

METAPHYSICAL MATERIALISM IN DIGITAL AGE: THE INTERSECTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA, ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY, AND TALISMANIC EWOM CONSUMPTION AMONG THAI MILLENNIAL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines sociocultural determinants of talismanic acquisition and metaphysical beliefs. Using qualitative methodological frameworks, this investigation synthesizes rich ethnographic data to explain the complex interrelationships between digital socialization, consumer behavior, and supernatural belief systems in contemporary Thai society. The research makes use of rigorous content analysis to show the profound impact that virtual communities and social media ecosystems have had on cultivating and disseminating paranormal beliefs which consequently also steered electronic word-of-mouth dynamics as well as consumption patterns for apotropaic artifacts. The findings highlight the relationship between economics and traditional belief systems as evident in a rise in talismanic consumption among Thai youth thereby providing an insight into how supernatural materialism persists but at the same time transforms under late-stage capitalism and digital modernity. Furthermore, this paper adds value to academic discourse about the meeting grounds of traditional belief patterns as well as modern customer culture with particular reference to emerging digital spheres.

Keywords: eWOM, Talismanic, Millennial, Traditional Belief

1. INTRODUCTION

Materiality spirit is a very important aspect of religion especially when it comes to Buddhism whereby reality cannot be separated from its material aspect. The Thai society is very religious and has strong beliefs in metaphysics. This is the reason why there is a huge market for talismanic artifacts that are rented to people who believe in them. Talismanic artifacts belong to a group of material culture which have supernatural or magical characteristics ascribed to them, and they work like containers that hold metaphysical powers through which their owners can be protected, healed, made rich, other desirable results. They are not only limited to material aspects but also carry with them complex symbolic systems and epistemologies that enable people to understand the cosmic designs they represent, as well as global religious and cultural practices where they come into view as concrete manifestations of theoretical cosmological principles. The fact that they have a similar meaning across different civilizations means that these objects address the fundamental questions of human life concerning the feeling of vulnerability; uncertainty and the need for agency over unknown elements among others, thus necessitating interdisciplinary researches integrating anthropological knowledge with those from religious studies, art history, and material cultures. In this regard such objects can help bridge the gap between the spiritual world and everyday life.

Through this analysis it will become clearer how these objects provide a way for humans to interact with forces perceived to exist beyond direct sensory experience while at the same time reinforcing social orders, identities and patterns in religion within particular societies.

The consequence of this is that a strong and substantial commercial sector with significant market capitalization has developed. In the present study, Jalilv and Samiei's (2012) theoretical framework on e-wom's influence on brand image and purchase intention was used to examine consumer purchasing decision on sacred things in the Thai cultural context regarding how digital marketing communication strategies influence consumer procurement decisions regarding consecrated objects within the Thai cultural context. Consequently, for an amulet to have value, it must be ancient while still retaining its aesthetic integrity. This connection between age and value reflects a wider socio-cultural valuation system inherent in Thai material religious culture. At first glance, there seems to be a contradiction between merit making and commercial transactions in Thai Buddhism, especially within the Theravada tradition where all acts of virtue accumulate spiritual merit. The main role of Buddhist commerce is largely aimed at enhancing mental strength as well as life confidence (Tuntaisong, 2018). It is through various rituals which include participation in chant ceremonies; merit making through Na Metta (ณ เมตตา); lunar rituals; and purchase of protective talisman among others.

Kumarthong (กุมารทอง) is a talisman that protects children while Kwaitanoo and Sing are talismans in zoomorphic form. In the contemporary Thai Buddhist material culture, there is a wide range of sacred objects with miniature representations of Buddha, venerated monks, kings, and legendary creatures such as Krut ครุฑ (Garuda) and Phayanak พญานาค (Naga). The commercialization of these sacred objects includes jewelry such as rings, necklaces, pendants and bracelets which are often believed to have astrological significance. This connotes a relationship between certain gemstones and an individual's birth year or zodiacal position. Hence for Thais this phenomenon merges material acquisition with merit accumulation. In Thailand charitable giving is often tied to the purchase of sacred items. Such an association between acts of philanthropy and procurement of spiritually potent items seems to lead to not only more frequent but also larger donations because it allows donors gain immediate material benefits in return for long-term spiritual gains". "The economic changes have compelled people to seek psychological solace more than ever before", said the source who reminded us that in 2014 amulet/talisman business worth about 40 billion Bahts" (Naepimai & Chaisingkananont, 2023).

