

Virtual Enlightenment: E-Spirituality as a Post-Secular Phenomenon in Türkiye

Authors: G. Gorucu, A. Kitsiou

The 2025 IARIA Annual Congress on Frontiers in Science,
Technology, Services, and Applications
IARIA Congress 2025

July 06 - 10, 2025 - Venice, Italy

Presenter: G. Gorucu



Authors



Asst. Prof. Angeliki Kitsiou

A. Kitsiou is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Cultural Technology and Communication, University of the Aegean, Greece. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology and specializes in the sociology of the internet, privacy engineering, and social informatics. Her research focuses on socio-technical requirements for privacy-aware digital systems, particularly within cloud computing and social media environments, combining insights from digital culture, identity, and participatory technologies.



Gulsah Gorucu, PhD Candidate

Gülşah Görücü is a Ph.D. Candidate specializing in Cultural Communication and Technology. With a background in media, arts management, and urban studies, her research explores the intersections of digital spirituality, spatial justice, and sociotechnical systems. Her interdisciplinary approach integrates qualitative methods, critical theory, and sensory ethnography to investigate how culture, belief, and technology shape contemporary social life.

Focus, Objectives, Methodology

Focus: “Cyber-sacred space” as a thriving research hub for both **Islamic-oriented communities** and **New Age Movements communities** of Türkiye. Türkiye is located on a crossroad of East and West; presents **unique modernization and secularization trajectory** among other Muslim countries.

Threefold rationale:

 **Lack of Research**  **Theological Bias**  **Global Neglect**

Objectives: To explore the **digital transformation of New Age Movements (NAMs)** in terms of knowledge, practices, communities, and influencers, by examining how these actors engage with new media technologies, in order to unveil **the sociological phenomena within the contemporary E-Spiritual environments** of Türkiye.

Analytical Framework:

- The massification of the e-spirituality industry in Türkiye
- The individual and social implications of digital spirituality
- Post-secular theory is used to interpret these transformations

Methodology

 **Qualitative Research Design**  **Ethnographic Observation**
 **Phenomenological Perspective with Digital/Visual Material Focus**

 **Descriptive Content Analysis**

Overview

I. Theoretical & Conceptual Framework: Bridging “Structure” and “Agency”

- Religion and Spirituality in Context: Historical Roots and Discursive Practices

II. The History of Spiritual Pursuits and the Rise of "New Age Movements (NAMs)"

- “New Age Movements”: Conceptual Foundations, Empirical Dimensions, Social Implications

III. The Online Transformation of "New Age Movements": E-Spirituality as a New Digital Culture

- The Digital Reinvention of Faith & Rituals: Digital Sacred Space, E-Practices, E-Community
- The Impact of Digital Technologies on Spirituality: Individualization in the Context of Digitalization, Commodification & Commercialization in the Context of the Neo-Liberal Economy, Consumer Culture in the Context of Globalization, and Cultural Synthesis in the Context of Hybridization

IV. Discussions on Türkiye's E-Spirituality Realm: Transformations, Adaptations, Metamorphoses

- Cyber Identity, Online Self-Presentation Virtual Performances; The Intersection of Spectacle and Control: The New E-Spiritual Reality; the Rise of the E-Spiritual Economy, E-Spiritual Commerce, E-Spiritual Market; Personal Data Protection and Digital Privacy: Risks, Challenges, Concerns

V. Key Findings, Limitations, Future Work

Theoretical & Conceptual Framework

“In the past, people spoke with the universe, or at least they thought they did; even if the universe did not respond, it was at least their mirror. In the 20th century, however, the mythical speaker and mysterious voices disappeared. And now, in vast cities, each person is alone, sharing their solitude with millions of others who are also alone. We discovered that we are alone in the universe (left only with our machines). —This was the beginning of great selfishness.”

Octavio Paz, The Other Voice

The Social Construction of Values and Belief Systems

Ontological Security

Globalization, Neoliberalization, and Digitalization Reshape the Search for Meaning

COVID-19 Impact, Digital Pursuits of Meaning

The digitalization of New Age Movements

Global characteristics of E-Spiritual Beliefs & Practices

Türkiye’s E-Spiritual Landscape

Emerging Challenges, Institutional & Individual Tensions within the Post-Secular Milieu

Bridging “Structure” and “Agency”

📌 Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984; 1991)

Key Idea: Structure and agency are mutually constitutive.

