



Research article

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Dissemination of The Bhagavad Gita Through Digital Storytelling: A Thematic Analysis of Short Videos of Spiritual Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The Bhagavad Gita, a timeless philosophical and spiritual text, continues to offer guidance on morality, self-realization, and resilience. In the digital era, its dissemination has shifted from oral traditions and scriptures to short-form videos on platforms such as YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels. This study investigates how the Gita's teachings are reinterpreted and communicated through digital storytelling by popular Indian spiritual leaders/gurus. Addressing a research gap in the role of short-form content for sacred texts, the study employs a qualitative research design using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. A purposive sample of 70 short videos (2022–2025) from five prominent spiritual leaders, Jaya Kishori, Gaur Gopal Das, Acharya Prashant, Swami Mukundananda, and Devi Chitralakha, was analyzed. The findings highlight twelve recurring themes, including ethical dilemmas, self-discipline, resilience, detachment, karma, and daily reflection, which were contextualized within contemporary challenges such as career stress, relationships, and mental health. Narrative strategies such as character portrayal, symbolic settings, and condensed plots, alongside multimedia elements like captions, music, and animations, were found to enhance accessibility and engagement while safeguarding the essence of the scripture. The study concludes that digital storytelling not only preserves the philosophical core of the Bhagavad Gita but also adapts it to modern attention spans, making it a relevant guide for personal and professional life in the digital age.

INTRODUCTION

The Bhagavad Gita is a classic philosophical and spiritual text that offers profound insights into self-realization, accountability, and morality. Written by Maharishi Ved Vyas, it is composed of 700 shlokas (verses) arranged in 18 chapters. These verses are found in Chapters 23-40 of the Mahabharata's Bhishma Parva. Based on the Mahabharata, it provides direction for people looking for knowledge beyond everyday life. Even though it was written more than 5,000 years ago, its lessons are still relevant today and resonate with seekers of all backgrounds and ages. The conversation on the battlefield of Kurukshetra between Lord Krishna and Arjuna is the central part of the Gita. Seeing his family members as enemies paralyzes Arjuna,

causing doubt and moral dilemmas. Krishna replies with enlightening knowledge, exhorting Arjuna to put aside his feelings and behave morally (dharma). Beyond the battlefield, this discussion deals with the never-ending struggle between human emotions and greater wisdom, pointing people toward purpose and clarity. (Vedanta Vision, n.d.) Its lessons and fundamental principles have survived through the ages and still apply to our contemporary lives, guiding us toward a more satisfied and meaningful way of living.

Technology in spiritual discourse has significantly expanded the reach and accessibility of spiritual practices. Digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and virtual reality experiences allow spiritual instructors

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to interact with audiences worldwide, encouraging online communities and disseminating sacred teachings. While social media's interactive features allow users to engage with spiritual content dynamically, immersive technologies like virtual reality open up new possibilities for religious rituals, yoga, and meditation. The digital revolution has broken down geographical and institutional barriers in the modern era, making spirituality more accessible to wider audiences. (Chakraworty, 2023) This change highlights how digital platforms make it easier for spiritual content to spread and influence how it is consumed and marketed. Furthermore, social media has expanded Indian spirituality's global reach, mirroring McLuhan's idea of a globalized society where people interact with spiritual teachings across national and cultural divides. Indian spiritual practices can be modified and incorporated into a variety of international contexts thanks to online communities that further promote cross-cultural interactions.

The Bhagavad Gita's teachings have been disseminated through various means over the centuries, from oral traditions and scriptures to modern digital storytelling. In the digital age, short-form video content has replaced traditional texts and oral teachings as the primary means of disseminating the Bhagavad Gita. Platforms such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts have gained popularity as ways to convey the timeless wisdom of the Gita in a way that is appropriate for modern attention spans. These short videos make the lessons of the scripture understandable to a worldwide audience by combining its main ideas into appealing aesthetic stories. These formats leverage engaging visuals, concise narratives, and interactive elements to communicate age-old spiritual wisdom in a manner that aligns with contemporary digital consumption habits.

This study explores how the Bhagavad Gita is being interpreted and disseminated through short-form digital storytelling, analyzing key thematic representations, narrative techniques, and its elements. By examining selected short videos, this research seeks to understand whether the essence of the Gita's teachings is preserved or altered in the transition to modern digital platforms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to recent studies, digital media has a profound impact on how people engage with religion, spread culture, and study philosophy. Missier (2025) highlights the transition from traditional religious authority to online philosophical communities as she investigates how Gen Y and Gen Z in Mumbai use digital platforms to navigate religious beliefs. Digital spaces promote introspection and diverse faith understanding despite worries about online hate speech and algorithmic persuasion. Similarly, de Sousa et al. (2021) talk about how digital platforms change how people talk about religion, making it more

approachable while also questioning institutional authority. Using McLuhan's theories, Bhatia (2024) expands on this analysis, showing how social media promotes digital spirituality through the blending of consumer culture and religious teachings by influencers such as Swami Ramdev and Sadhguru. Rahman et al. (2024) examine this shift in more detail by assessing the function of digital resources in Islamic religious education and making the case for a fair blending of technology and conventional teaching techniques.