According to Maikami S. and Boonmee K. (2016), in 2015, the value of amulet and talismanic business in Thailand reached 80,000 million baht with a constant inclination for growth." The demographic composition of Thailand's belief systems is mostly made up of Buddhist millennials, born between 1980 and 2003, who form the core labor force as well as dominant consumer group. This cohort accounts for approximately one-third of the Thai people exceeding a population of over 20 million (Phromphaet W., 2020). The percentage share of the national population constituted by millennials currently stands at more than a quarter according to Bangkok Post research findings; this figure is projected to reach 50 percent by the year 2025 (Phromphaet W., 2020). Thai millennial spirituality has evolved across various faith traditions, reflecting a complex historical trajectory including shamanic practices such as amulet and talismanic veneration which have been replaced with contemporary spiritual practices such as palmistry, horoscopy and astrological divination. This spiritual market place has seen significant strategic repositioning particularly through upmarket

differentiation targeting high income demographics. These repositioning efforts can manifest in a number of ways such as setting call center operations or incorporating Feng-shui consulting services among others thus offering international religious pilgrimages to various places such as Hong Kong temples and shrines (Wiboonpote & Seeumpornroj, 2016). Faith remains fundamental to psychological resilience that is why positive testimonials disseminate quickly within the networks of millennials. This demographic shift has brought about changes in target market composition.

According to Park and Seo (2023), the replacement of traditional word-of-mouth with digital marketing strategies, especially through social media influencers has gained a lot of popularity as indicated by numerous amulet-related content on social media platforms. The digitization phenomena advance Millennial participation in different forms of talismanic objects. Interestingly, the attractiveness of Thai amulets extends beyond national borders and this has generated significant attention from international quarters” (McBain, 2024). This was also observed when COVID-19 broke out in Thailand which led to unprecedented societal instability that spawned a marked increase in spiritual seeking behaviors among millennials. In this climate of deep uncertainty, Thai millennials have been increasingly attracted to older forms of spiritual comfort; hence, information about effective spiritual practices and talismans have spread like wildfire across social networks. This is evident in a heightened recourse to divinatory acts and purchase of sacred amulets which serve as psychological anchors and sources of ontological security during times of turbulence. Economic conditions continue to boom in Thailand leading to an increasing obsession with wealth. Again these beliefs are no longer residual cultural forms but central elements within the national religious tradition.”

According to (Sanpinit, 2024), these people have been entangled in state functions and are backed by the state sponsored Buddhism. Thus, Thailand’s worship of wealth is indicative of an expanding market for religious symbols, which mirrors a wider societal trend of blending spiritualism with material affluence (Jackson, 2016). Nowadays, it is common for one to find people using scented talismans that ward off evil spirits. However, some of these practices lack research on understanding the causal mechanisms underlying their contemporary popularity. The study aims at providing a detailed analysis of what has made amulets remain relevant and popular among Thai millennial. Historically, Thai individuals sought spiritual guidance through geographically dispersed fortune tellers and mediums. They have changed because of digital connectivity which enables people to access services such as those via social media platforms in a moment. Many researchers have studied this practice but few if any have focused on it from the generational perspectives that adopted current project. What drives this obsession with amulets remains insufficiently investigated in existing scholarship particularly within the context of generational dynamics. Although numerous studies have examined various dimensions of sociological cognition, this work will fill in the gap by looking into the underlying casual mechanisms governing these phenomena. This paper seeks to investigate why these objects continue to be significant among millennials regardless of time and place, transcending mere descriptive analysis to interrogate the complex interplay between social, psychological and economic variables supporting these beliefs in an increasingly modernized society. In general terms research on why young Thais continue to hold these beliefs despite their obvious contradictions with traditional Buddhism is limited & little has been done on how this religiosity translates into consumer behavior for young Thai people.

This research seeks to unravel the complex interplay of sociological, psychological and cultural factors that contribute to the persistence and evolution of talismanic practices among this age group through systematic inquiry. Thailand serves as a major hub for transnational spiritual commerce, attracting global stars and influential people from various professions who purposely come here for their famous talismans. This occurrence of prominent international patronage underscores both the universal appeal of Thai sacred objects and their position as prized articles in the world market of spiritual things. The swarming presence of celebrities, tycoons, and other top personalities around Thai charms signifies an interface between traditional Buddhist material culture and current Global networks of elite consumption & spiritual seeking occurring within them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Most modern scholars of religion focus exclusively on the beliefs and practices of monotheistic religions, viewing expressions of faith as the essence of religious practice. Under this approach, spiritual forms that prioritize rituals, especially those which lack texts or an official clergy, are often ignored or excluded from academic consideration. This poses difficulties for religious studies, particularly in accommodating the multifaceted nature of Asian polytheism, which is largely ritualistic rather than faith-based pursuits motivated by the search for absolute truths found in sacred texts.

In addition, black magic not only persists but thrives in modern expressions as a contradiction of contemporary society. Various black magic movements contain specific objects of worship and cults, ceremonies, and sacred spaces with designated altars and pilgrimage sites. Within this context, sacred ritual performance overshadows the more foundational principles and teachings, illustrating a shift toward understanding religious practice as communal, shared in nature and experience.

