceptual tensions (Doublespeak, Hybrid Spirit, Crony Capitalism, etc.). For website analysis, the "Website Analysis" framework guided a phased analysis (Initial Exploration, Deep Dive, Synthesis) focusing on website structure, design, content, user journey, spirituality/commerce balance, authority building, capitalistic practices (courses, shop, donations), justification strategies, dominant Orders of Worth across different pages, and the management of ideological tensions as manifested within the website artifact itself.

The analysis systematically examined several key dimensions across both the website and video data, as guided by the theoretical framework and facilitated by the analytical instruments detailed above and summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of analytical dimensions and key indicators

Analytical dimension	Key indicators/concepts examined	Primary data source(s)
Overall context & framing	Target audience; website structure, aesthetics & tone; spirituality/commerce balance; elements of modern globalised spirituality	Website, video
Capitalistic practices (RQ1)	Paid courses/programmes (descriptions, call to action, value framing); donations (appeals, framing); e-commerce/merchandise (products, links); Techno- <i>Seva</i> (digital delivery/fund-raising); lifestyle association; partnerships	Website, video

Analytical dimension	Key indicators/concepts examined	Primary data source(s)
Justification strategies (RQ2)	Explicit justifications for costs/activities (e.g., <i>Seva</i> /service, mission necessity, value provided, follower demand); defensive tactics (e.g., attacking critics, whataboutism); link between practice & justification	Video, website
Authority & persona construction	Displays of knowledge/wisdom; textual & visual persona construction; addressing spirituality/commerce tension; founder-centrism	Website, video
Theoretical concepts & tensions	Orders of Worth (Market, Industrial, Civic, Inspired, Fame, Projective, etc. – identification & dominance); DHSC concepts (Cosmic Capitalism, Karmic Algorithms); tension management (integration/segregation); hybrid spirit; techno-solutionism; doublespeak; ideological battleground (“us vs them” framing)	Website, video
Political alignment & patronage	References to national pride/history; statements on other religions; mentions of government projects/awards (e.g., Padma Vibhushan); framing of criticism as “anti-national”	Video, website (news/press sections)
Comparative elements	Structural differences (websites); integration vs segregation (commerce/spirituality); dominant logics/justifications; branding/persona differences; differential manifestation of DHSC/tensions	Website & video synthesis

Source: collation of literature.

Our analytical process followed the phases outlined in the Website Analysis framework and utilised the Content Identification Checklist for videos. It began with an initial holistic review of each website, followed by a detailed, section-by-section analysis of key website pages and of the selected video transcripts, using the respective instruments. Specific data points (quotes, structural observations, design elements, discursive strategies) were recorded and coded against the theoretical concepts and research questions. Finally, findings for each influencer were synthesised before a comparative analysis was conducted to identify convergences and divergences in their digital strategies and DSC manifestations.

Within the broader field of TA, this study explicitly adopts a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke 2019), which is distinct

from more positivistic “coding reliability” approaches. The latter may view themes as pre-existing entities to be discovered in the data. Instead, reflexive TA posits that themes are not discovered but are actively developed by the researcher through a deep, subjective engagement with the data. Themes are understood as “creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher’s theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves” (Braun & Clarke 2019: 594). This approach was chosen because it acknowledges and embraces researcher subjectivity as a central part of the analytical process, which is essential for interpreting the complex, ideologically-laden discourses of power and justification central to this study.

The analytical process therefore involved a hybrid inductive and deductive theme-development strategy, consistent with a reflexive methodology (Boyatzis 1998). With Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) Orders of Worth as an a priori theoretical framework, a deductive lens was systematically applied to identify and categorise the justificatory logics used to legitimise capitalistic practices (RQ2). This theory-driven coding was complemented by an inductive, data-driven process that allowed for the emergence of unanticipated themes such as “Techno-*Seva*” and “Hybrid Discourse” that characterise the DHSC (RQ1). The dual approach allowed for a robust, systematic, and nuanced comparative analysis, encompassing both theoretical grounding and sensitivity to the unique characteristics of the data.

/// Findings and Discussion: Comparative Analysis of Digital Hindu Justification Strategies

Here we delineate the justification strategies employed by two prominent figures: SSR, with his Art of Living (AoL) NGO, and Sadhguru, with his Isha Foundation. Drawing upon extensive video content and digital platform analysis (interviews, talks, organisational websites, debates, promotional materials, and news articles), this study utilises Boltanski & Thévenot’s (2006) Orders of Worth framework to understand how these influential figures legitimise their diverse practices (RQ1) through specific justifications (RQ2). Both figures operate sophisticatedly within the DHSC. They adeptly leverage modern communication technologies and adapt traditional concepts for a global audience. Our engagement aligns with the scholarly focus on “Digital Hinduism,” which examines how digital media shapes and is shaped by Hindu practices and emphasises the agency of Hindu actors within this transformation (Zeiler 2018; Lövheim 2011). The

DHSC concept itself reflects the complex intertwining of contemporary spirituality with the demands and logic of the “new spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005), which is characterised by a fusion of personal growth narratives and neoliberal market values. Within this context, nuanced differences emerge in SSR’s and Sadhguru’s dominant justificatory logics, particularly concerning their integration of commercial activities. While both demonstrate remarkable adaptability, the analysis reveals that SSR’s justifications frequently rest upon a foundational Projective Order of Worth, whereas Sadhguru more characteristically foregrounds a tightly integrated blend of Market, Industrial, Projective, Inspired, and Fame logics. Their activities highlight the relevance of studying “digital religion,” the mutually constitutive relationship between digital media and religious practice (Campbell 2012).

