



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Seeking Benefits through Digital Engagement

A Qualitative Analysis of YouTube Comments on Japanese Power Spot Videos

Master's Programme in Area and Cultural Studies

Asian Studies

Master's thesis

Author:

Marjo Oksanen

Supervisor:

Professor Xenia Zeiler

21.06.2025

Helsinki

Title: Seeking Benefits through Digital Engagement: A Qualitative Analysis of YouTube Comments on Japanese Power Spot Videos

Author: Marjo Oksanen

Month and year: June 2025

Number of pages: 67

Keywords: power spots, Japan, digital religion, YouTube, benefits, coding comments

Abstract:

This thesis explores how the Japanese power spot phenomenon is being discussed and engaged with in online environments. Power spots are places believed to emit energy or spiritual power that provides visitors with various benefits such as improved mental and physical well-being, and the fulfilment of wishes. In Japan, power spots are often associated with Shinto and their popularity as tourist destinations has been influenced by extensive media coverage. While power spots are typically experienced through physical visits, they are also a subject of online discourse, with users sharing content and engaging in discussions on social media platforms. This thesis contributes to the limited existing literature on power spots and individuals interested in them by extending the scope of research to include online discussions, with a particular focus on comments sections on video-sharing platforms. Consequently, the present study also encompasses individuals who, for diverse reasons, may not visit power spots in person.

A dataset of 1,200 mainly Japanese language comments from six YouTube videos featuring power spots in Japan was collected between 28 and 29 April 2021. The data was analysed using Zeiler's coding comments on gaming videos method, in which commenters' verbatim statements were systematically coded and categorised through a three-stage process consisting of in vivo, axial, and selective coding. The objective was to understand what users had commented on and to identify the central theme or themes of the discussion. A careful examination of the dataset revealed seven main categories of discussion: wishes and requests, religion and spirituality, videos, physical and emotional reactions, visiting the location, power and energy, and gratitude. These categories were ultimately unified under one central theme: seeking and receiving of benefits. This core category illustrates the spiritual, emotional, and practical motivations users had for viewing and commenting on videos featuring power spots. The findings of this study indicate that, much like visiting power spots in person, commenters on power spot videos seek various benefits by expressing wishes, engaging with the site's power or deities, and immersing themselves in its atmosphere. Additionally, the results suggest that power spot videos and their comments sections offer alternative means of experiencing and connecting with these locations, thus overcoming barriers such as distance, time constraints, and physical or financial limitations.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Power spots	4
2.1	Definition and characteristics of power spots	4
2.2	Power spot phenomenon in Japan	5
2.3	Power spots as a diffuse phenomenon	9
2.3.1	Mass media	9
2.3.2	Spirituality and religion	10
2.3.3	Sacred sites	12
2.3.4	Shinto	13
2.3.5	Tourism	14
2.4	Purposes of visiting power spots	15
2.4.1	Spiritual experiences and personal transformation	15
2.4.2	Pursuit of this-worldly benefits	16
2.5	Visitor behaviour at power spots	17
2.6	Visitor demographics	18
3	Digital religion	19
3.1	Theoretical frameworks in digital religion research	19
3.2	Practicing religion and spirituality on the internet	20
4	Methodology	23
4.1	Data collection and processing	23
4.2	Power spot videos	24
4.3	Coding comments on gaming videos method	25
4.4	Ethical concerns	27
5	Analysis	30
5.1	In vivo codes	30
5.2	Axial codes	31
5.2.1	Wishes and requests	32
5.2.2	Wishes related to money	32
5.2.3	Religion and spirituality	42
5.2.4	Videos	44

5.2.5	Physical and emotional reactions	46
5.2.6	Visiting the location	51
5.2.7	Power and energy	56
5.2.8	Gratitude	60
5.2.9	Use of emoji and kaomoji	60
5.3	Selective code	61
6	Discussion	64
7	Conclusions	66
	References	68

1 Introduction

The concept of *power spots* (パワースポット *pawāsupotto*) has witnessed a surge in popularity in Japan over the past two decades. Power spots are locations believed to radiate a strong, invisible spiritual power or energy (Horie, 2017, p. 192), which is thought to offer visitors healing and good fortune (Ivakhiv, 2007, p. 266; Horie, 2017). They range from ancient shrines and sacred natural sites to more recently popularised urban landmarks (Ivakhiv, 2007, p. 266; Horie, 2017, p. 202) and occupy a unique position at the intersection of spirituality, tourism, and mediatisation in contemporary Japan. While the concept has its origins in global New Age movements (Roth, 2019, p. 96), in Japan, power spots have become closely associated with Shinto (Carter, 2018, pp. 152–153). The emergence of these sites as popular tourist attractions has elicited a range of responses, from enthusiasm to criticism (Uchikawa, 2017; Rots, 2019a, 2019b). At the same time, the rise of user-generated content and social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok has reshaped the ways in which cultural and spiritual spaces are represented, experienced, and discussed. These platforms provide viewers digital access to distant or otherwise inaccessible locations and opportunities to engage with them and other users through comment sections and other participatory features. This thesis examines how power spots in Japan are discussed and interpreted in the comment sections of YouTube videos that feature these sites.

My interest in power spots was first kindled during my studies in Okinawa Prefecture, where I was introduced to the region's rich spiritual traditions and practices. As a popular tourist destination, Okinawa is home to many power spots, yet I learned that the increasing popularity of these sites is not always welcomed by locals who wish to keep their sacred places less crowded and reserved for their own spiritual use. Around the same time, I realised that I had unknowingly visited one of Japan's most renowned power spots during a trip to Tokyo in 2012: Kiyomasa's Well in the Inner Garden of Meiji Shrine. I remember seeing people photographing the well, touching the water, and collecting it, though I did not yet understand the significance of their actions at the time.

After returning to Finland, I began to explore the concept of power spots more deeply. Unable to visit the sites in Japan in person, I turned to video content on platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, where I found that users not only shared videos of their visits to power spots but also engaged with the content and one another through lively, often

emotional discussions in the comment sections. I recognised that these comments provided valuable insights into the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of individuals interested in power spots, as well as the diverse ways in which these sites can be experienced and spiritually connected with. In seeking to understand power spots and their appeal through these videos, I realised that I, too, had become part of the phenomenon I aimed to explore.

As Carter (2018) and Uchikawa (2016) have noted, the power spot phenomenon is a relatively new and under-explored aspect of Japanese spiritual life. Previous research has traced its historical development, identifying several distinct phases (Suga, 2010; Horie, 2017). Some scholars have delved into the complex relationship between the power spot phenomenon and Shinto (Carter, 2018; Rots, 2014), while others have explored its effects on local communities, tourism, and regional economies (Azuma, 2014; Dorman, 2016; Rots, 2019a; Rots, 2019b; Uchikawa, 2017). Much of the previous research has examined the power spot phenomenon through the images and information disseminated by the media, with particular focus on print media. Interviews and field observations have primarily explored the perspectives and experiences of shrine representatives, local residents, tour guides, and business owners. While some researchers have conducted interviews and field observations to examine aspects such as visitor behaviour and demographics (Carter, 2018; Horie, 2017; Uchikawa, 2016), comprehensive studies that directly engage with visitors or use their personal experiences and perspectives as primary data remain limited. Further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations, perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of those who visit power spots. In the context of video games, Zeiler (2018) argued that research should consider all individuals and actions within the cultural and social environment of the phenomenon, rather than limiting the focus to game-specific content and players. Echoing Zeiler's argument, a comprehensive understanding of the power spot phenomenon can only be achieved by investigating its full range of manifestations. Therefore, research on power spots must also explore alternative methods of experiencing these sites, extending beyond conventional in-person visits.

The present study involved a detailed analysis of 1,200 predominantly Japanese-language comments drawn from the comment sections of 12 YouTube videos showcasing various power spots in Japan. The objective was to identify the key themes of the discussions by closely examining the comments. The analysis was conducted using the "coding comments

on gaming videos" method developed by Xenia Zeiler (2018), which offers a systematic yet flexible approach to exploring user-generated content through users' verbatim statements. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What topics do users discuss in the comment sections of power spot videos?
2. What is the central theme(s) of the discourse?

By answering these questions, this thesis offers insights into the interests, feelings, experiences, and interpretations of individuals who engage with power spot-related content on YouTube. The study also highlights how social media platforms can serve as a means of accessing and engaging with spiritual locations and tourist destinations. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of individuals interested in power spots, regardless of whether or not they visit the sites in person.

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the concept of power spots, defining their characteristics and tracing the phenomenon's development in Japan based on prior research. It also explores connections between power spots and elements such as Shinto, sacred sites, and tourism. Chapter 3 examines how religion and spirituality are practiced online. Chapter 4 explains the research methodology, detailing the data collection process, the analysis method, and ethical considerations. Chapter 5 presents the analysis, in which the data is categorised through three coding stages in order to identify the central theme of the discussion. Chapter 6 discusses the findings in relation to the existing literature and theoretical context. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings and discussing their broader implications.

Japanese script in this thesis has been romanised using the modified Hepburn system (UK Government Digital Service, 2018). All translations from Japanese to English are my own, unless otherwise stated. Japanese proper names are denoted with the family name preceding the given name. During the writing process of this thesis, I employed AI tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and DeepL Write. These tools assisted with language-related tasks, including grammar checking, enhancing clarity and style, and expanding vocabulary. AI tools were not used for any other aspects of the thesis.

2 Power spots

2.1 Definition and characteristics of power spots

While there is no fixed definition for the concept of power spots, they are typically understood to be places believed to emanate a strong, invisible spiritual power, energy, or *ki* (the Japanese word for qi) at a higher level than their surroundings (Carter, 2018, p. 145; Horie, 2017, p. 192; Roth, 2019, p. 96). Religious studies scholar Wakimoto Tsuneya (1986) defined power spots in *Gendaiyōgo no kisochishiki* (Basic Knowledge of Contemporary Terms) as “sacred places [seichi] where the vital energy and spiritual power of the universe coalesce” (as cited in Suga, 2010, pp. 243–244). Ivakhiv (2001, p. 29) and Carter (2018, p. 145) described power spots as locations where the earth’s energy is believed to be at its highest. Kiyota Masuaki, a Japanese psychic and television celebrity, defined them as places where energy flows between the universe and the earth (Kiyota, 1991, as cited in Carter, 2018, p. 150). Power spots have also been described as places where positive energy is present, categorised by its source: the earth, the universe, or people (Azuma, 2014, p. 40). The energy absorbed and released by power spots is believed to promote health and spiritual growth (Ivakhiv, 2007, p. 266; Horie, 2017, p. 192), and in Japan, many power spots are associated with good fortune, attracting visitors seeking this-worldly benefits (Horie, 2017).

Ivakhiv (2007) divided power spots into two categories: natural and cultural sites. Natural sites include striking mountains, lakes, canyons, hot springs, rock formations (p. 266), old-growth trees, rivers, and waterfalls (Carter, 2018, p. 151). Cultural sites refer to ancient human-made monuments and structures such as Stonehenge, Machu Picchu, and the Great Pyramid of Giza (Ivakhiv, 2007, p. 266). Many New Age followers believe these structures were built on natural power spots (Ivakhiv, 2007, pp. 266–267). Roth (2019) similarly linked power spots to ancient worship sites in natural landscapes but emphasised nature as the essential factor (p. 96). Ehara Hiroyuki, a prominent Japanese spiritual counsellor, categorised power spots into two types: *energy spots* surrounded by nature that revitalise the body and *spiritual sanctuaries* such as shrines, temples, and sacred sites that deepen the soul’s awareness (Suga, 2010, pp. 249–250). Initially, Japanese New Age practitioners focused on overseas power spots, such as Sedona and Mount Shasta in the United States and the pyramids in Egypt (Horie, 2017, p. 198–199). Over time, domestic sites became the primary destinations (Tsukada & Ōmi, 2011, pp. 32–33). Kiyota Masuaki

was one of the earliest authors to identify power spots in Japan in the 1990s. These were mostly natural sites, with some Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, and non-religious locations included (Horie, 2017, p. 202). Since then, numerous domestic sites have been discovered and reframed as power spots (Rots, 2014, p. 43), often shrines, temples, or natural heritage sites already perceived as spiritually significant (Tsukada & Ōmi, 2011, p. 33). Like other countries, power spots in Japan are typically in scenic natural or rural areas (Carter, 2018, p. 154). In the 2000s, they became increasingly associated with Shinto and shrines (Carter, 2018, p. 153; Dorman, 2016, p.93), with many traditional Shinto sacred places rediscovered as power spots (Horie, 2017, p. 201). Celebrity counsellor and former Shinto priest Ehara Hiroyuki helped drive this shift, emphasising shrines, Shinto rituals, and kami worship in his books on power spots (Carter, 2018, pp. 152–153). Additionally, the designation of non-religious places as power spots has been influenced by *kikō* (the Japanese word for qigong) and other ki-related terms and belief systems, including *fūsui* (the Japanese word for feng shui) (Azuma, 2014, p. 39; Horie, 2017, pp. 201–205; Yamato, 2015, p. 95).

The Japanese power spot phenomenon emphasises finding one's own power spot. Since the 1990s, power spots have been understood as places people can discover in their daily lives (Suga, 2010, p. 244). Kiyota (1991, as cited in Suga, 2010, p. 245) noted that an individual's compatibility with a power spot depends on various factors, including their state of health. Ehara encouraged finding a personal sacred place, calling these *jibun dake no sankuchuari* (one's very own sanctuaries) (Suga, 2010, pp. 250–251). Visitors may also discover personal power spots, such as a bridge, fountain, or tree within a larger area recognised as a power spot (Yasuda, 2021, p. 8). Suga (2010) described 21st-century power spots as places that uplift the mind and body without any effort required (p. 246). Azuma (2014) argued that if any place where one feels energized qualifies as a power spot, the concept becomes infinitely expansive (p. 40). Even one's home can serve as a personal power spot, demonstrating the term's flexibility and ambiguity (Dorman, 2016, p. 92).

2.2 Power spot phenomenon in Japan

The concept of power spots is generally believed to have originated within the global New Age movements (Roth, 2019, p. 96) where travelling to sacred sites for spiritual purposes is considered an important aspect of one's spiritual life (Ivakhiv, 2007, p. 263). As early as the 1960s and 1970s, people in the New Age and the hippie movements were interested in

travelling to sacred *power places* around the globe (Ivakhiv, 2007, p. 265). The idea of power places was brought to the attention of a wider public in 1987 when an art historian and New Age theorist José Argüelles called for 144,000 people to join the Harmonic Convergence, a globally synchronized peace meditation and prayer ceremony inspired by ancient Mayan astronomy (Ivakhiv, 2007, p. 265–266; Sipchen & Weisman, 1987). The event was to take place at ancient sacred places considered *power centers* or *power points* round the world (Associated Press, 1987a, 1987b). According to Roth (2019), the term power spot has no canonical definition or clear origin (p. 96). One of the earliest recorded uses of the term power spot appeared in descriptions of Sedona by self-help guru Dick Sutphen in 1976 (Ivakhiv, 2001, p. 174). Other terms used to refer to the phenomenon include *spiritual vortex* (Roth, 2019, p. 96), *vortex*, *power place*, *power center*, and *power point* (Ivakhiv, 2001, p. 29, 52, 82, 174). Translations to other languages include *Kraftort* in German, *lieu de force* in French, and *kiba* (気場 place of vital energy) in Japanese, although in Japan the English transliteration *pawā supotto* (パワースポット) is most commonly used (Roth, 2019, p. 96).

There is some disagreement among researchers regarding the origins of the power spot concept and its introduction to Japan. In Japan, the term *seishin sekai* (World of the Spiritual) is used to refer to a phenomenon similar to Western New Age spirituality. *Seishin sekai* was influenced by elements of Japanese, Indian, and Chinese traditions as well as New Age ideas (Horie, 2017, p. 205; Shimazono, 1999, 2012, p. 4). According to the generally assumed theory, the concept of power spots and the word power spot entered Japanese discourse along with other New Age influences in the mid-1980s, thus making them foreign imports (Carter, 2018, p. 145; Roth, 2019, p. 100). Horie (2017), however, considered *pawā supotto* a *wasei-eigo* word, a Japan-born English term (p. 192). He argued that Japanese spiritual and New Age practitioners were familiar with power spots and travel to sacred sites before interest in them grew in the West in the mid-1980s. According to Horie, the growing interest in power spots followed the tradition of earlier religious pilgrimages and ascetic practices. What set it apart is the detachment of sacred sites and their energy from their original local religious and cultural contexts (pp. 197–198). In 1986 the term power spot was included for the first time in *Gendaiyōgo no kiso-chishiki* (Basic Knowledge of Contemporary Terms), an encyclopaedia of new words entering common usage in Japan (Suga, 2010, p. 243). In the same year, the Tenkawa Daibenzaiten Shrine in Nara Prefecture was referred to as a power spot on the back cover

of the guidebook *Tenkawa: Sūpā saikikku supotto* (*Tenkawa: Super Psychic Spot*), which was edited by the chief priest of the shrine, Kakisaka Mikinosuke (Horie, 2017, pp. 193–194).

Although the power spot trend did not gain widespread popularity beyond the New Age movement worldwide, it attracted a large audience in Japan (Carter, 2018, p. 150). Anthropologist Suga Naoko (2010) conducted one of the earliest in-depth studies on power spots in Japan. Suga analysed the media's interest and impact on the power spot phenomenon and its association with Shintoism by examining Japanese newspapers and magazines. Suga identified three phases in the evolution of power spot features between 1991 and 2008: 1) the years 1991–2002, during which the number of articles was still low and readers were not expected to be familiar with the term, 2) the years 2002–2005 when the number of articles featuring power spots began to increase and 3), the years 2006–2008 when the number of articles rapidly increased. During the first phase power spots gradually became part of the public discourse. Initially, magazine features portrayed power spots as mystical places where supernatural phenomena occurred (Yamato, 2015, p. 94). Writing about one's spiritual experiences at mystical and sacred sites has a long tradition in Japan and many healers, psychics, and spiritual counsellors have told stories about their visits to power spots (Horie, 2017, p. 198). Today, many of the power spot guidebooks published in Japan are authored by media celebrities (Roth, 2019, p. 97). This trend began in 1991 when Kiyota Masuaki who has been known in Japan since his childhood as a person possessing extrasensory perception (Horie, 2017, p. 201–202), published a guidebook called *Hakken! Pawā supotto* (*Power Spots Discovered!*) (Roth, 2019, p. 97). Kiyota's thinking was considerably influenced by the New Age movement (Roth, 2019, p.96). His book introduced 27 power spots around Japan and was the first Japanese book to use the term power spot in its title (Horie, 2017, p. 201). The media's increased interest in power spots during the early 1990s was mainly due to Kiyota's book (Suga, 2010).