The interplay between socio-cultural evolution and shifting forms of sacredness reveals the impact of the changing socio-cultural landscape on the notion of the sacred. The rise of neoliberal economics and new forms of media has expanded religious boundaries, nurturing the proliferation of rituals and the construction of novel forms of sanctity. These include symbolic frameworks, including the cult of wealth worship, commodified amulets, and professional spirit mediumship. Tambiah argues that while liberal capitalism and individual wealth seeking does not integrate easily with the socio-cultural ethos of Buddhist-inhabited countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand, “in Thailand, religion has shown itself to be not only supportive but eager to endorse capitalism.” (Foxeus, 2017). Neoliberal Economy in Thai Society, the combination of neoliberal economics and contemporary mass media has shifted the ritualistic elements of religion, resulting in new forms of sacredness and new symbolic structures linked to wealth worship. As Tambiah posits, restrained capitalism and individual wealth seeking present in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand often conflicts with the Buddhist socio-cultural ethos that predominates in these regions.

The search for understanding within religious items is regarded as a means to achieve success, prosperity, and prominence, thereby enabling the rise of quasi-religious adoration. This shift represents a more general change whereby the spiritual and cultural dimensions of life are transformed into goods and assimilated into the modern economic system (Asprem, 2020). The emergence of democratic systems of governance also deepens these processes by restructuring religion, allowing it to be marketed and turned into a product tailored to modern civilization.

In Talismanic business, Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been identified as one of the most powerful channels for relaying information in any market. The development of modern technology and online social networks have transformed information dissemination. Such a phenomenon is important to target consumers because the easily accessible information has the potential to greatly influence the decision to purchase goods and services (Jalilvand M., 2012). The link between anxiety brought about by the pandemic and the return of conventional spiritual practices among younger generations demonstrates the impact of material religion on managing crises and psychological resilience. The swift spread of these practices through social networks shows the adaptability of traditional coping strategies to contemporary existential dilemmas. The widespread resort to fortune telling and talismanic protection among millennials reflects an increasingly common response to collective anxiety, merging age-old rituals with contemporary psychological frameworks. Researcher argue that the combination of technological innovations and their increasing usage has led to intensified competition in the market for sacred artifacts. A survey by Mahidol University's College of Management, *The Marketing in the Uncertain World* (2021), indicates a discontinuity in the behavior of Thai consumers, marking a shift from reliance on traditional to the use of digital media.

Importantly, the results reveal that more than 52 million people in Thailand still believe in supernatural phenomena. As with many Thai millennials, the worship of amulets is approached with particular self-serving reasons, with many individuals believing that these practices bring benefits to their lives in multiple dimensions. This study attempts to find out and investigate the primary motivators that drive amulet purchasing behavior in this particular group. It is important to understand that social psychological factors shape the millennial interest in amulets differently, thus leading to different levels of popularity that coincide with personal goals. In order to form a complete picture of amulet purchasing behavior, it would be useful to have a larger, more diverse sample in terms of age to capture the views of all Thai people. The study of Buddhist amulets is situated at a remarkable point where belief systems and mercantilism of contemporary Thai Buddhism converge, revealing a rich tapestry of capitalism within spirituality. Empirical studies have shown a marked preference for amulets received from famous monk masters, with private collectors reportedly accumulating hundreds or thousands of pieces stored in private chapels.

The intricate nature of some variants has created an increased demand in the market which in turn has created an economy based on Buddhist metaphysical philosophies alongside economic factors. Considering the societal context within Thailand, engagement with talismanic practices among millennials illustrates a duality of materialistic and non-materialistic goals. These include the following: accumulation of wealth, favorable outcomes, social dominance, success in relationships, bodily health, and societal esteem (Jackson, 2016). Such a blend of diverse motives showcases an advanced form of adaptation of age-old spiritual practices to modern life challenges and aspirations.

The emergence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a significant change in shaping both spiritual convictions and procurement motivations for millennials. This digital exchange has never been more effective than it is now in molding beliefs about spirituality and buying motives. The magnitude and speed with which information disseminates through digital channels have given rise to new patterns of sharing and validating of talismanic knowledge among people who are part of the present day Thailand society. Introduction Thai Society and Talismanic Objects over centuries,

talismanic objects have been an integral part Thai cultural practices (Tanat, 2017). According to Tanat (2017), these artifacts initially served four cardinal functions: as markers of social stratification, conduits of auspicious energy, instruments of sacred ritual observance and catalysts for psychological well-being. The extent to which talismanic objects are important in the various spheres of life has been widely studied by scholars. Amulet possession among Thailand Buddhists is a pervasive practice that scholars note provides protection to its holders leading them to good outcomes.

Absence of these talismanic accessories in a person's daily attire goes against cultural expectations (Irene's, 1998). These sacred objects are kept secret and remain largely invisible in the public domain as many people prefer to wear them under their clothing. In the home, there are usually interested rooms called Hong Phra (ห้องพระ) where various Buddha images and other sanctified paraphernalia are kept. The physicality of Thai amulets that illustrate religious and cultic beliefs, which enable individuals to realize desires, create prosperity and avoid miseries. The historical inheritance of this practice is evident through archaeological evidence that dates back around two millennia thereby indicating the early adoption of venerating sacred objects within Thai territories (Akeannan & Suchart's, 2019). Reproduction is the dynamic process by which specific cultures are transmitted from one generation to another within society. Some historic cultures have been chosen for reproduction or changed for example to suit contemporary morality in a new social context (Distapan, 2014). Reproduction connects with cultural communication influencing individuals' perception concerning the meaning of culture.

