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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 25:4 April 2025
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Homogeneity in Popular Culture: AI and Representation of Hindu Deities in Social Media

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Abstract

This article explores how artificial intelligence (AI) and popular culture intersect within the Indian cultural context. It looks into how popular culture and AI technologies work together in cultural production, focusing on how creators intentionally and systematically design AI-based cultural content. This paper examines the impact of AI-integrated popular culture, especially regarding creativity and how such content is perceived by the uninitiated audience. A key aspect of this study is the role of aesthetics in shaping perception, which includes both everyday experiences and those connected to the arts in religious scenario. In popular culture, people can have aesthetic experiences in either or both areas, often trying to combine them into a single, meaningful experience. The study aims to open up new possibilities for understanding how art and digitally produced content come together in this process and how these different domains are increasingly interconnected. The paper tries to look into the limitations of such tools in generating images of Hindu deities and its blatantly obvious representation.

Keywords: Hindu Deities in Social Media, Artificial Intelligence (AI), AI-Generated Imagery, Cultural Representation, Cultural Stereotypes, AI Bias.

Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into popular culture is changing how cultural content is produced and represented in Indian visual media. It is significant now to assess

how AI and digital platforms come together in the Indian cultural setting which could probably offer insights into the way creative media get actively involved in generating AI-driven content. It is now an established fact that AI is a powerful force that is transforming modern society by changing how industries, economies, and everyday life function. AI expert Pedro Domingos describes AI as a broad area that includes technologies like machine learning, neural networks, and natural language processing, all aimed at giving machines human-like abilities.

According to Domingos, AI can revolutionize fields such as healthcare, finance, transport, and entertainment by automating tasks, analyzing large amounts of data, and making decisions on its own. However, he also warns about the ethical and social issues that AI raises, such as biased algorithms and the risk of job loss, stressing the importance of responsible AI use to ensure fair and positive outcomes for everyone (Domingos, 2015).

Cultural identity, on the other hand, involves a mix of beliefs, traditions, language, and customs that shape how individuals and communities see themselves and express who they are. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall explains that cultural identity is not fixed; instead, it changes over time through social interactions and historical events. It is influenced by shared histories, social contexts, and personal experiences. Cultural identity is also linked to power structures, as dominant cultural narratives influence how groups view themselves and how others see them. Understanding cultural identity requires acknowledging its complexity and the many perspectives that contribute to the diversity of human experience (Hall, 1990).

The meeting point of AI and cultural identity brings important questions for how technology develops and affects society. Hall's ideas help us understand how people form their identities within larger cultural systems. In the field of AI, cultural identity matters in how algorithms are designed and used, and in how people interpret the content produced by AI. Domingos emphasizes that cultural differences must be considered in data analysis and AI decisions to reduce bias and ensure fairness. As AI becomes more present in everyday life, it can either support existing cultural patterns or challenge them. This highlights the need for inclusive, culturally sensitive approaches in developing and applying AI technologies.

Literature Review

Several studies have already been published in this field and are worth highlighting. Christine L. Liao (2008) suggests that new media art goes beyond simply using digital tools and the internet. It combines artistic expression, technology, and human interaction, and is defined by features like digitality, interactivity, hypertextuality, dispersion, and virtuality. New media art is rooted in active participation and hybrid forms of creation.

Daniel Becker (2017) argues that forgeries reflect a systematic logic of perception, resembling how digital systems like AI function. While artists may use gaps or flaws creatively, forgeries aim to fill them in seamlessly. New media artworks discussed in the study reveal the processes behind forgeries, showing that both machines and AI follow programmed instructions. Unlike traditional forgeries, which try to hide their artificial nature, AI-generated content makes its structure visible. Whether something is seen as real or fake, or AI as authentic or deceptive, often depends on the viewer's expectations and interpretive framework.

Michele Elam (2022) emphasizes the importance of integrating AI more deeply with the humanities and the arts to promote human well-being, especially in the context of social justice. She argues that race, ethnicity, and gender should not be treated as fixed or commercialized data points, but rather as evolving social constructs influenced by political and power dynamics.

