



## DIGITAL RELIGION AND VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW OF ONLINE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

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### **Abstract**

#### **Keywords:**

*bibliometric  
review; digital  
religion; virtual  
communities*

*Technological transformation has affected every aspect of human life, including the way individuals and communities conduct their spiritual activities. This phenomenon, known as digital religion, has become increasingly prevalent in society. Recently, numerous scientific studies have been conducted on the topic of digital religion and virtual communities. This study analyzes digital religion and virtual communities using a bibliometric approach, employing the Biblioshiny R programming application and data from Scopus, spanning the period from 2011 to 2024. The resulting dataset comprises 31 scientific articles, which were then extracted and summarized. The results showed a fluctuating production of articles on the topic of digital religion and virtual communities each year, with the highest production occurring in 2024 when a total of 7 scientific articles were published. Meanwhile, the average number of citations for scientific articles occurred in 2011. Sweden dominates in the contribution of articles and citations, while the United States occupies a position slightly below it. The top researchers in this field are Alfonso, I. B and Buesa, M. G. The journal with the most publications is Jenkins H. Convergence Culture. The major trends and thematic clusters reflect the picture related to digital religion and virtual communities. This research makes a significant contribution to understanding the development of digital religion and virtual communities research through bibliometric analysis. This research can serve as a strategic guide for future researchers who will delve deeper into this topic.*

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### Abstrak

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#### Kata kunci:

analisis  
bibliometrik;  
agama digital;  
komunitas virtual

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Transformasi teknologi telah mempengaruhi setiap aspek kehidupan manusia, termasuk cara individu dan komunitas dalam menjalankan kegiatan spiritualnya. Fenomena ini dikenal sebagai agama digital, kehadirannya kian marak di masyarakat. Belakangan ini, sudah banyak penelitian ilmiah dengan topik fenomena tersebut, digital religion and virtual communities. Penelitian ini menganalisis digital religion and virtual communities melalui pendekatan bibliometrik dengan aplikasi Biblioshiny R programming yang menggunakan data dari Scopus dalam rentang waktu 2011-2024. Dataset yang dihasilkan sebanyak 31 artikel ilmiah, kemudian diekstrak dan dirangkum. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya fluktuatif produksi artikel dengan topik digital religion and virtual communities setiap tahunnya, dan produksi tertinggi terjadi pada tahun 2024 dengan total 7 publikasi artikel ilmiah. Sementara rata-rata sitasi artikel ilmiah terjadi pada 2011. Swedia mendominasi kontribusi artikel dan sitasi, sementara Amerika Serikat menempati posisi di bawahnya dengan selisih tipis. Peneliti teratas dalam bidang ini ditempati oleh Alfonso, I. B dan Buesa, M. G. Jurnal dengan publikasi terbanyak diraih oleh Jenkins H. *Convergence Culture*. Tren dan tematik cluster-cluster utama mencerminkan gambaran terkait dengan digital religion and komunitas virtual. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi signifikan dalam memahami perkembangan penelitian digital religion and virtual communities melalui analisis bibliometrik. Penelitian ini dapat dijadikan panduan strategis bagi peneliti yang akan mengeksplorasi topik ini lebih dalam ke depannya.

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#### How to cite this (APA 7th Edition):

Alrissa, R. S., Winoto, Y., & Khadijah, U. L. S. (2025). Digital Religion And Virtual Communities: A Bibliometric Review Of Online Religious Practices, *Al-Balagh : Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi*, 10(1), 119-148, <https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v10i1.10436>

## INTRODUCTION

### *Background Of The Study*

Technological transformation has impacted every aspect of human life, including the way individuals and communities live their spiritual lives. In recent times, the internet has transformed into a platform for communication, learning and interaction. However, more than just a communication tool, the internet has created new spaces for religious expression and practice that were previously limited to physical spaces, such as houses of worship or local communities. The internet, as a new space for religious

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expression, has further potential for religions to disseminate their ideologies through digital intermediaries (Toni, Ronaldo, Yazid, & Aditya, 2021). This phenomenon is known as digital religion, which, in other words, is defined as religious expression mediated by digital technology.

Campbell & Evolvi (2020) note that, over the past few decades, innovations in digital technology, as well as their reception and adaptation by various groups of religious users, combined with advancements in internet studies, have given rise to the study of digital religion. Digital religion refers to the ways in which religious beliefs, values, and practices are integrated into digital spaces. According to Campbell (2017), digital religion refers to the technological and culturally generated spaces where offline and online religious domains intersect, allowing for the emergence of hybrid spaces of practice. The concept of digital religion leads to new ways in which religion can be expressed, practised and even experienced in digital spaces (Sinaga, 2024).

According to McDonnell (2014) and Campbell & Tsuria (2021), digital religion refers to the ways in which the fluid and flexible nature of the internet enables new forms of religiosity and religious practices that exist in cyberspace. Ilhami (2022) stated that the emergence of virtual religious communities can shift the conventional order in religious life. Wahid (2020) noted that the shift of traditional culture towards digital often coincides with changes in societal values. The internet will eventually shape a new culture in social and religious practices (Malik, 2021). The presence of virtual religious communities enables religious believers who are scattered and whose members come from various regions or even parts of the world to connect, share experiences, and engage in religious practices together.

Along with the rise of digital religion comes the phenomenon of virtual communities, which are groups of individuals who interact online based on common interests, including religion. Fitriana (2024) defines virtual communities as social aggregations on the internet that encompass various issues discussed over a prolonged period and involve the thoughts and feelings of their members. This phenomenon has created a unique virtual space where the boundaries between religion, culture and technology are blurred. Rituals that once required physical presence, such as mass sermons, and other spiritual activities, can now be performed online. This provides

greater access, especially for individuals who were previously isolated from their religious communities due to geographical, social, or health reasons. The phenomenon of virtual communities facilitates access to information for religious believers and their members in performing religious rituals (Kuncari, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also played a role in accelerating digital transformation, including in religious contexts. O'Brien (2020) is clear that the rise of innovation in digital religion is also partly due to COVID-19 and its associated lockdowns worldwide. As social distancing restrictions were imposed worldwide, many houses of worship were forced to close, compelling congregations and religious leaders to find alternative ways to worship. This situation accelerated the adoption of digital technologies among religious institutions, including those that were previously reluctant to adapt to technological change.

Simanjuntak (2022) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic presents new challenges in navigating three communities: the physical community, the family community, and the virtual community. Nugraha (2023) stated that the church continually strives to innovate, improving its methods and utilizing digital communication media to foster faith among its people. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, many Catholic churches began to implement online religious activities, and Mass was conducted online with a priest leading the service from a screen (Tonggo & Irwansyah, 2021). Under these conditions, digital platforms are an inevitable solution. Sermons, prayers, and other religious rituals are now being streamed online to platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, YouTube Live, Instagram, and TikTok. Many churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues have begun offering live-streaming services to ensure that their congregations can continue to worship even if they are unable to attend in person.

Randani, Safrizal, Latuconsina, and Purwanto (2021) note that social media, such as TikTok, has garnered considerable public attention for its preaching. Experienced scholars have widely used this platform to reach young *da'is* and spread religious messages. Nahied & Ubaidillah (2024) consider TikTok to be a platform that allows *da'i* to convey religious and spiritual messages in a more relevant and contemporary way. By combining religious teachings with everyday conditions, the messages conveyed become more easily accepted and relevant to the younger generation (Hidayat, et al.,

2024). Homogeneity in virtual worlds brings together diverse community members with different backgrounds, which aligns with the fluid and open nature of virtual spaces (Iswaratama, 2024).

