

Religious Rituals and Social Cohesion in Urban Societies: The Shift of Solidarity from Physical to Virtual Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This article examined how religious ritual supported social cohesion in urban settings and how solidarity was reshaped as participation shifted from physical communal space to virtual space. The study used a qualitative literature-based design relying on secondary data from recent scholarship in the sociology of religion, urban sociology, and mediated communication. The analysis compared predominantly physical, predominantly virtual, and hybrid ritual environments through three dimensions of solidarity: emotional attachment, moral commitment, and networked support. The findings indicated that physical rituals strengthened cohesion through embodied co-presence, informal social interaction, and locally visible accountability. Virtual rituals expanded access and accelerated coordination of support, but they also loosened membership boundaries and reconfigured authority through curation and platform dynamics, producing a more fluid form of affiliation. Hybrid patterns mitigated these trade-offs by combining the relational depth and accountability of in-person gathering with the accessibility and connective capacity of digital participation. The article concluded that solidarity persisted across spaces, but the mechanisms producing cohesion shifted from place-based reciprocity to connectivity-based participation.



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INTRODUCTION

Urban religious life has never been simply a matter of belief carried privately from home to place of worship. In cities, religion is practiced under conditions of density, anonymity, and accelerated mobility that continually test the durability of social ties. People share sidewalks and public transport yet often lack stable communal rhythms. Work schedules fragment time, residential turnover weakens neighborhood familiarity, and everyday encounters are frequently transactional. Within such settings, religious ritual becomes a social technology for producing togetherness. It gathers dispersed individuals into patterned interaction, assigns roles and expectations, and converts symbolic commitments into recognisable social bonds. The point is not that ritual automatically generates harmony, but that ritual offers a recurring format through which trust, mutual recognition, and moral obligation can be renewed in an environment where these resources are otherwise fragile (Zhang et al., 2021).

Sociological accounts have long treated ritual as a central mechanism for social integration. Ritual concentrates attention, synchronises bodily and emotional states, and reinforces a sense of shared meaning. These effects matter in urban contexts where solidarity cannot rely on kinship proximity or long-standing village ties. City dwellers navigate plural moral worlds and multiple affiliations, so cohesion tends to be achieved through selective communities rather than inherited membership. Religious gatherings, commemorations, and cycles of worship provide predictable occasions for meeting, cooperating, and reaffirming norms. They also operate as sites where belonging is made visible, through dress, speech, gesture, and the circulation of shared narratives. Even when participants interpret ritual in different theological registers, the act of co-presence can stabilise the feeling of being part of something larger than the isolated self. In that sense, ritual contributes to the everyday

infrastructure of social cohesion in cities, not by erasing difference, but by organising difference within a bounded moral space (Cornejo-Valle & Martin-Andino, 2023).

Over the last decade, however, the spatial basis of ritual has been reconfigured by digital mediation. Religious participation increasingly occurs through livestreamed services, online prayer groups, messaging platforms, and short-form religious content. This shift is not reducible to the idea that religion has moved from “offline” to “online.” Rather, it indicates a transformation in the social conditions through which solidarity is produced. In physical rituals, cohesion emerges through shared space, embodied coordination, informal conversations before and after events, and the tacit discipline of being present among others (Evolvi, 2022; Siuda, 2021). In virtual rituals, togetherness is organised through connectivity, platform architectures, and curated interaction. Participation can become simultaneous without being co-located, intimate without requiring prolonged commitment, and wide-reaching without generating durable mutual obligations. The same ritual vocabulary may remain, but the social mechanisms that carry it are altered.

This article addresses that transformation by focusing on a specific analytical question. How do religious rituals in urban society contribute to social cohesion, and how does the shift from physical communal space to virtual space reshape the form, boundaries, and intensity of solidarity? The concern is not whether online ritual is authentic from a theological standpoint, but how different ritual environments affect social ties. The analysis treats solidarity as a multi-dimensional outcome that can include emotional closeness, moral commitment, and practical mutual aid. Urban religious communities may sustain cohesion by cultivating empathy and shared identity, by reinforcing normative expectations and accountability, and by mobilising support networks in times of need. The move to virtual space may strengthen some of these dimensions while thinning others. It may expand reach and inclusivity while weakening face-to-face obligations. It may enable rapid collective response while encouraging episodic participation driven by trends and attention economies (Mikoski, 2025).