The second phase Suga (2010) identified was the three-year period between 2002 and 2005, during which the number of magazine features on power spots began to increase especially in women's magazines. At this point, it was assumed that readers were already familiar with the term (Suga, 2010, pp. 234–240). According to Yamato (2015), during the 2000s, the content of the features gradually shifted from a focus on the paranormal and occult to a more diverse range of topics, including introductions to shrines and temples, as well as stories about celebrities visiting power spots. Around 2004, the influence of *fūsui*

practitioners and spiritualists began to increase (p. 95). Celebrity spiritual counsellor and former Shinto priest Ehara Hiroyuki is generally credited with bringing the “spiritual boom” to Japan and familiarising the general public with various New Age concepts including power spots (Horie, 2017; Suga, 2010). In 2004, Ehara published a special edition mook based on his year-long serialized project in the women’s magazine *Hanako WEST*. This work, along with a six-volume book series released between 2005 and 2007, introduced various shrines Ehara identified as power spots (Suga, 2010, p. 238; Horie, 2017, pp. 205–207). He also made regular television appearances promoting his shrine pilgrimages (Carter, 2018, p. 152). Although Ehara claimed to reject mass tourism and expressed some concern that the shrines he introduced would become tourist attractions, his books inspired worshippers from all over Japan to visit the shrines, some of which were previously unknown to the wider population. This led to the power spot boom becoming mass tourism (Horie, 2017, pp. 205–207).

The third phase identified by Suga (2010), spanning from 2006 to 2008, saw a significant increase in the popularity of power spots among women. This was reflected in the number of power spot special issues in women’s magazines and the expansion of the target demographic to include teenagers and women in their 40s and older. By this point, the concept of power spots was widely understood, although its definition was not strictly established. Suga predicted that the popularity of power spots would continue even after the third phase (pp. 241–243).

As Suga (2010) predicted, enthusiasm for power spots in Japan continued beyond 2008. In fact, power spots were so frequently discussed in the Japanese mass media in 2010 that Tsukada and Ōmi (2011) called it the “year of the power spot” in a report on “religion in the news” for the 2011 issue of *Gendai shūkyō* (Contemporary Religion) (p. 30). Uchikawa (2017) found that the vast majority of articles on power spots in Japan’s top three national newspapers with the largest circulations were published from 2010 onwards. The full-scale power spot boom is considered to have started when comedian and palm reader Shimada Shūhei promoted Kiyomasano-ido (Kiyomasa’s Well) as a power spot on the TV show *Dauntaun DX* (Downtown DX) on December 24, 2009 (Horie, 2017, pp. 207–208; Yamato, 2015). According to Shimada, visiting the spring water well located within the precinct of Meiji Jingū Shrine in Tokyo and setting a photograph of it as your mobile phone wallpaper would bring good luck (Tsukada & Ōmi, 2011, p. 30; Yamato, 2015, p. 90). Rather than emphasising any spiritual aspects of the visit, Shimada focused on the

material benefits, particularly the economic gains (Horie, 2017, p. 208). After the show, the reputation of Kiyomasa's Well as a power spot quickly spread, causing masses of people to visit it (Tsukada & Ōmi, 2011, p. 34; Yamato, 2015).

However, despite the term power spot becoming an established part of public discourse, media interest in them began to wane. According to Yamato (2015), the number of magazine articles about power spots dropped after the Great East Japan Earthquake and the subsequent accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011 (p. 93). Similarly, Azuma's (2014) study found a significant decrease in the use of the term power spot in article titles in magazines and mooks in 2012 and 2013, while other related words such as *seichi* (sacred place), *seinaru* (holy), *kami* (god, deity), *jinja* (Shinto shrine), and *kaiun* (the opening up of good fortune) were increasingly used (pp. 43–46). Azuma argued that while the term power spot may have lost its appeal, interest in spiritual tourism and its commercialisation as a tourism product has only grown and become mainstream (p. 51). Horie (2017) raised the question of whether the power spot boom truly ended after March 2011. According to Carter (2018) and Padoan (2019), the general public remains interested in power spots, even though media coverage has decreased. Roth (2019) noted that due to the relative novelty of the phenomenon, it remains to be seen whether power spots are a passing media trend or a permanent part of the Japanese religious and spiritual landscape.

2.3 Power spots as a diffuse phenomenon

According to Carter (2018), power spots are a diffuse phenomenon influenced by multiple elements, rather than having a single overarching doctrine (p. 148). These elements include mass media, tourism, pilgrimage, commercial interests, Shinto, popular discourses on spirituality, nature and eco-spirituality, sacred sites, and interest in Ancient Shinto (Carter, 2018, p. 145; Roth, 2019, 95).

2.3.1 Mass media

Carter (2018, p. 145) and Roth (2019, pp. 99) emphasised the influential role of the media in popularising and shaping the power spot trend. Power spots are frequently introduced by celebrity fortune-tellers, psychics, and other public figures, and have been widely featured across various media platforms, including magazines, newspapers, travel guides, and television. The term has even appeared in unrelated media contexts (Yamato, 2015).

Rather than merely reflecting public interest, the media actively construct and influence perceptions of power spots.

2.3.2 Spirituality and religion

In the academic world, there is no universally accepted definition of religion, and no definition covers all phenomena (Shimazono, 2012, p. 8). Radde-Antweiler (2008) noted that religion is diverse and heterogeneous, rather than a rigid and homogeneous system of symbols (p. 205). Karaflogka (2002) defined the concept of religion as “fluid and contested, and notoriously difficult to constrain within any one meaning” (p. 280). According to Siuda (2021), religion is “recognized as a social-cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, morals, beliefs, worldviews, texts, ethics, organizations, and other elements that relate to supernatural, transcendental, spiritual, and sacred” (p. 2). Shimazono (2012) defined religion as “the system relating to something sacred”. According to Shimazono, the term sacred refers to spiritual, supernatural, and mystical beings, forces, and experiences that have a powerful influence on people, as well as specific objects, books, and words, among other things (p. 8).

The application of the term religion, which originated in a Western Christian context, to Japanese phenomena has been a subject of academic debate (Horii, 2018; Reader, 2016; Shimazono, 2012, p. 8). The contemporary Japanese word for religion is *shūkyō* (宗教), which is composed of two ideograms that can be translated as “sect/religious organization” and “teaching/doctrine” (Baffelli et al., 2011, pp. 7–8; Reader, 2016, p. 200; Shields, 2010, p. 134). In the early 1870s, the Meiji government adopted this originally Buddhist term (Baffelli et al., 2011, p. 7) as the translation for the modern Western concept of religion to navigate the reintroduction of Christianity in Japan and Western demands for religious freedom (Ama, 2005, pp. 28–30; Josephson, 2012, pp. 94–97; Shimazono, 1998, pp. 61–62). The term was used to promote Shinto as a cultural and secular practice, a feature of Japanese national identity, rather than a religion, to bolster its legal status (Josephson, 2012, pp. 94–97; Reader, 2016, pp. 203–205). After the Second World War, the occupying forces stipulated a constitutional separation of state and religion (Rots & Teeuwen, 2017). The category of religion is often used in legal and academic contexts in Japan (Baffelli et al., 2011, pp. 7–8; Reader, 2016, pp. 200–201). However, according to Reader (2016), ordinary Japanese people typically associate the term with formal religious institutions and view religiosity as linked to membership of a particular religious group. When asked,

many Japanese identify as *mushūkyō* (not religious) (pp. 200–201). Activities such as visiting Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, reverence for the kami, Buddhist rituals, pilgrimages, shrine festivals, buying and inscribing an ema votive tablet, and memorial rituals for ancestors are commonly seen as traditional, cultural and social actions, even habits (Anderson, 1991; Horii, 2018, pp. 87–100; McLaughlin, 2013; Shields, 2010, p. 9). Some scholars, such as Anderson (1991) and Horii (2018), have argued that the term religion should not be used to describe activities that are not referred to as such by their practitioners. Horii suggested that they should be studied in their own terms or as part of the category of “social or cultural practices” (Horii, 2018, pp. 46–47). Other scholars, such as Reader (1991), have argued that religion and religious activity should not be defined solely by belief. Instead, Reader suggested that customs and habits involving elements of worship and prayer performed in religious settings and centres should be studied as religious behaviour.

In Japanese, there are two words for spirituality: *reisei* (霊性) and *supirichuariti* (スピリチュアリテイ). Of the two concepts, *reisei* is closest in meaning to the Western Christian concept of spirituality (Horie, 2009; Shimazono, 2012, pp. 8–9). Scholars such as Horie (2009) and Shimazono (2012) have drawn on Suzuki Daisetsu's (1944/1972) definition of *reisei*-spirituality. According to Suzuki, spirituality refers to personal religious consciousness, or religious experience itself, while religion refers to the institutionalisation of individual spirituality (Horie, 2009; Shimazono, 2012, pp. 8–10). Although the Western Christian idea of spirituality does not necessarily exclude adherence to a religious organisation, contemporary Japanese people often draw a clear distinction between the two concepts; individually spiritual people prefer to maintain distance from organised religion (Horie, 2009). *Reisei* and *supirichuariti* are often used synonymously in the field of religious studies (Uchikawa, 2017, p. 62). However, according to Horie (2009), the terms *supirichuariti* and *supirichuaru* (スピリチュアル spiritual) have little to no religious connotations, despite being translated from Western concepts that are often linked to religion. Instead, these terms are often associated with promoting health, well-being, healing, and self-cultivation (McLaughlin, 2013, p. 312).

Although traditional institutional religions have declined in popularity (Horie, 2009), the Japanese people's interest in the spiritual world has grown significantly, leading to what has been described as a spiritual boom (Horie, 2017; McLaughlin, 2013, pp. 310–313; Shimazono, 2012, p. 6). Shimazono (2012) referred to the individual search for spiritual

fulfilment outside organized religion as *new spirituality*. Many Japanese consider themselves “spiritual but not religious” or “spiritual but not affiliated” (Horie, 2009). One event, in particular, contributed to the Japanese people’s reluctance to identify themselves as religious. On March 20, 1995, the new religious group Aum Shinrikyō released sarin gas on the subway in central Tokyo, resulting in the death of 13 people and injuries to thousands. As a result, religions, particularly new religions and cults, came to be viewed as dangerous (Horie, 2009; McLaughlin, 2013, pp. 309–310). Following the incident, the term *rei* (soul, spirit) and related vocabulary commonly used to refer to spiritual matters were replaced with more neutral alternatives due to their association with Aum and other religious groups (McLaughlin, 2013, p. 311). The terms *supirichuaru* and *supirichuariti* gained popularity particularly in the 2000s, as they allowed individuals to pursue experiences and knowledge similar to those associated with religion, without being linked to any particular faith (Horie, 2009; Horii, 2018, pp. 97–99). However, individual participation in the practices of established religions, such as Zen meditation or Shugendō, has been considered a less risky way of exploring personal spirituality (Horie, 2009). Japanese people who identify as spiritual but not religious have also demonstrated an increasing interest in Ko-Shintō (ancient Shinto) and animism (Horie, 2009; Shimazono, 2012, p. 20), and some spiritual celebrities have integrated elements of Shinto and other Japanese religious traditions into their teachings and guidance (Dorman, 2016, p. 93). The power spot phenomenon is part of the growing interest in spirituality in Japan. According to Uchikawa (2017), visitors are more interested in casual prayer for benefits, healing, and rejuvenation, as well as enjoying experiences and events, and sharing information on social media, than individual religious beliefs and *reisei* spirituality (p. 62). However, given that power spots have been generally examined within the broader context of religion and spirituality, this thesis builds upon and contributes to that existing body of research.

2.3.3 Sacred sites

Rots (2014) argued that contemporary Japan has undergone various processes of sacralisation, with the power spot phenomenon being one example. According to Rots, there has been a shift in the perception of places of worship, ritual practices, and sacred buildings and objects in recent decades. They are no longer viewed as religious, but as valuable remnants of traditional culture and cultural heritage. Rots proposed that instead of secularisation, this process could be described as the “culturalisation of worship traditions.” When these places of worship are (re)sacralised, for example as places that

offer spiritual power to visitors, this is not a return to seeing them as religious, but rather as “sacred” and “spiritual” (pp. 32, 41). According to Rots, sacredness is now commonly viewed as socially constructed rather than intrinsic (pp. 31–33). Yamato (2015) suggested that any place can become a sacred place in contemporary Japan, regardless of whether a god is enshrined there or not (p. 101).

In Japan, power spots have been known as sacred places since the 1980s. According to Suga (2010), Japanese print media has often referred to power spots as sacred sites. *Seichijunrei* (pilgrimages to sacred places) and *seichikankō* (sacred site tourism) became buzzwords, initially referring to sacred sites like shrines and temples (pp. 232–234, 247). However, the definition of sacred sites has expanded to include a wider variety of locations, such as those featured in movies, dramas, anime, and manga (Andrews, 2014; Suga, 2010, pp. 248–249). The definition of power spots has undergone a similar process (Suga, 2010, p. 249). While the concept of sacred sites has influenced the development of the power spot phenomenon (Carter, 2018), it has also at least partially replaced the term power spot (Azuma, 2014, pp. 44–45, 51). Both phenomena are part of a wider trend of spiritual tourism (Azuma, 2014).

2.3.4 Shinto

The strong association between power spots and Shinto, particularly since the mid-2000s, can be largely attributed to former Shinto priest Ehara Hiroyuki, who promoted power spots with an emphasis on shrines, Shinto rituals, and kami worship (Carter, 2018, pp. 152–153; Horie, 2017, pp. 205–207). Many Shinto shrines have been rediscovered as power spots (Horie, 2017; Rots, 2014, p. 43; Tsukada & Ōmi, 2011, p. 33), and the relationship between power spots and Shinto has been mutually influential. The popularity of well-known shrines in particular has increased due to several factors, including the power spot boom, as well as interest in ancient Shinto, nature worship, and spiritual care (Carter, 2018, pp. 164–165; Rots, 2014, pp. 42–43). According to Suga (2010), the association of power spots with shrines may have led to the perception of all shrines as places for healing when feeling exhausted (p. 252). Rots (2014) also suggested that the power spot phenomenon may be transforming people’s view of Shinto in general (pp. 44–45).

The power spot phenomenon has received mixed reactions from the individuals and associations directly involved with Shinto institutions (Carter, 2018; Dorman, 2016, p. 93;

Padoan, 2019, p. 87; Rots, 2014, pp. 44–45; Yasuda, 2021, p. 8). Shrines are typically designated as power spots by non-clergy outsiders (Rots, 2014, p. 44), and critics have accused the power spot phenomenon of being superficial, commercial, and unrelated to “real Shinto” (Rots, 2014, pp. 44–45). Jinja Honchō (Association of Shinto Shrines), which is the umbrella organisation for around 80,000 shrines, has mostly rejected the designation of shrines as power spots (Carter, 2018, pp. 161–164). The association has expressed concern that the power spot phenomenon and its focus on this-worldly benefits may cause visitors to fixate on certain objects, neglect the worship of kami (Carter, 2018, pp. 161–162), and forget the true purpose and meaning of visiting a shrine (Dorman, 2016, p. 93). On the other hand, some priests have embraced the title and even actively redefined their shrine as a power spot. The reputation as a power spot can be seen as positive PR that attract more visitors to the shrine, benefit the shrine and the community economically, and increase people’s interest in Shinto (Rots, 2014, pp. 44–45; Yasuda, 2021; Carter, 2018, p. 148, 158). According to some priests, the concept of power spots is compatible with the Shinto notions of the power of the kami (Carter, 2018, pp. 158–161).

2.3.5 Tourism

Enthusiasm for power spots in Japan is part of a wider interest in spirituality and, by extension, spiritual tourism. According to Azuma (2014), spiritual tourism has become an attractive form of travel in Japan, both in itself and as part of more conventional tourism (pp. 42–45). Azuma argued that the increase in spiritual tourism has resulted in the commercialisation of religious experiences, allowing individuals with no connection to the original faith to have pseudo-religious experiences through participation in religious practices and rituals. For many Japanese people, the most accessible destinations for spiritual tourism are Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples (p. 47).

The term power spot has become an extremely useful tool for turning traditional religious sites as well as other cultural, historical, and natural assets into popular tourist attractions, which especially in areas with few famous attractions can greatly contribute to the revitalisation of the area (Azuma, 2014, pp. 28, 45–46; Uchikawa, 2017). Designation as a power spot has the potential to transform previously overlooked locations into valuable tourism resources (Uchikawa, 2017) and even save them from being demolished (Rots, 2019a). Many shrines and other sites have seen significant increases in visitor numbers since their designation as power spots (Tsukada & Ōmi, 2011, pp. 34–35). In some cities

and prefectures, as Uchikawa (2017) and Yasuda (2021) show in their research, local administrations and communities have rebranded the image of the area around one or several power spots in order to revitalise it. Featuring power spots in travel and leisure magazines has created the image that visiting power spots is a leisure activity (Yamato, 2015, p. 96).

Designation as a power spot can also have a negative impact on the area and its local community. A sudden increase in the number of tourists can complicate or even prevent the organization of local traditional events and create or intensify environmental and traffic-related problems in the area (Tsukada & Ōmi, 2011, p. 35). Turning religious sites into tourist resources, treating places that were not originally religious as sacred sites, and visiting them for the purpose of obtaining this-worldly benefits has not been universally supported (Yamato, 2015, p. 101). This has led to conflicts over the authority, particularly in sites that are used for both tourism and religious or spiritual activities (Carter, 2018; Rots, 2019a, 2019b). However, communities that are economically dependent on tourism may have no choice but to tolerate the influx of tourists to their sacred sites (Rots, 2019a) even if this means that some local worshippers no longer visit them (Rots, 2019b, p. 174).

2.4 Purposes of visiting power spots

2.4.1 Spiritual experiences and personal transformation

Several scholars have argued that the desire for spiritual or unusual experiences is one of the key factors attracting visitors to power spots, especially in the early years of the phenomenon. According to Ivakhiv (2007), many New Age pilgrims travelled to sacred places driven by a personal desire for “experience, personal transformation or self-actualization” (p. 274). Horie (2017) and Yamato (2015) argued that in Japan power spots were initially visited with the purpose of gaining inspiration and connecting spiritually and energetically with an unknown power of the universe and the earth (Horie, 2017, p. 204; Yamato, 2015, p. 94). Horie (2017) found that visiting a power spot enabled some individuals to express and expand their spirituality in new ways (p. 200). Kiyota (1991, as cited in Horie, 2017, p. 202) proposed that visiting power spots could satisfy the “emotional thirst” that he believed many people suffer from in the modern age. According to Dorman (2016), power spots offer people a place to fulfil their spiritual needs without having to adhere to an established religious institution (p. 93). Similarly, Roth (2019) supported this view, arguing that the desire for spiritual connection is evident in Japanese

people's visits to power spots, although it is often linked to the pursuit of so-called this-worldly benefits (p. 100).