Digital storytelling and artificial intelligence's effects on religious and philosophical studies are also becoming more well-known. The potential of AI in digital humanities is demonstrated by Chandra & Ranjan (2022), who use deep learning to investigate thematic connections between the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads. The teachings of the Gita are in line with India's National Education Policy, according to Jana & Adhikary (2024), who highlight the text's significance in moral reasoning and ethical leadership. In the meantime, Poongundran (2024) and Pandey & Mishra (2021) emphasize the Bhagavad Gita's significance in promoting moral judgment, intellectual development, and adaptability. Furthermore, Jiasheng (2024) investigates how audiovisual storytelling on short video platforms reshapes cultural narratives, consistent with Moldoveanu's (n.d.) research on the impact of social media on cultural visibility and hybridization. When taken as a whole, these pieces highlight the complex interaction in modern society between digital media, religious ideas, and cultural identity.

RESEARCH GAP

While prior studies have examined digital religion and online spirituality, little attention has been given to short-form storytelling as a medium for sacred texts. The role of narrative techniques and multimedia elements in simplifying the Bhagavad Gita's complex teachings remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how spiritual leaders use short videos to balance accessibility with authenticity.

Research Objectives

- To identify the popular themes of the Bhagavad Gita disseminated in short videos.
- To analyze the narrative techniques, storytelling methods and presentation styles used in short videos.
- To identify the relevance of Digital Storytelling over traditional dissemination methods.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a Qualitative research design using a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke's 2006) to investigate the ways in which short-form



digital storytelling is used to spread the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. The present Qualitative method allows a thorough examination of the recurrent themes, narrative techniques, and multimedia components used in the short videos.

Sampling Strategy

The present study employed Purposive sampling to select 70 short videos from the five prominent spiritual leaders from YouTube, i.e., Jaya Kishori, Gaur Gopal Das, Acharya Prashant, Swami Mukundananda, and Devi Chitralekha.

Inclusion criteria

- Videos that specifically quote or interpret the Bhagavad Gita and its lessons.
- Content published between 2022–2025 to ensure contemporary relevance.
- Short-form videos (under 3 minutes) on YouTube Shorts.
- Leaders with a significant digital presence and subscriber base to ensure reach and influence.

Data Collection

For the present study, videos were collected from YouTube Shorts as of February 18, 2025. The dataset consisted of 70 videos that directly addressed the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted in accordance with

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework to examine the selected 70 short videos of spiritual leaders. The process is followed as:

Familiarization with the Data

The videos were viewed repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of their content, narrative style, and audiovisual elements. Also, the use of symbolism and the overall storytelling strategies were noted

Generating Initial Codes

During the coding process, segments of data were labeled based on recurring ideas and narrative patterns. Codes such as ethical dilemmas, self-discipline, detachment, resilience, daily reflection, use of captions, and visual symbolism were identified across the dataset.

Searching for Themes

The codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories. For example, codes related to detachment, resilience, and impermanence were combined under the theme Impermanence, Calmness, and Flexibility, while codes on decision-making, responsibility, and duty were grouped into Decision-Making, Ethical Dilemmas, and Self-Discovery.

Reviewing Themes

The emerging themes were reviewed against the dataset to ensure consistency and accuracy. This step ensured that each theme had a strong evidential basis in the data.

Table 1.:Description of Spiritual Leaders Selected

| S. No. | Name of the Spiritual Leaders Selected | Description | Subscribers on YouTube (as of 18 Feb 2025) |
|--------|--|---|--|
| 1. | Jaya Kishori | Indian spiritual speaker, singer, motivational speaker, life coach, and social reformer known for her spiritual discourses and soulful bhajans. | 3.7 million+ |
| 2. | Gaur Gopal Das | Gaur Gopal Das is an Indian monk, lifestyle coach, and motivational speaker. He is also a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) | 5.13 million+ |
| 3. | Acharya Prashant | Indian philosopher, author, and Advaita teacher. He teaches seventeen forms of the Gita and sixty forms of the Upanishads. He is the founder of a non-profit organization named Prashant Advait Foundation | 55.1 million+ |
| 4. | Swami Mukundananda | A spiritual leader, Vedic scholar, author, and teacher of spirituality, yoga, and meditation. He founded the yogic system called Jagadguru Kripaluji Yog, widely known as JKYog. | 2.89 million+ |
| 5. | Devi Chitralekha | A well-known Indian spiritual orator and Bhagavat Katha Vachak (narrator of the Bhagavata Purana). She is recognized for her discourses on Hindu scriptures, particularly the Bhagavata Purana (Shrimad Bhagavatam) and other devotional teachings related to Sanatan Dharma. | 4.08 million+ |