/// Symbiosis of Power: Legitimising the Guru, Sanctifying the State

The spiritual enterprises of Sadhguru and SSR do not operate in a political vacuum but are deeply embedded in the symbiotic framework of patronage and legitimacy characteristic of India’s contemporary political economy. While both figures benefit from this benevolent climate, they exemplify the symbiosis in distinct yet complementary ways: Sadhguru through overt ideological alignment, and SSR through the strategic deployment of spiritual soft power.

Sadhguru’s Isha Foundation stands as a clear example of political-spiritual synergy. The relationship is signalled through high-profile state honours, such as his receipt of the Padma Vibhushan award from the BJP-led government in 2017 (Isha Foundation 2017), and through his widely publicised access to the highest levels of government, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This alignment is not merely symbolic but is actively ideological. Sadhguru has consistently used his platform to support controversial government policies. For instance, the video he released in support of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) was endorsed by Prime Minister Modi as a “lucid” explanation (Kumar 2020).

Patronage includes the active participation of top cabinet ministers in his projects, framing his campaigns as being aligned with the national agenda. For instance, Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s public endorsement of the “Save Soil” campaign explicitly linked the guru’s initiative to the government’s own environmental policies, lending state legitimacy to

a foundation-led project (Pathak 2025). Such ideological work is further solidified by Sadhguru's own discourse. When questioned about his political leanings, he strategically reframes the "left-wing vs right-wing" binary as a false choice, arguing the only real distinction is between those who are for the nation's good and those who are against it (Isha Foundation 2019). This rhetorical move allows him to position his Hindu nationalist viewpoints as simple patriotism, while implicitly branding dissent as anti-national. The alignment provides a crucial shield of legitimacy for his large-scale, and sometimes legally contentious, land-based projects, which, despite facing accusations of illegal construction in ecologically sensitive zones, have been effectively protected from regulatory and judicial scrutiny (PTI 2025).

While adopting a more moderate and "above politics" public persona, SSR's Art of Living also functions within the same symbiotic framework. His alignment is less overtly ideological and more functional, positioning him as a powerful agent of cultural nationalism and spiritual soft power for the Indian state. This strategy was evident during the 2014 general election, where he maintained a veneer of political neutrality while simultaneously offering high praise for then-candidate Narendra Modi and sharply criticising a key political rival (ET Bureau 2014).

The state's support becomes most visible during his large-scale international events. The 2016 World Culture Festival, for example, faced significant legal and environmental challenges for damaging the Yamuna floodplains. However, the event was not only inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi but also received a direct grant from the Union culture ministry and logistical support from the Indian Army (Sardesai 2016). This top-level state endorsement effectively neutralised the controversy, demonstrating how state patronage can override regulatory processes for politically aligned cultural projects. Furthermore, SSR's role as a court-appointed mediator in the Ayodhya Ram Mandir dispute saw him publicly advocate for a resolution that strongly favoured the Hindu nationalist stance (FE News Desk 2019). His subsequent high-profile attendance at the temple's foundation and consecration ceremonies meant that he contributed his immense global and spiritual legitimacy to one of the most significant political projects of the Hindutva movement. Thus, even without the explicit ideological rhetoric of hardline figures, his enterprise serves as a valuable asset to a state seeking to project a particular vision of Indian culture onto the world stage.

In both instances, the ability to operate vast, commercially successful enterprises is inseparable from a benevolent political climate. A central

feature of the DHSC is thus that its success is contingent not just on market appeal but on successfully navigating and leveraging the prevailing political currents.

/// Shared Strategies in the Digital Hindu Spirit of Capitalism

Despite their differing foundational logics, both SSR and Sadhguru exhibit significant commonalities characteristic of successful figures navigating the DHSC. A primary shared trait is their adaptive deployment of justification strategies. They skilfully navigate diverse contexts and invoke different orders of worth as circumstances demand, often in response to challenges or *épreuves* (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006). This reflects the “strategic arbitration” that religious leaders often employ in mediated environments to maintain authority across varied situations (Cheong et al. 2011; Cheong 2016). For instance, when confronted with criticisms about commercialism (an *épreuve*), both figures deploy Market logic. SSR, in debate with Javed Akhtar, a famous Indian celebrity, explicitly justified his organisation’s fees by arguing it ensures participant commitment (“sometime we had to charge people so that they learn properly,” a justification echoed in a dedicated explanatory video where the Market logic (value, earning) is linked directly to Mission Necessity and Civic goals. Similarly, Sadhguru, when questioned about fees, justifies them by citing follower demand for comfort (“people want air-conditioned rooms [...] somebody has to pay for it,” and the necessity of funding extensive free services (*Seva*/Civic logic). This justification strategy, which links market activity to civic good, resonates within the expanding spiritual marketplace (Arli et al. 2023).