The novelty offered here lies in tracing mechanisms rather than describing a trend. Many discussions note the rise of online worship and digital religiosity, especially in cities where time scarcity and commuting pressures already limit participation. Yet the key sociological task is to explain how solidarity changes when ritual is mediated by screens and platforms. The argument is developed through a three-domain lens that differentiates between emotional solidarity, moral solidarity, and networked solidarity. Emotional solidarity refers to the affective experience of belonging and mutual warmth generated by shared ritual. Moral solidarity refers to the internalisation of obligations and the sense that one is accountable to a community’s normative expectations. Networked solidarity refers to the capacity of a community to mobilise resources, information, and assistance through its relational ties. By using this lens, the paper can specify what is gained, what is lost, and what is reconfigured when ritual moves across spaces (Jacobi et al., 2022).

This focus is particularly relevant in urban settings because cities are sites of both intensified pluralism and heightened inequality. Digital mediation does not occur on a neutral terrain. Access to devices, stable internet connections, and digital literacy shapes who can participate and whose voices are heard. Platform dynamics can amplify certain religious styles, reward charismatic communication, and privilege content that performs well within algorithmic attention systems. At the same time, digital tools can create bridging connections across neighborhoods, workplaces, and even cities, allowing urban residents with weak local ties to find a moral community (Hussain & Wang, 2024). The shift to virtual ritual therefore interacts with urban social structure. It can reinforce bonding solidarity within like-minded clusters while reducing cross-cutting encounters, or it can open spaces for new forms of bridging that were difficult to maintain through physical attendance alone.

The aim of this study is to provide a conceptually grounded synthesis that clarifies these dynamics and offers a coherent map for further empirical research. By bringing together sociological theories of ritual and cohesion with scholarship on mediated religion and urban social life, the paper explains how religious ritual operates as a cohesion-building practice and how virtualisation alters its operative mechanisms. The expected contribution is an explanatory framework that helps readers distinguish between continuity at the level of symbols and discontinuity at the level of social production. Ritual may still name itself as collective worship, but the social process through which collectivity is generated may shift from embodied co-presence to connected participation, from local community discipline to platform-enabled interaction, and from long-term membership to flexible affiliation. Understanding that shift is essential for assessing the future of urban religious communities, the quality

of solidarity they can sustain, and the broader implications for social cohesion in increasingly digitised cities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article used a qualitative, literature-based research design within the sociology of religion. The study relied exclusively on secondary data drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books discussing religious ritual, social cohesion, urban religious life, and digitally mediated worship. The materials were selected for conceptual relevance to the paper's core problem—how solidarity shifts from physical co-presence to virtual participation in urban contexts—and were read through a thematic qualitative analysis. The analysis proceeded by coding the literature into three analytical domains of solidarity (emotional attachment, moral commitment, and networked support), comparing how each domain is generated in predominantly physical, predominantly virtual, and hybrid ritual settings, and then synthesizing the recurring mechanisms identified in the discussion (visibility and accountability, attention management, authority and curation, and rapid coordination) into a coherent explanatory narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Physical Ritual in the City as a Cohesion-Generating Mechanism

In urban settings, physical religious ritual functioned as more than a scheduled gathering; it operated as an infrastructure of coordination for people whose daily lives were otherwise scattered across work shifts, commuting routes, and segmented neighborhoods. The city produced frequent contact without stable familiarity, so routine ritual attendance became a mechanism that converted anonymity into recognisable membership. By returning to the same place at predictable times, participants encountered a repeated social script that reduced uncertainty about others' intentions and reliability. This regularity supported trust formation because it allowed members to observe continuity, punctuality, and compliance with shared norms over time. Physical rituals also created a public setting in which belonging was performed rather than merely claimed, and this visibility mattered in cities where ties often remained weak and easily dissolvable (Cornejo-Valle & Martin-Andino, 2023).

Physical rituals generated cohesion through co-presence that was not only spatial but also interactional. The shared environment shaped attention and conduct in ways difficult to reproduce online: participants entered a bounded space with cues that signaled transitions from ordinary time to ritual time. Such cues included collective silence, rhythmic recitation, structured seating, and orderly turn-taking. These micro-orders disciplined individual behavior and produced a shared focus, which strengthened the sense that participants were oriented toward the same moral center. In urban life, attention was frequently fragmented by multitasking and constant stimulation, so the ritual environment became a rare site of concentrated collective engagement (Andie Bandile, 2024). The social effect was not simply emotional uplift; it was the production of a temporary moral community where participants experienced themselves as part of a coordinated whole.