Todd C. Helmus (2022) explores the dangers posed by deepfakes and reviews strategies to reduce their risks. He also discusses ongoing efforts to detect and counteract them effectively.

Yan Zhao (2024) investigates how AI technology is shaping visual communication in new media art. The study introduces an AI-based approach to layout design using Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and highlights how generative AI, through deep learning and big data analysis, can independently create design elements and structures—contributing to innovation in visual communication.

Yilin Ye and colleagues (2024) analyze how Generative AI (GenAI) is being rapidly adopted in visualization design. They review earlier work and outline major breakthroughs like diffusion models and large language models that have expanded GenAI's capabilities. The paper classifies GenAI applications into four stages: data enhancement, visual mapping, stylization, and interaction. It also evaluates various GenAI techniques—including sequence, tabular, spatial, and graph generation—by identifying their strengths and weaknesses.

V. Pandiyaraj, Dr. N. Raja, and Deeparajeswari (2024) examined how Indian identity is portrayed in AI-generated images, focusing on how cultural representation appears in technology-supported narratives. The present paper takes up their argument further.

Ionela Bara and collaborators (2025) explore how information about AI systems affects people's moral and aesthetic judgments. In the first experiment, participants rated AI-generated art as less morally acceptable and less aesthetically valuable when they were given details about how the AI worked—especially in situations involving money or artistic credit. In the second experiment, learning about an AI artwork's success didn't significantly affect moral judgments. The third experiment showed that people's unconscious associations between human- and AI-made art were mixed and did not always favor human-made works. Shaily (2025) in AI Generated Gods and Impacts on the Information Ecosystem writes about such concerns. She explores the impact of Generative AI on fragile information ecosystems—such as religion—that are open to broad interpretation, rely on limited or contested sources, and are often difficult for the general public to access or understand.

Background of Popular Art in Deity Representation

Figures and pictures of deities are common to the Hindu custom wherein realistic or symbolic representations are generally accepted for religious veneration. In the late 19th century, lithographic prints of deities gained popularity in India, initially influenced by European imports from Italy, Germany, and England. These prints depicted religious and secular themes and incorporated Western artistic styles. Punjab became an early site of intermingling between Eastern and Western art traditions, and by the 1870s, major lithographic presses were established in cities like Calcutta and Poona.

Raja Ravi Varma emerged as a key figure, blending European oil painting techniques with Indian religious iconography. In 1892, he founded the Ravi Varma Press, producing high-quality prints using German inks and meticulous lithographic methods. His works portrayed deities like Vishnu and Shiva in traditional South Indian attire, with naturalistic features and minimal ornamentation. Backgrounds often included symbolic and European elements. With the rise of nationalist movements and the decline of international trade during the world wars, India's domestic print industry expanded significantly. Over time, rising demand led to mass production, resulting in a decline in quality. The changeover from limestone lithography to metal etching reduced visual depth and detail, ultimately damaging Ravi Varma's critical reputation. Despite this, his prints played a pivotal role in shaping popular visual culture and religious representation in colonial and postcolonial India.

Methodology

This study focuses on visual materials and uses Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model (1973) to understand how media messages are produced, shared, and interpreted. According to Hall, media creators embed meanings in their messages, shaped by their cultural, political, and social contexts. However, audiences do not always interpret these messages in the same way. Their personal experiences, cultural background, and ideologies influence how they understand the content. This model highlights that communication is 'interactive' i.e., meaning is not simply passed from producer to receiver but is reshaped through interpretation.

When applied to AI-generated imagery and Indian cultural identity, the proposed concept helps us to analyse how cultural content is embedded by AI systems and how it is perceived by viewers. These visuals are based on datasets that carry cultural, historical, and artistic influences. It is quite logical that an AI that is trained mostly on Western data, it may not accurately reflect Indian culture. But when the training includes Indian-specific elements the output becomes more culturally aligned. Audience interpretation also varies. Some might accept these images as authentic (dominant or accepted reading), others may agree with parts but critique certain details (negotiated or 'via media' reading), and some may completely reject the portrayal as incorrect or stereotypical (oppositional or 'disapproved' reading).