Both figures strongly appeal to Civic worth when justifying large-scale social service projects or environmental campaigns, such as Sadhguru’s Cauvery Calling or SSR’s various river rejuvenation projects. SSR, for example, defended the controversial location of the World Culture Festival (WCF) by framing it as essential for highlighting Yamuna pollution and catalysing cleanup efforts – a justification that uses Civic ends to legitimise a potentially problematic action. The expansion of traditional *seva* into highly visible, large-scale humanitarianism is characteristic of contemporary global guru movements (Lucia 2014; Beckerlegge 2000). At the solid core of their teachings is Inspired logic, which appeals to inner transformation, unique insights, and visionary goals, and thus grounds the charismatic authority of the religious leader (Weber et al. 1947). Furthermore, these leaders

leverage their global recognition through Fame/Opinion logic, especially in a defensive sense when facing *épreuves* (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006). SSR dismisses criticism of the WCF as ignorance, while Sadhguru attacks critics of Isha's activities or temple stances by calling them "activists" or by saying they lack cultural understanding. SSR and Sadhguru thus demonstrate a kind of reputation management that is crucial in the digital sphere.

/// Hybrid Discourse and Techno-Solutionism

Both figures also embody a pervasive Hybrid Spirit in their communication. They seamlessly interweave traditional Hindu-derived concepts (yoga, dharma, karma, *seva*, guru) with modern language from science (neuroscience, research validation, technology (Sudarshan Kriya/Inner Engineering as "technology"), business, and psychology (stress, well-being). This strategic hybridisation makes ancient wisdom appear relevant and palatable to contemporary global audiences and is a common feature of digital religion adaptations (Campbell 2012). Complementing the feature is a strong tendency towards Techno-Solutionist Certainty (Huberman 2022). Their core techniques (SSR's SKY Breathwork, Sadhguru's Inner Engineering) are presented not just as spiritual practices but as effective "technologies" or "tools" that offer tangible solutions to modern problems such as stress, anxiety, or lack of focus. SSR cites NIMHANS research validating SKY's effect on depression, while Sadhguru references studies on Shambhavi Mahamudra's neurological impact. This framing minimises ambiguity and emphasises efficacy; it aligns with an Industrial logic of results and standardisation, and resonates with modern reinterpretations of tradition as "technology" (DeNapoli 2017).

/// Digital Platform Reliance (Techno-*Seva*)

Finally, both SSR and Sadhguru exhibit a deep reliance on digital platforms, engaging in Techno-*Seva*. Their sophisticated websites (AoL/Isha sites), active social media, and extensive video content (numerous interviews, talks) are central hubs. These platforms disseminate teachings, build global "networked communities" (Campbell 2012: 64), manage organisational networks, mobilise significant financial resources via online donations (Mannila & Zeiler 2019) and course registrations (AoL/Isha sites), and project charismatic authority globally. The very interviews analysed

here, which were distributed digitally to millions, exemplify this *Techno-Seva*; they use digital means to serve the mission of outreach and authority building. They thus reflect the broader landscape of mediated religion (Hjarvard 2011; Lundby et al. 2018).

While sharing these characteristics of the DHSC, a key distinction emerges in the foundational emphasis of their respective justificatory frameworks, particularly concerning the integration of commercial activities and responses to specific *épreuves* (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006).

/// Sri Sri Ravi Shankar: The Primacy of Projective Worth

For SSR, analysis strongly suggests that justifications for the Art of Living's diverse activities consistently rely on the Projective Order of Worth as the most common foundational logic. Although specific justifications are adapted situationally, the underlying capacity to operate effectively through dynamic networks on a global scale emerges as a persistent legitimising theme. SSR frequently offers justifications for his actions, particularly when facing *épreuves*, and this Projective capacity – the ability to initiate, connect, and mobilise networks – consistently underpins these justifications. His approach goes beyond merely using digital tools; it involves (*Techno-Seva*) framing the very *ability* to build and leverage extensive networks as a primary source of worth and legitimacy.

Evidence for this Projective foundation is amplified when examining responses to criticism. Facing environmental critique for the WCF, the justification pivoted strongly towards the Projective capacity to mobilise and execute large-scale action for a claimed Civic good (highlighting pollution). The scale and network reach were presented as justifying the controversial means. Similarly, when justifying involvement in complex peace mediations, SSR's emphasis is less on guaranteed outcomes (Inspired/Solutionist) and more on a Projective ability – enabled by his global network and fame – to act as a “bridge” connecting diverse actors across political and social divides. The justification for AoL's associated business activities also incorporates Projective logic, framing them as contributing to national progress by leveraging the organisation's reach and capacity. The sheer scale of AoL's claimed presence in 180 countries (AoL website) and impact (200 million people) are frequently invoked, demonstrating Projective power as direct evidence of worth. This use of large-scale projects and networks for legitimacy echoes strategies seen in other transnational movements

(Lucia 2014; Dobe 2015). Furthermore, SSR's defence of adapting ancient yoga for modern times explicitly values the Projective quality of flexibility and adaptation itself as a justification.