Cultural beliefs are closely connected with groups and societies, as they often determine how human reproduction can be done through people or technological interaction. It is not unusual for some amulet artisans to assign amulets unique identities such as being protected from unbelievable accidents, having great mercy, promoting wealth growth and excelling in different careers. The more celebrities repeatedly have such experiences, the higher their popularity and value is. Old amulets are usually very expensive this is due to the fact that they are non-reproducible and there is a high demand in the market for them. When the master died, his sacred things were sold at high prices because of the sanctity of his ethics. The fluctuations of demand and supply on the Amulet market resemble those on the stock exchange. The new generation of amulets may enjoy high demand hence can be bought within minutes (Tibor K., 2019). However, if there will be a large build up then supply increases and therefore value falls down.

In the recently published article of “Luang Pu Thuat Stepped on Fresh Sea Water (หลวงปู่ทวดเหยียบน้ำทะเลจืด Luang Pu Thuat Yiab Nam Ta Le Jeard): Reproduction of Beliefs and Myths through Various Models of Sacred Objects,” it was documented that there are different instances when the legend of Luang Pu Thuat stepping on fresh seawater has been reproduced, produced depending on various occasions and objectives set by temples and departments such as; constructing to celebrate his birthday, elevating his level, making a regular year, anniversary which may bring results that have been developed, restored or any charity (Ruengmak & Tipsrinimit, 2021). For example, in the year 2002 Construction of Luang Pu Thuat for The Ministry of Defense Edition's 115th Anniversary was done at Wat Pha Kho Songkhla Province because it is a consecration ceremony for this place which is according to the legend Luang Pu Thuat.

The back of this Amulet consists of a seal from the Ministry with the occasion and year it was made (Channarong Kongchim, 2020). The Thai linguistic paradigm surrounding amulets acquisition is

particularly revelatory; by using ‘chaw’ เช่า (rental) instead of ‘sue’ ซื้อ (purchase), it suggests that an amulet or talismanic ownership is transitory in nature. This way, metaphysically speaking, one cannot be said to possess these sacred articles absolutely (Kwiecien, et al., 2024). However, most transactions are done with previously owned pieces in specialized emporia for purchasing amulets and talismans. Nevertheless, this secondary market status does not diminish their perceived value among persons who hold them. Conversely, vintage specimens often command exceptional prestige, with the most coveted ancient amulets experiencing exponential price appreciation over recent decades.

Examples of such rare specimens are exceedingly expensive, some selling for several million baht (Audiger, 2018). Ethnographic research has also sought to understand the experiential aspect of amulet efficacy in which individuals often credit their survival to the talismanic properties of these sacred objects (Channing's, 2020)). This has led to a complex authenticity discourse where authentic powerful amulets are considered more valuable in spite of the presence of many identical replicas. The contemporary spiritual practices demonstrate divergence from traditional frameworks whereby current practitioners already have inclination towards metaphysical belief systems before approaching traditional authorities. The core reason behind having a talisman is based on the need for spiritual stabilization making it an ontological anchor amidst increasing volatilities (McBain, 2024). This kind of behavior represents a spiritual exchange as devotees look forward to their desires to be met by engaging in devotional practices.

The Thai millennials demonstrate an interesting occurrence of consumer psychology where there is a negative correlation between economic stability and superstitious belief systems. This describes the behavior that shows coping mechanism by which traditional religious practices are used to respond to modern economic rationality (Krisnatalia, et al., 2023). As such, as soon as the economic indicators worsen there is a corresponding increase in the metaphysical dependence and talismanic procurement. Contemporary media dynamics within the talismanic industry present a complex ecosystem where traditional broadcast and print platforms coexist with digital channels although their relative influence exhibits significant variation (Agarwal & Jones, 2022). Mainstream media still continue to deliver informative content, promotional offers, sales advice etc. with testimonials about how effective these talismans' are; however this indicates a paradigm shift in the media consumption patterns of millennial generation (Jones & Kang, 2020). Wealth worship is one of the symbols of market society merging with religious symbolism where individuals can participate in new rational order established for sustainable economic growth. Several studies show that these rituals and cult practices are mostly prevalent among rural populations and economically disadvantaged urban dwellers.

Within the capitalist framework, a large number of participants in these rituals often lack political power and they are increasingly being marginalized. These groups have adopted supernatural beliefs as a means of empowering themselves in response to their socio-economic disempowerment so that they can cope with the challenges emanating from a global capitalist economy (Hao, 2021; Singh, 2013). This is an example of how wealth worship has expanded and become more influential within an evolving market environment in Thailand. This practice fuses emerging types of market society with religious iconography thereby creating a context for people to participate in a redefined rationalized order focused on self-sustainable economic growth (Ruengmak & Dejpawuttikul, 2024). Scholars commonly view these rituals and belief systems as wide spread devotional practices among rural communities and urban populations who suffer economically (Ganjanapan,

2012). In many cases, these larger groups which are usually politically disadvantaged and marginalized under the mechanics of capitalist economies turn to spiritual beliefs as forms of empowerment and resilience against economic diversity (Jackson, 2016). The process by which those at the margins of global capitalism incorporate spiritual elements into their practices highlights their strategic use of ritualistic activities for navigating and responding to economic instability.