According to Ariyani, Wilujeng, and Dwiningrum (2022), bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research approach that utilizes statistical and mathematical tools to analyze articles or research data. Adirati, Susianti, & Ananda (2023) wrote that bibliometrics is a method used to analyze, measure, and evaluate citations, collaboration between authors, and author productivity in scientific research. According to Guofang, Rasul, and Omar (2024), bibliometric analysis can provide a quantitative and objective representation of research trends in a particular field, collaboration networks, influential publications, and the primary contributors to research in a specific field of knowledge.

In other words, bibliometric analysis is used as a technique to examine information networks and identify solutions to thematic issues within a topic (Fahamsyah et al., 2023). Ananda, Rizal, & Rohman (2025) explained that bibliometric analysis aims to map the structure of science. Mapping science needs to be designed to explore the structure and dynamics of a scientific field (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). With bibliometric analysis, it is possible to systematically review and synthesise the literature (Latifah, Winoto, & Khadijah, 2024).

### ***Research Gap***

The internet has become a vital platform that enables individuals and communities to lead their spiritual lives without geographical or social boundaries. Numerous researchers have conducted research on digital religion and virtual communities, Campbell & Evolvi (2020) argue that digital spaces are not only a means of communication but also a space for shaping new religious identities. Therefore, understanding these dynamics is crucial to exploring the changing global spiritual landscape. Another study, Homogeneity in virtual worlds, brings together diverse community members with different backgrounds, which corresponds to the fluid and open nature of virtual spaces (Iswaratama, 2024).

The application of quantitative analysis, particularly bibliometric analyses, in this subject is limited. Limited research has investigated the evolution of themes in digital religion in relation to technological and social development. The current literature primarily focuses on the emergence of digital faiths and virtual communities, although the examination of research progress in this field has received limited attention. Furthermore, the acceleration of digital adoption during the COVID-19 epidemic has not been comprehensively examined regarding its impact on the evolution of digital religion research. The bibliometric technique facilitates the mapping of knowledge structures within a topic by analyzing publication patterns, author collaborations, and journal production (Ariyani, Wilujeng, & Dwiningrum, 2022; Guofang, Rasul, & Omar, 2024).

### ***Purposes Of The Study***

This study aims to employ bibliometric analysis on a compilation of Scopus-indexed research datasets related to digital religion and virtual communities from 2011 to 2024. This study will analyze the authors, sources, nations, and publishing trends related to these themes. The analysis encompasses the evaluation of numerous elements, including research trends, contributing authors, citations, and concept development pertinent to digital religion and virtual communities. Bibliometric analyses can provide extensive insights into the diverse research trajectories and advancements related to digital religion and virtual communities.

### ***Rationale Of The Study***

The rationale of this research is to investigate the analysis of the development of digital religion, and virtual communities research trends in the Scopus database. Understanding the development of research trends is crucial for understanding how the production of articles and the number of citations per year, as well as which countries and affiliations are most productive in conducting research and identifying the authors who contribute the most. This knowledge also helps determine what research trends are related to the topic of digital religion and virtual communities.

### ***Novelty Of The Study***

According to McDonnell (2014), the flexibility of the internet is reflected in digital religion, which enables new forms of religiosity and religious practices that live in cyberspace. Ilhami (2022) notes that the presence of this virtual religious community enables a shift in the conventional order of religious life. The COVID-19 pandemic has also been instrumental in driving the development of digital religion and its associated lockdowns worldwide (O'Brien, 2020). As social distancing restrictions were imposed around the world, many houses of worship were forced to close, forcing congregations and religious leaders to find alternative ways to worship. This situation accelerated the adoption of digital technologies among religious institutions, including those that were previously reluctant to adapt to technological change.

Along with the development of digital religion and virtual communities, numerous studies have explored this topic, particularly since the COVID-19 Pandemic. Nevertheless, there has been no research that has mapped the publication of scientific articles on the topic of digital religion and virtual communities. The novelty of this research lies in the research methodology used, namely bibliometric analysis using R-biblioshiny. Bibliometric analysis enables researchers to identify various sub-categories of analysis on a research topic through the visualization of interesting graphs, tables, and patterns. This research provides an overview of research trends on digital religion and virtual communities, serving as a reference for further studies on this topic.

### **METHODS**

This research uses a quantitative method with a bibliometric analysis approach. Research conducted using this bibliometric approach can produce interesting visualizations and research data tables based on researchers, years of research, citations, information sources, countries, and research trends studied. Many tools can be used to make bibliometric analyses, such as R-biblioshiny. R-biblioshiny is a web interface that is integrated with the latest version, allowing users from various backgrounds to conduct bibliometric analysis using this programme. According to the R Core Team (2021), biblioshiny is a web interface that operates on the R system. R itself is open software that can be accessed easily and for free. R-biblioshiny is a

software programme developed by Professor Massimo Aria in 2017 in the R programming language (Fanani & Safii, 2023).

This research is based on data collection activities that extract data from the Scopus database, focusing on the topics of digital communities and virtual communities, spanning the years 2011-2024. The time span was chosen based on the results of data collection from the Scopus database with the keywords 'Digital AND Religion AND Virtual AND Communities'. The data criteria in this research are limited to scientific articles, and the selected subject areas are the arts and humanities, as well as social science.

The Scopus database was used in this study to search and collect datasets that represent the topic under study. The imported data is the result of the researcher's search on 3 December 2024, based on the keywords 'Digital AND Religion AND Virtual AND Communities', and resulted in 56 data points. In the data search, the search result components include abstracts, article titles, and keywords. Then, the data were selected according to the predetermined criteria, leaving 31 data points that could be studied. After going through all these stages, the dataset was downloaded in CSV format and then the data was analysed and visualised using the R-Biblioshiny tool.

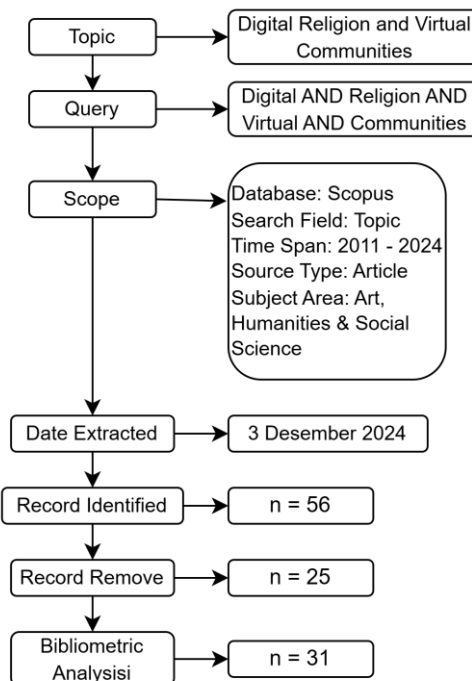


Figure 1. Data Processing Flow

Table 1. Data Source Set And Selection

Category	Information
Research Database	Scopus
Time Range	2011 - 2024
Language	English, Russian, Spanish, French
Keyword Search	Digital AND Religion AND Virtual AND Communities
Document Type	Article
Data Extraction	Exported with complete records (citations, bibliography, abstract & keywords, and other information) in CSV format
Number of Sample	31

The set of data sources and subjects is the result obtained from bibliometric mapping based on the Scopus database. In visualizing this bibliometric research data, researchers utilized the Biblioshiny software, which aims to facilitate visualization activities and provide a comprehensive representation of the results obtained from the topic of digital religion and virtual communities for the period 2011-2024.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The search terms used in Scopus were ‘Digital AND Religion AND Virtual AND Communities,’ and the time span of the scholarly articles from 2011 to 2024 was used as the criterion for constructing this dataset. The following is the main information about this dataset that has been extracted and summarised.