Embodied synchrony also worked as a cohesion mechanism because bodies carried social meaning that exceeded speech. Singing together, standing and sitting in unison, or participating in communal prayer aligned movement and tempo, which often intensified emotional attunement among participants. This bodily coordination provided a shortcut to affective solidarity, especially among urban residents who might share few social links outside the ritual setting. Participants could feel connected before deep personal intimacy existed, and that felt connection often lowered barriers to subsequent cooperation. In a city, where people could live close while remaining socially distant, embodied ritual made togetherness tangible. The repetitive nature of such synchrony further reinforced attachment by building familiarity into the body, so the sense of belonging was not only remembered cognitively but also reactivated through repeated physical participation (Areiza-Padilla et al., 2022).

Cohesion was further thickened by the informal sociality surrounding the formal rite. Encounters before and after services, brief conversations, shared refreshments, and small gestures of assistance created relational texture that formal ritual alone could not supply. These peripheral interactions supported the slow accumulation of mutual knowledge: who had recently moved, who was struggling financially, who needed help with transportation, and who had skills useful to the community. In urban contexts, where social life could be compartmentalized and neighborly ties weak, this informal layer turned ritual gatherings into platforms for social integration. The collective was not sustained merely

by shared doctrine, but by recurring opportunities to recognise, greet, and exchange small acts of care. Over time, such interaction could translate emotional solidarity into practical readiness to cooperate.

Physical ritual also produced accountability through visibility, which functioned as both normative reinforcement and an enabling condition for mutual care. Participation was legible: members saw who attended, who volunteered, who withdrew, and who carried responsibilities consistently. This visibility supported gentle forms of social control, such as expectations to contribute, reminders to uphold communal norms, and reputational consequences for repeated absence or disregard (Saeed Kabiri et al., 2019). Yet the same visibility enabled support to circulate, because needs were more likely to be noticed and responded to when people were present in shared space. Accountability therefore did not operate only as constraint; it operated as a relational assurance that membership involved reciprocal attention. In cities, where individuals could disappear into the crowd, ritual visibility countered social drift by creating a setting in which belonging had observable indicators and relational consequences.

At the level of networked support, physical rituals acted as hubs that linked participants into durable local circuits of assistance. Committees, volunteer groups, study circles, and charity initiatives often depended on face-to-face coordination, and ritual gatherings provided reliable points for recruitment and task distribution (Andok, 2024). These networks were strengthened by the ease of immediate follow-up: agreements could be made after services, tasks could be delegated in conversation, and commitments could be clarified through direct interaction. Urban residents often relied on such networks for practical resources, including information about employment opportunities, housing, healthcare referrals, and emergency assistance. The cohesion generated here was not abstract unity; it was an operational capacity to mobilise help. Physical ritual supported that capacity by stabilising relational access—people knew where and when they could find one another.

Despite these cohesion-generating functions, physical ritual in cities also carried limits that shaped who benefited from it and how widely cohesion extended. Attendance could be constrained by long working hours, precarious employment, caregiving responsibilities, disability, transportation costs, and neighborhood distance. These constraints meant that cohesion produced through co-presence could become unevenly distributed, concentrating among those with greater time and mobility. Physical ritual could also intensify bonding within a group while leaving broader urban plurality untouched, since ritual spaces might reproduce class, ethnic, or cultural segmentation already present in the city. These boundaries did not negate cohesion inside the community, but they clarified that cohesion was often achieved through selective association rather than across the city as a whole. This tension set the stage for understanding why virtual participation appeared attractive, even as it reconfigured the mechanisms that physical rituals had historically supplied (Bognár, 2024).

2. The Shift Toward Virtual Ritual and the Reconfiguration of Solidarity

Virtual ritual participation in urban contexts reconfigured solidarity primarily by changing how people entered, stayed, and were recognized within a religious community. When worship moved onto platforms, the first shift occurred at the level of access. Distance, commuting time, and rigid schedules mattered less, so participation became compatible with fragmented urban routines. This expansion widened the community's perimeter because newcomers, migrants, and time-poor workers could join without the costs of physical attendance (Jacobi et al., 2022). Yet the same accessibility also altered the social meaning of "showing up." In physical settings, attendance carried visibility and implied a readiness to be counted. In virtual settings, participation could be partial, intermittent, and silent, so belonging became easier to claim and easier to suspend. Solidarity therefore spread outward, but the boundary between members and audience became more porous.