The objective of this paper is to explain the expansion of Thailand's amulet market among youth. This signifies more than a mere fashion or superstition; it reflects broader socio-economic anxieties, the digitalization of traditional practices and the blending of spiritual and material aspirations. The phenomenon demonstrates how young people in different generations refashion traditional religious artifacts as they confront new challenges while maintaining links with their cultural heritage.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework outlined herein posits a sophisticated dialectical relationship between tradition and innovation, wherein religious praxis undergoes evolutionary transformations whilst still holding ontological continuity with its historical antecedents. Instead of having a linear progression from traditional to modern forms, this relationship is characterized by complex feedback mechanisms through which innovative adaptations recursively redefine yet simultaneously reinforce traditional elements. This symbiotic interplay facilitates the preservation of essential doctrinal continuity while accommodating contextual exigencies—a phenomenon particularly salient in Thailand's religious landscape where Theravada Buddhism's canonical foundations remain discernible despite substantial morphological adaptations. The framework fundamentally challenges conventional modernization theories predicated on the inevitability of secularization. Instead, it advances a nuanced paradigm wherein modernization catalyzes religious metamorphosis rather than attenuation. This reconceptualization illuminates how contemporary socioeconomic conditions and epistemological frameworks generate new expressions of religiosity that seem to be compatible with ostensibly secular worldviews.

Consequently, thus religiosity not as anachronistic vestige but as a dynamic system that actively negotiate with and incorporate elements of modernity thereby. Central to this theoretical framework is the concept of “hybrid rituals”. These are sophisticated mediating structures that negotiate between institutionalized religious authority and individualism spiritual autonomy which is characteristic of late modernity. The syncretic practices therefore exist as liminal spaces where traditional cosmological frameworks meet contemporary self-determination imperatives. The resultant ritualistic expressions exhibit dual legitimacy, hence bridging the gap between historical precedent and personal relevance towards religious experience. Hybridity transcends mere syncretism in that it creates emergent forms whose phenomenological properties can never be reduced to the sum of their parts. Theoretical framework also states that religious adaptation takes place through complex process of selective retention involving differential preservation and transformation of doctrinal, ritualistic, and organizational elements. This selectivity takes place both in terms of conscious decision making by religious authorities and unconscious sociocultural evolutionary processes.

Elements that demonstrate functional congruence with contemporary requirements undergo preservation, although occasionally followed by hermeneutical reinterpretation, which maintains

semantic continuity while allowing pragmatic adaptation. Conversely, elements that show significant dissonance from prevailing epistemological frameworks go through substantial transformation or sometimes strategic obfuscation. This evolutionary mechanism helps religious systems maintain perceived authenticity despite a profound alteration of their constitutive elements.

4. METHODOLOGY

Content analysis is one of the most rigorously conducted and interpreted research methodologies in contemporary academic writing. Researchers can expose intricate patterns, theoretical frameworks, and epistemological paradigms that may not be clearly depicted by simply looking at an article using this analytical approach which examines both manifest and latent content found in scholarly manuscripts. To identify emergent themes, methodological trends, and conceptual development within particular academic domains; qualitative interpretative frameworks is necessary for such an analytic approach to work. In this framework, sacred rituals assume precedence over formal principles and teachings, illustrating how the lived experience of faith often prioritizes communal and individual expressions of devotion.

This shift invites a reevaluation of how religious practices are understood and appreciated, emphasizing the need for a more nuanced approach that recognizes the significance of ritual-centric expressions within the broader tapestry of religious life. Such an understanding challenges traditional paradigms within religious studies and opens new avenues for exploring the dynamic interplay between ritual, culture, and belief in the contemporary world.

The complexity of religious practice in pre-modern Siam illustrates that the societal landscape cannot be simplistically categorized as solely “Theravada.” Instead, daily religious rituals in Thailand serve as pragmatic responses to the needs and dynamics of the community, creating interconnected religious spaces through a multitude of ritual practices. In neoliberal society, these ritual efficiency and effectiveness have proved crucial in renewing ideas related to modern sanctity (Taylor, 2015). The proliferation of supernatural beliefs along with reformist and orthodox movements is indeed linked intrinsically with modern global marketplace dynamics.

Capitalist production methods have risen and given birth to a rise in consumer culture, as well as cultural heritage industry hence the emergence of "new models that enable the management, dissemination, and consumption of knowledge and ritual practices" (Strahm 2008: 1). In religious studies there is still an ongoing debate about how best to analyze polytheistic Asian religions which are primarily based on rites rather than scriptures as written documents. For these monotheistic religions, however, rituals that emphasize doctrines and teachings are usually prioritized over other aspects like worship or sacred space.