Table 2. Main Information

Description	Information
Time Range	2011 - 2024
Document	31
Annual Growth Rate %	16.15
Document Average Age	4.42
Average Citations per document	4.806
Reference	1240
Author	59
Single-Author Document	17
Co-Author Document	1.9
International Co-Authorship %	6.452
Document Type	Article

Using the keywords 'Digital AND Religion AND Virtual AND Communities' from 2011 to 2024 enabled the researcher to analyse long-term research trends. There are a total of 31 scientific articles that have been reviewed and processed in the bibliometric study for this research. This dataset was extracted from the Scopus database. In this study, the key information extracted from the data extraction process forms a crucial foundation for the bibliometric analysis of the topic of Digital religion and virtual communities. The dataset used has been carefully collated, and the results are presented neatly in Table 2, providing a comprehensive picture that supports the research objectives.

### Overview

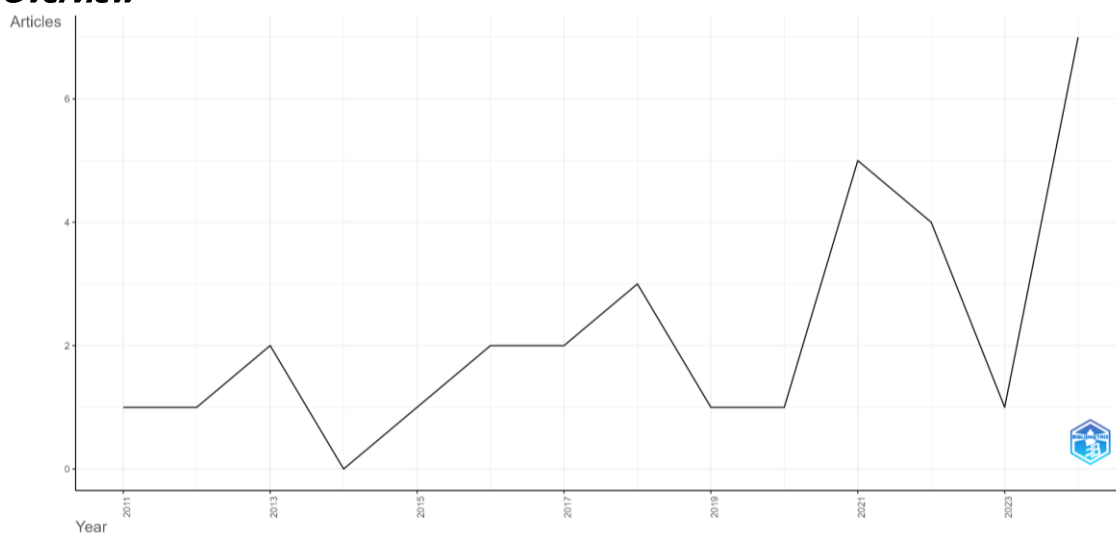


Figure 2. Annual Scientific Article Production

Table 3. Annual Scientific Production

Year	Articles
2011 - 2013	4
2014 - 2016	3
2017 - 2019	6
2020 - 2024	18

In Figure 2, it can be seen that the research trend of digital religion and virtual communities is quite fluctuating and tends to increase, with a peak in 2024, when the number of articles reaches 6. This graph illustrates the number of scientific articles published each year, with significant increases observed in certain periods, such as

2014, 2016, 2020, and 2021. Although there are some decreases in certain years, the overall trend shows a positive development over time. This increase indicates a higher intensity of research activity in these periods.

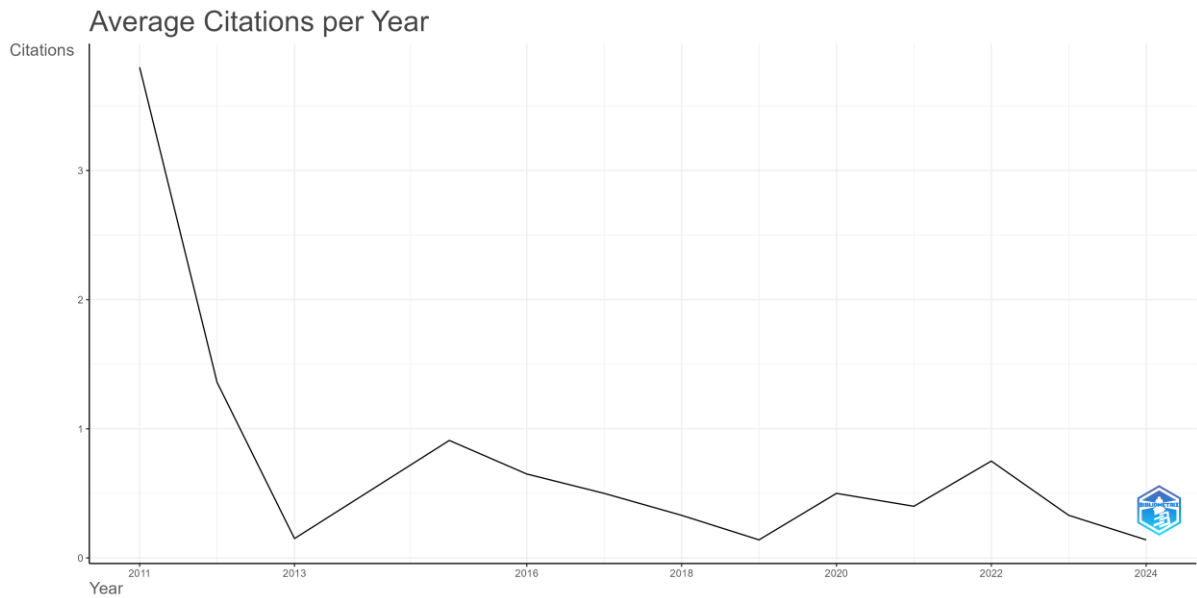


Figure 3. Average Citations Per Year

Table 4. Average Citations Per Year

Year	Average Per Year
2011	3.80
2012	1.36
2013	0.15
2014	0.15
2015	0.91
2016	0.65
2017	0.50
2018	0.33
2019	0.14
2020	0.50
2021	0.40
2022	0.75
2023	0.33
2024	0.14

In Figure 3, the average number of scientific articles cited per year is interpreted. Over time, there is variation in the average citations per year, with some

years having higher values than others. The annual publication of cited articles increased in 2011 with an average citation of 4.07 per year and decreased in 2012 with an average citation of 1.46 per year. There were fluctuations in the average number of citations per year in certain years related to this research topic. There was a significant decline in 2013, with the average reaching 0.17 citations per year. Furthermore, in 2015 there was a significant increase, with an average of 1.00 citations per year.