This framework is useful in examining AI's role as a media creator and raises important questions about dataset diversity, training methods, and cultural accuracy. It pushes for more inclusive AI development that respects cultural nuance.

To explore this, the study uses content analysis to investigate how Indian culture appears in AI-generated visuals. The steps as suggested in the article by V. Pandiyaraj, Dr. N. Raja, and Deeparajeswari (2024) are followed here;

Item	Category	Description
1	Prompt Selection:	Prompts focusing on Indian cultural elements are selected to guide image generation.
2	Image Generation:	These prompts are input into Leonardo AI and Imagine AI, which create images based on advanced algorithms.
3	Data Collection:	The resulting images are collected systematically to form a dataset representing Indian culture across multiple themes.
4	Content Analysis:	Each image is reviewed and coded according to themes, helping to interpret how cultural elements are presented.
5	Data Analysis:	The analysis identifies visual patterns and cultural meanings, exploring how Indian identity is expressed in AI-generated art.

Discussion and Findings

AI now plays a major role in shaping cultural content. From recommending content to generating images, music, and scripts, AI is transforming how media is created and consumed

and in many ways perpetuated. Indian media is increasingly using AI to boost storytelling and visual appeal. While this makes production more efficient, it also changes how creativity is defined, raising questions about originality and authenticity. From the audience's view, AI content can shape how people engage with culture. While AI customizes content to suit different tastes, this also creates risks—such as cultural bias, privacy issues, and a possible loss of diversity in representation. Visually, AI also influences aesthetics and how people experience culture. Today's digital world blends everyday visual experiences with AI-generated art, deepfakes, and filters. This alters the perspective of how people see themselves and others. AI allows experimentation with new artistic forms, blurring the lines between tradition and digital innovation and sometimes ideological dimension of images become farfetched.

The study reveals the reasons behind AI's impact in Indian popular culture across media like AI-generated images in popular figures and Hindu deities.

The researcher suggests the readers to go directly to the website given to see some samples: (Please read the limitations also)
https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/mahabharata-english-summary/d/doc1345145.html
https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/mahabharata-english-summary/d/doc1345205.html
https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/mahabharata-english-summary/d/doc1345215.html
https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/mahabharata-english-summary/d/doc1345030.html

The examples show how AI affects cultural meaning and challenges traditional roles in media creation. Further, there are issues of standardization and creativity. A typical AI generated male divine figure has the same appearance with a well-built muscular body, long nose, fair skinned (not the European category) and an infant will have a chubby cherubic look with ornaments. As per the Hindu tradition, there is well preserved system of how a God or Goddess is visualised and each deity will have a special mantra system which enable the

devotee to internally conceive the image through the shloka. However, with art becoming a commodity, this opportunity is lost and there is a kind of standardisation. This will become all the more problematic with AI taking up the reins.

The study underscores the concerns like the homogenization of content, reduced creative variety, and machine-made visuals. As AI simplifies content creation, it may limit artistic uniqueness. The merging of AI and popular culture not only enables new forms of creative expression but also challenges traditional ideas about art and creativity. Moreover, the author/painter is now a prompt maker.

Conclusion

By analyzing visuals produced using AI tools the paper has attempted to understand how Hindu deities are represented. Images related to Hindu deities and cultural events often failed to reflect the full cultural richness of the religious and spiritual aspect. This highlights the limitations of AI in conveying the true sense of representation. These aspects point to the need for careful evaluation and improvement of AI tools and prompts. This paper is only a reminder that AI generated art, especially for religious purposed need to improve and they should represent diverse cultural identities, contributing to broader efforts in making this technology more culturally responsive and responsible rather than too predictable.

Study and Limitation

- The author accepts the fact that it is unfair to pick images from Web resources as it may lead to infringement of copy right. Further, the pamphlets received from temples at hand may bear resemblance with such web resources.
- Transparency: The author states that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.
- Competing Interests: The author declares that he has no competing interests
- Acknowledgment is expressed to Wisdom Library maintained by Gabe Hiemstra the author of the website. (https://www.wisdomlib.org/)

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