/// Sadhguru: An Integrated Blend of Market, Industrial, and Charismatic Logics

In contrast, while Sadhguru also operates within a highly Projective framework, as evidenced by large initiatives such as Cauvery Calling, global Isha centres, and extensive *Techno-Seva*, his most characteristic justification strategy appears to be the consistent foregrounding of a specific, tightly integrated blend of Market, Industrial, Projective, Inspired, and Fame logics. This blend becomes particularly visible when he defends the seamless integration of commercial and non-commercial activities, often in response to direct challenges (*épreuves*). Such integration reflects the broader trend of commodifying spirituality (Sinha 2019). However, Sadhguru's justification frames it not merely as a necessity but as an intrinsically valuable part of the mission, legitimised by the specific combination of logics.

When justifying paid programmes like Inner Engineering or the foundation's e-commerce activities, Sadhguru simultaneously invokes multiple logics: Market (the value proposition of a unique "technology," meeting follower demand for comfort/access), Industrial (emphasis on methods that "work," efficiency, sometimes citing scientific validation, e.g., neuronal rejuvenation, scale of delivery), Projective (global network reach, large projects funded by commerce), Inspired (grounded in his unique vision, experiential authority, offering transformation), and Fame/Opinion (leveraging his global influence, a large dedicated following as proof of value). For instance, the justification "I'm just robbing you [affluent attendees] to keep that 70% [free rural work] active" explicitly links Market transactions to Civic purpose, supported by the requisite Projective scale. This justification strategy successfully integrates branding and mission (Arli 2017).

Crucially, unlike SSR's tendency to justify commerce primarily via Civic ends, Sadhguru's blend often presents the commercial elements as inherently valuable and efficient components *within* the spiritual mission. Facing *épreuves* often triggers a forceful reassertion of this blend. When challenged by a law student about e-commerce and temple entry, Sadhguru defended commerce via the Civic/Mission-necessity justification (funding schools/

food) but defended the temple restrictions by appealing strongly to unique cultural knowledge (Domestic/Inspired logic), while aggressively dismissing an equality-based civic/legal challenge as “activism” and cultural ignorance. The strategy is one where an integrated blend (including Market/Industrial efficiency and Inspired/Domestic authority) is deployed to protect the entire operational model, even when certain traditional aspects clash with modern civic values. A Newslaundry report, though critical, describes an operation embodying this blend – extensive commerce (Market), large projects (Projective), influential networks (Fame/Projective), and a powerful central figure (Inspired/Fame) – and alleges that Civic/Inspired justifications mask these other logics.

/// Conclusion: Delineating the Digital Hindu Spirit of Capitalism

This paper introduced and investigated the concept of the DHSC, a framework for understanding the intersection of contemporary Hindu-derived spirituality, global capitalism, and digital technologies. Through a qualitative comparative analysis of two of DHSC’s most prominent exponents, Sadhguru and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, this study sought to identify the capitalistic practices embedded in their digital enterprises and the distinct justificatory strategies they mobilise to legitimise them. The findings reveal that while both figures operate within and are beneficiaries of a political ecosystem characterised by a symbiotic relationship with the state and the dynamics of crony capitalism (Rubin 2016), they employ distinct logics to navigate the inherent tensions of their commercial and spiritual ventures.

Our evaluation of the findings confirms that the DHSC is not a monolithic phenomenon but is characterised by both shared strategies and divergent logics. Both Sadhguru and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar exhibit certain core features, which we can consider foundational in the DHSC, including the adaptive deployment of justifications from multiple Orders of Worth (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006), the use of a hybrid discourse blending spiritual and scientific-managerial language, a techno-solutionist framing (Huberman 2022) of their practices as “spiritual technologies,” and a deep reliance on digital platforms for what we term “Techno-*Seva*,” the leveraging of technology for outreach, fundraising, and community building. However, our comparative analysis highlights a crucial distinction in their primary legitimating frameworks, which becomes most apparent during moments of public challenge, or *épreuves*. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar’s justifications are

found to rest predominantly on a foundation of Projective Worth, where legitimacy is derived from the sheer scale, network capacity, and project-based mobilisation of his Art of Living organisation. In contrast, Sadhguru employs a more seamlessly integrated blend of Market, Industrial, Projective, Inspired, and Fame logics – a strategy that frames commercial activity not merely as a necessary means to a civic end, but as an intrinsic, efficient, and vital component of his spiritual mission.