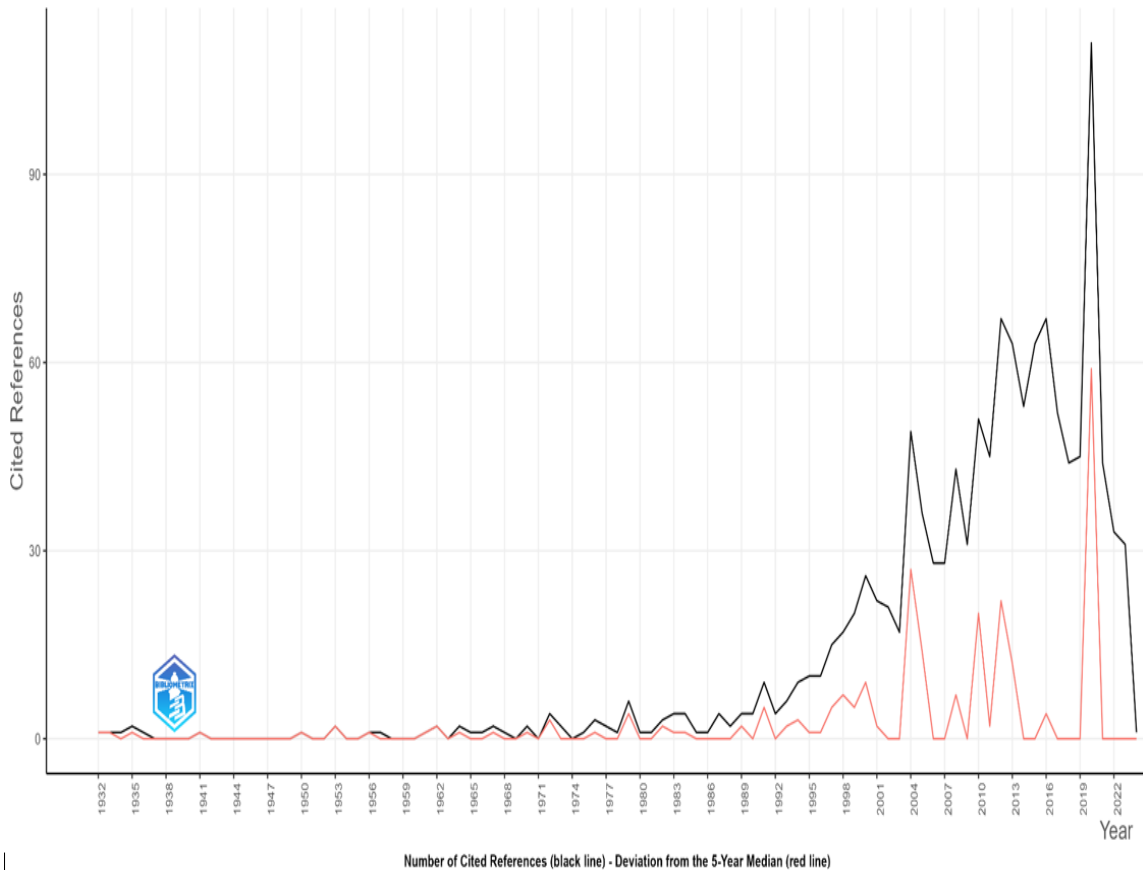


Figure 4. Reference Publication Year Spectroscopy

Next is an analysis of the references used in scientific articles published based on the year of spectroscopy. RPYS (Reference Publication Year Spectroscopy), is a bibliometric method used to analyze the historical origins of a research field or researcher by examining the references cited (CR) and, especially, the publication years referenced in a set of publications (Leydesdorff et al., 2016). The most widely cited references in scientific articles on this topic are those from 2020, with a total of 111 references.

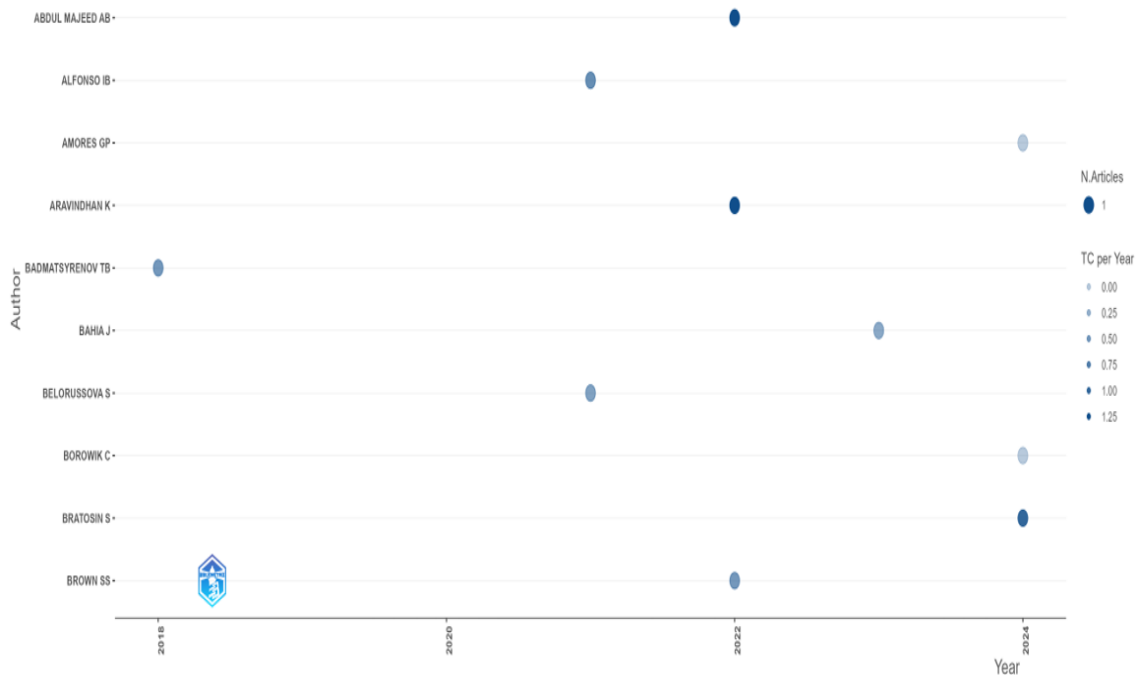


Figure 5. Author's Production Over Time

Table 5. Author's Production Over Time

Ranking	Author	Year	Frequency
1	Abdul Majeed, A. B	2022	1
2	Alfonso, I. B	2021	1
3	Amores, G. P	2024	1
4	Aravindhan, K.	2022	1
5	Badmatsyrenov ,T. B	2018	1
6	Bahia, J.	2023	1
7	Belorussova, S.	2021	1
8	Borowik, C.	2024	1
9	Bratosin, S.	2024	1
10	Brown, S. S	2022	1

The table is the result of a bibliometric analysis, which contains the distribution of authors in digital religion and virtual communities. The results of this analysis show that there is an equal number of frequencies among the authors, each of whom issued one publication on this topic. This analysis of the top authors can provide valuable information for researchers and journal readers, enabling them to understand the contribution profile and research influence of each author and institution related to the topic of library promotion strategies.