Table 2: Major Themes Identified in Short-Form Videos of Spiritual Leaders

| Theme | Description | Illustrative Examples from Videos |
|--|---|--|
| Decision-Making, Ethical Dilemmas, and Self-Discovery | The Gita encourages action without attachment to outcomes, guiding individuals through moral dilemmas and self-discovery. | Videos compared Arjuna’s battlefield dilemma to modern struggles in careers, relationships, and ethics. |
| Ancient Wisdom vs. Modern Self-Help | Core Gita principles align with contemporary self-help ideas, emphasizing mindset and perspective over ritual. | Leaders highlighted motivation, discipline, and purpose as timeless lessons reinterpreted in a modern framework. |
| Impermanence, Calmness, and Flexibility | The Gita stresses detachment and resilience by teaching that emotions and challenges are temporary. | Short clips used quotes like “This too shall pass” alongside calming visuals and music. |
| The Modern Mahabharata – Internal Conflicts | The battlefield symbolizes internal struggles faced in modern life. | Leaders explained Krishna’s guidance as a metaphor for overcoming inner doubts and existential crises. |
| Truth, Consciousness, and Bliss | The triad of Sat–Chit–Ananda (truth, consciousness, bliss) represents enlightenment. | Videos stressed higher awareness beyond daily distractions, using symbolic imagery and meditative tones. |
| True Surrender: Inquiry, Faith, and Krishna’s Guidance | Spirituality is portrayed as an active dialogue balancing faith and reason. | Clips showed Arjuna’s surrender as guided by rational inquiry and devotion, not blind obedience. |
| Material vs. Spiritual Knowledge | The Gita distinguishes inner growth from material gain. | Videos contrasted spiritual wisdom with the competitive rat race, encouraging balance. |
| The Role of Women and Divine Virtues | Emphasis on courage, patience, and forgiveness; recognition of women’s strength in preserving dharma. | Leaders drew parallels with festivals like Navratri, highlighting feminine divinity. |
| The Path of Action (Karma Yoga) | Duty and integrity are central; engagement with the world must align with dharma. | Short videos encouraged audiences to act responsibly without escapism, aligning with Krishna’s advice to Arjuna. |
| The Power of the Mind: Friend or Enemy | The mind can elevate or enslave depending on self-control. | Videos illustrated how anger management and mindfulness are key to spiritual progress. |
| Learning from Mistakes and the Law of Karma | Mistakes are seen as growth opportunities within the karmic cycle. | Leaders explained stories like King Parikshit to show karma as continuous learning. |
| Life Transformation through Discipline (Abhyasa Yoga) | Spiritual progress requires sustained practice and effort. | Clips stressed persistence and spiritual exercises over instant results. |
| Spiritual Growth through Detachment | Freedom from attachment leads to peace and realization. | Leaders used examples of letting go of desires to achieve balance. |
| The Gita’s Transformative Spirituality | Spirituality is depicted as active struggle, not passive devotion. | Videos portrayed life as a battlefield of distractions requiring resilience. |
| Daily Reflection and Practical Application | Even a single verse of the Gita offers profound guidance for daily living. | Short videos encouraged reading one verse daily for personal growth. |



Table 3: Narrative and Multimedia Elements in Digital Storytelling of the Bhagavad Gita

| Narrative / Multimedia Element | Description | Illustrative Examples from Videos |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Characters | Videos highlight Krishna as the mentor and Arjuna as the seeker, symbolizing teacher–disciple dialogue. | Leaders portrayed Krishna guiding Arjuna through moral dilemmas, making ancient wisdom relatable. |
| Setting | The battlefield of Kurukshetra is reimagined as a metaphor for modern struggles. | Short videos framed daily life challenges such as stress and conflict as the ‘battlefield’ of the mind. |
| Plot | Narratives are simplified to present the essence of the Gita within a short time frame. | Videos condensed Krishna’s teachings into 1–3 key takeaways per video. |
| Themes | Content reflects universal issues such as personal growth, conflict, and spiritual clarity. | Spiritual leaders linked verses of the Gita to modern concerns like career stress and relationships. |
| Perspective | Teachings are presented in a simplified, accessible manner for wider audiences. | Leaders translated Sanskrit verses into everyday language, emphasizing practical applications. |
| Captions | Text highlights key shlokas or insights for emphasis and retention. | Videos displayed verses such as ‘Karmanye vadhikaraste’ with translations for clarity. |
| Music | Background music creates emotional resonance and enhances engagement. | Meditative tunes and bhajans were used to strengthen the spiritual atmosphere. |
| Images & Visual Symbolism | Use of symbolic imagery to reinforce philosophical ideas. | Lotus flowers, battlefields, and light motifs were used to symbolize purity, struggle, and enlightenment. |
| Animations | Animations bring abstract concepts to life for modern viewers. | Animated sequences showed Krishna’s guidance or the cosmic form (Vishwaroop) in visually engaging ways. |