The implications of the above evaluation for the study of contemporary religion are significant. First, for the discipline of Digital Hinduism, this study moves beyond describing the use of digital media to analysing the underlying economic, political, and ideological logics that shape these religious expressions. The DHSC framework provides an analytical tool to dissect how traditional concepts such as *seva* and guru authority are strategically repurposed to energise and morally ground ventures that are deeply enmeshed in platform capitalism (Srnicek 2017; van Dijck et al. 2018) and influencer culture (Abidin 2016). Second, for the broader sociology of religion and capitalism, this research extends the theoretical lineage of Weber, Boltanski, and Chiapello by offering a detailed, non-Protestant case study of how a “spirit of capitalism” is forged in real time. It demonstrates how justifications are drawn from the cultural repertoire of Hindu traditions to meet the demands of a globalised, networked, and increasingly politicised marketplace. The analysis shows that the success of these enterprises cannot be understood apart from the prevailing political economy of national-populism, where ideological alignment and state patronage provide a crucial shield of legitimacy that facilitates expansion and neutralises critique.

This study is subject to several limitations. Its reliance on publicly available digital content within a specific time frame, from March 2025 to May 2025, necessarily constrains the scope of the findings. Another significant limitation is the exclusion of the followers’ perspective. Consequently, the crucial role that followers play in supporting and accepting the justifications offered by influencers remains unexamined in this study. A deeper analysis of the relations between the state and spirituality is needed; it could be achieved by further examining media coverage and legal documents concerning these organisations. To sharpen claims about historical shifts, a critical genealogy tracing their justification logics from the pre-digital to the digital era is necessary. Furthermore, an intersectional approach is required to explore how these digital platforms engage with, and impact, structures of gender, caste, and class. Finally,

a comparative study across different religions would reveal whether this “spirit of capitalism” is a uniquely Hindu phenomenon or a universal logic adaptable to various faiths.

/// Appendix

An appendix has been prepared to accompany this article and is available online as a Google Docs file at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1O501UD14eWCa1hiSxqximS92La-ylQZ_qb3lTPH-_LA/edit?tab=t.0, accessed 2.12.2025.

/// Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the limited use of AI tools for literature summarisation, data processing, and manuscript refinement, while manual oversight was maintained to ensure scholarly rigour. During the literature review, AI tools were employed to summarise key academic works and to help identify relevant scholarship efficiently. However, in order to ensure accuracy and contextual understanding, the researchers read and analysed all the literature deemed important.

For transcription, TurboScribe AI was used to refine transcripts and assist with translation. Manual supervision remained integral, and any inconsistencies or errors were resolved by the researchers. Additionally, data coding was conducted manually using collaborative Google Docs to preserve methodological rigour and interpretative accuracy.

After we drafted the manuscript, we employed AI tools, namely ChatGPT-4o and Gemini 2.0 Pro Experimental 02–05, to enhance readability, refine sentence structures, and improve coherence without altering substantive content. These AI models were used as editorial aids rather than as generative authors. We thus ensured that the intellectual contributions in the manuscript remained entirely our own.

In accordance with COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) guidelines (2023), AI tools cannot be credited as authors as they do not take responsibility for the work. The authors bear full responsibility for all content, including sections where AI assisted refinement was applied. Ultimately, all the theoretical insights, analyses, and substantive arguments remain the result of our own rigorous research and academic engagement.

We are grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers for their insightful comments and constructive feedback. Their suggestions were invaluable in strengthening our arguments and improving the clarity of the manuscript.

Additionally, we acknowledge the role of our colleagues – Barsha Mandal, Regina Gurumayum and Dorothy Kalita – who provided crucial support during the project.

Bibliography:

/// Abidin C. 2016. “Visibility Labour: Engaging with Influencers’ Fashion Brands and #OOTD Advertorial Campaigns on Instagram,” *Media International Australia*, vol. 161(1), pp. 86–100.

/// Arli D. 2017. “Does Ethics Need Religion? Evaluating the Importance of Religiosity in Consumer Ethics,” *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, vol. 35(2), pp. 205–221, <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-06-2016-0096>.

/// Arli D., Gupta N., Sardana D., Sharma P. 2023. “Demystifying the Evaluation of Brands Endorsed by Religious Leaders in the Emerging Markets,” *International Marketing Review*, vol. 40(1), pp. 155–175, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-01-2022-0008>.

/// Athique A., Parthasarathi V., eds. 2020. *Platform Capitalism in India*, Palgrave Macmillan.

/// Balog A., Baker L., Walker A. 2014. “Religiosity and Spirituality in Entrepreneurship: A Review and Research Agenda,” *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, vol. 11(2), pp. 107–129, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2013.836127>.

/// Beckerlegge G. 2000. “Swami Akhandananda’s Sevavrata (Vow of Service) and the Earliest Expressions of Service to Humanity in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission,” [in:] *Gurus and Their Followers*, ed. A. Copley, Oxford University Press, pp. 59–82.

/// Bingaman K.A. 2023. “Religion in the Digital Age: An Irreversible Process,” *Religions*, vol. 14(1), 108, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010108>.

/// Boltanski L., Chiapello E. 2005. “The New Spirit of Capitalism,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 18, pp. 161–188.