2.4.2 Pursuit of this-worldly benefits

Uchikawa (2017) argued that visiting power spots is a form of tourism rather than a manifestation of religious faith or spirituality. Visitors are not necessarily religious or reisei-spiritual but rather enjoy visiting popular sites where they can casually experience activities such as fortune telling and pray for the fulfilment of their wishes (Uchikawa, 2017, pp. 61–62). Horie (2017) noted that due to the phenomenon's increased identification with Shinto, the purpose of visits has shifted from seeking spiritual growth to seeking material benefits (p. 210). Power spots are commonly regarded as auspicious sites for making wishes, with many visitors drawn by the potential to receive *genze riyaku* (現世利益), a trend that has become particularly prominent since the mid-2000s (Carter, 2018; Horie, 2017; Yamato, 2015). According to Reader and Tanabe (1998), *genze riyaku* refers to direct, immediate beneficial gains relevant to people's daily lives as opposed to rewards in life after death. The term can be translated as "this-worldly benefits," "practical benefits in this lifetime," or "practical benefits" (p. 2). Reader and Tanabe categorised this-worldly benefits into two main groups: those aiming at *yakuyoke* (protection against misfortune and external dangers) and those beckoning *kaiun* (the opening up of good fortune). These can be further divided into numerous specific categories and subcategories that cover a wide range of issues relevant to human life and desires (pp. 45–49). The promise of healing and health benefits is an important part of the power spots' attractiveness (Suga, 2010, p. 239). New forms of benefits may appear according to changes in social and individual needs (Reader & Tanabe, 1988, p. 45).

Reader and Tanabe (1998) argued that the pursuit of this-worldly benefits is not only associated with power spots but is an integral or even central part of Japanese religion, and its various manifestations can be found in new religious movements as well as in Shinto and Buddhism. In temples, shrines, and other religious institutions, any visitor regardless of their religious beliefs or affiliation can seek benefits through a variety of means and take home with them representations of the site's spiritual power and good fortune (pp. 4, 7–8). Benefits can be granted by kami, buddhas, bodhisattvas, ancestral spirits, spirits of powerful humans, and various other deities (pp. 13–14, 29, 38). According to Roth (2019), power spots offer a new way to receive blessings and this-worldly benefits without the

involvement of deities or spirits (p. 98). Carter (2018) noted that when a religious site is reinterpreted as a power spot, the contribution of deities may not be considered necessary (p. 158). Like shrines and temples, power spots may be associated with one or more specific worldly benefits (Azuma, 2014, pp. 27–29).

2.5 Visitor behaviour at power spots

Visitors to power spots have at times been accused of focusing exclusively on the designated power spot, disregarding the surrounding area and traditional practices such as venerating the deity of the shrine (Carter, 2018, pp. 160–161; Yamato, 2015, pp. 89–90). However, according to Carter's (2018) ethnographic research, conducted from 2015 to 2017, it can be challenging to distinguish power spot enthusiasts from other visitors. This is because they tend to follow general shrine etiquette during their visit, including praying, making offerings, purchasing amulets, talismans, and fortunes, and discussing the kami (deities, spirits) (pp. 157–158, 162). Similarly, Horie (2017) found that younger women, in particular, strictly adhere to the etiquette of worship, possibly following instructions from popular authors like Ehara Hiroyuki and Shimada Shūhei (p. 209).

Carter (2018) suggested that individuals whose visit is motivated by an interest in power spots can often be identified by certain patterns of behaviour and language. They typically have a strong interest in specific natural objects and show great respect for them. Carter observed individuals standing in front of an object designated as a power spot, bowing and raising their hands, typically with palms facing outward (pp. 146, 158). Many people believe that touching the object transfers energy to the person (p. 146). This belief has led visitors to touch, stroke, or even hug the objects (pp. 158, 162). While this behaviour is not necessarily a new phenomenon, it has increased significantly in some sites since their designation as a power spot (Carter, 2018, p. 158). Photographs of the power spot are also commonly taken, as illustrated by the case of Kiyomasa's Well (Yamato, 2015). Prominent authors on power spots have provided instructions on how to visit them. For example, Kiyota Masuaki (1991, as cited in Horie, 2017) emphasised the importance of feeling the power of a power spot with one's body. He recommended a series of steps, including sitting down, doing breathing exercises, sharpening the senses, moving the body, and visualising the achievement of one's goals (p. 202). Ehara (2004, as cited in Horie, 2017) underlined spiritual growth and encouraged visitors to seek it through self-reflection and prayer (pp. 205–207).

2.6 Visitor demographics

The power spot phenomenon has commonly been perceived as a passing craze among young, unmarried women in their 20s and 30s (Carter, 2018, p. 155). Suga's (2010) research on power spots and shrines in the print media found that special issues were particularly numerous in magazines aimed at working women in their 20s and 30s, although they were also published in various other types of magazines. Horie's (2017) findings supported the notion that power spots are primarily of interest to women. The study involved interviews with Japanese tourism professionals and local American therapists in Sedona from 2009 to 2010. According to the interviewees, 80–90% of Japanese visitors to Sedona were single women in their 30s and 40s (p. 200).

Carter (2018), however, criticised previous scholarship for delimiting the power spot enthusiasts to young women, which he attributed to a lack of fieldwork-based research and the emphasis placed on this group in media and marketing campaigns. Carter conducted fieldwork in power spots in Japan from 2015 to 2017 and found that the phenomenon interested visitors of varying ages, genders, and lifestyles. Approximately one-third of the participants observed and interviewed in the study were men. Carter observed people visiting alone, groups of women, couples, as well as friend groups, families, and tour groups of mixed gender. The age range of the visitors was between 30 and 70 years old. Similar to Horie's (2017) findings, the largest age group, approximately 50%, were people in their 30s (pp. 155, 166). According to Yamato (2015), at the peak of its popularity, Kiyomasa's Well was also reported to be visited by both women and men, ranging from teenagers to people in their 60s (p. 88). Carter (2018) also highlighted that visitors to power spots often exhibit varying levels of interest and commitment, ranging from devoted enthusiasts to casual participants, with most falling somewhere in between.

3 Digital religion

3.1 Theoretical frameworks in digital religion research

The relationship between religion and the internet has been studied under various names, including cyber-religion and virtual religion. Since the early 2010s, the term *digital religion* has been used to describe how digital media and spaces influence and become integrated into religious practices, beliefs, identities, and communities, as well as how religious practices in turn shape these digital environments (Campbell, 2013, 2017). The first of the three waves of digital religion research, identified by Højsgaard and Warburg (2005), focused on describing the presence of religion and religious practices on the internet. The second wave sought to provide categories and typologies of common trends within the internet practices of religious communities. During the third wave, scholars identified methods and theoretical frameworks for analysing the offline religious communities' use of new media and explored in more detail how digital religion shaped religious authority, identity, community and rituals, increasingly treating digital religion as integrated with everyday life (Campbell & Vitullo, 2016; Campbell, 2017; Tsuria and Campbell, 2021). The fourth wave, termed the convergent wave by Tsuria and Campbell (2021), explores the everyday use of digital technologies in religious contexts and emphasises the interplay and blurring of online and offline religious spheres. It offers deeper insights into identity, community, and religious authority in contemporary society, while also exploring embodiment in digital spirituality and ritual (Campbell & Vitullo, 2016; Campbell, 2017; Tsuria & Campbell, 2021). Tsuria and Campbell (2021) proposed that a fifth wave of digital religion research is emerging, building on earlier developments while seeking new directions and fostering wider interdisciplinary collaboration.

Various theories have been developed to examine the relationship between religion and the internet, including Helland's (2000) influential framework, which distinguishes between *religion online*, the use of the internet by established religious institutions to disseminate information in a top-down, non-interactive manner, and *online religion*, which involves interactive, participatory practices occurring outside traditional religious hierarchies. Helland (2005) later developed his framework, and it has been expanded by scholars such as Siuda (2021), who argued that many religious websites now blend informational and interactive elements. Siuda proposed two further types of digital religion: *traditional* (e.g. Christianity or Islam) and *innovative* (e.g. new religious movements), noting that these

types often intersect. Karaflogka (2002) used the term *cyberreligion* to describe religious movements that primarily exist and operate within the internet (p. 284–286).

According to Campbell (2017), three theoretical frameworks have been particularly influential in the study of digital religion: mediation of meaning, the religious-social shaping of technology (RSST), and mediatisation. Mediation of meaning refers to how media serve as sources of meaning through which individuals interpret, explain, and express religious and spiritual beliefs and ideas (Campbell, 2017, pp. 18–21). Building on the broader social shaping of technology (SST) framework, Campbell's (2010) religious-social shaping of technology (RSST) framework offers a structured approach for analysing how religious communities and individuals make decisions about their use of new media. Mediatisation refers to the process of social change in which the media has become an independent institution, interwoven with and influencing various spheres of society, including religion (Campbell, 2017, pp. 18–21; Hjarvard, 2008; Lövheim, 2014, p. 551). In the context of religion, mediatisation explores how media institutions such as the internet are increasingly acting as a primary source of religious symbols, discourses and social functions, shaping the way religion is understood and practised in modern societies (Campbell, 2017; Hjarvard, 2008). According to Hjarvard (2008), media representations of religion often combine elements of institutionalised religion and folk religion and are conveyed through popular genres such as news, drama, and entertainment. The concept of mediatisation has been employed to analyse how religious institutions engage with new media, how traditional forms of religious authority are reshaped by media influence, and how digital media facilitate new modes of communications for religious individuals and communities (Campbell, 2017, pp. 18–21).

3.2 Practicing religion and spirituality on the internet

Religious and spiritual activities on the internet have been the subject of extensive academic research, approached from a range of theoretical perspectives and covering a wide variety of topics; such practices have been referred to using terms such as cyber, virtual, and online religion or ritual. Drawing on Helland's (2000) framework of religion online and online religion, Miczek (2008) introduced the distinction between *ritual online* and *online ritual*. The term ritual online refers to ritual texts and descriptions made available on the internet, while the actual performance of the ritual occurs offline. In contrast, online rituals are rituals that are enacted in cyberspace (Miczek, 2008, p. 145).

Jacobs (2007) distinguished between synchronous cyber-rituals, in which participants gather online at a predetermined time to perform a ritual simultaneously, and asynchronous cyber-rituals, which can be performed individually at a time convenient for the participant (Jacobs, 2007).

Previous studies have documented diverse forms of rituals and religious activities performed with the help of new media technologies, including text-based rituals in early chat rooms (O’Leary, 1996), sharing religious testimonies (Jacobs, 2007, p. 1115), and meditating in virtual worlds (Miczek, 2008, p. 145). The internet has been used to organise prayer meetings in chat rooms (Miczek, 2008, p. 145), to send wishes and prayer requests to sacred sites (Williams, 2013; Kalinock, 2006, p. 13), to post prayers and prayer requests (Helland, 2005, p. 7; Jacobs, 2007, pp. 1114–1115; Kalinock, 2006, p. 1;4 Karaflogka, 2002, p. 284), and to use prayer apps that automatically post prayers from its users’ social media accounts (Öhman et al. 2019). Some websites guide users through prayer with on-screen instructions (Siuda, 2021, p. 8), while others provide online tombs for commemorating deceased relatives (Duteil-Ogata, 2015; Inoue, 2000, p. 29; Siuda, 2021, p. 8) or enable performing rituals such as the Eucharist by clicking through them (Miczek, 2008, p. 145). The internet enables constant access to religious content and allows individuals to seek out activities that align with their personal needs (Fukamizu, 2007, pp. 985–986).

Scholars have used the terms *cyberpilgrimage* and *virtual pilgrimage* to describe forms of pilgrimage mediated by the internet, though Hill-Smith (2011, p. 236) suggested using the term *cyberpilgrimage* for internet-based practices, as *virtual pilgrimage* also includes non-digital, distant enactments of pilgrimage rituals. *Cyberpilgrimage* reflects the broader ambiguity in defining pilgrimage itself, where the distinction between pilgrimage and tourism is often blurred (Hill-Smith, 2011, p. 237). MacWilliams (2002) described *cyberpilgrimage* as a form of religious web travel that can resemble sightseeing, yet he also acknowledged its potential to evoke a sense of divine presence through multimedia engagement, to satisfy people’s spiritual curiosity and to serve as a means of religious expression. Hill-Smith (2011, pp. 236–239) found that *cyberpilgrimage* can serve as a meaningful substitute for physical pilgrimage or act as a preparatory stage for those intending to undertake one in person. *Cyberpilgrimage* offers several advantages, as it can be undertaken instantly and without the limitations of time, cost, mobility, or other logistical and physical barriers (MacWilliams, 2002; Williams, 2013). It enables access to sacred sites regardless of the pilgrim’s religious affiliation (MacWilliams, 2002; Hill-

Smith, 2011; Kalinock, 2006, p. 14), and provides opportunities for affordable, personalised engagement with religious spaces. Participants may experience greater visual proximity to sacred places and explore them at their own pace, free from concerns related to environmental degradation, crowd safety, health risks, or security threats (Hill-Smith, 2009, as cited in Hill-Smith, 2011, p. 242; Williams, 2013).

In the 1990s, Japan saw the emergence of virtual or cyber shrines that either existed solely in cyberspace or allowed users to visit real shrines and temples. These websites enabled users to engage in ritual actions such as praying or purchasing amulets, a practice termed *intānetto sanpai* (インターネット参拝 internet-based religious veneration, online worship) by Reader and Tanabe (1998, pp. 217–222), who linked it to the pursuit of this-worldly benefits. Although Reader and Tanabe predicted growth in online worship, Baffelli et al. (2011) found limited expansion over the following decade, attributing this in part to opposition from traditional authorities such as Jinja Honchō and the inherently tactile nature of Japanese religious practice. Nevertheless, websites simulating shrine visits may include interactive elements such as purification rituals, offering practices, and the ability to purchase talismans (Kurosaki, 2011, pp. 64–65). According to Baffelli et al. (2011), internet-based veneration is only one example of Japan’s long-standing tradition of virtual or distance worship (pp. 25–26).

Religious activities taking place in online environments have often been regarded as less authentic or meaningful than those performed offline (Campbell & Vitullo, 2016). However, scholars such as O’Leary (1996) have challenged this view, arguing that the absence of physical presence does not diminish the reality, validity, or efficacy of ritual acts. O’Leary further suggested that cyber-rituals may even offer unique qualities that encourage repeated engagement (p. 795). In a similar vein, Hill-Smith (2011) argued that undertaking pilgrimage or ritual at home with the aid of digital technology should not be considered any less real.

4 Methodology

4.1 Data collection and processing

In this study, I analysed 1200 comments from 12 videos uploaded to the video-sharing platform YouTube. YouTube was selected as the platform for its status as the second most visited website and the leading video-hosting site worldwide. (Sui et al., 2022). The comments were collected between 28 and 29 April 2021 using an incognito account with cleared cache and cookies, with the location and language settings set to Japan and Japanese. I began with a broad search using the keyword パワースポット (pawāsupotto), which produced diverse content ranging from fortune teller and spiritual counsellor discussions to recommendations on which locations to visit and videos capturing visits to these sites. I decided to focus only on videos documenting power spots on location, using the same keyword to identify both relevant videos and channels. After reviewing the first 50 results from each search, I identified 35 channels that primarily posted videos of power spots visits. Notably, a few channels dominated the search results due to their higher popularity. For practical reasons, I collected the data from the six most popular channels, as the videos uploaded by these channels had generated the most comments. Although the number of views, comments and likes could also be considered valid indicators, the number of subscribers was chosen as an indicator of a channel's popularity. At the time of data collection, the six selected channels had between 2,980 and 241,000 subscribers.

While many videos on the six selected channels featured the term パワースポット (pawāsupotto) in their description boxes or hashtags, its usage in titles was inconsistent. In this study, I focused on the most commented videos that explicitly mentioned power spots in the title. From each channel, the 100 most recent comments from the two videos with the most comments were collected, a total of 1,200 comments, using the "newest first" filter. These 12 videos varied widely in comment volume, ranging from 109 to 7004 comments. The data sample primarily comprised top-level comments (direct comments to the video), with some replies included. Replies from creators thanking commenters for watching the video were excluded. Nearly all comments were in Japanese, with only a few in other languages (two in Russian, one in Korean, one in English, one in Portuguese, and two mixing Japanese and English). Due to their small number and brevity, the non-Japanese comments were easily translated and included in the analysis. Comment lengths varied from one sentence to over 15, with most comprising one to five sentences.

All comments on the 12 videos were saved as screenshots. The comments and information about the videos and the channels were also collected by using YouTube Data Tools, a collection of tools developed by Bernhard Rieder (2015) for extracting data from the YouTube platform via the YouTube API v3 (YouTube Data Application Processing Interface). The 100 most recent comments from each video, including user nicknames and avatars, were then manually copied into separate Word documents and combined into a single anonymised document. Each comment was assigned a sequential number from 1 to 1,200 and imported into ATLAS.ti for coding and analysis. Finally, the data were securely stored on two hard disks accessible only to the researcher.

4.2 Power spot videos

Among the various power spot-related videos, I identified two distinct categories: (1) videos documenting a visit from start to finish, capturing the location and its features in great detail, and (2) videos filmed from a fixed perspective, showing the power spot from one or two angles over an extended period. Both types were included in the analysis. Ten of the 12 videos belonged to the first category, while two videos represented the second. The average duration of the visit videos was eight to ten minutes, whereas the fixed-angle videos lasted over eight hours. All videos were uploaded to YouTube between January 2020 and February 2021.

Of the 12 videos analysed, 11 featured Shinto shrines and one a Buddhist temple in Japan. All sites were identified as power spots by the channel owners. This division reflects the strong association between power spots and Shinto shrines in Japan. The dataset included videos of ten different shrines, with one appearing in two videos. The concept of power was consistently highlighted across titles, hashtags, text overlays, and description boxes. Each video offered insights into a variety of topics, including the site's history, its enshrined deities or buddhas, the benefits associated with the site, and notable objects found in the area. Most videos instructed viewers on worship practices, including appropriate timing and methods for expressing prayers or requests. Additionally, they suggested that watching the videos could bring physical or emotional healing, wish fulfilment, or financial prosperity. Two videos explained the emotions and sensations viewers might experience while watching the video.