In E-Spirituality: Digital platforms act as structured environments, while users actively reproduce spiritual meanings through them.

Ontological security is maintained through digital rituals and spiritual content circulation

📌 Socio-Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2006)

Key Idea: Human development is shaped by multi-layered ecological systems.

In E-Spirituality: Spiritual behaviors are responses to environmental disruptions (e.g. pandemic, crisis). Macro (global uncertainty) and micro (personal fear) levels drive people toward digital spiritual spaces.

E-spirituality becomes a coping mechanism within shifting ecological systems.

📌 Theory of Field & Habitus (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992)

Key Idea: Individuals act within structured “fields” using internalized “habitus”.

In E-Spirituality: Social media functions as a new symbolic field. Users display and exchange spiritual capital (rituals, aesthetics, knowledge) to position themselves in the digital faith economy.

E-spirituality becomes a performative identity shaped by field dynamics.

📌 Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989; 1991)

Key Idea: The public sphere enables critical-rational discourse.

In E-Spirituality: Digital platforms create quasi-public spaces where spiritual ideas are debated, marketed, and transformed.

Individual agency is shaped by platform logic, moderation policies, and algorithmic visibility. **The digital public sphere** reframes how faith and meaning circulate.

Religion and Spirituality in Contemporary Context

Religion, Spirituality & Meaning-Making

- ✦ Religion vs. Spirituality → Institutional vs. personal frameworks
- ✦ SBNR (Spiritual But Not Religious) → Individualization of faith
- ✦ Public vs. Private → From ritual to personalized practice
- ✦ Personal Faith & Belief Systems → Subjective narratives of sacredness

Spirituality in the Modern World

- ✦ Religion in Modern Society → Tensions with secular life
- ✦ Globalization and Spirituality → Hybridization & mobility of belief
- ✦ Consumer Culture & Symbolic Value → Spirituality as lifestyle
- ✦ Transformation of Spiritual Identity → Fluid, re-negotiated selfhood

Institutional Dynamics & Authority

- ✦ Religious Institutions & Authority → Gatekeepers of orthodoxy
- ✦ Historical Evolution of Spirituality → From organized religion to hybrid practices
- ✦ Faith and Social Context → How belief is mediated by social structures
- ✦ The Social Function of Spirituality → Social cohesion, belonging, community

Secularization & Individualization

- ✦ Secularization & Individual Expression → Decline of institutional control
- ✦ Spiritual Experience & Individualism → Inner life as authority
- ✦ Work-Life Separation & Faith → Fragmented modern life vs. integrated belief
- ✦ Sacred vs. Secular Practices → New rituals in everyday settings
- ✦ Spiritual Communities & Practices → Online and offline hybrid forms