/// Boltanski L., Thévenot L. 2006. *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, Princeton University Press.

/// Boyatzis R.E. 1998. *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*, Sage Publications.

/// Braun V., Clarke V. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 3(2), pp. 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

/// Braun V., Clarke V. 2019. "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, vol. 11(4), pp. 589–597, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>.

/// Campbell H.A. 2012. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, Routledge.

/// Cheong P.H. 2016. "Religious Authority and Social Media Branding in a Culture of Religious Celebrification," [in:] *The Media and Religious Authority*, ed. S. Hoover, Penn State University Press, pp. 63–80, <https://doi.org/10.5325/j.ctv14gp1zt.8>.

/// Cheong P.H., Huang S., Poon J.P.H. 2011. "Religious Communication and Epistemic Authority of Leaders in Wired Faith Organizations," *Journal of Communication*, vol. 61(5), pp. 938–958, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01579.x>.

/// Copeman J., Longkumer A., Duggal K. 2023a. "Gurus and Media: An Introduction," [in:] *Gurus and Media: Sound, Image, Machine, Text and the Digital*, eds. J. Copeman, A. Longkumer, K. Duggal, UCL Press, pp. 1–60.

/// Copeman J., Longkumer A., Duggal K., eds. 2023b. *Gurus and Media: Sound, Image, Machine, Text and the Digital*, UCL Press.

/// De Michelis E. 2004. *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism*, Continuum.

/// DeNapoli A.E. 2017. "Dharm Is Technology: The Theologizing of Technology in the Experimental Hinduism of Renouncers in Contemporary North India," *International Journal of Dharma Studies*, vol. 5, 18, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40613-017-0053-0>.

/// Dobe T. 2015. *Hindu Christian Faqir: Modern Monks, Global Christianity, and Indian Sainthood*, Oxford University Press.

/// Dobe T.S. 2016. “Modern Monks and Global Hinduism,” [in:] *Hinduism in the Modern World*, ed. B.A. Hatcher, Routledge, pp. 161–179.

/// Duffy B.E., Pinch A., Sawey M. 2021. “The Nested Precarities of Creative Labor on Social Media,” *Social Media + Society*, vol. 7(2), <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211021368>.

/// ET Bureau. 2014. “I Never Said I Support BJP: Sri Sri Ravi Shankar,” *The Economic Times*, 10.04.2014, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/i-never-said-i-support-bjp-sri-sri-ravi-shankar/articleshow/33531872.cms>, accessed: 2.12.2025.

/// FE News Desk. 2019. “Ayodhya Ram Mandir Case Mediation: Know All about Justice FM Kalifulla, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Sriram Panchu,” *Financial Express*, 8.03.2019, <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/ayodhya-ram-mandir-case-mediation-supreme-court-justice-fm-kalifulla-sri-sri-ravi-shankar-sriram-panchu-all-you-need-to-know/1509169/>, accessed: 2.12.2025.

/// Flood G. 2004. *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition*, Cambridge University Press.

/// Flood G. 2014. “Foreword,” [in:] *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hindu Studies*, ed. J. Frazier, Bloomsbury, xi–xii.

/// Frazier J., ed. 2014. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hindu Studies*, Bloomsbury.

/// Gillespie T. 2010. “The Politics of ‘Platforms,’” *New Media & Society*, vol. 12(3), pp. 347–364, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738>.

/// Goodall D., Isaacson H. 2011. “Tantric Traditions,” [in:] *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies*, eds. J. Frazier, G. Flood, Continuum International Publishing Group, pp. 122–137.

/// Habermas J. 1970. *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, MIT Press.

/// Halbfass W. 1988. “Philosophy in Modern Hinduism,” [in:] *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, State University of New York Press, pp. 287–309.

/// Hansen T.B. 1999. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, Princeton University Press.

- /// Hatcher B.A., ed. 2016. *Hinduism in the Modern World*, Routledge, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203362037>.
- /// Hausner S.L. 2007. *Wandering with Sadhus: Ascetics in the Hindu Himalayas*, Indiana University Press.
- /// Heelas P., Woodhead L. 2005. *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*, Blackwell.
- /// Hjarvard S. 2011. "The Mediatisation of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change," *Culture and Religion*, vol. 12(2), pp. 119–135, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2011.579719>.
- /// Huberman J. 2022. *The Spirit of Digital Capitalism*, Polity Press.
- /// Isha Foundation. 2017. "Sadhguru Receiving the Padma Vibhushan Award," 13.04.2017, <https://isha.sadhguru.org/en/wisdom/video/sadhguru-receiving-padma-vibhushan>, accessed: 2.12.2025.
- /// Isha Foundation. 2019. "Sadhguru, Are You Right-Wing?," <https://isha.sadhguru.org/en/wisdom/video/sadhguru-right-wing>, accessed: 2.12.2025.
- /// Jacobs S. 2015. *The Art of Living Foundation: Spirituality and Wellbeing in the Global Context*, Routledge, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315612621>.
- /// Jacobsen K.A., ed. 2011. *Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities Attained through Meditation and Concentration*, Brill.
- /// Jacobsen K.A. 2014. "Sāmkhya-Yoga Traditions," [in:] *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hindu Studies*, ed. J. Frazier, Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 95–110.
- /// Jaffrelot C. 2017. "India's Democracy at 70: Toward a Hindu State?" *Journal of Democracy* vol. 28(3), pp. 52–63, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0044>.
- /// Jaffrelot C. 2021. *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*, Princeton University Press.
- /// Kanungo P. 2019. "Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Politics: The Baba Ramdev–BJP Partnership in the 2014 Elections," [in:] *The Algebra of Warfare-Welfare: A Long View of India's 2014 Election*, eds. I. Ahmad, P. Kanungo, Oxford University Press, pp. 119–142, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199489626.003.0004>.