From Chaya (2019), it is evident that the prevalence of amulets in Thai society is majorly attributed to the worship of influential Buddhist monks, rather than being based on any empirical justification. In this regard, Thai Buddhists believe these holy things as embodiment of Buddha’s virtues which result in miraculous outcomes. In other words, people consider their religious significance in relation to Thai Buddhist cosmology and specific attributes associated with them such as their supposed capacity to bless AMULETS four wearers who find themselves battling against any odds (Chaya, 2019). Therefore, the popularity and fame of amulets started with their production by monks and then described by devotees through extraordinary experiences encountered either directly or indirectly. This is further shaped by normative social influences on individual decision-

making processes in the consumption hemisphere (Shastry, V.S., & Anupama, D. 2021). The interplay of these psychological and sociological variables underlines the multifaceted character of consumer behavior in modern market dynamics. In a demographic analysis, empirical investigation reveals that there was one main marketing section with females mainly between the ages of 25-44 purchasing amulet accessories. These consumers were found to have tertiary educational qualifications as the majority possessed bachelor's degrees as their education level hence most were involved in corporate employment. The socio-economic stratification showed that most of the respondents earned from their personal sources between zero and 40 thousand baht or 1,233USD per month.

The marital status had more single participants while around a quarter of participants were married with offspring. Among those psychographic profiling of consumers resulted in self-reported personality traits which could be hierarchically ranked as follows; "conscientiousness," "autonomy," "creativity" (in descending order). The dominance of males' preference for online amulet purchases seems to have roots in Thailand's historical deeper involvement with Buddhism institutions and practices such as temporary ordination as a traditional practice.

This experiential foundation facilitates a more nuanced understanding of sacred artifacts metaphysical properties and their ritualistic significance. The contemporary proliferation of amulet collecting, trading, and broader societal acceptance has evolved from these traditional underpinnings. Professional demographics emerge as a significant determinant in amulet acquisition patterns. Public service personnel, particularly those in law enforcement and military sectors, demonstrate a predisposition towards protective talismans, seeking metaphysical safeguarding against occupational hazards. Additionally, amulets serve as culturally appropriate ceremonial gifts marking professional advancement, circumventing monetary compensation conventions. Similarly, entrepreneurs exhibit a preference for amulets associated with commercial prosperity and revenue enhancement, illustrating how vocational contexts shape specific talismanic requirements and anticipated efficacy.

This paper identifies several motivational factors that underline the desire for amulets: psychological support, apotropaic purposes, karmic fleshing out, commercial success and trouble removal. It also underscores the importance of social networks in purchase decisions whereby peer and family recommendations greatly influence purchasing patterns. Specifically, these different studies converge on fundamental motivational paradigm in relation to amulet acquisition within Thailand. This phenomenon is deeply rooted in Thai cultural psychology where materialism intersects with spirituality resulting into supernatural means of happiness, comfort and prosperity. The synthesis between spiritual aspirations and materialism reflects a wider sociocultural ethos within Thailand. This review of existing literature reveals a complex relationship between psychological anxiety and resorting to talismans among Thai people. The tendency to go for defensive amulets especially when individuals face personal struggles or dissonance reflects an engrained cultural reaction mechanism. This tendency becomes more pronounced during uncertain times associated with performance since people develop increased inclination towards reliance on the supernatural. Some interpersonal dependencies may be better understood under such metaphysical conditions that forms part of this process of rapid socio-cultural change. The associated resultant psychological instabilities seem to be a direct outcome of accelerated social transformation as seen through the changes in traditional religious and educational paradigms.

Historically, Thai education systems have been influenced by Buddhist cosmology and mythology which has created an epistemic framework in the country, where both spiritual and physical realms exist in continuous dialogue (Ray et al., 2024). Amongst other millennials, this ontological duality is especially pronounced in Thailand, where despite their economic agency and contemporary market participation; they strongly hold onto their affiliation with Theravada Buddhist principles. This ability to concurrently operate in the material and spiritual worlds reflects an evolved or sophisticated cultural adaptation rather than mere supernatural dependence (Kaloyanides, 2021). The present-day socio-economic volatility has heightened this trend where individuals seek talismanic materials to cope with uncertainty and promote positive future expectations.

5. RESULT

The research results show that internal motivational factors significantly influence talismanic acquisition patterns among Thai millennial consumers who mainly aim at attaining wealth accumulation. Such a phenomenon implies a search by the generation for metaphysical anchoring within an increasingly fluid socioeconomic landscape. A shift of paradigms can be observed within media influence hierarchies whereby modern digital platforms eclipse traditional broadcast and print media forms. Primarily driven by social media ecosystems such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube; these are the main channels used by Thai millennials when buying amulets.

This change in media usage reflects the general alterations in information distribution and consumer engagement strategies. eWom among Thai Millennial Research on eWOM dynamics has identified a particularly interesting finding: respondents were highly influenced by supernatural efficacy stories concerning products, which therefore affected their decision to buy them. Nevertheless, there are certain crucial methodological shortcomings that need to be taken into account while conducting an online survey. Similarly, the self-selecting nature of the sample group implies a bias towards digital platform engagement and an existing interest in talismanic artifacts that may have overstated the effect of eWOM.