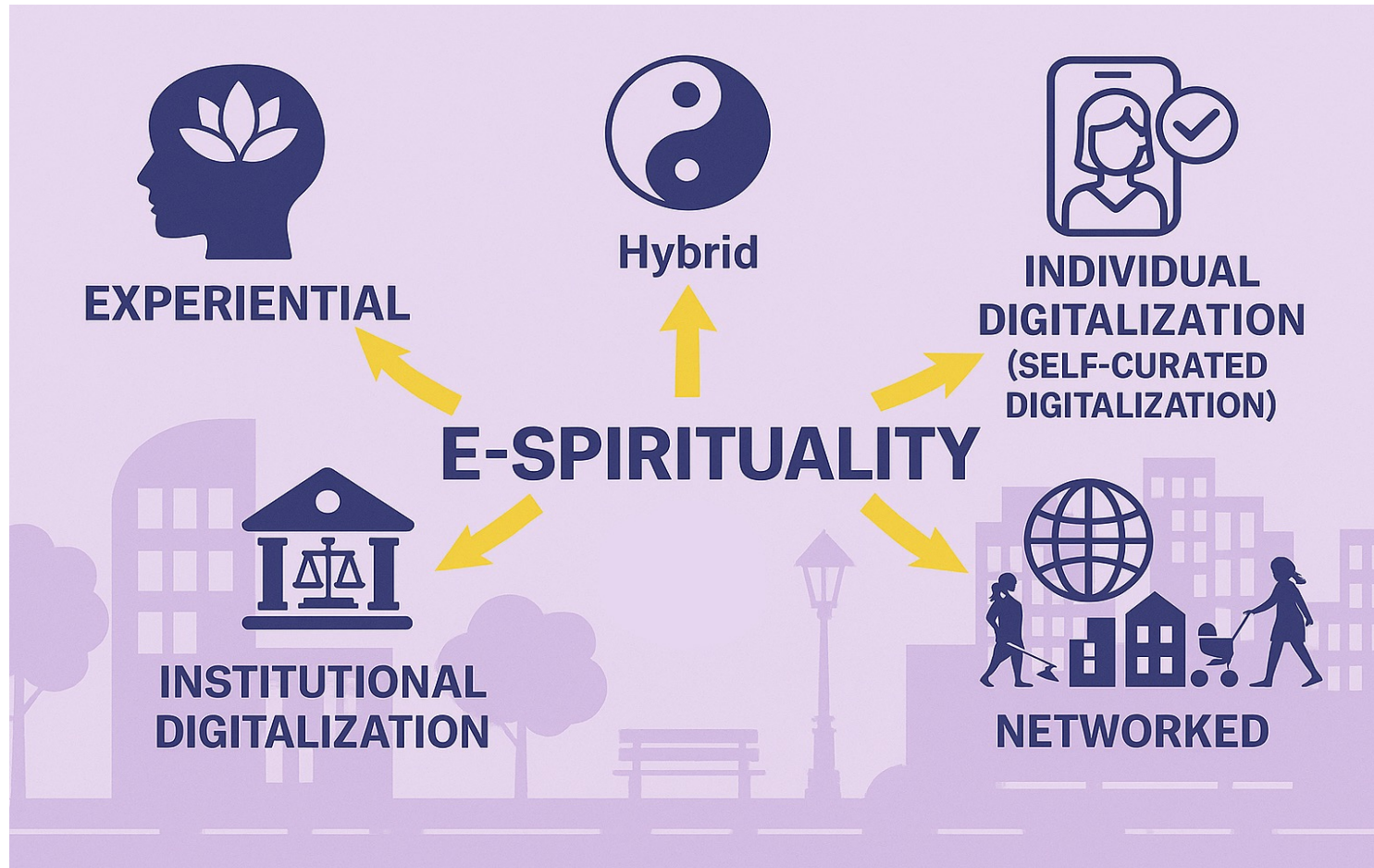
E-Spirituality: Space, Practice, Community

There is an analytical distinction between traditional spirituality and contemporary spirituality. The focus of this research, "New Age Movements (NAMs)," falls within the contemporary category in this analytical distinction (Heelas, 2009). The 7th new stage proposed in this research, E-Spirituality, also falls within this contemporary category.

1. The "Romantic Movement" of the 19th century
2. "Nazi Spirituality" between 1910-1945
3. The "Counterculture" of the 1960s
4. "Seminar Spirituality" of the 1980s
5. "Individual Well-Being Spirituality" of the 1990s
6. "Well-Being Spirituality" of the 2000s
7. E-Spirituality of 2020s



E-Spirituality: Space, Practice, Community



E-Spiritual Ecosystem Categorization of Türkiye

Digital Platforms & Applications

Social Media Apps and Digital Media Platforms:

Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Telegram, Facebook groups, Twitter/X (spiritual guides, tarot readers, yoga and meditation groups)

Instant Messaging Apps:

Mostly WhatsApp and Telegram groups (astrology, healing practices, spiritual counseling and groups)

Body Practice, Meditation and Mindfulness Apps:

Headspace, Calm, Meditopia, Flov Studio, and other global & local digital platforms and applications

Video Communication Platforms:

Spiritual counseling services offered individually or in groups via video communication platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, GoTo Meeting, and more

E-Spiritual Markets, E-Commerce

Online Tarot, Fortune-Telling, and Astrology Services:

Fortune-telling applications (SorumGeldi, Co-Star, AstrolojiMaster, Binnaz, Faladdin, etc.), paid/free consultation services

Healing, Alternative Therapy, Yoga, and Meditation Products:

Reiki, crystal stones, talismans, incense, chakra balancing products, meditation cushions, yoga mats, and other spiritual accessories

Digital Subscriptions and Memberships:

Spiritual content platforms, time-limited or unlimited special meditation and/or energy work services offered by specialists

Retreat Tourism:

Meditation and yoga camps, healing and detox programs, retreat programs, and digital detox/retreat experiences

Digital Training & Education

Online Certified Courses, Seminars, and Webinars:

Educational programs offered through digital platforms focusing on spiritual growth and awareness.