**Affiliate Analysis**

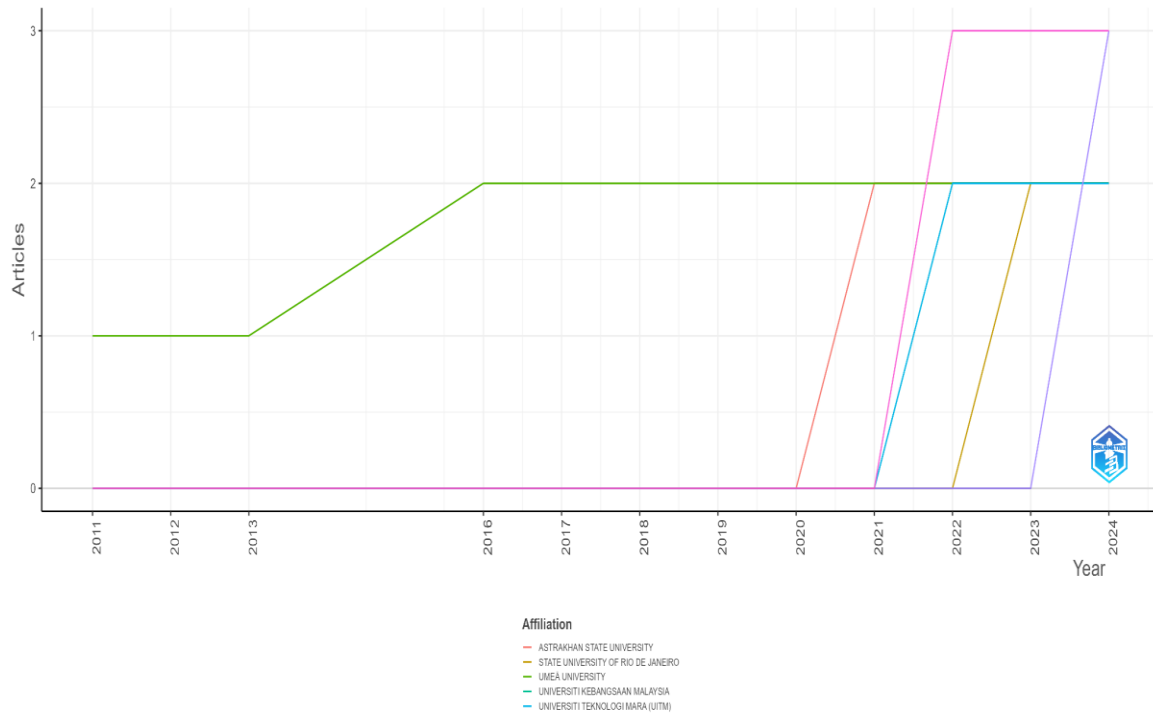


Figure 6. Affiliations Production Over Time

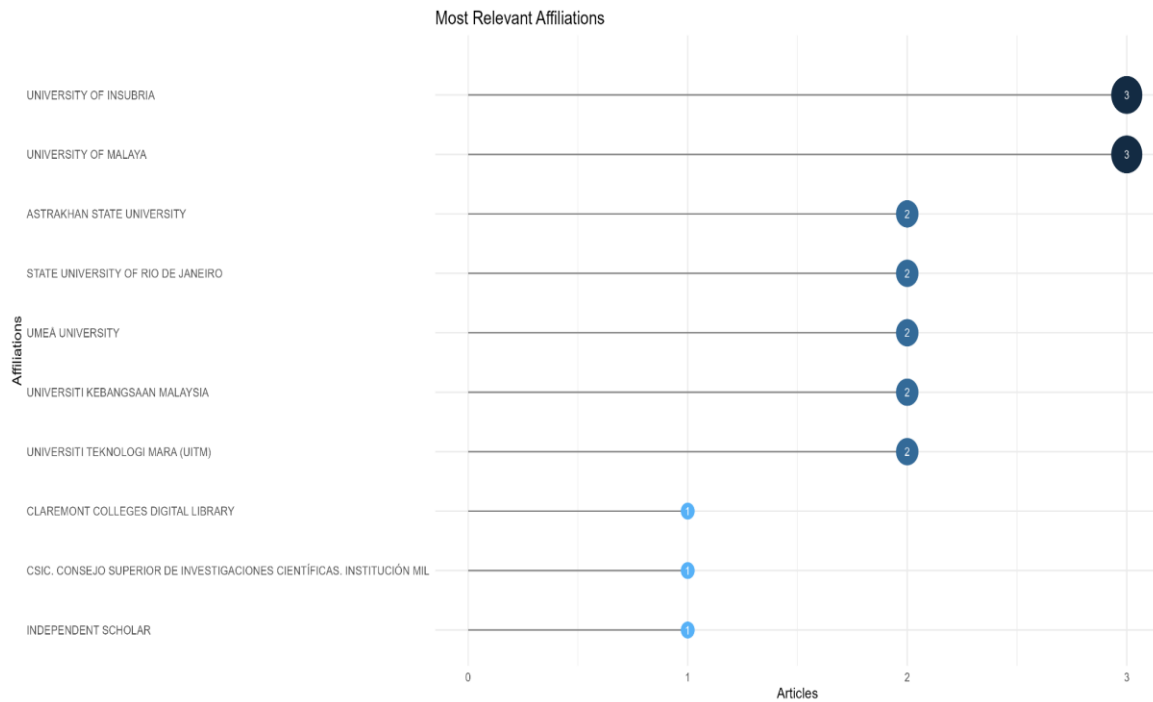


Figure 7. Most Relevant Affiliations

Table 6. Most Relevant Affiliations

Ranking	Institution	Number of Articles
1	University of Insubria	3
2	University of Malaya	3
3	Astrakhan State University	2
4	State University of Rio De Janeiro	2
5	Umea University	2
6	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	2
7	Universiti Teknologi Mara (UITM)	2
8	Claremont Colleges Digital Library	1
9	Institucion Mila Y Fontanals De Investigacio En Humanidades	1
10	Independent Scholar	1

Based on this figure, the University of Malaya has 3 author affiliations in research in the field of digital religion and virtual communities. The three authors are recorded as making joint publications, including Aravindhan, et al. (2022). With the same number of author affiliations, Insubria University is below. These three author affiliations include Fusco, Licata, & Picozzi (2024). Other universities, such as Astrakhan State University, Rio de Janeiro State University, and Umeå University, also stand out with consistent contributions to the topic, indicating continuity in their engagement with the subject. This increased participation from previously less active universities reflects the potential for future research expansion in digital literacy as well as opportunities for cross-institutional collaboration. This analysis shows that the affiliation of researchers from these universities has a role in the development of research in this field in this Scopus dataset

### ***Journal Analysis***

Next is the analysis of journals with the aim of segmenting journal publications on the topic of digital literacy in school libraries. The analysis of journals using Bradford's law aims to determine the level of productivity of journals, which in the analyzed literature will be categorized from those that publish the most scientific articles to those with the most relevant knowledge. In addition, further elaborating on the analysis of these journals aims to distinguish the core area where most scientific articles are published from the peripheral area (Venable et al., 2016). The results of

analysing journals using Bradford's law provide deep insights into the structure of the scientific literature by identifying key journals and understanding the level of focus across different rankings.