Notably, nine out of ten videos depicting a full visit included the term *enkaku sanpai* (遠隔参拝 remote visit and worship) in their titles. In many of the videos, the individual

operating the camera bowed several times during the visit and engaged in tactile interactions, such as touching objects or placing money in the offertory box. In addition to the gentle instrumental background music, sounds such as running water, birdsong and insect buzzing, bell chimes, and the sound of footsteps and clapping hands could be heard.

4.3 Coding comments on gaming videos method

I decided to use coding in the analysis process, as it is a widely accepted method in qualitative research. Coding helps the researcher to become deeply familiar with the data sample, to find patterns and themes in it, and possibly arrive at a theory (Saldaña, 2016). Although coding is “primarily an interpretive act” (Saldaña (2016, p. 5), it reduces the risk of the researcher making unintentional interpretations of the data sample (Zeiler, 2018). However, two researchers may interpret and code the same data in very different ways, depending on the perspective from which they view the phenomenon (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 7–8). There are also several coding techniques and methods to choose from (Saldaña, 2016).

The coding comments on gaming videos method, developed by Xenia Zeiler (2018), was chosen as the method of analysis. Zeiler designed the method to systematise and sort a large dataset of comments on YouTube Let’s Play gaming videos about games that incorporate religious elements and themes. Zeiler’s method, which builds on the concept of “gameenvironments” (Radde-Antweiler et al., 2014), is actor-centred and includes the perspective of all people watching and commenting on a gaming video, not just those who play the game. The method seeks to identify the central themes discussed in the data sample by carefully examining the commenters’ own statements. This approach suited my aim to better understand the power spot phenomenon from the perspective of people who watch power spot videos, regardless of whether they visit them in person or not. The coding comments on gaming videos method can be adjusted and modified to suit a wide range of research questions and data samples collected from websites and video hosting platforms that include a comments section (Zeiler, 2018).

The coding process in Zeiler’s (2018) coding comments on gaming videos method is based on the Straussian Grounded Theory method (e.g., Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and its threefold coding approach of in vivo, axial, and selective coding. However, unlike Grounded Theory, the coding comments method does not aim at developing new theories. Yet the approach is still inductive, meaning that it does not attempt to test a pre-defined theory or hypothesis

either. The objective is to determine what users comment on in the videos and to identify the central themes in the discussions. By sorting and systematising the dataset, Zeiler's method supports the formulation of further research questions and provides a sound foundation for analyses such as discourse or content analysis (Zeiler, 2018). Given the limited scope of a master's thesis, I chose to apply only the coding comments on gaming videos method, rather than extending the analysis with additional methods. I consider this approach sufficiently in-depth, as Zeiler (2018) emphasized that the method not only labels and organises data but also ultimately analyses it. Similarly, Saldaña (2016) argued that "coding is analysis" (p. 9).

The first step of Zeiler's (2018) coding comments on gaming videos method is to collect and archive the data sample. The second step is to conduct a context analysis to answer the "who, what, when, where, why and how" questions about the research topic and data, as proposed by Radde-Antweiler and Zeiler (2015). In this study, the context analysis was applied at three levels: 1) power spots, 2) power spot videos, and 3) comments and commenters. The power spot phenomenon and previous research on it was discussed in detail in Chapter 2. For the power spot videos, I examined the upload date, number of views and comments, channel subscriber and view counts, video length, and content. Regarding the comments, I recorded their quantity, language, and posting frequency and timing. For the commenters, I considered both their number and their relation to the total number of comments.

The first stage of the threefold coding process in Zeiler's (2018) coding comments on gaming videos method is the carefully and thoroughly conducted *in vivo* coding, in which codes are assigned to text passages. *In vivo* codes are verbatim statements, meaning that they are literal keywords and expressions used by the commenters. The codes are often individual words or parts of sentences. *In vivo* codes are descriptive but not yet analytical. According to Zeiler, this helps the researcher to obtain an unfiltered, full picture of what is being discussed in the data. The second stage, called axial coding, is the stage where the data sample is examined through a more abstract and analytical lens. The codes formed in the *in vivo* coding are related to each other and grouped into representative categories and sub-categories based on the connections and similarities found. The main interpretative work in Zeiler's method is done in the third coding stage of selective coding. In selective coding, which takes place at a more abstract level than the preceding stages, the categories and sub-categories formed in axial coding are verified by repeatedly and systematically

reapplying them to the data. In this process, one or more core categories of major themes and concepts discussed in the comments are identified. In order to find patterns, relationships between significant concepts, and the overarching themes discussed in the comments, the core categories are then consistently related to the previously formed categories and to each other. In the final stage, a systematic summary of the findings is presented, and the findings are brought together to produce a final, conclusive abstraction of what the commenters discussed in the data set (Zeiler, 2018). In her case study, Zeiler only included quotations in the final presentation of the results, focusing on comments that illustrated the selective code. This study differs from Zeiler's method and case study in that the categories and sub-categories developed by axial coding are discussed in more detail and illustrated with quotations.

Zeiler (2018) noted that the researcher's subjective interpretation, particularly in the steps following in vivo coding, is a part of the method, but it is also one of its limitations. In this study, it was not possible to have the codes and categories verified by a second person, as suggested by Zeiler. I did, however, follow another of Zeiler's recommendations, which was to write analytical memos during the coding process to keep track of my decisions and how I arrived at my final conclusions. As I had no prior experience of the analysis method or coding in general, I familiarised myself with them and with ATLAS.ti and its functions by conducting a practice coding on a small sample of 60 comments collected from 6 power spot videos on 9 April 2021.

4.4 Ethical concerns

The use of data from social media comments sections and online discussions raises several ethical considerations. According to McKee and Porter (2009), one of the first questions the researcher should consider is how to determine what is public and what is private information on the internet. A related concern is whether users are fully aware that their comments may be visible to anyone, including researchers (McKee & Porter, 2009, p. 5). While some have argued that users can generally be assumed to understand the public nature of their posts (Kozinets, 2010, pp. 141–142), others have suggested the issue is more nuanced. According to Kuula (2006, p. 186) and Turtiainen and Östman (2013), the site and its content may not be considered fully public if a login is required to view comments. Even on platforms with open registration, users may believe the space is used exclusively by a community with shared interests (Kuula, 2006, p. 183). This is especially true for

closed groups requiring membership approval (Turtiainen & Östman, 2013). Kuula (2006) also noted that children may not fully understand the reach of their comments and may disclose sensitive personal information (p. 184). Since YouTube allows users aged 13 and older, and younger children may access it with parental consent, the dataset in this thesis may include comments written by minors.

In general, research have the right to be informed that they are being studied and to decide whether to participate (Turtiainen & Östman, 2013). However, some scholars have argued that permission is not required to use publicly available online material (McKee & Porter, 2009, p. 6), particularly when researchers do not interact with users and the individuals cannot be identified (Kozinets, 2010, pp. 141–142). According to Turtiainen and Östman (2013), informed consent is necessary when the data is drawn from discussions users may perceive as private exchanges within a limited peer group. Beninger (2017) found that social media users were divided on the issue: some view consent as unnecessary, while others believe it should always be obtained, especially when content is sensitive or personal. The comments analysed in this thesis were publicly accessible without registration or login to YouTube. Given that these sections were commented on by hundreds or thousands of users, they are unlikely to be perceived as private. Moreover, obtaining informed consent would have been impractical due to the volume of comments and the limited means of contacting users

According to McKee and Porter (2009), determining which regulations apply when researching online communications that originate in one country but are accessed in another can be particularly complex. Cultural differences, for example, can affect the interpretation of what constitutes private and public information (McKee & Porter, 2009, pp. 5, 78). Nakada and Tamura (2005) argued that Japanese conceptions of privacy are shaped by both traditional worldviews, which prioritize social harmony over individualism, and modern, Western-influenced perspectives. While traditional values emphasize interpersonal harmony, aspects of Western privacy norms have been adopted with the rise of digital media (Nakada & Tamura, 2005). Capurro (2005) suggested that Japanese users perceive cyberspace as “private,” but in a collective, non-individualist way” (p. 43). Although studies have shown that East Asians are generally less likely than Westerners to share sensitive personal information, Japanese people tend to be more open online (Wang, 2016). They are particularly inclined to self-disclose on platforms that allow anonymity and do not emphasize direct interpersonal interaction, such as blogs and Twitter (Acar &

Deguchi, 2013; Bovee & Cvitkovic, 2009; Ishii, 2008; Wang, 2016). According to Wang (2016), anonymity is considered the norm in Japanese cyberspace.

Another important consideration related to privacy and anonymity is the use of direct quotes when reporting findings. McKee and Porter (2009) cautioned that precise quotes can be easily traced, potentially revealing users' online or offline identities (p. 106–107). While platforms like YouTube allow users to control the visibility of their personal information, not all users have the technical knowledge to manage these settings effectively (McKee & Porter, 2009, p. 89). Based on my observations, although some users may have used real names as nicknames, very few shared personal or contact information on their profiles, making identification unlikely. However, anonymity may still be compromised if users employ the same nickname across multiple platforms, one of which may include identifiable details (Kuula, 2006, pp. 185, 198). To reduce this risk, Kuula (2006) recommended editing quotes containing sensitive or personal information to prevent them from being discoverable through free-text searches (p. 183).

In the data sample collected for this thesis, many users shared potentially sensitive information, including details about their health, relationships, finances, and employment. While some topics were personal, the commenters on power spots videos do are not a particularly vulnerable group whose community might be harmed by increased visibility (McKee & Porter, 2009, pp. 83–84). However, Beninger (2017) found that some users prefer their nicknames not be used in research publications, fearing judged, ridicule, or misrepresentation. To protect user privacy, I have omitted nicknames when quoting comments. At the same time, I acknowledge that some users may view the omission of their nickname is a violation of copyright (Beninger, 2017; McKee & Porter, 2009, pp. 5–6, 53; Turtiainen & Östman, 2013). Comments containing identifying information have either been excluded or edited to reduce traceability.

5 Analysis

5.1 In vivo codes

When I decided on the size of the dataset, I was confident that I could code 1200 comments and adhere to my schedule. However, I quickly realized that certain aspects of the Japanese language slowed down the coding process more than I had expected. First, the Japanese writing system employs a combination of logo/morphographic kanji (mostly derived from Chinese characters), syllabic kana (consisting of the syllabaries hiragana and katakana), and, to a lesser extent, rōmaji (the Latin alphabet and Arabic numerals) (Smith, 1996). This also means that the same word can be written in multiple ways (Joyce, 2018, p. 185). As a result, several different in vivo codes could be generated for the same word, depending on the script or combination of scripts used. Second, the coding process was further slowed down by factors such as verb and adjective conjugation, as well as the use of honorific speech. In the Japanese language, verbs, adjectives, and nouns are modified to express different grammatical forms, tenses, moods and levels of politeness (Makino & Tsutsui, 1989). As a result, several different in vivo codes could be formed from the same word root. I had no predetermined method for selecting the in vivo codes; rather, it developed organically during the coding process. Selecting the entire word as an in vivo code preserved its verbatim nature, although choosing the root of the word could have made organizing and combining codes less time-consuming.

Because the same word can take several different forms depending on the script(s) used, grammatical factors such as tense, and the level of politeness, the data sample included nearly 40 different variations of some of the in vivo codes. I have simplified the list of in vivo codes by presenting the words in their plain form, meaning that they are not conjugated, or in the form most frequently used in the data sample. The thirty most frequent in vivo codes identified in the data sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 The 30 Most Mentioned In Vivo Codes in the Sample

<i>Position</i>	<i>In vivo code</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Mentioning</i>
1.	ありがとうございます	thank you	414
2.	動画	video	186
3.	幸せ	happiness, happy	167
4.	お願いします	please (do me a favor)	139
5.	神社	Shinto shrine	130

<i>Position</i>	<i>In vivo code</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Mentioning</i>
6.	お金	money	125
7.	生活	living, life	120
8.	良い	good	118
9.	行く	to go	112
10.	遠隔参拝	remote visit to a shrine or temple, paying homage/worshipping at a shrine or temple remotely	102
11.	皆様	everyone	99
12.	感謝	gratitude, thanks	98
13.	感じる	to feel, to sense	96
14.	参拝	visit to a shrine or temple, paying homage/worshipping at a shrine or temple	93
15.	神	kami, god, deity, spirit	89
16.	宝くじ	lottery	86
17.	家族	family	83
18.	素敵	lovely, wonderful, nice, great	81
19.	手	hand, arm	76
20.	のりこさん	Noriko-san (name of one of the YouTubers)	71
21.	仕事	work, job, business, occupation	62
22.	健康	health; healthy	60
23.	心	mind, heart, spirit	60
24.	コロナ	coronavirus	60
25.	見る	to watch, to see	54
26.	パワー	power	52
27.	高額	large sum (of money)	45
28.	気持ち	feeling, sensation, mood, state of mind	42
29.	ロト	lotto	42
30.	願い	desire, wish, hope; request; prayer	38

5.2 Axial codes

After completing the in vivo coding, I grouped the codes into code families, resulting in seven dominant categories, which are presented in Table 2. It is possible to see some overlap between the axial codes. For example, the categories of wishes and requests, visiting the location, as well as power and energy, could be considered as part of a broader category of religion and spirituality. However, the number of wishes in the comments

stood out clearly from other discussions of religion and spirituality, supporting the decision to keep it as a separate category. Furthermore, it remains ambiguous whether all commenters perceive their interests and activities related to power spots and other religious or spiritual sites as religious or spiritual. In the following pages, I will present my analysis of each axial code.

Table 2 Axial Codes of the Sample

1.	wishes and requests
2.	religion and spirituality
3.	videos
4.	physical and emotional reactions
5.	visiting the location
6.	power and energy
7.	gratitude

5.2.1 Wishes and requests

Out of the 1,200 comments in the sample, 53% (636 comments) contained at least one wish. Specifically, 314 comments included one wish, 189 comments included two wishes, and 133 comments included three or more wishes. Of the commenters who expressed their wishes, 79.6% (506 comments) simply stated their requests, sometimes including an expression of gratitude, but did not discuss any other topic.

The sample included wishes on a wide variety of topics, which were grouped under the main category of wishes and requests and then divided into subcategories and further subcategories. The following six subcategories appeared most frequently in the data sample: money, health and sickness, happiness, work, love and romantic relationships, and COVID-19 pandemic. In the following sections I will explore the six primary subcategories in greater detail. Finally, comments regarding fulfilled wishes will be briefly discussed. The dataset also included subcategories for housing, peace, education, personal appearance, and personal character. However, due to the significantly smaller number of comments, these subcategories will not be further discussed.

5.2.2 Wishes related to money

The subcategory of money was the most frequently mentioned request subcategory in the sample. Of the 636 comments that contained a wish, 49.4% (314 comments) included at

least one related to money. Money-related wishes were also the most common type of request when the commenter made only one wish and did not discuss any other topic. The ten most frequently found money related in vivo codes were お金 okane (money; 114 mentions), 宝くじ takarakuji (lottery; 86 mentions), 金運 kin'un (economic fortune or luck with money; 54 mentions), 高額 kōgaku (large sum; 45 mentions), ロト roto (lottery; 34 mentions), 借金 shakkin (debt or loan; 21 mentions), 大金 taikin (large amount of money; 17 mentions), 豊か yutaka (rich, wealthy; 16 mentions), 収入 shūnyū (income; 14 mentions) and 億万長者 okumanchōja (billionaire; 14 mentions).

In this dataset, all commenters expressing wishes related to money sought to either improve their financial situation or achieve stability. Commenters who provided a reason for their request intended to use the money for purposes such as paying off debts, buying or renovating a home, living independently, covering medical expenses, starting a business, or taking early retirement. The most common type of money-related requests, however, was the wish to be able to live a life without having to worry about money. These comments often included wishes about other topics such as living a happy and healthy life.

60. お金に困らない生活ができますようにお祈りいたします 🙏
I pray that I will be able to live a life free of financial worry 🙏

Many commenters expressed a desire to become wealthy—some even aspiring to be billionaires or the richest person in the world. They wished for a comfortable lifestyle that would allow them the freedom to pursue their personal ambitions. Several commenters specified exact amounts of money they hoped to win, receive, or earn.

826. 遠隔参拝 金運上昇 億万長者 一攫千金 🙏🙏🙏
Remote worship, rising luck with money, billionaire, getting rich quick 🙏🙏🙏

In contrast, some commenters stated that they would not request large sums of money, but only enough to meet the basic needs of a 'normal' life.

794. 宝くじなんて欲張りはしませんが衣食住が十分に、それと健康が欲しい。
I'm not so greedy to ask to win the lottery, but I want to have shelter, enough food and clothing, and to be healthy.

One of the most frequently expressed wishes in the data sample was to win the lottery. Another common aspiration was for improved general luck with money. Commenters also hoped to enhance their financial situation through various means, including salary

increases, accumulating savings, achieving financial success through work, investing in the stock market, and earning casual income.

1155. 宝くじ、ロト6、ロト7、TOTO BIG、競馬の高額当選がありますように。
I hope I win a large sum of money from the lottery, LOTO6, LOTO7, TOTO BIG and horse racing.

Although the majority of commenters did not specify their financial circumstances at the time of commenting, several individuals openly shared information about their significant financial hardships. They described their situation as being ‘broke’ or ‘poor’ and asked for help. Some commenters experienced poverty as a result of being unemployed.

166. 真面目に金欠です、龍神の神様 お助け下さい宜しくお願い致します。m(_ _)m
I seriously have no money, Dragon God, please help me. m(_ _)m

Most commenters who expressed money-related wishes hoped to receive the funds for themselves. Some, however, intended to use the money to support their families, and a few wished for their loved ones to be the direct beneficiaries. Requests for financial support extending beyond the family were rare, but when they did occur, they were intended to benefit all people or even all living beings worldwide.

5.2.2.1 *Wishes related to health and illness*

Another frequently mentioned wish subcategory in the sample was the combined subcategory of health and illness. Of the 636 comments that contained at least one wish, 22.5% (143 comments) mentioned at least one wish related to health or illness. The seven most frequently found health and sickness related in vivo codes were 健康 kenkō (health, healthy; 64 mentions), 病気 byōki (illness, 24 mentions), 治る naoru (to get better, to recover from an illness, to heal; 22 mentions), 良くなる yokunaru (to become better, to improve; 18 mentions), 元気 genki (healthy, in good health, full of spirit; 17 mentions), 長生き nagaiki (longevity; 11 mentions), 癌 gan (cancer; 6 mentions).

Wishes related to health and illness can be broadly categorized into two groups: those expressing a desire for general good health, and those seeking relief from or a cure for a specific illness or ailment. Some comments included both types of wishes.