- /// Khandelwal M. 2016. "Renunciation and Domesticity," [in:] *Hinduism in the Modern World*, ed. B.A. Hatcher, Routledge, pp. 196–211.
- /// Kim H.H. 2016. "Thinking through Akshardham and the Making of the Swaminarayan Self," [in:] *Swaminarayan Hinduism: Tradition, Adaptation, and Identity*, eds. R.B. Williams, Y. Trivedi, Oxford University Press, pp. 383–401.
- /// Kumar S. 2020. "Sadhguru: BJP's Spiritual Henchman," *The Express Tribune*, 2.04.2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/article/93511/sadhguru-bjps-spiritual-henchman>, accessed: 2.12.2025.
- /// Larkin B. 2013. "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," [in:] *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 42, pp. 327–343, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522>.
- /// Lawrence D.P. 2011. "Hindu Philosophical Traditions," [in:] *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies*, ed. J. Frazier, Continuum, pp. 137–151.
- /// Lövhheim M. 2011. "Mediatization of Religion: A Critical Appraisal," *Culture and Religion*, vol. 12(2), pp. 153–166.
- /// Lucia A. 2014. "Innovative Gurus: Tradition and Change in Contemporary Hinduism," *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, vol. 18(2), pp. 221–263, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-014-9159-5>.
- /// Lundby K., Christensen H.R., Gresaker A.K., Lövhheim M., Niemelä K., Sjö S., Danielsson Á.S. 2018. "Religion and the Media: Continuity, Complexity, and Mediatization," [in:] *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere: Comparing Nordic Countries*, eds. H.R. Christensen, K. Stjerna, N.K. Squires, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 193–249.
- /// Malinar A. 2011. "Hindu Cosmologies," [in:] *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies*, ed. J. Frazier, Continuum, pp. 60–74.
- /// Mannila H., Zeiler X. 2019. "Mediatized Gurus: Hindu Religious and Artistic Authority and Digital Culture," [in:] *Digital Hinduism*, ed. X. Zeiler, Routledge, pp. 145–161.
- /// Nachtwey O., Seidl T. 2023. "The Solutionist Ethic and the Spirit of Digital Capitalism," *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 41(2), pp. 91–112, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764231196829>.

/// Pandya S.P. 2015. "New Strategies of New Religious Movements: The Case of Art of Living Foundation," *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 64(3), pp. 287–304.

/// Pathak A. 2025. "The Guru and the Politician: The Broken Spirit behind the Spiritualism Industry," *The Indian Express*, 10.01.2025, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-guru-and-the-politician-the-broken-spirit-behind-the-spiritualism-industry-9766857/>, accessed: 2.12.2025.

/// Pennington B.K. 2016. "Hinduism in North India," [in:] *Hinduism in the Modern World*, ed. B.A. Hatcher, Routledge, pp. 31–47.

/// Prasad L. 2016. "Hinduism in South India," [in:] *Hinduism in the Modern World*, ed. B.A. Hatcher, Routledge, pp. 15–30.

/// PTI. 2025. "SC Pulls Up TNPCB for Filing Plea after Two Years against Order Quashing Notice to Isha Foundation," *The Hindu*, 14.02.2025, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/sc-pulls-up-tnpcb-for-filing-plea-after-two-years-against-order-quashing-notice-to-isha-foundation/article69218592.ece>, accessed: 2.12.2025.

/// Rubin P.H. 2016. "Crony Capitalism," *Supreme Court Economic Review*, vol. 23(1), pp. 105–120.

/// Sardesai R. 2016. "Art of Living and Politicians: When Loyalty Trumps Propriety," *Hindustan Times*, 17.03.2016, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/columns/art-of-living-and-politicians-when-loyalty-trumps-propriety/story-61YMQoub6EGFVWdiz8ffrj.html>, accessed: 2.12.2025.

/// Sen A.P. 2016. "Debates within Colonial Hinduism," [in:] *Hinduism in the Modern World*, ed. B.A. Hatcher, Routledge, pp. 67–79.

/// Senft T.M. 2013. "Microcelebrity and the Branded Self," [in:] *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*, eds. J. Hartley, J. Burgess, A. Bruns, Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 346–354, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118321607.ch22>.