Emotional solidarity often intensified online through what felt like connected presence, even without shared physical space. Livestreams, synchronous prayer sessions, and interactive comment streams created a sense of co-temporality that approximated gathering, while repeated exposure to the same leader or community voice produced familiarity. For some participants, especially those who felt socially anxious or marginal in local congregations, the online environment reduced interpersonal risk and made emotional affiliation more attainable. Expressions of vulnerability also circulated quickly: prayer requests, testimonies, and supportive replies could generate a shared emotional field in real time. The emotional bond here was frequently mediated through text and image rather than embodied synchrony, but it remained meaningful. The key change was that emotional closeness could scale

rapidly, attaching participants to a community narrative even before deeper reciprocal ties formed (Sierocki, 2024).

Moral solidarity shifted because norm formation and enforcement relied less on face-to-face accountability and more on discourse, moderation, and symbolic signaling. In physical rituals, conformity was reinforced by being seen and by the subtle pressures of co-presence. Online, participants could engage without being personally known, so adherence to norms could become performative rather than relational. Public agreement in comments, sharing religious content, or adopting recognizable piety markers functioned as signals of alignment. At the same time, platforms enabled strong normative environments when communities used clear rules, active moderators, and structured small groups. Where such governance existed, moral solidarity could be intense, even demanding. Where it did not, moral solidarity could become episodic, tied to moments of emotional resonance rather than sustained obligation. The overall result was a moral economy that depended more on curated communication and less on the thick social fabric of local relationships.

Networked solidarity often became faster and more expansive in virtual space, especially in cities where urgent needs and rapid change are common. Digital communities could circulate information quickly, coordinate donations, mobilize volunteers, and distribute aid through messaging groups and platform-linked fundraising. This capacity reduced the friction of organizing support, since requests and responses could occur immediately without waiting for the next physical gathering. Yet speed introduced volatility. Attention dynamics shaped whose needs were seen and which causes gained traction, so assistance could become uneven, influenced by visibility and the emotional salience of narratives. Mobilization also risked becoming event-driven rather than routine. Support surged during crises and faded afterward, producing a pattern of solidarity that was real but less predictable. Virtual networks could therefore amplify mutual aid, while simultaneously weakening the steady reciprocity that physical routines often sustained.

Authority and boundary-making were also reorganized as ritual moved online, affecting cohesion indirectly through legitimacy and trust. In many physical congregations, authority was anchored in institutional roles and local accountability. Online, authority could be produced through reach, charisma, and algorithmic amplification, creating “platform authority” that competed with local leadership. Participants could follow distant preachers or communities whose styles matched their preferences, which strengthened ideological coherence within subgroups but potentially fragmented the broader community. Boundary-making shifted as well: the community became less place-based and more preference-based. People curated their religious environments by choosing channels, teachers, and discussion groups, which could reduce uncomfortable cross-cutting encounters that sometimes occur in physical gatherings. The cohesion produced here could be strong, but it was often narrower, concentrated within digitally sorted clusters that were less exposed to internal diversity (Tsironis, 2022).

The virtual format also altered the ecology of attention, which mattered because cohesion depends on shared focus and shared experience (Kelton et al., 2022). Physical rituals can limit distraction through spatial cues and communal norms. Online rituals competed with the broader digital environment—notifications, parallel browsing, and short attention cycles. This competition often required communities to adopt engagement strategies, such as shortened services, more frequent interaction prompts, or highly produced content. These strategies helped sustain participation but also reshaped what counted as meaningful ritual involvement. The risk was that ritual became more consumptive, resembling media viewing rather than participation in a bounded moral community. Even when viewers felt spiritually moved, the social consequences differed when participation lacked durable interpersonal ties. Cohesion could still be generated, but it leaned toward affiliation and identification rather than the everyday obligations associated with embodied communal life.

In urban settings, virtual ritual therefore produced a distinctive solidarity shift from place-based reciprocity toward connectivity-based affiliation. Emotional attachment could broaden and intensify through mediated closeness, moral commitment could become either more regulated or more episodic depending on governance, and networked support could mobilize rapidly while remaining sensitive to attention economies. This transformation did not imply decline; it implied trade-offs. Virtual participation offered inclusivity and reach, but it thinned the mechanisms that traditionally anchored cohesion—visibility, informal interaction, and local accountability. The most sociologically significant point was that solidarity persisted but changed its social carrier. Instead of being carried primarily by

co-presence and routine local ties, it was increasingly carried by platforms, curated publics, and flexible patterns of membership that fit the fragmented tempo of city life.