1198. 心身共に健康になりますように . . . 宜しくお願い致します。
Please, may I be in good health both mentally and physically.

625. 娘が . . . てんかんの発作が起きない様になりますように。息子は、病気は、ないので、今の様に、元気で居られます様に

I hope my daughter . . . will not have epileptic seizures anymore. My son is not sick so I hope he can stay as healthy as he is now

Wishes concerning health and illness were typically expressed with the well-being of others in mind. Requests for general good health frequently focused on family members and relatives. Some commenters extended these wishes more broadly, including viewers and fellow commenters, all people worldwide, and even animals.

87. そして家族みんなが健康で平穏な日々を過ごせますように。

And may all of my family members live a healthy and peaceful life.

In addition to wishing for the good health of their loved ones, commenters often expressed concern and empathy for individuals suffering from physical or mental health issues. In approximately half of the comments that included a wish for the cure of an illness or ailment, the affected individual was someone personally known to the commenter. These wishes typically focused on immediate family members, such as parents, children, spouses, grandparents, or siblings.

849. 最愛な弟の病気が治り、美味しいもの食べれてずっと元気に長生きしますように。

May my beloved little brother be cured of his illness, be able to eat delicious food and live a long and healthy life.

Some commenters described health conditions using broad terms such as 'illness,' 'poor health,' or 'physical ailment.' In contrast, others were notably open about their own or their loved ones' health, providing detailed accounts of the progression and treatment of specific conditions. In some cases, this included information such as dates of medical procedures and the identities of those affected. To protect the anonymity of commenters and the individuals mentioned, comments containing excessive personally identifiable information were excluded from the example quotations used in this thesis. In the following quote, the commenter offers a detailed description of their medical condition and overall state of health.

676. 昨年12月から多発性骨髄腫と言う病気の数値が上がり悪化してしまい抗癌剤点滴治療しています。休薬→治療の繰り返しが続きます。副作用もあるので治療に耐えれます様に。これ以上悪くならず…。それと金銭面など迷惑かけてる家族の生活もより一層豊かに健康に過ごせます様に

Since December of last year, the levels of an illness called multiple myeloma have risen and gotten worse, and I have been receiving intravenous anti-cancer treatment. The cycle of drug withdrawal → treatment continues. There are side effects too, so I hope I can endure

the treatment. I hope it doesn't get any worse... Also, may my family, to whom I'm causing financial and other troubles, be able to live a much more prosperous and healthy life

The wishes referenced a variety of physical and mental health conditions, most of which significantly affected quality of life or posed a threat to it, including cancer, heart failure, depression, and personality disorders.

21. 母が多発性骨髄腫という病気で大変危険な状態です。主治医からはもってあと1、2週間と言われて終わりました。どうか母の病状が、奇跡的にでも回復に向かいますよう、どうか、よろしく願い申し上げます。

My mother has an illness called multiple myeloma and is in a very critical condition. Her doctor told me that she has only one or two weeks left. Please may my mother's condition miraculously turn towards recovery.

874. 生きる気力が取り戻せます様に、御護り下さい。
Please protect me so that I can regain my will to live.

5.2.2.2 *Wishes related to happiness*

Of the 636 comments that contained one or more wishes, 20% (126 comments) included at least one wish related to happiness, expressed through words denoting happiness. The two most frequently mentioned *in vivo* codes were 幸せ *shiwase* (happiness; 161 mentions), and 幸福 *kōfuku* (happiness, well-being; 9 mentions).

Commenters expressed not only a desire to find happiness but also to maintain the happiness they had already achieved. A common pattern was the combination of a wish for happiness with hopes for good health and freedom from financial worries, elements that, for many, appeared to be inherently linked to the experience of happiness. Such wishes were often extended to benefit the entire family. Direct expressions of a desire for personal happiness were typically made by commenters who had experienced significant hardships in their lives.

1077. 毎日苦しいです。今抱えている全てのモヤモヤが消えて幸せになりますように。お願いします。

Every day is painful. I wish all the uneasiness and gloom I'm carrying will disappear and I'll become happy. Please.

What stood out in the subcategory of happiness was the high number of wishes directed toward the well-being of others beyond the commenter or their immediate circle. Of the 126 happiness-related comments, 76% (96 comments) included a wish for the happiness of a broader community, ranging from other people to animals, plants, deities, and other supernatural beings. Many commenters expressed hopes for the fulfilment of others'

dreams or simply wished that good things would happen to them. Expressions such as *subete no hitobito* (すべての人々 all people) and *sekaijū no hito* (世界中の人 people around the world) reflected a desire for universal happiness. Many commenters expressed concern for those in vulnerable or difficult circumstances, often hoping for improvements in their living conditions. The following commenter initially watched the video to enhance their own happiness. After recognizing that there were others facing greater challenges, the commenter expressed a wish for their happiness instead.

1043. 私も自分の幸せを思ってたけど、私よりづらい人は沢山いる。その人達の幸せをお願いします。今まで幸せで生きてて有難う
I also watched the video thinking of my own happiness, but there are many people who are having a harder time than I do. Please, I ask happiness for those people. I'm thankful for having lived happily so far

In addition to expressing concern for the well-being of all people globally, many commenters also acknowledged one another. Notably, the most frequently expressed wish in this subcategory was for the happiness of fellow viewers and commenters. The comments section thus served as a space for viewers to engage with one another, where many chose to demonstrate kindness and solidarity. The expressions *minasama* (皆様) and *minasan* (皆さん), both respectful forms of addressing “everyone” or “all of you”, were frequently employed in the wishes. These expressions were interpreted as referring specifically to other viewers and commenters, a reading supported by several instances in which commenters explicitly stated that their wishes were intended to benefit others who had watched or commented on the video.

1002. 動画を見ながら皆さんのコメントを読みました。皆さんの願いが叶いますように、幸せになりますように。コロナ禍で大変ですが、この動画に出会えて荒んでた心が温まりました。
I read your comments while watching the video. May the wishes of you all come true and may you become happy. I'm having a hard time with the coronavirus crisis, but coming across this video warmed my hardened heart.

1071. 誰かの幸せを願った人が 幸せになりますように
May the people who wished for someone else's happiness become happy

5.2.2.3 Wishes related to work

Of the 636 comments that contained at least one wish, 17% (107 comments) included at least one wish related to work. The four most frequently found work-related in vivo codes were 仕事 *shigoto* (work, job, employment; 56 mentions), 会社 *kaisha* (company,

workplace; 17 mentions), 就職 shūshoku (finding employment, getting a job; 8 mentions), and 職場 shokuba (workplace; 7 mentions).

All commenters who expressed work-related wishes hoped for either positive developments in their professional lives or the continuation of existing favourable conditions. These aspirations were often articulated through general hopes for improved career prospects or for work to proceed smoothly. Some commenters specifically wished for a salary increase or a larger-than-usual bonus. A few also expressed a desire for improved interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Another recurring theme in work-related wishes was the aspiration to find employment. These wishes ranged from general hopes for securing a job to more specific goals. Some commenters expressed a desire to succeed in job interviews or qualification examinations. For some, the primary objective was to secure their first job after graduation, whereas others hoped to return to the workforce following a period of unemployment.

838. 第一志望の企業から最終面接の連絡が来て、内定が来月中までにもらえますように。受けた面接がよい結果となり、選考通過していますように。

May the company of my first choice contact me for the final interview and may I receive an unofficial job offer by the end of next month. May the results of my interview be good and may I pass the selection process.

Some commenters expressed satisfaction with their current positions and wished to remain in their existing roles, while others aspired to explore new employment opportunities.

62. 今の会社で末永く働けように。

May I be able to work at my current company for a long time.

72. 今の会社辞めて他の会社に行けますように。他の会社からぜひうちに来てほしいって連絡来ますように。他の会社に引き抜かれますように。よろしく願いいたします



I hope that I can quit my job at my current company and get a job at another company. I hope that other companies will contact me and ask me to come work for them. May I be headhunted by another company. Thank you very much for your help 🙌👏

Some commenters also expressed wishes related to self-employment, such as aspirations to start their own business or hopes for the success and growth of their own or their family's existing enterprise.

908. ニット工房とカフェを経営したいと考えています。無事に開業し、商売が繁盛いたしますよう、御加護をください。経済的に安心で、豊かな暮らしができますよう、お守りくださいませ。

I would like to run a knitting studio and a café. Please give me your divine protection for a successful opening and thriving business. Please protect me so that I can live a financially secure and prosperous life.

5.2.2.4 Wishes related to love and romantic relationships

The subcategory of love and romantic relationships encompasses commenters' wishes concerning their personal love lives. Common desires included finding or rekindling love, getting married, and maintaining a lasting partnership. Of the 636 comments that contained one or more wishes, 8% (50 comments) included a wish related to love or romantic relationships. The three most frequently mentioned *in vivo* codes in this subcategory were 結婚 *kekkon* (marriage; 13 mentions), 好きな人 *sukina hito* (one's crush, the person one likes; 11 mentions), and 付き合う *tsukiau* (to go out with, to date, to be together with someone in a romantic relationship; 11 mentions).

The most frequently expressed wish related to love and romantic relationships was the desire to find a partner. Many commenters expressed a general longing for a romantic relationship, often specifying a wish to find, for example, a boyfriend or life partner. Some provided more detailed descriptions of the type of relationship they sought or the qualities they valued in a potential partner. One commenter, for instance, expressed a hope to meet someone who could understand and accept their medical condition.

754. うつ病で通院中ですが、現状を理解してくれる方 私を受け止めてくれる パートナ
ーと出会いたいです 🌈

I'm going to the hospital for regular treatment for my depression, but I'd like to meet
someone who understands my present situation, a partner who can accept me for who I am
🌈

The dataset also included several comments in which the commenter wished for their romantic feelings toward a specific person to be reciprocated. These commenters hoped to spend time with their romantic interest, form a relationship, and potentially even marry them.

97. 大好きな先輩と付き合えて幸せになれますように。クリスマス2人で楽しく過ごせま
すように。

May I be able to date my senior who I love and become happy. I wish that the two of us can
spend a happy Christmas together.

Another frequently expressed wish concerning love and romantic relationships was the desire to get married. Some commenters expressed an intention to marry their current partner, while others hoped to find a romantic relationship that would eventually lead to

marriage. In many cases, individuals simply stated a wish to get married, without indicating their current relationship status.

1031. 信頼できる女性と恋愛して結婚して愛しあって子供をつくりたい。それが本当の僕の姿です。幸せになりたい。

I want to have a romantic relationship with a reliable woman, get married, love each other and have children. That's who I really am. I want to be happy.

5.2.2.5 Wishes related to COVID-19 pandemic

Although most of the wishes in the dataset focused solely on the commenter or their immediate social circle, one issue extended beyond the personal sphere and had global implications. At the time the comments were written, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was spreading worldwide. Of the 636 comments that included at least one wish, 6% (41 comments) contained a wish related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most frequently found *in vivo* code in this subcategory was コロナ corona (coronavirus; 40 mentions).

Initially, I considered categorizing wishes related to the COVID-19 pandemic under the subcategory of health and illness, anticipating that many would involve concerns about avoiding infection or recovering from the disease. However, only two commenters explicitly expressed concern about contracting the virus, and none articulated a wish to be cured of COVID-19 specifically.

628. 今年の9月はコロナに気にせず母と東京に行けますように。家族がコロナ陽性になりませんように。コロナに感染しませんように。

I hope I can go to Tokyo with my mother this September without having to worry about corona. May my family not get tested corona positive. I hope I won't get infected with corona.

What emerged more prominently was a shared desire for the pandemic to end, allowing individuals to return to their normal lives and freely spend time with loved ones without restrictions. The pandemic had affected commenters in diverse ways. Some expressed a longing to live without face masks or vaccination requirements, while others wished to be reunited with family members. Additionally, several commenters voiced concern about the economic consequences of the pandemic, particularly the difficulties faced by small business owners, such as those operating shops and restaurants.

822. コロナウイルスが1日も早く収束し、また人と会い、笑って歓談出来ますように。

I hope that the corona virus situation will return back to normal as soon as possible, and that it'll be possible to see people again and laugh and chat together with them.

5.2.2.6 Fulfilled wishes

While most comments in the wishes and requests category expressed unfulfilled desires, the dataset also included 55 comments referring to wishes that had already come true. It remains unclear whether these wishes were fulfilled specifically after viewing the video in question or, for instance, after visiting the site in person. However, some commenters attributed the fulfilment of their wishes to watching the video or engaging in remote worship.

1034. この動画を見てから本当に願っていた思いが叶いました。些細な願いではありませんが、それも一瞬でしたが本当に幸せでした。ありがとうございます！

The wish I made really came true after watching this video. It was a trivial wish, and just for an instant, but I was very happy. Thank you!

Initially, I interpreted all comments referring to achievements and life events in the past tense as descriptions of events that had already occurred. However, a few comments challenged this assumption. For example, one commenter explicitly stated that they had intentionally written their wish in the past tense, as if it had already been fulfilled. Another claimed to have won the lottery, but clarified in parentheses that the statement was, in fact, a wish. Some commenters wrote that they had lived a good life until they died, which suggests they were expressing hopes for the future rather than recounting past experiences, unless the commenter was nearing the end of life and meant it more literally. These instances led me to question whether some statements that seemed to describe fulfilled desires were expressions of wishes rather than accounts of real events.

1188. お金に困ることなく死ぬまで生活できました。家を建て家族みんなで幸せに暮らしました。ありがとうございました。

I was able to live without financial worries until my death. I built a house and the whole family lived happily. Thank you very much.

The dataset also included references to achievements and life events written in the present or present progressive tense, both of which can be used to describe future intentions. It is likely that these comments expressed aspirations rather than current realities. One commenter, for example, described their message as a declaration outlining their dreams and the actions they intended to take to achieve them. Such phrasing may reflect an attempt to manifest future outcomes by confidently stating what will happen or by speaking as though their wishes had already come true.

5.2.3 Religion and spirituality

Commenters in the dataset discussed various topics related to spirituality and religion. Of the 1,200 comments, 30.6% (367 comments) included at least one reference to religious or spiritual themes. This figure excludes wishes unless the commenter specifically used a term associated with prayer. Comments about visits to shrines or temples, whether in person or through video, were only counted if they included language indicating that the visit was intended for worship. The most frequently found in vivo codes were 神社 *jinja* (Shinto shrine; 130 mentions), 遠隔参拝 *enkaku sanpai* (remote visit to a shrine or temple to worship; 102 mentions), 参拝 *sanpai* (visit to a shrine or temple to worship; 93 mentions), 神 *kami* (god, deity, kami; 89 mentions), パワー *pawā* (power; 52 mentions), and 奇跡 *kiseki* (miracle, 28 mentions). Some of the in vivo codes aligned with multiple categories formed during the axial coding stage. A separate category was created for discussions related to power and energy, while visits to shrines are examined in more detail in the chapter that focuses on visiting the video locations. In this chapter, I will explore commenters' discussions of prayer, Shinto shrines, gods, deities and spirits, miracles, and luck. Other topics that appeared at least once in the dataset but are not discussed here due to their low frequency include religious and spiritual practices, objects and phrases, pilgrimages, purification, healing, sanctity, benefits, heresy, religious groups, and prophecies.

As stated in the previous chapter, 53% of the comments (636 comments) included at least one wish. Most of these wishes were expressed using language and grammatical structures typically associated with expressing desires. Among those who made a wish, 9.4% (60 comments) used expressions that explicitly referred to praying. These included expressions such as *inoru* (祈る), *kigan suru* (祈願する), and *kinen suru* (祈念する). In addition, some commenters employed visual symbols such as emojis and kaomojis to convey similar meanings. For instance, 9.1% (58 comments) included the folded hands emoji (🙏) alongside their wish. Although this emoji is often interpreted as a gesture of prayer, it can also signify gratitude or a polite request, depending on the context.

Shinto shrines were mentioned in 10.5% (126) of the comments. Nearly all of them referred to the shrine featured in the video. Commenters described previous visits to the shrine or to other shrines, expressed a desire to visit the site in person in the future, and shared their

experiences of visiting it remotely. Many also offered thoughts, impressions, and knowledge about the shrine, with evaluations that were almost uniformly positive. The shrine was frequently described using words such as *subarashii* (素晴らしい wonderful), *suteki* (素敵 lovely, nice), *kirei* (綺麗 pretty, beautiful), and *shinsei* (神聖 sacred). Some commenters noted how much they liked the shrine, with a few even referring to it as their favourite.

740. この神社に行くと、鳥肌が立つのです。大変、神聖な神社です。
I get goosebumps when I go to this shrine. It is a very sacred shrine.

Gods, deities, and spirits were mentioned in 6.9% (83 comments) of the dataset. These references included both general terms and specific names, with most comments focusing on deities associated with the location depicted in the video. *Ryūjin* (龍神), the dragon god in Japanese mythology, was the most frequently mentioned. Other deities, such as *Shichifukujin* (七福神 Seven Gods of Fortune), were also mentioned. Several commenters claimed to have seen a dragon deity in a video that combines footage of a shrine building with a flowing river.

222. 龍神さまのように思えるお顔と、目が合ったのでビクッとしましたが、画像処理でないかもしれない…と思い、ご挨拶しました。それ以降は、何度か見ましたが、目は合っていないので、挨拶が済んだからでしょうか？
I was startled when my eyes met with a face that looked like Dragon God, but I thought it might not be image processing... so I greeted it. After that I saw it several times, but our eyes didn't meet, perhaps because I'd already greeted it?

In addition to discussing the deities they perceived in the videos, some commenters shared personal experiences of encountering gods. For example, several individuals claimed to have sensed a divine presence either during or after visiting a shrine or while watching the video. Attitudes toward these deities varied, ranging from reverence to familiarity. One commenter described their interaction with a deity as enjoyable and entertaining, referring to the deity's reactions as "lovely." In contrast, another commenter expressed feeling intimidated by the deity's powerful presence. Overall, deities were portrayed in a positive light, and some commenters reported feeling protected by a divine being.

121. この動画に出会い自分を守ってくれていたのが龍神様だとやっと気付きました。
(. . .) 龍神様にお会いできるのが今からすごく楽しみです。
When I came across this video, I finally realised that it was the Dragon God who was protecting me. . . I am really looking forward to meeting the Dragon God from now on.

A small number of commenters directly addressed deities, often requesting their help or protection. Some also expressed gratitude for perceived divine support. In addition to deities, the dataset included occasional references to other supernatural beings, such as evil spirits, human and animal spirits, monsters, fairies, and tengu, a type of supernatural creature found in Japanese mythology and folklore. In these cases, commenters were typically seeking protection from these entities or looking for ways to banish them.