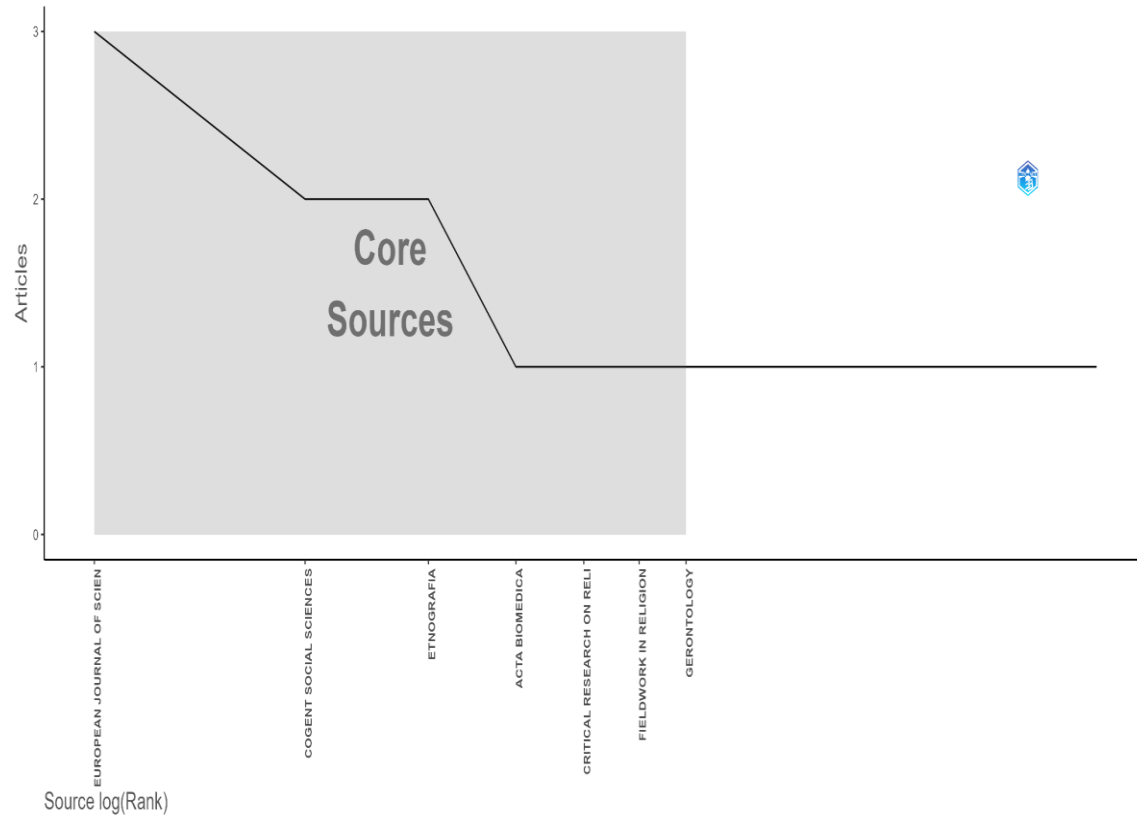


Figure 8. Bradford's Law

Table 7. Bradford's Law

Zone	Ranking	Number of Journal	Number of Article
Zone 1	1 - 7	11	11
Zone 2	8 - 17	10	10
Zone 3	18 - 27	10	10

Zones in this context are groupings of journals based on the production of articles on the topic of digital religion and virtual communities. Based on the analysis results, the journals are divided into three different zones: Zone 1, which is occupied by journals ranked 1-7; Zone 2, which contains journals ranked 8-17; and the last zone, which comprises journals ranked 18-27.

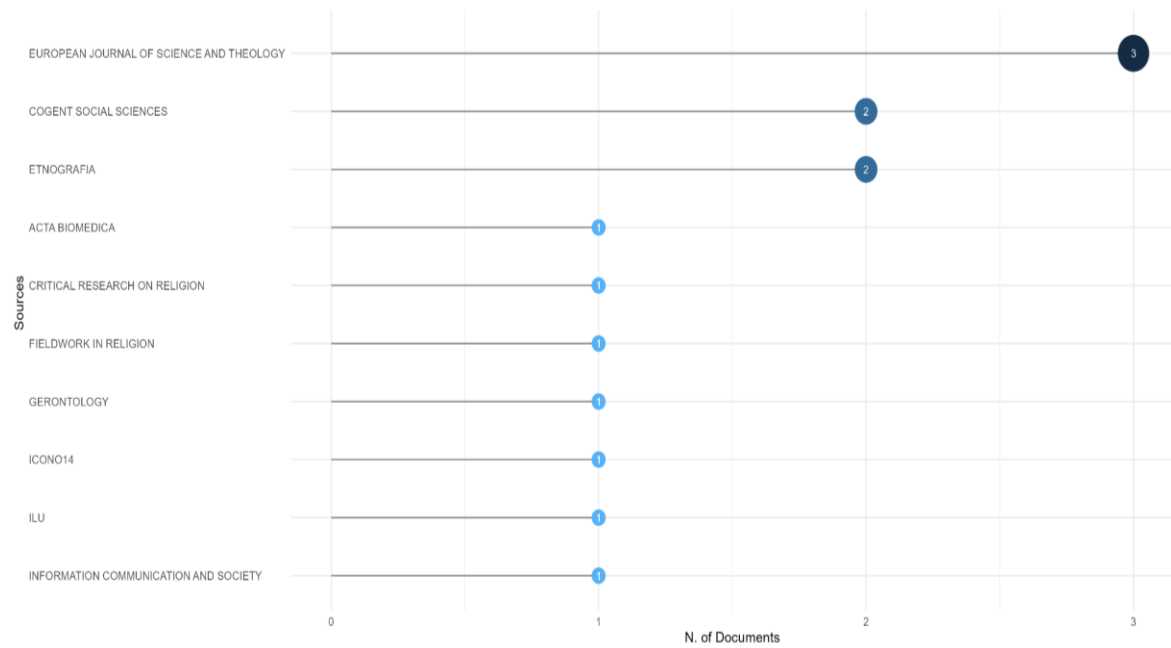


Figure 9. Most Relevant Sources

Table 8. Most Relevant Sources

Ranking	Journal	Frequency of Publication
1	European Journal of Science And Theology	3
2	Cogent Social Sciences	2
3	Etnografia	2
4	Acta Biomedica	1
5	Critical Research on Religion	1
6	Fieldwork on Religion	1
7	Gerontology	1
8	Icono14	1
9	ILU	1
10	Information Communication and Society	1

Figure 9 contains information related to some of the most relevant journals based on the number of articles published on the topics of digital religion and virtual communities. Based on the analysis figure, The European Journal of Science and Theology, with a total of three articles published on the topic of digital religion and virtual communities, is the first source of relevant journal information. This journal has a significant impact on the three articles published on this topic (In the beginning was the internet (2017); Psycho-logic within techno-logical settings (2013); The influence of

rhizomality and transgressiveness on religious identity in the digital era (2021)). In addition, two scientific journals published two articles on this topic, Cogent Social Sciences (Jehovah's Witnesses' Adoption Of Digitally-Mediated Services During COVID-19 Pandemic (2022); Islamic Proselytizing in Digital Religion in Indonesia: the challenges of broadcasting regulation (2024)), and Etnografia (Cyber religions, between dematerializing the sacred and re-enchanting the world (2018); Foundations of Comparison: Finding Home in a material Field site, a digital Field site, and a Virtual Village (2021)). This analysis of the most relevant journals can help researchers understand the journals that have an impact in the field of digital religion and virtual communities research and assess their relevance and influence in the scientific literature on Scopus.

### **Country Analysis**

Analyses of these countries, particularly in this context, aim to provide an interpretation of the impact and significance of research from diverse demographic regions.