3. Transformational Leadership, School Climate, and Performance-Supportive Conditions

Hybrid ritual patterns in urban religious life emerged as a practical response to two competing realities. On one side, embodied gatherings remained central for producing dense ties, mutual recognition, and the felt weight of communal accountability. On the other side, urban schedules, mobility constraints, and the normalisation of platform-based communication made exclusive reliance on physical attendance increasingly unrealistic (Lussier, 2024). Hybrid arrangements therefore operated as an adaptive architecture that combined periodic co-presence with continuous digital connection. The sociological significance of hybridity lay in its ability to distribute functions across spaces: physical rituals sustained relational depth and shared embodied experience, while online infrastructures maintained continuity between gatherings and reduced participation barriers for those whose urban routines limited attendance.

In many communities, hybridity reconfigured what counted as participation and membership. Attendance could no longer be read solely through bodies present in a room; it was also measured through logins, viewing time, group chats, and digital volunteering. This produced layered membership, often with a locally committed core that remained highly visible in physical gatherings and a broader digital periphery that participated intermittently. Layering was not inherently negative, but it altered the community's internal structure (Yilmaz, 2023). If pathways from periphery to core were clear—through small groups, service roles, or periodic in-person events—hybridity could function as an integration pipeline. If such pathways were absent, the periphery could become permanently detached, creating a community with wide symbolic reach but limited reciprocal obligation beyond the core.

Hybrid formats also changed the temporal rhythm of solidarity. Physical rituals often concentrate community life into weekly or seasonal peaks, while the online layer can extend community interaction into daily micro-engagements. Messaging groups, short reflections, and digital check-ins can preserve relational continuity, especially in cities where distance and time scarcity reduce spontaneous meetups. This continuity can strengthen emotional solidarity because connection is repeatedly refreshed rather than left to fade between gatherings. Yet continuity can also create fatigue and pressure, especially when community expectations migrate into always-on communication. Hybrid cohesion therefore depended on how communities regulated digital interaction so that connectivity supported care without becoming surveillance or constant demand.

From the standpoint of moral solidarity, hybridity offered a way to balance visibility and flexibility. Physical gatherings retained the social cues that reinforce norms through observation and shared discipline, while digital spaces provided channels for teaching, reminders, and moral discussion throughout the week. This combination could stabilise normative expectations in plural urban contexts where members are exposed to competing moral narratives. At the same time, hybrid arrangements intensified the importance of governance (Astor et al., 2024). Without clear norms for online conduct, moderation, and authority, digital spaces could become arenas for conflict or polarisation that spill back into physical community life. When governance was strong but relationally grounded, the hybrid model could reinforce moral cohesion; when governance was weak or overly punitive, it could erode trust.

Hybrid community also reshaped networked solidarity by integrating rapid digital mobilisation with the credibility of embodied relationships. Online tools facilitated fundraising, volunteer coordination, and information dissemination, while physical gatherings provided the trust infrastructure that made such mobilisation legitimate. In cities, where needs can arise quickly and where institutions are often overloaded, this combination could enable communities to respond with both speed and reliability. The risk, however, was that digital mobilisation could drift toward event-driven campaigns detached from the slower work of care. Hybrid models were most cohesive when online mobilisation remained anchored in relationships built through co-presence, ensuring that assistance was not only responsive but also sustained through follow-up, accountability, and long-term support practices.

Another consequence of hybridity was a reconfiguration of authority across spaces. Leaders who were locally trusted could expand influence through digital teaching, while digitally prominent figures could shape expectations within local congregations. Hybrid communities therefore had to manage potential misalignment between institutional authority and platform authority (Kołodziejska et al., 2024). Some communities addressed this by curating online content, setting clear guidelines for external

influences, and integrating digital teaching into local pastoral structures. Others experienced fragmentation when members adopted competing online authorities that created ideological fault lines. Cohesion in hybrid settings thus required alignment between offline leadership and online presence, not by suppressing plurality, but by maintaining shared interpretive reference points that reduced internal drift.

Finally, hybridity affected the community's relationship to urban pluralism. Physical gatherings can force cross-cutting encounters because members must share space, endure minor differences, and practice co-existence under one roof. Online environments, by contrast, often allow selective exposure and preference-based clustering. Hybrid communities could moderate digital sorting by retaining physical moments where diversity is lived rather than curated. Yet they could also intensify sorting if the digital layer encouraged subgroup formation that rarely recombined offline. The hybrid model therefore did not guarantee cohesion; it created a field of institutional choices. Where communities treated hybridity as an integrated system that connected periphery to core, balanced flexibility with visibility, and anchored online participation in offline accountability, solidarity tended to become both accessible and durable within the constraints of urban life.