While the power spot videos generally followed a similar pattern, the themes discussed could vary depending on the unique content of each video. Some topics were more frequently discussed in the comments sections of certain videos. This was the case with miracles (*kiseki* 奇跡), which were predominantly mentioned in the comments section of a video promising that those who watched it would experience miracles. Commenters reacted positively, saying that miracles would happen or that they were looking forward to them.

472. きっとミラクル炸裂ですね ♡ 奇跡は必ず起きるー 🎵
It must be an explosion of miracles ♡ Miracles will certainly happen 🎵

Luck was a recurring theme in the dataset, with many commenters expressing a desire for improved fortune or an end to their bad luck. While general references to luck appeared throughout the comments, the concept of lucky days was discussed almost exclusively in the comments section of one video. In this thesis, lucky days refer to dates considered especially auspicious according to Chinese astrology or Japanese tradition. In this dataset, several commenters expressed happiness at having watched the video on such a favourable day.

597. コロナでなかなか参拝にも行けない中、虎の日に毘沙門天様を遠隔参拝出来るなんて 🎵 とても嬉しいです ✨ ありがとうございます 💎
It's also not easy to visit shrines and temples because of corona, so to be able to worship Bishamonten [Vaiśravaṇa] remotely on the day of the tiger 🎵 makes me very happy ✨
Thank you 💎

5.2.4 Videos

Out of the 1200 comments, 18.4% (221 comments) mentioned a video or the act of watching a video. The most frequently found in vivo codes were 動画 *dōga* (video; 186 mentions), 見る/ 観る *miru* (to watch, to view; 71 mentions), 拝見 *haiken* (seeing, looking

at; 22 mentions), 聴く/聞く kiku (to listen; 18 mentions), and 映像 eizō (video, image (on a screen); 16 mentions).

Many commenters described how they had come across the video. Some had actively searched for it, while others encountered it by chance. One commenter, for example, returned to the video to explain that they had initially found it through YouTube recommendations and decided to watch it despite being sceptical about the promised benefits. According to their comment, their romantic life had improved three days after viewing the video.

1098. この動画を見つけたのは本当に偶然でした…！ 😊 神社仏閣参りなどは好きですがオススメ欄には私の趣味関連の動画ばかりでお参りの動画が出たのが不思議だったのと、本当に幸せになれるのかと半信半疑で動画を開きました！ 見たちょうど3日後、好きな人に初めてお出かけに誘われました！ ㄋ(´▽`)/❤️ 本当にありがとうございます！！
It was really a coincidence that I found this video...！ 😊 I do like visiting shrines and temples, but the recommendation section is always full of videos related to my hobbies, so it was strange to see a worship video, and half in doubt whether it would really make me happy, I opened it! Just three days after watching it, the person I like asked me out for the first time! ㄋ(´▽`)/❤️ Thank you so much!!

Although some viewers watched the video out of mere curiosity, many others were driven by specific motivations, even if they encountered it by chance. One such motivation was the pursuit of material benefits, particularly the hope of improving their economic circumstances. Another reason for viewing the videos was to see power spots, shrines, or temples that were not easily accessible to the viewers. Many commenters indicated that they were unable to visit these sites in person due to factors such as geographical distance, time constraints, physical disabilities, or restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included the annual practice of *hatsumōde* (初詣), the first visit to a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple at the beginning of the Japanese New Year. Commenters' experiences with remote visits and worship are discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

162. コロナ禍で、参拝出来ず... 12.31日 23:26分この動画に辿り着きました。
I can't go and worship because of the coronavirus pandemic... On December 31st at 23:26 I finally found my way to this video.

159. 初詣に行けていませんが、昨晚からずーと一人旅さんの動画みてました！
I haven't been able to go on the New Year's first shrine/temple visit, but I've been watching Hitoritabi-san's videos since last night!

Power spot videos were also viewed with the intention of enhancing physical and mental well-being. Users actively sought out such content to improve sleep quality, reduce stress,

elevate mood, alleviate pain, and address other health-related concerns. One commenter, for example, discovered the video while searching for a way to restore their energy levels.

384. 最近 弱っていて どこかで エネルギーを補充したくなっていて 探してたら ここに たどり着きました ありがとうございます

I've been feeling weak lately and wanted to replenish my energy somewhere, and when looking for that I finally arrived here. Thank you.

While some viewers were watching the video for the first time, the dataset reveals that many had prior experience with power spot or remote worship videos. For example, one commenter reported watching the video whenever they felt cold, claiming it helped them feel warmer. Another user, after facing a distressing situation, returned to a video that had previously provided comfort. Some commenters noted that it had been a considerable time since their last viewing, whereas others described themselves as frequent viewers.

Numerous commenters conveyed a strong desire to re-watch the video, with many eagerly anticipating future uploads.

498. のりこさん 素敵な動画ありがとうございます。一緒に遠隔参拝させて頂きました

🙏💎 これからもパワースポットチャンネル 楽しみにしています♪

Thank you for the wonderful video, Noriko-san. I was able to remotely worship with you

🙏💎 I'll look forward to the content on your power spot channel in the future too ♪

Commenters predominantly offered positive feedback on the videos, frequently describing them as *suteki* (素敵 lovely), *subarashii* (素晴らしい wonderful), *kirei* (綺麗 beautiful), and *utsukushii* (美しい beautiful). The videos were also described as *shinpiteki* (神秘的 mysterious), and *makafushigi* (摩訶不思議 profound mystery). For many viewers, watching the videos was an unusual experience and the emotions and sensations they evoked could not be easily explained.

225. まるで画面からヒノキの様な香りが伝わる様な、摩訶不思議な画像ですね!!ずっとここに居たくなる様なとても奥ゆかしい雰囲気です。ありがとうございます!

It's a profoundly mysterious video and it feels like there's a Japanese cypress-like scent coming from the screen!! It has a very refined atmosphere that makes me want to stay here forever. Thank you!

5.2.5 Physical and emotional reactions

The third axial code identified in the dataset encompasses the various physical sensations, emotional reactions, and feelings described by commenters. Notably, most of these references were posted in the comment sections of the same four videos where nearly all mentions of power or energy were also concentrated. Although physical and emotional

responses were initially coded as separate axial categories, they were later merged into a single code with two subcategories. This decision was based on the observation that the distinction between physical and emotional responses was not always clear-cut. While certain experiences, such as sensations of warmth or chilliness, or emotions like happiness, could be easily categorised, others, such as crying or the urge to cry, were harder to place in one category. Tears, for instance, are a physical response that may be triggered by either physical or emotional discomfort. Consequently, although the expressions are divided into two subcategories, the boundaries between them remain blurred. Taking this into account, 14% (169 out of 1,200) of the comments were identified as containing references to physical sensations. Emotional expressions, excluding those of gratitude, appeared in 12.8% (153 comments) of the dataset.

5.2.5.1 *Physical sensations*

Many commenters provided detailed accounts of the physical sensations they experienced, particularly when they perceived these sensations as extraordinary or noteworthy. They also often shared their interpretations and emotional responses to these experiences. The most frequently mentioned *in vivo* codes related to physical sensations were 感じる *kanjiru* (to feel; 43 mentions), 暖かい *ataakai* (warm, (pleasantly) hot; 23 mentions), ピリピリ *piripiri* (tingling, burning; 22 mentions), 温かい *ataakai* (warm, (pleasantly) hot, kind, genial; 17 mentions), ビリビリ *biribiri* (feeling an electric shock, trembling; 16 mentions), 感覚 *kankaku* (sensation, feeling; 15 mentions), and 風 *kaze* (wind, breeze; 12 mentions).

A significant number of physical sensations described in the comments were perceived through the hands or fingers. This was especially common in response to the two videos specifically designed to facilitate the perception of power, in which the YouTuber instructed viewers to place their hands over their device to sense the energy. The most frequently reported sensation was warmth. Several commenters noted a rise in body temperature, while some also described heat emanating from their device or the device itself becoming warm.

257. 寒かったので、しゅうさんの動画みて手をかざしたら、手足がすぐあたたまりました。冬にはかかせません。ぽっかぽか(#^.^#)
I was cold, so I watched your video Shū-san, held my hand over it, and immediately my hands and legs warmed up. This is a must for winter. It's so pleasantly warm (#^.^#)

400. 手をかざしたら熱っ！となりました。驚いて海の動画で確認したら風が吹いたのですが、この動画に戻ってきたらまた熱っ！と

I held up my hand and it was hot! Surprised, I checked a video of an ocean and felt the wind blow, but when I returned to this video, it was hot again!

Some commenters reported feeling coolness rather than warmth, which led to confusion and concern. While some questioned their ability to sense the power, others feared the cold might indicate negative energy, as suggested by one of the YouTubers.

377. 温かさを感じた方が多いのですが、私は手をかざすとそよそよと涼しい感じがします。感じ取れてないのでしょうか？

Many people have felt the warmth, but I feel a gentle coolness when I hold my hands out. Am I not feeling it?

However, not all commenters were concerned by the sensation of coolness. Several described feeling a gentle stream of air, commonly referred to as *kaze* (風 wind or breeze), emanating from their device, which they generally characterized as pleasant and refreshing. Tingling or prickling sensations, often felt in the hands, head, or face, were frequently mentioned by commenters. These were typically described using the mimetic word *piripiri* (ピリピリ tingling, stinging, burning). Several users reported sensations akin to electric shocks, commonly expressed with the mimetic word expression *biribiri* (ビリビリ).

552. 頭がピリピリする感覚があり、パワーを頂いた気がします。

I felt a tingling sensation in my head, and I feel like I received power.

328. かざした指先がビリビリしてきて次に手のひらの真ん中辺りがビリビリ… 不思議です。効果が現れますように！

I felt like I was getting electric shocks in the fingertips I was holding up, then in the middle of my palm... It's strange. I hope there will be some effects!

Several commenters reported experiencing all three sensations: warmth or coolness, airflow, and tingling. Other physical reactions included goosebumps, shivering, trembling, ringing in the ears, increased heart rate, numbness, sensations of pressure, lethargy, and episodes of immobility or uncontrollable movement. Several commenters cried, while others felt on the verge of tears. Some users claimed improvements in physical health, describing sensations of bodily lightness and relief from ailments such as headaches, abdominal pain, rheumatism, and fatigue. In many cases, it was difficult to determine whether these experiences were perceived as physical, psychological, or a combination of both. More unusual sensations included the ability to smell elements depicted in the video, the feeling of something leaving the body, the brain undergoing purification, and the

sensation of water, blood, or energy flowing through the body. A few commenters even described experiences such as floating in a river or flying alongside a dragon god.

Some users suggested that the sensations of heat and airflow reported by many viewers might simply be caused by the device used to watch the video. To assess the authenticity of their experiences, commenters compared the video with similar content, considered others' accounts, and examined their own devices. Only a few expressed outright disbeliefs. Others, on the other hand, appeared unconcerned with the origin of the sensations, viewing the experience as healing or satisfying regardless of its cause. This suggests that, for some, the subjective experience itself held more value than verifying its authenticity.

324. 手をかざしたらあたたかさを感じました！びっくりしてコメント見たら、他にも感じての方がいらしたんですね。あたたかいからスマホかと思い、スマホを触ったら全然違いました。全画面にせずにかざすとわかりやすいです 画面の上と下では感じ方が全然違いました。貴重な体験が出来ました。有り難うございます。

I felt warmth when I held out my hand! Surprised, I had a look at the comments and there were other people who had felt it too. I thought the warmth was from my phone, but when I touched it felt totally different. It's easy to notice if I hold my hand over it when the video is not on full screen, the feeling is totally different at the top and the bottom of the screen. It was a valuable experience for me. Thank you very much.

364. ホントに暖かく感じた・・・ちょっと待って、スマホ画面が熱を発しているだけでは?!?! どっちでもいいけど、かなり癒される。笑

It really felt warm... Wait a minute, isn't it just the phone screen emitting heat?!?! Either way, it's quite healing. LOL.

5.2.5.2 *Emotions and feelings*

The discussion of emotions and feelings primarily focused on the emotional experiences that the commenters had during and after watching the video. The most frequently mentioned *in vivo* codes related to emotions and feelings were 気持ち *kimochi* (feeling, mood, state of mind; 31 mentions), 心 *kokoro* (mind, heart, spirit; 31 mentions), 嬉しい *ureshii* (happy, glad, pleased; 29 mentions), 癒される *iyasareru* (to be healed, to be satisfied; 14 mentions), びっくり *bikkuri* (to be surprised; 11 mentions), スッキリする *sukkiri suru* (feel refreshed; 10 mentions), 落ち着く *ochitsuku* (to calm down; 10 mentions), and 浄化される *jōka sareru* (to be purified; 10 mentions).

The videos and the experiences they evoked elicited surprise, confusion, and wonder among commenters. Many were astonished that simply watching a video could trigger unexpected physical and emotional responses. Beyond surprise, the videos also had a

positive impact on the commenters' emotional well-being. Several commenters reported feeling calmer both physically and emotionally, often using expressions such as *kokoro ga ochitsuku* (心が落ち着く) and *kokoro ga odayaka ni naru* (こころが穏やかになる), both of which translate to “the mind/heart calms down.” Others described the videos as offering relief from negative emotions or helping them to overcome emotional distress.

322. ここ数日どうしても負の感情や負のエネルギーに浸かってしまい、どうしてみようもなく、この動画にたどりつきました。動画が流れ始めてすぐに心のざわめきが治まり8回の鐘が鳴り終わるころには、心が静かになるのをかんじました。ありがとうございました
✦

For the last few days I've been drowning in negative emotions and negative energy, had no idea what to do, and finally found this video. As soon as the video started playing, the racket inside my mind calmed down, and by the time the eighth bell had rung, I felt my mind become quiet. Thank you ✦

Given that the dataset includes several Japanese words and phrases with multiple meanings and translation nuances, it is possible that, despite careful attention, some translations may not fully capture the original intent of the commenters. For instance, the verb *iyasareru* (癒される), can imply both being healed and that something is making you feel relaxed or calm. Commenters often attributed such feelings of healing or relaxation to elements like background music, the sound of water, the visual aesthetics of the video, or the natural scenery depicted.

217. イライラと焦りのような感情もあって精神的によくはない状態でしたが、こちらの水の音を聴いているだけで癒されました ✦

I was not in a good state mentally as I was also feeling irritated and impatient, but I was calmed down [or healed] by just listening to the sound of water here ✦

Some commenters described the video as having a purifying effect, often using the expression *jōka sareru* (浄化される) which translates as “to be purified.” Viewers also reported feeling refreshed after watching the video. This sensation was commonly expressed through phrases such as *sukkiri suru* (スッキリする) and *kokoro ga arawareru* (心が洗われる), both of which can be translated as “to feel refreshed” or “as if one's heart/mind has been cleansed.”

253. ありがとうございます✦ 涙が流れて、心が浄化されました。感謝です。
Thank you ✦ Tears flowed and my heart was purified. I'm grateful.

196. 右足首の病気で3ヶ月入院して、今は自宅療養中。あれこれ考えてしまうけど、この動画の流れる雲を無心で見ると気分がスッキリしてきます。

I was hospitalized for three months due to an illness in my right ankle, and now I'm

recovering at home. I've been thinking a lot about this and that, but when I watch the floating clouds in this video without thinking about anything else, I feel refreshed.

Expressions such as *ureshii* (嬉しい happy, joyful), *yorokobu* (喜ぶ to be delighted or glad) and *shiwase* (幸せ happiness) were commonly used to convey the joy many commenters felt at being able to visit a shrine or other sacred site remotely through video. Other sources of joy and appreciation included, for example, having sufficient time for worship and the opportunity to view the video on an auspicious or lucky day.

571. ありがとうございます。寅の日の今日のうちに参拝できてとても嬉しい!!見終わった今でもまだ心臓がバクバクしています。なかなか行けない神社に行けて幸せです!また一緒に参拝させていただきたいです。お参りの時間が長くて嬉しかったですよー。
Thank you. I'm so happy that I was able to visit and worship today, on the day of the tiger!! Even after watching, my heart is still racing. Being able to visit a shrine that I can't visit easily makes me happy! I would like to make a visit together again. I was so glad that the worship time was long.

5.2.6 Visiting the location

One recurring axial code identified across the dataset was the theme of visiting the location featured in the video. Of 1200 comments, 17,1% (205 comments) contained one or more references to visiting the site either in person or remotely via video. This category was further divided into two sub-categories based on the nature of the visit: remote visits and in-person visits. The most frequently mentioned in vivo codes related to visiting the site were 行く *iku* (to go;112 mentions) and 遠隔参拝 *enkaku sanpai* (remote visit and worship 102 mentions).

5.2.6.1 Remote visit and worship

All of the videos selected for the dataset were filmed on-site, with most offering a first-person perspective that allowed viewers to follow the videographer's visit from beginning to end. In nearly all videos, the YouTuber included the term *enkaku sanpai* (遠隔参拝 remote visit and worship) in the video title, text overlay, or description box. This suggests that the videos were intentionally designed to enable viewers to remotely explore the power spot and, if desired, participate in remote worship. The concept of remote visits was also reflected in the dataset, particularly within the comments sections of two videos. Out of 1200 comments, 11.7% (141 comments) referred to remote visits and worship, often using the term *enkaku sanpai* or similar expressions such as *rimōto sanpai* (リモート参拝

remote visit and worship). All comments related to remote visits were positive and appreciative.

435. のりこさん！ 私のりこさんの遠隔参拝ずっと望んでましたっ。
Noriko-san! I have been hoping for your remote worship [video] for a long time.

The majority of comments were from viewers who reported having completed a remote visit by watching the video and expressed their gratitude to the YouTuber for facilitating the experience.

417. 遠隔参拝させて頂きました🙏
I visited remotely 🙏

Remote visits were regarded by many commenters as a valid substitute for physical visits. Several commenters described feeling as though they were physically present at the location shown in the video. Some users actively enhanced this experience through both physical and psychological actions. For instance, they reported joining their hands in prayer, walking in place, and imagining sensory details such as the smells and wind at the site. Viewers who had previously visited the site also reported that the videos could provide a comparable experience to visiting the site in person.

480. 現地でお参りさせて頂いているようなタイミングの効果音(伝われ)がとても心地よく、時勢柄、なかなか遠出が出来ない中で、本当にその場で参拝させて頂いて居るような気持ちになり、ありがたさが溢れてきて思わず泣きそうになりました。これからも楽しみにしています！

The timing of the sound effects was very pleasant, as if I was visiting the place on-site, and in times like these when you can't easily go on trips, it felt like I really were there to worship, and I was overwhelmed with gratitude and almost cried. I look forward to seeing more!