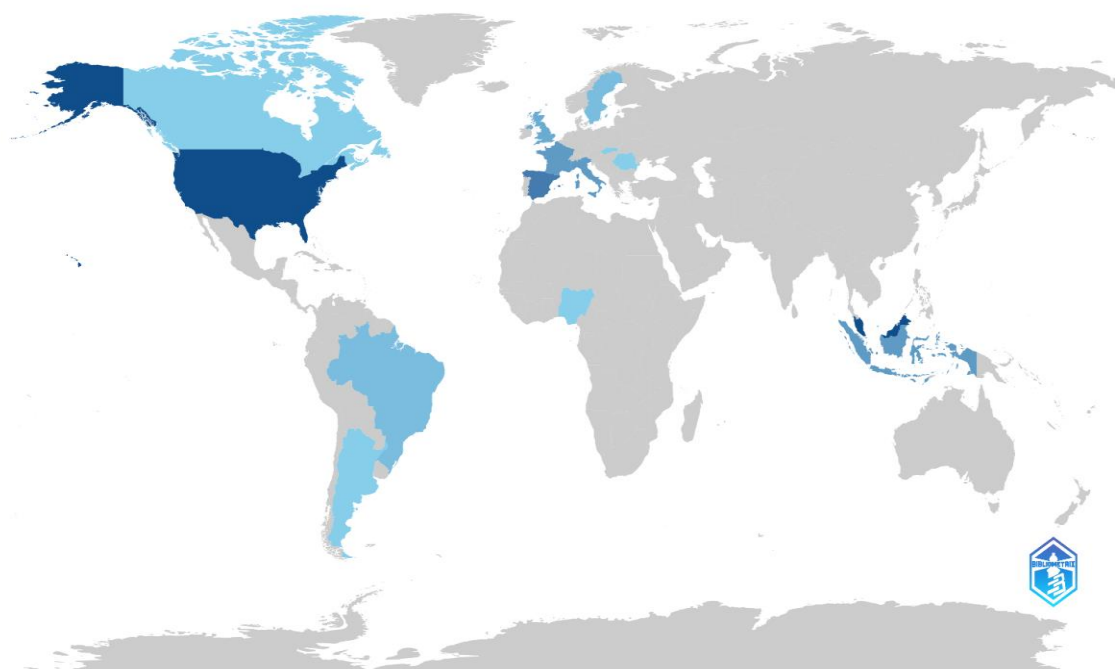


Figure 10. Country Scientific Production

Table 9. Country Scientific Production

Ranking	Country	Frequency
1	Malaysia	9
2	USA	9
3	Spain	6
4	France	4
5	Indonesia	4
6	Italy	4
7	UK	3
8	Brazil	2
9	Sweden	2
10	Argentina	1

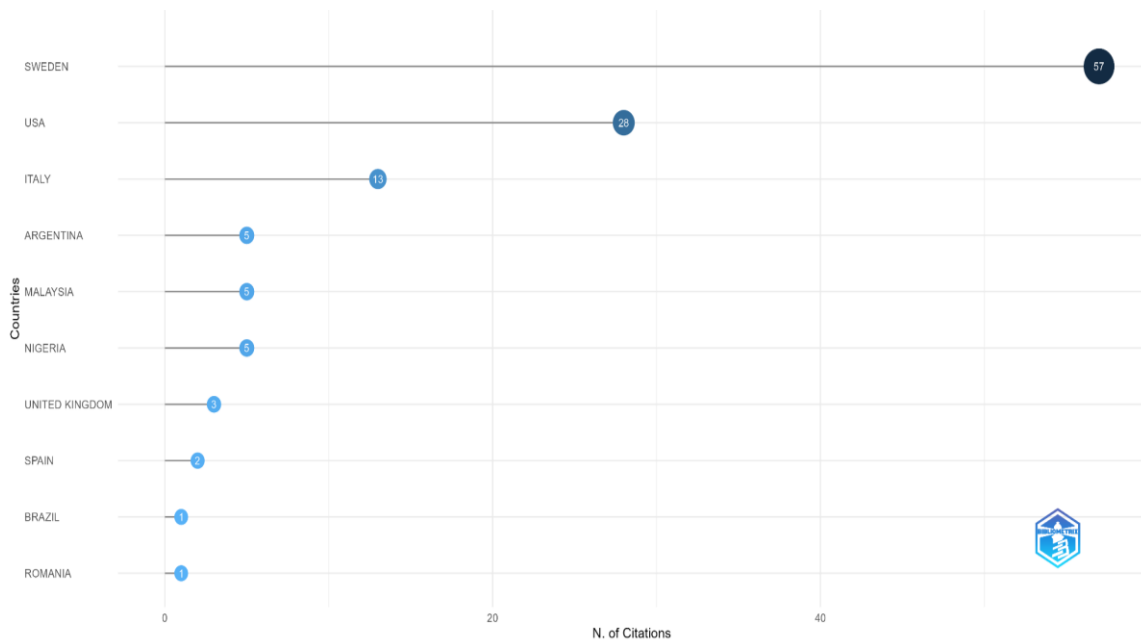


Figure 11. Most Cited Countries

Table 10. Most Cited Country

Ranking	Country	Frequency
1	Sweden	57
2	USA	28
3	Italy	13
4	Argentina	5
5	Malaysia	5
6	Nigeria	5
7	UK	3
8	Spain	2
9	Brazil	1
10	Romania	1

Based on the figure above, the country with the most cited scientific article publication is Sweden, with 57 citations, specifically "Contemporary Religious Community and the Online Church" (2011). The large number of citations demonstrates that scientific articles originating from the Swedish region are frequently cited by researchers and scientists worldwide, particularly in the Scopus database. Followed by the United States, which was cited 28 times, Religious Identity and Borderless Territoriality in the Coptic e-Diaspora (2017); Projecting, exposing, revealing self in the digital world: Usernames as a Social Practice in a Moroccan chatroom (2012); Ethnography of religious instants: Multi-sited ethnography and the idea of "third spaces" (2015); Sacred realms in virtual worlds: The making of Buddhist spaces in Second Life (2019). The number of citations of scientific articles published in Sweden and the United States is quite far apart, which is almost double. This indicates that Swedish articles on digital religion and virtual communities have garnered significant global recognition and relevance, contributing to the country's scientific output in this field.

### **Trend Analysis**



Figure 12. Word Cloud

Table 11. Word Cloud Frequency

Topics related to digital religion and virtual communities	Frequency
Religion	4
Frailty	3
Malaysia	3
Article	2
Cultural Identity	2
Human	2
Interpersonal Communication	2
Adult	1
Aged	1
Aging	1

This word cloud visualisation illustrates the trend analysis on this topic of digital religion and virtual communities in the Scopus database. The word “Religion” appears 4 times in the Scopus database with this topic. It is followed by the words “Malaysia”, “frailty”, “interpersonal communication”, “cultural identity”, “article”, and “human”.

### **Discussion**

Fluctuations in the number of annual publications suggest external influences, such as technological advancements, global events, or specific social conditions. If we look further, the significant spike in publications in 2021 then dropped in 2023 and increased again in 2024. The fluctuation can be attributed to the accelerated adoption of digital technology during the COVID-19 pandemic, which encouraged many researchers to explore themes related to digital religion. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, information and communication technology is a resource that churches must utilize skillfully for the proclamation of the Great Commission in the digital age (Simanjuntak, 2022).

Sweden occupies the top position as the country with the highest number of citations in this study. This can be attributed to the quality of research produced and the innovative approaches used by researchers in Sweden. Several local churches are beginning to explore the use of digital media as a means of religious expression. As institutional religious involvement declines and the use of new media becomes more

widespread in Sweden, understanding the characteristics of a religious community can help in utilizing new communication channels (Lundby & Evolvi, 2022).

University of Malaya and University of Insubria are the institutions with the highest number of publications in this study. This dominance is most likely related to the presence of courses or research centres that focus on digital religion and virtual communities. Both institutions are active in cross-university collaboration, which broadens the scope of their research. Researchers also require social support and influence to increase scientific publications. In other words, to increase the productivity of scientific publications, teachers also need to consider social support. The greater the social support they get, the more it will affect the productivity of their scientific publications (Lestari, Faozanudin, & Puspita, 2018).

Analysis of journals reveals that the European Journal of Science and Theology is the primary source, with the highest number of publications. The journal is specifically orientated toward interdisciplinary studies involving theology, science, and digital studies, making it a top choice for digital religion research publications. Meanwhile, the results of the author analysis in this field show an interesting thing. Authors in the research topics of digital religion and virtual communities are evenly distributed with only one research each, including Brown, S. S. (Jehovah's Witnesses' Adoption of Digitally-Mediated Services During COVID-19 Pandemic, 2022) and Alfonso, I. B. (Stardom as mythology of the digital age: Hyperculturality and Rosalía's El mal querer, 2021).