The integration of longstanding traditions and modern digital marketing approaches illustrates how ancient customs are being reinterpreted in relation to contemporary consumption, particularly within younger generations who have grown up in the digital world. The results illustrate how religious belief systems, social factors, and digital technologies interact in shaping contemporary Thai consumer culture. The compelling impact of faith on the popularity of talismans offers a puzzling paradox within the millennial age group, who, in spite of being technologically immersed and digitally native, possess a strong affection for metaphysical objects. This observation demonstrates the degree to which traditional belief systems persist in contemporary society, particularly among members of the younger generation known for their technological expertise. The rise in the veneration of amulets can be attributed to the matrix of deeply-rooted esoteric belief systems, astrological leanings, and sacred notions that have historically shaped societal consciousness. Rather than being displaced by modernization, these belief systems have undergone a syncretic process, adapting to and coexisting within the contemporary world.

The intertwining of technology and the spiritual realm has given rise to a distinctive cultural paradigm in which ancient mysticism appeals to the digitally literate millennials. A faith-desire symbiosis operates through an intricate motivational matrix activated by individual stories and collective mythologies regarding the efficacy of talismans (Nisar et al., 2022). This framework of

motivation has diverse dimensions including: impulsive buying behaviors, monetary desires, socially conformist drives, pursuit of pleasure, and anxiety alleviation tactics. Qualitative data analysis offers insight into a multi-layered hierarchy of motivation, revealing that in the context of financial progression, romantic and aesthetic motivations come secondary.

Financial gain serves as the primary motivator, followed by romantic and aesthetic pursuits in which respondents perceive increased charismatic allure from talismans. Within the affluent population of Thailand, seeking consultation from fortune tellers and astrologers is considered normal behavior. The striking finding is the relationship between educational level and the frequency of these consultations; those with higher education tend to seek astrological advice more frequently.

The engagement in divination practices pointed out in this study indicates that such engagement is located among those who are trying to maximize their productive time and resources, which reflects the more general trend of where economic ambitions and spiritual beliefs converge on individual and collective pursuits. Research on gamblers, mediums, and informal creditors in Thailand showed that these socially marginalized groups participate in something called “irrational superstition,” which often translates as self-destructive spending behavior. This occurs because people attempt to make sense of their belief in the supernatural, especially as a means of obtaining some measure of financial equilibrium. The so-called “religious revival” in contemporary Asia is often described as a form of “medicine” that remedies (medicalizes) the suffering and transforming demands of people who are undergoing deep suffering or facing major existential crises.

An industry that revolves around cultural heritage has emerged due to the rise of consumer culture. This development has seen various knowledge paradigms and ritual practices being widely spread, parallel to the spreading of democracy. The evolution is a representation of modernity as a condition that is fragmented whereby reason’s purification changes into ideology leading to a situation where spiritualities are actually commoditized and offered as rituals for consumption.

The above illustrates the complicated relationship between religious beliefs and capitalism, as well as the problems faced by those who are trying to connect these two areas. Gambling and Amulet in Thai society according to the research done on gamblers, spirit mediums, and informal lenders in Thailand, they are viewed as “irrationality, superstition and financially imprudent behavior” which is accompanied by efforts to legitimize practices such as hypnosis as viable economic activities (Amonhaemanon 2022). The notion of religious revivalism that has been documented in contemporary Asia can best be understood as a response to socio-economic instability putting itself forward as “a remedy for turbulence lives and difficult conditions,” particularly during times when individuals “feel threatened or experience profound losses” (Dillon 2022). In Thailand’s Buddhism, respect for amulets and sacred objects has moved beyond mere popular belief systems into integral parts of the political economy.

The cult of wealth worship does not aim at ridding society of bad spirits (Mulder, 2001). In this sense, it is important to consider how far ritual practices have evolved and been adapted to fit the needs and desires of the economic actors. This claim primarily focuses on the middle class comprising a significant percentage of Thai society that has historically shown an inclination towards astrology and fortune telling (Baird, 2014). “This demographic engagement with these beliefs reveals how ritualistic practices as well as mystical consultations have become tools that resonate with economically active individuals’ aspirations and anxieties” (Baird, 2014). The

integration of technological advances into ritual practices in modern social life has enabled spirit mediumship to serve as a stabilizing force amidst market fluctuations and uncertainties about life.

Ambition and spiritual ritual, where the pursuit of security and prosperity is intertwined with cultural and religious expressions (Agarwal & Jones, 2022). Power in Royal Court the prevailing worldview emphasizes the significance of auspiciousness, power, and legitimacy—concepts deeply rooted in the cultural legacy of the royal court and the ruling elite (Malikhao & Servaes, 2017). Historically, astrology has been safeguarded as a body of knowledge integral to the educational traditions of royalty and noble families (Soonthornthum, 2017). While astrology originally played a crucial role in the administration of power within the royal court, its cultural importance has persisted through the ages (Siani, 2023). With the abolishment of the absolute monarchy in 1932, astrology became much more widespread among the emerging middle class and became an integral part of their social and political awareness.