402. いつも スマホを片手に、その場で足踏みをしながら、現地の風や匂いを想像して実際に足を運んだつもりで参拝させて頂いておられます🌟

When I visit [remotely], I always hold my smart phone in one hand, walk in place, and imagine the wind and the smells of the site, as if I'm truly there. 🌟

For many commenters, the experience was so positive that they expressed an intention or willingness to continue watching the videos and participating in remote worship in the future.

502. これからは遠隔参拝します。機会を与えてくださってありがとうございます。
From now on I will worship remotely. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity.

Many commenters expressed a desire to visit the site in person but were prevented from doing so by various obstacles. The phrase *nakanaka ikenai* (なかなか行けない), translated

here as “cannot easily go” or “cannot seem to go,” was frequently used to convey this. Distance was the most cited barrier. For many, videos of power spots and remote worship provided an accessible alternative, allowing viewers to explore a wide range of destinations without the constraints of geographical distance.

579. 遠方でなかなかいけないので、こちらから参拝させていただきました !
I can't seem to go there because it's so far away, so I worshipped from here !

On the other hand, power spot videos were also watched and appreciated by individuals for whom distance was not a limiting factor, including commenters who lived in the same area as the featured site.

534. 地元なのでよく参拝させていただいている神社です。 . . . とてもステキな パワーの強い 神社ですので遠隔参拝の動画がとても嬉しいです。ありがとうございます。
I often visit this shrine because it is in my hometown. . . . It is a very nice shrine with a strong power, so I'm very happy to there is a remote worship video of it. Thank you.

The second obstacle mentioned by commenters was lack of time. Watching power spots or remote worship videos allowed them to engage with spiritual and religious sites despite their busy schedules. Compared to physical visits, videos required significantly less time and offered the flexibility to participate in remote worship at a personally convenient moment. However, some commenters noted that their lives were so busy that even finding a quiet moment to watch a short video required planning.

426. 先日は動画をみただけでしたが、今日は息子のお昼寝中にゆっくりと遠隔参拝をする事ができました。
The other day I just watched the video, but today I was able to take my time and do a remote worship while my son was napping.

The videos enabled viewers to visit and worship on special occasions, including so-called auspicious days, and to participate in religious and cultural events such as hatsumōde, even when a physical visit was not possible.

535. 巳の日の本日は、私はお出かけの機会がなく。 榛名神社さまに遠隔参拝させていただき、心と体がとても喜んでます❤️
Today, on the day of the snake, I did not have a chance to go out. I visited Haruna Shrine remotely and my mind and body are very pleased ❤️

The COVID-19 pandemic was cited by commenters as a third reason for not visiting power spots, shrines, and temples in person. The pandemic disrupted or entirely prevented some individuals from maintaining their usual visiting and worship practices. Several commenters mentioned adhering to the Japanese government's call for self-restraint

(jishuku 自肅) (Borovoy, 2022, pp. 15–16; Iijima, 2021) and refrained from going out unless necessary.

344. 貴船神社は数回参拝させて頂きました。．．． お礼参りに行きたくてもコロナの影響でなかなか行かれませんでした。しゅうさんのサイトに出会ってから遠隔で参拝をさせて頂いております。

I have visited Kifune Shrine several times. . . . Even though I have been wanting to visit the shrine to express my gratitude, the corona pandemic has prevented me from doing so, but since I came across Shū-san's site, I have been worshipping remotely.

The fourth factor limiting commenters' access to physical locations was disability.

39. 自身が身体障害者なので遠隔参拝を楽しみにしていますいつもありがとう 🥰❤️✨ ございます

I'm looking forward to the remote visits as I am physically disabled. Thank you 🥰❤️✨ for everything.

5.2.6.2 Visiting the site in person

Out of 1200 comments, 8,5% (102 comments) included references to visiting the site in person. Viewers watching a video about a power spot were often reminded of their previous visits, and the videos evoked positive memories. While some commenters briefly mentioned having visited the location, others provided more detailed accounts. These included descriptions and evaluations of the site, explanations of their motivations for visiting, the activities they engaged in, and notable events that occurred during their stay. Commenters also described the emotional and physical responses they experienced while at the location.

488. 戸隠神社には、河鍋暁斎の天井絵の龍図を見るためと、その龍が描かれている御守りをいただきに中社に一度だけ行ったことがあります。すごく神聖な神秘的な空気が漂っていて心身共に浄化された記憶があります。

I went to the middle shrine of Togakushi Shrine once to see Kawanabe Kyōsai's dragon painting on the ceiling and to get a charm with the dragon drawn on it. I remember that the atmosphere there was very sacred and mysterious, and both my mind and body were purified.

Commenters also reflected on how visiting the site had influenced their lives. Some reported a noticeable improvement in their luck following their visit and worship at the site. For others, however, the impact was less favourable, with a few attributing subsequent misfortunes to their experience.

530. 2020年、立春にお参りに行き、正式参拝を受けました。本当にびっくりするくらい、この一年で運気が向上しました(^) いま、ここでお礼参りをすることができ、感謝いたします。ありがとうございます。

In 2020, I went to worship on the first day of spring and performed a formal worship. I was really surprised at how much my luck improved over the past year (^_^) I'm grateful to be able to visit the shrine here now and express my gratitude. Thank you.

Although some commenters indicated a preference for continuing to watch videos rather than visiting power spots in person, many others expressed a strong interest in experiencing the locations in person. The findings suggest that the videos may not only satisfy viewers' immediate curiosity but also inspire a desire to visit the sites themselves. Additionally, they reinforced existing interest and encouraged return visits among those who had previously been to the locations.

436. 遠隔参拝させて頂きありがとうございます♡ . . . 自分の目で見たくなったのでいつかは参拝に行きたいです！ 本当にありがとうございます♡

Thank you for letting me worship remotely ♡ . . . Now I want to see it with my own eyes, so I want to visit there some day! Thank you so much ♡

Several commenters expressed a desire to visit the site in person as a way of showing gratitude for fulfilled wishes and other positive experiences they attributed to watching the video or visiting the site. Others stated that they would make a visit if their wishes were granted in the future.

1060. 検査の前日に偶然この動画を見ました。覚悟を決めて望んだ検査でした。結果、大丈夫でした。。いつかお礼に御参りしたいです。ありがとうございます！！

I watched this video by chance the day before I had an examination. I had prepared myself for the worst. The results of the test were all good. I would like to visit there one day to express my gratitude. Thank you!!

Viewers typically expressed a desire to visit the site “someday.” However, some commenters articulated more specific plans or timelines for their visit. While several intended to travel to the site after the COVID-19 pandemic had subsided, others mentioned plans to go in the near future, such as within the following week. A few even considered visiting on the same day they posted their comments.

414. コロナが終わったら 末娘と行く予定です 遠隔でなく直接行かなければならない神社だと思います

I plan to go there with my youngest daughter after the corona [pandemic] is over. I think it's a shrine we should visit in person, not remotely.

In most cases, the dataset does not indicate whether commenters who expressed a desire or intention to visit the site in person ultimately followed through with their plans. However, a small number of comments suggest that some viewers did visit the location after watching videos related to power spots. One commenter noted that watching the

YouTuber's videos, along with similar content, had inspired them to begin visiting numerous shrines and power spots the previous year, which they credited with improving their life. In another example, a viewer initially expressed interest in visiting the site in the near future. The YouTuber encouraged them to make the trip, and the commenter later reported having visited the site that same morning, also expressing an intention to return.

5.2.7 Power and energy

The sixth axial code identified in the dataset was power and energy. Out of 1200 comments, 10.9% (131 comments) contained a word denoting power or energy. The most common in vivo codes referring to power were パワー pawā (power; 52 mentions), エネルギー enerugii (energy; 20 mentions), 気 ki (qi or vital energy; 15 mentions), 力 chikara (force, power, or energy; 11 mentions), 波動 hadō (energy vibration; 11 mentions), パワー スポット pawāsupotto (power spot; 9 mentions), and 気 ki (qi or vital energy; 8 mentions). Mentions of power were divided into three subcategories: references explicitly using the term power spot, descriptions of sensing or receiving power or energy, and evaluations of the perceived power or energy.

It is worth noting that discussions of power and energy were not evenly distributed across the dataset. Nearly all comments referencing power or energy appeared under videos from two specific YouTubers. The first explicitly stated that their videos were intended to convey the power or energy of the site, rather than to facilitate wish-making. Accordingly, the comments on these videos primarily focused on experiences of power and viewers' physical and emotional responses. However, power-related comments were also found under videos by another YouTuber who followed a more conventional format, offering a full tour of the power spot, providing contextual information, and including moments of worship and prayer. Compared to the other eight YouTubers who produced similar content but sparked little to no discussion of power, this creator appeared to place greater emphasis on the significance of power or energy. A further distinguishing feature of these two YouTubers was their broader content: in addition to showcasing power spots, they also uploaded videos in which they discussed various topics related to spirituality. The uneven distribution of comments concerning power may have been influenced by these factors; however, a comprehensive investigation of the underlying causes lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

5.2.7.1 Power spots

As every video in the dataset included the term power spot in the title and many also in the text overlays, description boxes, channel names, and hashtags, it is reasonable to assume that most viewers were aware that the location was being presented as a power spot. Nevertheless, the term was rarely used by commenters, appearing in only 0.8% (ten comments) of the entire dataset. The in vivo code *pawāsupotto* (パワースポット power spot) appeared nine times, while its abbreviated variation *pawasupo* (パワスポ) was mentioned once. Four of these ten comments were posted by the same user on a single video, leaving only seven unique users who used the term in their comments.

No clear pattern emerged from the limited number of comments that included the term power spot. However, these comments reflect many of the thematic categories identified in the dataset. One commenter, for example, had not been aware a shrine in their prefecture was considered a power spot associated with financial fortune. Another user explained that they began visiting shrines and power spots after watching related videos, and both they and another commenter expressed gratitude to the YouTuber for enabling them to visit distant power spots. Comments that mentioned power spots also included a viewer describing their experience of watching a “power spot video” and another expressing anticipation for new content on the “power spot channel.” One commenter suggested that power spots should be visited alone or with family rather than as part of a bus tour. Another advised viewers to regard shrines primarily as sacred spaces where deities are enshrined, rather than simply as power spots.

199. パワースポットとは バスでいくものでなく 一人や家族でいくものなんです
Power spots aren't something you go to by bus, they're something you visit alone or with your family

797. みなさん、パワースポットとかいう事ではなく神様の鎮座されている場所だという意識の元、参拝されて欲しいのです。
I would like all of you to visit the shrine with the awareness that it is not a power spot or something like that, but a place where gods are enshrined.

5.2.7.2 Feeling the power or energy

In addition to being popular sites for making wishes, power spots are said to emit energy or power that visitors can sense, absorb, and be revitalized by. The data collected for this thesis indicate that some individuals believe this power or energy can also be perceived through videos of power spots. In this dataset, 7.4% of comments (89 out of 1,200)

included claims of having sensed or received power or energy while watching the video. The most frequently found in vivo codes indicating sensing or receiving power or energy were 感じる *kanjiru* (to feel, to sense; 26 mentions), 頂く *itadaku* (to receive, to get; 6 mentions), and 伝わる *tsutawaru* (to be conveyed, to be transmitted; 5 mentions). Only comments containing a word that explicitly referred to power or energy, namely the in vivo codes *pawā* (パワー), *enerugii* (エネルギー), *ki* (気), *chikara* (力), *hadō* (波動), and *ki* (氣), were included in the count. However, there were also comments in which users reported sensing “something” without being able to articulate further. Notably, the two videos specifically intended to convey power through the screen attracted a significant number of comments describing physical and emotional responses. While terms such as power and energy were not always mentioned, these comments nonetheless contribute to the broader discourse surrounding these concepts.

Given that the term power spot appeared in only ten comments across the entire dataset, it is not possible to determine whether the majority of commenters regarded the locations and objects depicted in the videos as power spots. Even when discussing power or energy, viewers may not have identified the site as a power spot. Nonetheless, many commenters expressed a belief in the existence of a power or energy that could be sensed or received. A few attributed this power to the deities enshrined at the site, while others described receiving energy from both the shrine and its natural surroundings, particularly the mountains. Natural phenomena, such as light, rainbows, the sound of ringing bells, and running water, were also perceived as sources of power.

Most individuals who reported sensing power did not appear to question the authenticity of their experience. Instead, they responded with enthusiasm and appreciation, with several providing detailed accounts of their sensations. For many, the experience of sensing power or energy through a video was described as both memorable and emotionally moving.

286. 両手をかざして間もなく両手の平が暖かくなりました。これが氣なんですね。感動しました。

I held up both hands and soon both of my palms became warm. So this is qi. It impressed me deeply.

521. とても大きなパワーを感じ取る事が出来ました🙏👉 . . . 清々しく、何とも言えない大きなパワーに包まれました💎 幸せが、また一つ頂けました😊 ありがとうございます!!

I was able to sense a really great power 🙌👉 . . . I felt like I was enveloped by a refreshing, indescribable great power ✨ I got one more blessing 😊 Thank you!!

Some commenters appeared initially sceptical about the possibility of sensing power or energy and expressed surprise at the sensations evoked by the video. This sense of astonishment was conveyed through expressions such as *fushigi* (不思議 strange) and *uso* (うそ unbelievable, no way).

278. 不思議…気を感じますね。
Strange... I feel the qi.

209. えっ、うそ、ホントに波動をジンジン感じました。有り難う御座います。
Huh, unbelievable, I really felt a tingling energy vibration. Thank you.

Some users believed that only certain videos could transmit energy, prompting them to assess the authenticity and quality of the content. The two commenters quoted below compared the video in question to other similar videos and concluded that the energy they experienced was genuine, as it was absent from the others.

310. 指をかざして他の動画と比べてみたら本当にじんわりと温かい気を感じました！
🙌❤️ ありがとうございます！
When compared to other videos by holding my fingers over them, I really did feel a gradually increasing warm energy from this one! 🙌❤️ Thank you!

365. この動画本物です。他の動画は本物霊能者みたいだけど気を全く感じ無い。
This video is real. Other videos seem like real mediums, but I don't feel the qi at all in them.

The dataset also included comments in which users expressed uncertainty about whether their physical and emotional experiences were caused by a power or energy. Observations such as white mist stirring in the video, the smell of running water, a sensation of warmth, and sudden improvements in health were among the phenomena that commenters speculated might be signs of energy transmitted through the video. Some users sought to better understand these experiences and invited the YouTuber and other viewers to share their interpretations.

5.2.7.3 Evaluations of power or energy

Out of 1200 comments, 4,4% (53 comments) included commenters' descriptions and evaluations of the power or energy. The power or energy was most frequently described as either overwhelmingly strong and impressive or as warm and pleasant. Some commenters expressed a sense of awe, with one even cautioning others by referring to it as *kowai gurai*

no sugoi pawā (恐いぐらいの凄いパワー frighteningly great power). The most frequently used words to describe the power or energy were *sugoi* (凄い amazing, great, terrific), *tsuyoi* (強い strong, intense), and *ōkii* (大きい big, great).

78. 私は二度神様にお願いをし、願いが叶いました！ 本当に凄いパワーです 😊
I made a wish to the god twice and my wish came true! It really is an amazing power 😊

5.2.8 Gratitude

As demonstrated in the analysis of axial codes, the majority of commenters expressed a positive and engaged attitude toward the videos. In addition to expressing positive feelings, emotions, and evaluations, numerous commenters explicitly articulated gratitude. Out of 1200 comments, 32.2% (386 comments) contained at least one clear expression of gratitude. The most frequently found in vivo codes related to gratitude were ありがとうございます arigatōgozaimasu (thank you; 414 mentions, including 11 spelling and grammatical variations), and 感謝 kansha (gratitude, thanks; 98 mentions). Some commenters directed their gratitude toward deities, thanking them for assistance, protection, or the fulfilment of wishes. The dataset also included numerous expressions of appreciation towards the YouTuber for creating and sharing the videos, suggesting that the videos were highly valued. Several commenters noted that they had been searching for a video or creator that aligned with their preferences and expressed satisfaction upon finding one. Additionally, the YouTubers were thanked for enabling remote participation in worship and visits to the sites.

105. 大変貴重な動画ありがとうございます感謝致します
Thank you for the very precious video. I really appreciate it.

5.2.9 Use of emoji and kaomoji

Finally, before turning to the discussion of the selective code, I will briefly examine the use of *emoji* and *kaomoji* within the dataset. An emoji is a pictogram or ideogram that is used to express an emotion or idea in digital communication. Kaomoji is a Japanese style of emoticon, which employs pictorial representations of facial expressions using characters and punctuation marks to convey emotions, moods, or reactions (Giannoulis & Wilde, 2020). Out of 1200 comments, 40% (481 comments) included at least one emoji or kaomoji. The most frequently found emoji were various smiling and laughing faces such as 😊 😄 😂 😃 😆 (179 mentions), stars such as ✨ 🌟 (175 mentions), folded hands 🙏 (124

mentions), hearts such as ❤️❤️💖 (92 mentions), a person bowing deeply 🙇🙇 (51 mentions), a four-leaf clover 🍀 (37 mentions), and musical notes 🎵🎶 (35 mentions). Additionally, a variety of nature-related emojis, including the sun, moon, flowers, and rainbow, were used. Furthermore, emojis relating to religion and spirituality, such as torii gates and dragons, were also used. The overwhelming majority of the emoji in the data set can be interpreted as having a positive or neutral connotation, and they were used in a variety of contexts. The most common symbols for conveying gratitude were hearts and stars. Stars were also used when expressing wishes and when discussing various themes related to spirituality, such as power. The folded hands or praying emoji and the emoji depicting a person bowing deeply were primarily used together with wishes, and on occasion to express gratitude.

While the emoji representing facial expressions were almost invariably smiling or laughing faces, the kaomoji showed a wider range of emotional expressions, including joy (for example: (*^o^*)), confusion (for example: (¯ _ ¯) and sadness (for example: (; _ ;)). Some kaomoji seemed to represent greeting or enthusiasm (for example: (≧▽≦)/ and \ (^o^)/). Among the various kaomoji, one that stood out was a representation of *dogeza*, a deep bow performed while kneeling (for example: m(_ _)m; 14 mentions). Commenters used it together with expressions of gratitude and respect, wishes and requests, as well as apologies.