/// Sinha V. 2019. "The Internet: A New Marketplace for Transacting Pūjā Items," [in:] *Digital Hinduism*, ed. X. Zeiler, Routledge, pp. 163–185.

/// Srnicek N. 2017. *Platform Capitalism*, Polity Press.

/// Stietencron H. von. 1997. *Hindu Religious Traditions and the Concept of Religion*, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

/// Taylor C. 2007. *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674044289>.

/// Tøllefsen I. 2011. “Art of Living: Religious Entrepreneurship and Legitimation Strategies,” *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, vol. 2(2), pp. 255–279. <https://doi.org/10.1558/ijsnr.v2i2.255>.

/// van Dijck J., Poell T., de Waal, M. 2018. *The Platform Society*, Oxford University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190889760.001.0001>.

/// Warriar M. 2005. *Hindu Selves in a Modern World: Guru Faith in the Mata Amritanandamayi*, Routledge Curzon.

/// Weber M. 1930 (1904–1905). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons, George Allen & Unwin.

/// Weber M., Henderson A.M., Parsons T. 1947. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Oxford University Press.

/// Williamson L. 2016. “Modern Yoga and Tantra,” [in:] *Hinduism in the Modern World*, ed. B.A. Hatcher, Routledge, pp. 180–195.

/// Zeiler X. 2018. “Mediatized Religion in Asia: Interrelations of Media, Culture and Society beyond the ‘West,’” [in:] *Mediatized Religion in Asia*, eds. K. Radde-Antweiler, X. Zeiler, Routledge, pp. 1–15.

/// Zeiler X., ed. 2021. *Digital Hinduism*, Routledge.

/// Abstract

This paper introduces and investigates the concept of the Digital Hindu Spirit of Capitalism (DHSC). It explores the nexus where contemporary spirituality, rooted in diverse Hindu traditions, intersects with global capitalism and digital technologies. Focusing on two influential global figures, Sadhguru (the Isha Foundation) and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (the Art of Living), this article examines how they navigate and legitimise their digital mediation, political alignment, and large-scale, commercially engaged spiritual enterprises. Building on Weber’s and Boltanski and Chiapello’s work on the spirit of capitalism, and Huberman’s analysis of digital capitalism, DHSC denotes the specific constellation of values and justifications arising when digital platform logics intersect with adapted Hindu concepts (e.g., *seva*, guru authority, spiritual technologies). Applying qualitative thematic

analysis to Sadhguru's and Shankar's primary websites, selected video content, and newspaper articles, the paper addresses two questions: (1) What capitalistic practices are embedded in the digital presence and organisations of these individuals? (2) How, when analysed through Boltanski & Thévenot's Orders of Worth framework, do they appear to mobilise justificatory strategies to legitimise these practices and manage inherent tensions? The findings reveal shared DHSC characteristics, including adaptive justifications, hybrid discourses, techno-solutionist framings, and reliance on digital platforms (*Techno-Seva*). However, a comparative analysis highlights distinct foundational logics, which are particularly visible during challenges (*épreuves*): Sri Sri Ravi Shankar predominantly relies on Projective worth (network capacity, scale), while Sadhguru employs a tightly integrated blend of Market, Industrial, Projective, Inspired, and Fame logics, and often frames commercial aspects as intrinsic to the mission. By delineating these strategies, the study contributes to understanding the operational features and legitimating mechanisms of the DHSC, offering insights into contemporary Digital Hinduism and the relationship between religion, the media, and capitalism.

Keywords:

spirit of capitalism, Sadhguru, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, digital religion, Digital Hinduism, Hindutva, justification strategies

/// Vatsal Tewari – a sociologist who recently completed his MA at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), India. His research focuses on digital capitalism, social media, and religious influencers. He has secured All India Rank 1 in UGC NET (2024) and has interned at the Indian School of Business (ISB) Hyderabad, India's top business school. He has presented his work at international conferences, including the ISA 2025 Conference in Morocco.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6796-213X>

E-mail: vatsal0147@gmail.com

/// Arpita Mishra – a sociologist who completed her MA degree at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her research disciplines encompass digital sociology, gender studies, emotional geographies, and development studies, with a particular focus on the impact of technology on society and the emotions of border staff. She qualified for the UGC-NET-JRF in

Sociology and achieved Rank 4 in the JNU MA Sociology Entrance. She has been selected for the prestigious Gandhi Fellowship Program (2025–2027). She has presented her work at international conferences, including the ISA 2025 Conference in Morocco.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9795-8164>

E-mail: arpi5114mish@gmail.com

/// Ritika Choudhary – an MA student in Sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University (graduation expected in 2026). Her research interests encompass digital sociology, migration and identity studies, and the sociological study of religion, with a particular focus on the interplay between religious institutions and society. Her work has appeared in *Vantage: Journal of Thematic Analysis* (“Farmers’ Lives in the Wake of Sustainable Development”). She is also actively involved in social empowerment as a Learning-Circle leader and teacher with U&I Trust.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8319-581X>

E-mail: choudharyritika8258@gmail.com