This social group attempts to validate their new goals by romanticizing history and reconciling utopian visions with concepts of political legitimacy (Ferrara, 2015). Well to do Thais frequently consult with astrologers and fortune tellers, and there seems to be a relationship between one's level of education and the likelihood of such engagement; the more educated a person is, the more likely he or she will to engage with astrologers and fortune tellers (Kubasova, 2021). Empirical studies show that the social class most associated with fortune telling is made up of productivity maximizers—people who are closely associated with economic capital and often hold specialized professional positions that emphasize development or returns on investment in the future (Das et al., 2022). The confluence of education, economic ambition, and spiritual counsel demonstrates the enduring impact of traditional astrology on Thailand's socio-economic landscape, including decision-making among the elite and emerging middle class. Opponents of superstition, in particular followers of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu พุทธทาสภิกขุ, condemn the rituals as “Buddhist commerce,” a term that describes the commercialization of genuine Buddhist teachings (Sieradzan, 2022). This argument suggests that heavy reliance on magical practices points to a lack of developed reasoning skills among the Thai people, leaving them vulnerable to the pressures of the modern world.

Supporters of the Dharma approach of critical reflection propose that undertaking the practice of Dharma strengthens self-discipline, boosts morale, and increases self-confidence, which are very crucial for the country to address the deep-rooted woes of economy exacerbated by the broader financial crises in Asia. These critics emphasize the need for mental strength and fortitude, which Buddhism is known for, to help people cope with and adapt to modern economic challenges (Jones et al 2016). This outlook raises the concern of the need for spiritual practice not as a form of ritual, but as an essential infrastructure for human and social transformation in a complicated world where everything is entangled.

6. DISCUSSION

The last couple of years have seen some progress in understanding how Thailand's socio-economic uncertainties have increased the rate of veneration of amulets with individual, societal, and economic dimensions. This phenomenon reflects a wider Thai pattern where people seek for a form of emotional anchorage through materialistic spirituality in times of social instability. The blending of ancient beliefs with modern digital trade demonstrates the cultural shift of practices to the use of modern technology. At the same time, it further illustrates the enduring importance of spiritual comfort in times of societal uncertainty.

Therefore, a situation is created where the cycle of faith and desire reinforces itself. In this way, belief systems are validated and made stronger by pursuing particular goals which shows that spirituality in millennials takes a unique approach to pragmatism. This demonstrates how traditional talismanic practices have been repurposed to fit in with new aspirational frameworks while remaining fundamentally spiritual.

The prevalence of digital platforms as the leading channels for information dissemination among Thai millennials mirrors broader changes in media consumption patterns. Online social networks' wide reach and instant access capabilities have revolutionized how companies communicate with their target markets. Thus enterprises operating in the amulet industry have adopted varying marketing approaches but with great bias on online engagement channels that ensure fast and precise access to the viewership. The result illuminates the role played by religion modernization in canonizing as well as democratizing core religious principles since new models of sacred rituals emerge simultaneously.

Thai sectarianism, however, is changing in response to contemporary practices culminating in hybrid rituals that have strayed from traditional religious frameworks but still draw on teachings and rationalist perspectives influenced by modernity. The diverse nature of religious practices in pre-modern Siam demonstrates that society cannot be accurately characterized simply as "Theravada". To this end, the ceremonial elements of Thai everyday religion suggest a pragmatic solution aimed at creating a religious space interconnected through various ceremonies. In this perspective, formalism's efficiency and effectiveness within a neoliberal society play critical roles in the reawakening of modern sacredness.

7. CONCLUSION

The Thai amulet phenomenon reflects an intricate mechanism of adaptation where traditional belief systems meet with modern psychological and economic realities. Instead of withering away as per modernization process talismanic culture has been rejuvenated through digital platforms particularly among millennials who mix traditional mysticism with current trends of consumption. This seeming paradoxical combination of technological sophistication and metaphysical materiality challenges established theories on secularization.

Economic uncertainty driven by COVID 19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for this cultural response where amulets serve as cognitive anchors during financial instability periods. The commodification of spiritual protection does not represent mere superstition but a complex cultural adaptation to uncertainty in an increasingly dynamic social landscape. The evolution of wealth worship from the cultural periphery to state-sanctioned practice illustrates how religious expressions adapt to modern conditions through hybrid ritual spaces that exist between doctrinal

traditions and secular rationality. This process has facilitated the institutional normalization of wealth veneration within Thailand's socio-religious landscape. These findings suggest that studying contemporary religious practices requires moving beyond traditional doctrinal frameworks to engage with the nuanced interplay of ritual, consumption, and digital community formation. As traditional cosmologies are actively reconfigured through modern channels, they reveal the remarkable resilience of religious epistemologies in contexts of rapid social change. The study sheds light on the influence of modern-day opinion leaders, such as social media influencers and celebrities, whose promotional messages greatly influence the purchasing behavior of this age group.

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