4. Sociological Implications

The shift of religious ritual from predominantly physical space toward virtual and hybrid configurations has implications that extend beyond internal religious life. It affects how social cohesion is produced in cities, how boundaries of belonging are drawn, and how collective responsibility is organised under conditions of pluralism and inequality. The first implication concerns the changing architecture of cohesion. Urban cohesion has often depended on institutions that can generate repeated face-to-face encounters and embed individuals in observable networks of reciprocity. As ritual participation becomes increasingly mediated, cohesion is less anchored in neighbourhood proximity and more anchored in networked connectivity. This can be socially advantageous in cities marked by mobility and weak local ties, because networked belonging offers continuity even when residence and work patterns shift. Yet it also means that cohesion becomes more dependent on infrastructures of communication and on patterns of attention, which are shaped by platform logics that do not necessarily prioritise durable community ties (Sierocki, 2024).

A second implication concerns the reconfiguration of authority and legitimacy. In physical congregations, authority is typically institutionalised and locally accountable, even when informal hierarchies persist. In virtual space, authority can be produced through visibility, engagement metrics, and algorithmic amplification. This introduces a competitive ecology of religious influence, where charismatic communication and content optimisation can increase reach regardless of local embeddedness. The result is a redistribution of interpretive power. Local leaders may find their authority contested by distant figures who provide religious guidance through digital channels. Conversely, local leaders can also amplify their reach and sustain community connection through online teaching and coordination. In either direction, legitimacy becomes more negotiable and can shift from institutional position to mediated presence. This has consequences for cohesion because normative unity often relies on shared interpretive reference points. When authority fragments, moral solidarity may harden within subgroups while weakening at the level of the broader community.

A third implication involves boundary-making and the social costs of fluid membership. Virtual rituals allow individuals to participate with lower social exposure and fewer commitments. This can increase inclusion for those who are new, socially anxious, disabled, or constrained by time and transportation. It can also create pathways for migrants and newcomers to find community quickly in unfamiliar urban environments (Bognár, 2024). At the same time, lower barriers can foster a consumer-like participation style, where affiliation becomes conditional and disengagement is easy. Cohesion may therefore become stratified between a locally committed core and a digitally connected periphery. If the relationship between these layers is not intentionally managed, the community's capacity for mutual aid and long-term responsibility can weaken, even as the community's symbolic reach expands.

A final implication concerns the quality of solidarity itself. Virtual networks can mobilise resources quickly, and hybrid communities can coordinate charity and mutual aid with high efficiency. Yet speed and scale do not automatically translate into durability. When solidarity is tied to visibility and attention, support may become episodic. This shifts the moral economy of care from routine obligations to event-based responsiveness. The challenge for urban religious communities, and for

sociological analysis, is to understand how hybrid arrangements can preserve the relational depth and accountability of physical ritual while harnessing the accessibility and reach of digital participation. The future of urban cohesion may depend on whether such institutional adaptations can stabilise solidarity as a sustained social practice rather than a series of mediated moments.

CONCLUSION

Religious ritual continues to matter for social cohesion in urban settings because it offers a structured way to convert dispersed urban life into recognisable membership, shared moral orientation, and practical networks of support. Physical rituals generate cohesion through embodied co-presence, predictable interaction, and the surrounding social texture that builds trust and accountability. As ritual moves into virtual space, cohesion does not simply weaken or strengthen. It is redistributed across dimensions of solidarity. Emotional attachment can expand through connected presence and mediated intimacy, moral commitment can shift toward discursive enforcement and curated belonging, and networked solidarity can become faster and more scalable through digital coordination. The result is a transformation in how togetherness is produced, from a model anchored in local visibility and reciprocal obligation toward a model anchored in connectivity, platform affordances, and flexible participation.

This shift carries implications for the boundaries and durability of urban religious community. Virtual participation can widen inclusion and support bridging ties across urban distance, yet it can also thin accountability and encourage a consumer-like affiliation that is easier to enter and exit. Hybrid configurations increasingly appear as the practical compromise, preserving the depth of embodied gathering while using digital infrastructures to maintain continuity and mobilise support in the fragmented rhythms of city life. The central contribution of this paper lies in clarifying mechanisms rather than narrating a trend. It explains why the same ritual symbols can sustain cohesion in different ways depending on whether solidarity is produced through co-presence or through curated connectivity, and it highlights how authority, inequality, and platform dynamics shape which form of cohesion becomes dominant in contemporary urban religiosity.

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