Defining and Naming Themes

After refinement, twelve major themes were defined and labeled to represent the recurring teachings and interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita. These included:

- Decision-Making, Ethical Dilemmas, and Self-Discovery
- Ancient Wisdom vs. Modern Self-Help
- Impermanence, Calmness, and Flexibility
- The Modern Mahabharata – Internal Conflicts and the Battle of Life
- Truth, Consciousness, and Bliss
- True Surrender: Inquiry, Faith, and Krishna’s Guidance
- Material vs. Spiritual Knowledge
- The Role of Women and Divine Virtues
- The Path of Action: Serving with Integrity
- The Power of the Mind: Friend or Enemy
- Learning from Mistakes and the Law of Karma
- Life Transformation through Direction and Discipline

Producing the Report

In the final phase, the themes were contextualized within existing literature on digital storytelling and spiritual communication. Narrative elements (character portrayal, setting, plot, and perspective) and multimedia features (captions, images, music, animations) were analyzed to show how spiritual leaders use short-form videos to simplify and contemporize the Bhagavad Gita’s teachings.

The findings demonstrate that digital storytelling not only preserves the scripture’s philosophical essence but also adapts it to modern attention spans and contemporary challenges.

RESULT

The thematic analysis of 70 short-form videos identified fifteen recurring themes that illustrate how the Bhagavad Gita is interpreted and disseminated through digital storytelling (see Table 2). Prominent themes included decision-making and ethical dilemmas, impermanence, resilience, spiritual growth, and detachment, which were consistently connected to contemporary challenges such as career choices, relationships, and mental health. Leaders frequently used Arjuna’s battlefield dilemma as a metaphor for personal struggles, thereby framing the Gita as a guide for self-discovery and moral clarity. Other themes emphasized the compatibility of ancient wisdom with modern self-help practices, highlighting discipline, motivation, and resilience as universal values. Additional themes, such as the power of the mind, the law of karma, and daily reflection, simplified complex philosophical ideas into practical advice for everyday living. Cultural dimensions, including the role of women and divine virtues, reinforced continuity between scriptural teachings and contemporary social practices.

Narrative and multimedia strategies were central to this dissemination (see Table 3). Characters, particularly Krishna as mentor and Arjuna as seeker, provided a relatable framework for teachings, while the battlefield of Kurukshetra was symbolically reframed as the “battlefield of life.” Short-form constraints encouraged condensed plots, typically highlighting one to three key lessons. Multimedia features—including captions, verse translations, music, imagery, and animations enhanced accessibility and emotional engagement.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight how digital storytelling serves as an effective medium for disseminating the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita to contemporary audiences. The thematic analysis revealed recurring themes such as ethical decision-making, resilience, detachment, and spiritual growth, which remain highly relevant to present-day personal and professional dilemmas. By drawing parallels between Arjuna’s battlefield dilemma and modern struggles in careers, relationships, and mental health, spiritual leaders recontextualize ancient wisdom in ways that resonate with global digital audiences. Narrative and multimedia strategies were equally significant in shaping audience engagement. Character portrayals of Krishna as mentor and Arjuna as seeker reinforced the dialogical structure of the scripture, while the battlefield of Kurukshetra was reimagined as a metaphor for everyday challenges. The use of captions, translations of Sanskrit verses, symbolic imagery, music, and animations ensured accessibility for diverse audiences and maintained emotional resonance. These findings support prior scholarship on digital religion (e.g., de Sousa et al., 2021), while extending it by demonstrating how short-form content uniquely condenses complex philosophical teachings into concise yet impactful formats.

Importantly, the study suggests that the shift from oral and textual traditions to digital storytelling represents not a dilution but an evolution of the Bhagavad Gita’s message. Although the brevity of short-form platforms poses risks of oversimplification, the authoritative presence of recognized spiritual leaders safeguards the integrity of interpretation. This indicates that digital storytelling functions both as a pedagogical tool and as a cultural bridge, connecting timeless scriptures with modern media practices.

In conclusion, short-form digital storytelling provides a transformative model for spiritual communication in the

digital age. By balancing accessibility with authenticity, it ensures that the Bhagavad Gita continues to inspire, educate, and guide individuals across cultures, thereby securing its relevance for future generations.

Limitations and future research

The current study focuses on the digital storytelling of the Bhagavad Gita, which can be extended to other religious texts and concepts. Future studies may focus on various aspects of digital storytelling. Also, more study is required to understand the contemporary narrative techniques and their elements in modern digital storytelling.

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