Individual or Group Coaching, Timed Training, and Workshop Services:

Programs providing guidance, practical applications, and personalized direction within a specific timeframe to support spiritual growth and awareness.

E-Resources:

E-books, audio guides, and interactive educational content available through digital platforms and applications.

Key Findings, Limitations, Future Work

Key Findings

- **Digital transformation of New Age Movements (NAMs)** as E-Spiritual environments have become highly visible in Türkiye's digital communication technologies and emerging new media landscape.
- **E-Spiritual Environments** of Türkiye reflect a hybrid model: spiritual belief systems adapting to technological platforms. **Türkiye's late modernization** creates a unique context where classical secularization theories do not fully apply in that sense. **Post-secular theory** affirms that religion and modernity are not necessarily in conflict—E-spirituality phenomenon exemplifies this adaptation.
- **E-spirituality** represents a convergence of digital communication technologies, Neoliberal market dynamics, Contemporary spiritual practices
- **These are the most visible spiritual domains in Türkiye's E-Spiritual environments:** Kabbalah, Sufism, mediums, alternative medicine, bioenergy, aromatherapy, regression therapy, Ayurveda, homeopathy, sound therapy, fortune telling, astrology, energy work, lightworkers, numerology, Tai Chi, Qigong, yoga, meditation, reiki, breathing exercises, mindfulness training, circle gatherings, shamanism, and more.

This transformation fosters:

🤝 New Forms of Social Bonding 🌐 A E-Sense of Belonging 🧘 Individualized Expression 🧩 E-Mediated Collective Identities

Limitations

🔒 Closed Communities 🚫 Platform Restrictions 🧩 Misleading App Categorization 🧑 Manual Data Collection Required

Future Work

🖥️ Cyber Identity & Virtual Performances 🗝️ Digital Privacy & Data Protection 🛒 E-Spiritual Economy & Digital Commodification

References

- [1] Aksan, G., Elnabarawy, K. (2024). İnanç Pratiklerinin Dönüşümüne Dair Sosyolojik Çıkarımlar: Yoga Deneyimi Üzerine Nitel Bir Araştırma, *İmgelem*, 15, 205-238.
- [2] Arweck, E. (2006). *Researching New Religious Movements: Responses and Redefinitions*. London: Routledge
- Bainbridge, W.S. (1997). *The Sociology of Religious Movements*, New York/London: Routledge.
- [3] Bayusena, B., Ridwansyah, R., & Erlina, E. (2024). Digital culture and performative acts for online identity: Social and physical consequences of yoga commodification. *International Journal of Management Studies and Social Science Research*, 6(1), 247-253.
- [4] Bowman, M. (2013). Valuing spirituality: Commodification, consumption and community in Glastonbury. In F. Gauthier & T. Martikainen (Eds.), *Religion in consumer society: Brands, consumers and markets* (Vol. 3, pp. 207–224). London, UK: Routledge.
- [5] Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1979)
- [6] Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. University of Chicago Press.
- [7] Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- [8] Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In R. M. Lerner (Ed.), *Theoretical models of human development* (6th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 793–828). Wiley.
- [9] Cengiz, K., Gür, H., Küçükural Ö. (2021). *Türkiye’de Spiritüel Arayışlar Deizm, Yoga, Budizm, Meditasyon, Reiki vb.* İletişim Yayınları.
- [10] Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. University of California Press.
- [11] ————— (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford University Press.
- [12] Gürbüz, G., & Aygöl, H. H. (2021). Arayıştan uyanışa, şifadan estetiğe yeni çağ inançları. *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 23(43), 19-51.
- [13] Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (T. Burger & F. Lawrence, Trans.). MIT Press. (Original work published 1962)
- [14] ————— (1991). *Communication and the evolution of society*. Polity Press.
- [15] Heelas, P. (2009). Spiritualities of life. In P. B. Clarke (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the sociology of religion* (pp. 758-782). New York City, NY: Oxford University Press.
- [16] Knoblauch, H. (2010). Popular Spirituality. *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 19, s. 24-39.
- [17] Redden, G. (2016). Revisiting the spiritual supermarket: Does the commodification of spirituality necessarily devalue it? *Culture and Religion*, 17(2), 231–249.
- [18] Van der Veer, P. (2009). Spirituality in Modern Society. *Social Research*, 76, s.1097-1120.
- [19] York, M. (1995). *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-pagan Movements*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.