Trend analysis based on word clouds, shows that this field is highly relevant in the digital age, especially with the emergence of virtual platforms in religious practice. There are several dominant themes related to the topic of digital religion and virtual communities, including the words "religion", "frailty", "Malaysia", "article", "cultural identity", "interpersonal communication", and "human". This reflects the aspects that are the main focus related to this topic.

Previous research has highlighted how technology supports virtual communities in interacting and sharing spiritual experiences. The dominance of the words "religion" and "cultural identity" confirms that research on digital religion addresses how cultural identities are formed and maintained in digital spaces. The

disruption of the digital era has led to significant changes in various aspects of life, including religious practices and societal perceptions of religion (Syahputra, 2017). This is in line with global trends where online platforms have become the main medium for discussing and expressing religious identity.

The words "frailty" and "human" suggest that issues related to human frailty, both physical and psychological, have relevance to virtual communities. This could include discussions on spiritual support for vulnerable individuals or how digital religion offers solutions for those in distress. In a previous study by Sinaga (2024), technological advancements led to the emergence of various online spiritual communities that enable individuals from diverse backgrounds to come together, share their views, and support one another's religious activities, all without being bound by geographical limitations. Meanwhile, interpersonal communication in virtual communities highlights the role of technology in shaping or transforming patterns of interaction between individuals in the religious sphere.

The word cloud also highlights themes with lower frequency of occurrence, such as "artificial intelligence", "health care policy", and "clinical article", indicating the potential for further research. AI can be utilised in the automation of religious services, such as faith-based chatbots or algorithms that customise religious content for users. However, research in this aspect is still relatively limited. The rapid development of technology, giving rise to new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), blockchain, the internet of things (IoT), and quantum computing, is expected to transform the digital landscape in the future further (Sinaga, 2024).

The analysis in this study has limitations, including the use of only one database, Scopus, which may not encompass all relevant publications in this field. Restricting the dataset to scholarly articles only may also exclude important insight from industry reports or non-academic publications that may make different contributions to this topic. This research has implications for applying bibliometric analysis to the topics of digital religion and virtual communities between 2011 and 2024. Bibliometric analysis can help provide a comprehensive understanding of the various research directions and developments related to digital religion and virtual

communities. Based on the results of this bibliometric analysis, future research could address related topics such as the influence of the local culture on the adoption of digital religion, the impact of new technologies such as artificial intelligence on religious expression, or the ethical challenges in virtual spiritual practices which are still relatively rarely discussed, such topics could provide a comprehensive view.

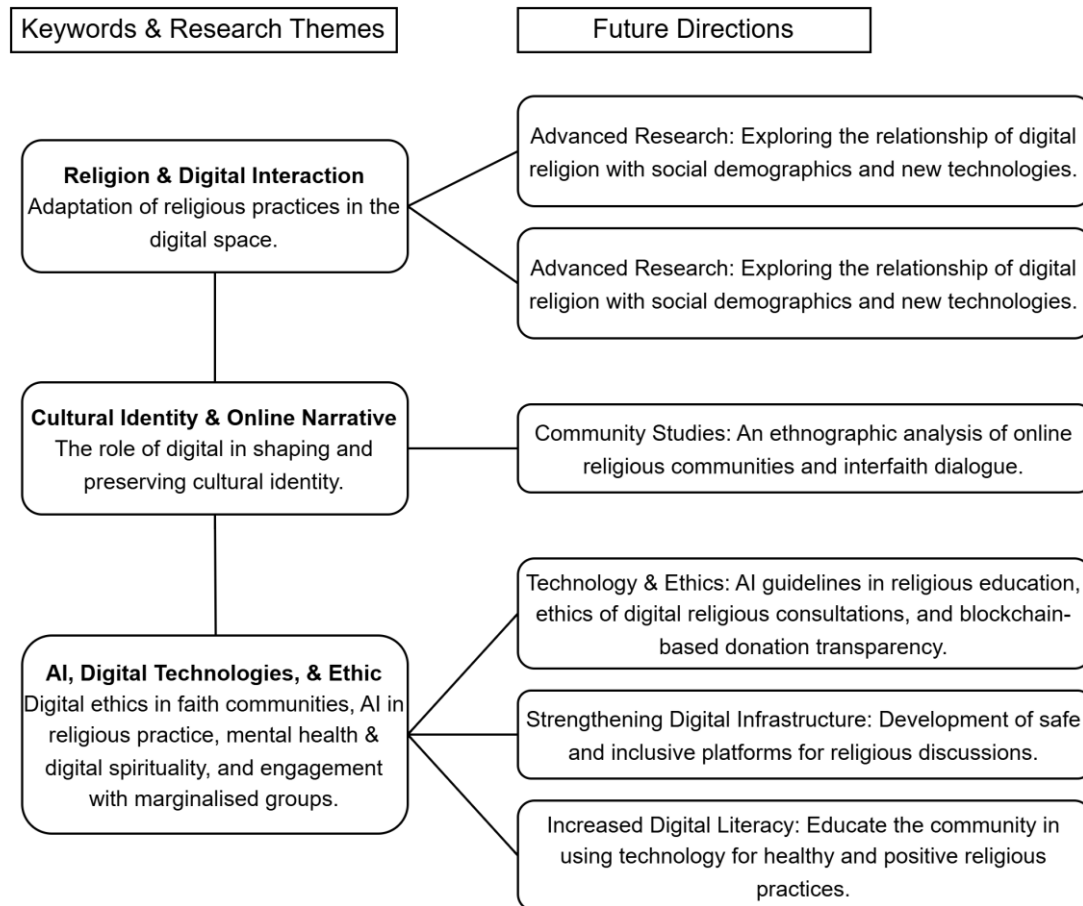


Figure 13. Future Directions

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

### Conclusions

Bibliometric analyses of digital religion and virtual communities based on datasets from Scopus spanning 2011-2024 provide a rich and detailed picture. The number of scholarly articles exhibits an increasing trend over time, peaking in 2024.

Meanwhile, fluctuations in average citations per year offer insight into variations in research impact from year to year, with the highest peak also occurring in 2024. The European Journal of Science and Theology is a relevant source of information, and journal zone analyses provide a perspective on research focus, ranging from core to topic expansion. Country contributions highlight Sweden's dominance in the number of articles and citations, while the United States stands out with a high impact, despite having fewer citations than Sweden. The overall analysis provides a deep understanding of the dynamics of research on digital religion and virtual communities. The research not only reveals the contributions of the authors involved in the topic but also interprets the contributions of Scopus-indexed scholarly journals and the active participation of countries worldwide in advancing the field of digital religion and virtual communities.

The research results collected and interpreted in this study provide a comprehensive picture of the evolution and significance of digital religion research within the context of virtual communities, illustrating the diversity of perspectives, approaches, and contributions that comprise the knowledge framework on this topic. Using bibliometric analysis, research on digital religion and virtual communities can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and evolution of knowledge in the field, providing a solid foundation for further research development.

### ***Suggestions***

Based on the results of this bibliometric analysis, there is some focus on sub-themes that rarely appear and can be used as alternatives for future research, for example, the influence of local culture on the adoption of digital religion, the impact of new technologies such as artificial intelligence on religious expression, or ethical challenges in virtual spiritual practices are still relatively rarely discussed. Future research could focus more on these themes to provide a more comprehensive picture.

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