5.3 Selective code

After examining the in vivo codes and axial codes, I will now move on to discuss the selective code, which is the final stage of the threefold coding process. The selective code indicates the main theme or core category of the discussions in the comments sections of the power spot videos (Zeiler, 2018). In the first two phases of coding, several potential core categories emerged from the data. However, as the coding progressed, it became evident that certain codes were too abstract or vague, some failed to encompass all relevant categories, and some proved to be less relevant than initially anticipated. After repeatedly reviewing and reapplying the categories and sub-categories to the data and relating them to each other, I arrived at a core category that captures the main theme of the discussion. However, the data covered a broad range of subjects, some of which aligned more closely with the selective code than others.

The code that most accurately captures the primary theme of the discussion was “seeking and receiving of benefits”. The most obvious example of this theme was the wide range of wishes and prayers expressed in more than half of the comments. The number of comments expressing a desire for material, mental, and physical well-being was significantly greater than that of any other category. It is also worth noting that the vast majority of commenters who expressed a wish did not discuss any other topic in their comments. While the specific content of the wishes varied, they all shared a common objective: to enhance well-being, whether for oneself, one’s loved ones, or the broader community. An improved financial situation, recovery from illness, good health, employment, favourable working conditions, happiness, a successful love life, and the end of a global viral pandemic are all factors that have the potential to positively impact our well-being and quality of life.

In the comment sections of the power spot videos, power and energy were associated with healing, rejuvenation, and purification of one’s body and mind. Many commenters reported having experienced or received power or energy through watching the video. Several commenters had raised their hand over or touched their device to feel or receive power or energy. Commenters were eager to experience the power and its potential benefits, whether driven by deliberate intent or curiosity.

The videos prompted a range of emotional, psychological, and physical reactions among the commenters. The responses were generally perceived as positive and beneficial, even when the commenter had not actively sought them out. The motivation to engage with content that has a beneficial impact on one’s mental or physical well-being was identified as one of the key factors influencing the decision to view the videos. For instance, commenters who were experiencing physical or emotional distress viewed the video to find solace and tranquillity. Some commenters had previously had positive experiences when viewing the video or other similar content, which led them to revisit the material when they felt unwell and in need of relief.

In addition to the experience of power and energy, the power spot videos provided a platform for viewers to engage with a range of spiritual forces, including gods, deities, and spirits believed to inhabit the sites. Deities were petitioned for blessings, protection, and guidance, and their presence was met with awe and appreciation. Many commenters appeared to be driven by the prospect of receiving benefits from these interactions, including the fulfilment of specific desires or the establishment of favourable relationships

with the gods. Other spiritual beings, such as evil spirits, were discussed with the intention of finding a way of expelling them, thus benefiting the commenter. Furthermore, other subjects connected to religion and spirituality, such as specific auspicious days and miracles, are associated with the pursuit and bestowal of benefits.

Moreover, commenters derived practical benefits from the videos, as they enabled viewers to engage in a range of actions without the necessity of physically visiting the location, which for many commenters would have been challenging or even impossible. Watching a video provided a convenient and accessible means of exploring a spiritual or religious site remotely from the comfort of one's home. Commenters were able to learn about the power spot and the historical, spiritual, and cultural heritage associated with it, revisit memories of previous visits, and gain inspiration for future visits. Furthermore, the videos served as a channel for praying, making wishes, interacting with a power or deities, and expressing gratitude and respect.

The above discussion demonstrates that the selective code "seeking and receiving of benefits" encompasses not only the pursuit of so-called this-worldly benefits, illustrated by the large number of wishes, engagement with power and energy, and search for physical and psychological responses, but also the practical benefits of accessing power spots, shrines, temples, and other sacred sites remotely. The considerable number of commenters who expressed gratitude to the YouTuber for creating and publishing the video indicates that the videos were perceived as useful regardless of whether the commenters' intention was to engage in religious or spiritual activities, such as praying or making wishes, to seek relief from an ailment, to explore the site for leisure, to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere and natural scenery, or to gather information. The videos were described in favourable terms, with many commenters expressing anticipation for future content. The term "seeking" in the selective code is not intended to imply that every commenter had a pre-established objective before viewing the video. As evidenced by the analysis, some commenters watched it out of curiosity. In most cases the initial motive for watching remains unclear. Nevertheless, the significant number of commenters who expressed requests and prayers, or attempted to feel the power or energy emanating from the power spot suggests that the desire to seek benefits was awakened at the latest while watching the video. Even those commenters who did not believe in the concept of power spots and were not motivated by the pursuit of benefits still participated in the discourse, albeit from a different perspective.

6 Discussion

My analysis of the comment sections on YouTube videos showcasing Japanese power spots revealed a wide range of discussion topics, which were ultimately unified under one central theme or selective code: seeking and receiving of benefits. This theme captures the complex interplay of spiritual, emotional, and practical motivations that drive online engagement with spaces such as power spots. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the existing literature on power spots and digital religion and spirituality.

Prior research has shown that visits to power spots are often driven by the pursuit of this-worldly benefits (Carter, 2018; Horie, 2017; Yamato, 2015). The desires expressed in the comment sections of the power spot videos closely mirrored those commonly sought when visiting power spots, shrines, and temples in person. Previous research has identified several common requests, including good health and longevity, success in love and marriage, safe childbirth, financial security, traffic safety, academic and business success, sporting victories for Japan, personal and family safety and protection, recovery from illness, enhanced personal well-being, and a life free of worries (Horie, 2017, pp. 204, 208; Reader & Tanabe, 1998, pp. 2, 16, 47–49). Reader and Tanabe (1998) explained that in Japan, requests are traditionally written on ema (wooden votive tablets) and left at shrines or temples to convey one's innermost desires to the deity. The public expression of one's wishes makes them appear more tangible and reinforces a connection between the individual, the place, and the deity (p. 197). Within the context of YouTube, writing one's hopes and prayers in the comment section can be seen as a digitally mediated equivalent of this tradition, offering a valuable resource to individuals unable to access the site in person. Some YouTubers positioned themselves as intermediaries, claiming to deliver the viewers' prayers, thereby reinforcing the role of digital media as a space not only for viewing but also for participating in spiritual acts.

The power or energy associated with power spots is often linked to healing, rejuvenation, and the purification of body and mind (Carter, 2018, p. 158; Horie, 2017, p. 192). Many believe that healing occurs through experiencing this power, traditionally by making physical visits. My analysis of the comment sections of power spot videos indicates that viewers often perceive these videos as channels for experiencing power or energy remotely, without the need for physical presence at the site. The power, as well as users' engagement with it through video viewing or actions such as commenting, is perceived by users as real

and spiritually effective. Even though the medium is digital, the emotional and sensory responses expressed by commenters suggest a deeply felt experience. Actions such as holding a hand over the screen or physically touching the device to receive power, writing requests and prayers, addressing a deity through the comment section, as well as descriptions of emotional or physical responses during viewing, highlight an experiential dimension that transcends geographical distance. They also demonstrate how viewers sought to establish a sensory and spiritual connection with the power spot. Although not all actions performed by the users happened within cyberspace, acts such as writing one's wishes, prayers, and testimonies of fulfilled wishes in the comments sections constitute what Miczek (2008) referred to as online rituals. Many of the comments could also be regarded as *intānetto sanpai*, or online worship, a concept first introduced by Reader and Tanabe in 1998. The commenters themselves called it remote worship (*enkaku sanpai* and *rimōto sanpai*). Power spot videos and their comment sections seem to operate as contemporary sacred spaces through which people seek this-worldly benefits and spiritual experiences. The digital medium does not diminish this function but appears to extend it, offering new channels through which they may be accessed.

Beyond spiritual experience, the videos also afforded practical benefits: they provided a safe, fast and inexpensive access to remote or otherwise inaccessible sites, offered educational insights into the locations' historical and cultural contexts, evoked memories of previous visits, and served as inspiration for future travel. The mentions of remote visits and remote worship featured prominently in the dataset, highlighting a demand for alternative ways to access and experience power spots. Commenters who had difficulty accessing the site in person expressed gratitude for the opportunity to visit the site remotely. Power spot and remote worship videos provided users with an opportunity to engage in what Jacobs (2007) termed asynchronous cyber-rituals. They may also be regarded as a form of cyberpilgrimage, in which a combination of online sightseeing and spiritual experiences and expression serves either as a substitute for, or a preparatory stage to, physical pilgrimage (Hill-Smith, 2011; MacWilliams, 2002). The desire for remote access to spiritually significant places and popular travel destinations is not new, but digital tools have drastically expanded its scope and reach.

7 Conclusions

The present thesis examined user-generated content related to the power spot phenomenon in Japan with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of individuals interested in power spots, regardless of whether or not they visit them in person. The primary objective was to identify the topics discussed by users in the comment sections of YouTube videos featuring power spots in Japan. Using a qualitative approach and a three-stage coding process adapted from Zeiler's (2018) coding comments on gaming videos method, 1,200 user comments from 12 videos were categorised into seven main thematic areas. These themes were ultimately unified under one selective code: the seeking and receiving of benefits, which refers to the pursuit of so-called this-worldly benefits and the practical benefits of accessing power spots, shrines, temples, and other sacred sites remotely. The resulting core category most effectively captured the diverse expressions of motivations, perceptions, feelings, beliefs, and experiences evident in the comment sections.

The study also illustrates how social media platforms can serve as a means of accessing and engaging with spiritual locations and tourist destinations. By analysing user-generated content and privileging the perspectives of viewers, this thesis offers a novel contribution to the study of power spots, complementing existing research that has primarily focused on representations in print media and the practice of physically visiting the sites. It demonstrates how digital media platforms have become important arenas for contemporary spiritual expression and everyday engagement with sacred sites and travel destinations. They also serve as spaces for interacting with individuals with similar interests. The findings of this study show that online environments have the capacity to reflect and extend offline experiences of visiting power spots and other spiritual and culturally significant sites. As global events such as pandemics, climate change, armed conflicts, and economic instability increasingly affect the accessibility of various destinations, the need for alternative ways to experience and interact with these locations becomes more pressing. The data for this study was collected during a period when travel was still limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a context that was also reflected in several comments. For many viewers, power spot videos served as a form of virtual travel and remote participation in spiritual practices. These observations suggest that digital platforms may assume an increasingly important role in how individuals engage with sacred and touristic sites, particularly during periods of crisis or restricted mobility. At the

same time, videos and other forms of remote access may not only offer substitute experiences but also stimulate viewers' interest and deepen their desire to visit the sites in person.

Carter (2018) found that the level of interest and commitment to the phenomenon varied widely among visitors to power spots. At one end of the spectrum were dedicated power spot enthusiasts who visit the sites frequently, while some visitors were described by Carter as merely curious participants. However, the majority were situated somewhere in the middle (p. 155). As the data set for this study consisted of the 100 most recent comments from each of the twelve most commented YouTube videos featuring Japanese power spots, it may not fully reflect the breadth and diversity of user engagement and discussion topics found across the wider spectrum of power spot videos. These limitations indicate that, while the findings provide valuable insights into patterns of online interaction with power spot content, they represent only a portion of the wider discourse and should be interpreted with consideration of the study's sampling scope and selection criteria.

During the initial stages of data collection, video-sharing platforms other than YouTube were also briefly explored. This preliminary investigation indicated that many of the most commented power spot videos on TikTok featured comment sections largely focused on wishes and prayers related to love and finding a romantic partner. In contrast, the most common wishes in the present YouTube-based dataset concerned financial well-being and economic success. This observation suggests that user engagement patterns and discussion topics may vary across platforms. However, a systematic comparison of user behaviour across platforms was beyond the scope of this thesis. The categorised data set of the present study can be used as a basis for subsequent research, such as discourse analysis or extended content analysis, thereby allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the linguistic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions present in user interactions with power spot content. As suggested by Campbell & Vitullo (2016), more studies on religious use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram are needed to understand their impact on religious practices and understanding. Direct engagement with users through surveys or in-depth interviews could provide a deeper understanding of their experiences, motivations, and perceptions. Additionally, examining the audiovisual content of power spot videos and other forms of user-generated media could shed light on how power spots are represented and mediated in digital environments.

References

- Acar, A. & Deguchi, A. (2013). Culture and social media usage: Analysis of Japanese Twitter users. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce Studies*, 4(1), 21–32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7903/ijecs.989>
- Ama, T. (2005). *Why are the Japanese non-religious? Japanese spirituality: Being non-religious in a religious culture*. University Press of America.
- Anderson, R. W. (1991). What constitutes religious activity? (I). *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 18(4), 369–372. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18874/JJRS.18.4.1991.369-372>
- Andrews, D. (2014). Genesis at the shrine: The votive art of an anime pilgrimage. *Mechademia*, 9, 217–233.
- Associated Press. (1987, August 15a). Harmonic convergence: 144,000 needed to establish field of trust. *Times Daily*, 118(227). <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=8V8eAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=LskEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=5771%2C2464174>
- Associated Press. (1987, August 15b). Convergences seek harmony. *Reading Eagle*, 13. <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=YiAyAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=ouUFAAAAIIBAJ&pg=3744%2C141928>
- Azuma, M. (2014). ポストモダンツーリズムにおけるイメージの生産：パワースポットをめぐる言説の分析を手掛かりとして Posutomodan tsūrizumu niokeru imēji no seisan: pawāsupotto o meguru gensetsu no bunseki o tegakari toshite. *Shakaigakubu Ronsō*, 24(2), 23–53.
- Baffelli, E., Reader, I., & Staemmler, B. (2011). Media and religion in Japan. In E. Baffelli, I. Reader, & B. Staemmler (Eds.), *Japanese religions on the internet: Innovation, representation and authority* (pp. 7–19). Routledge.
- Beninger, K. (2017). Social media users' views on the ethics of social media research. In L. Sloan, & A. Quan-Haase (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social media research methods* (pp. 57–73). SAGE Publications.
- Bovee, N. & Cvitkovic, R. (2009). Anonymity in computer-mediated communication in Japanese and Western contexts: Comparisons and critiques. *Cyber University Bulletin*, 2, 41–52. <https://www.cyber-u.ac.jp/about/bulletin/bulletin2.html>

- Borovoy, A. (2022). The burdens of self-restraint: Social measures and the containment of covid-19 in Japan. *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 20(19), Article 5759. <https://apjif.org/-Amy-Borovoy/5759/article.pdf>
- Campbell, H. A. (2010). *When religion meets new media*. Routledge.
- Campbell, H. A. (2013). Introduction: The rise of the study of digital religion. In H. A. Campbell (Ed.), *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds* (pp. 1–21). Routledge.
- Campbell, H. A. (2017). Surveying theoretical approaches within digital religion studies. *New Media & Society*, 19(1), 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146144481664991>
- Campbell, H. A. & Vitullo, A. (2016). Assessing changes in the study of religious communities in digital religion studies. *Church, Communication and Culture*, 1(1), 73–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2016.1181301>
- Capurro, R. (2005). Privacy. An intercultural perspective. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 7(1), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-005-4407-4>
- Carter, C. (2018). Power spots and the charger landscape of Shinto. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 45(1), 145–173. <https://doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.45.1.2018.145-173>
- Coats, C. (2009). Sedona, Arizona: New Age pilgrim-tourists destination. *Cross Currents*, 59(3), 383–389. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-3881.2009.00086.x>
- Dorman, B. (2016). “Spiritual tourists” and local healers at a Hawaiian “power spot.” *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture*, 40, 90–103. <https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/journal/3/issue/40/article/142>
- Duteil-Ogata, F. (2015). New funeral practices in Japan: From the computer-tomb to the online tomb (G. Varro, Trans.). *Le religieux sur Internet / Religion on the Web*, 8, 11–27. <https://doi.org/10.11588/rel.2015.0.20320>
- Ehara, H. (2004). *スピリチュアル・サンクチュアリシリーズ: 江原啓之神紀行*
Supirichuaru sankuchuari shirīzu: Ehara Hiroyuki kamikikō. Magazine House.
- Fukamizu, K. (2007). Internet use among religious followers: Religious postmodernism in Japanese Buddhism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(3), 977–998. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00359.x>
- Giannoulis, E., & Wilde L. R. A. (2020). Emoticons, kaomoji, and emoji: The transformation of communication in the digital age. In E. Giannoulis & L. R. A. Wilde (Eds.), *Emoticons, kaomoji, and emoji: The transformation of communication in the digital age* (pp. 1–22). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429491757-1>

- Helland, C. (2000). Religion online/online religion and virtual communitas. In J. K. Hadden & D. E. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion on the internet: Research prospects and promises* (pp. 205–224). JAI Press.
- Helland, C. (2005). Online religion as lived religion: Methodological issues in the study of religious participation on the internet. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 1(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.11588/rel.2005.1.380>
- Hill-Smith, C. (2011). Cyberpilgrimage: The (virtual) reality of online pilgrimage experience. *Religion Compass*, 5(6), 236–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2011.00277.x>
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of religion: A theory of the media as agents of religious change. *Northern Lights*, 6(1), 9–26. https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.6.1.9_1
- Horie, N. (2009). Spirituality and the spiritual in Japan: Translation and transformation. *Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies*, 5.
- Horie, N. (2017). The making of power spots: From New Age spirituality to Shinto spirituality. In J. Borup & M. Qvortrup Fibiger (Eds.), *Eastspirit: Transnational spirituality and religious circulation in east and west* (pp. 192–217). Brill.
- Horii, M. (2018). *The category of 'religion' in contemporary Japan: Shūkyō and temple Buddhism*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Højsgaard, M. T. & Warburg, M. (2005). Introduction: Waves of research. In M. T. Højsgaard & M. Warburg (Eds.), *Religion and cyberspace* (pp. 1–11). Routledge.
- Iijima, W. (2021). Jishuku as a Japanese way for anti-COVID-19: Some basic reflections. *Historical Social Research, Supplement*, 33, 284–301. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.suppl.33.2021.284-301>
- Inoue, N. (2000). From religious conformity to innovation: New ideas of religious journey and holy places. *Social Compass*, 47(1), 21–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003776800047001004>
- Ishii, K. (2008). Uses and gratifications of online communities in Japan. *Observatorio (OBS*) Journal*, 2(3), 025–037. <https://obs.obercom.pt/index.php/obs/article/view/176/179>
- Ivakhiv, A. J. (2001). *Claiming sacred ground: Pilgrims and politics at Glastonbury and Sedona*. Indiana University Press.
- Ivakhiv, A. (2007). Power trips: Making sacred space through New Age pilgrimage. In D. Kemp & J. R. Lewis (Eds.), *Handbook of New Age* (pp. 263–286). Brill.

- Jacobs, S. (2007). Virtually sacred: The performance of asynchronous cyber-rituals in online spaces. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, 1103–1121.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00365.x>
- Josephson, J. Ā. (2012). *The invention of religion in Japan*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Joyce, T. & Masuda, H. (2018). Introduction to the multi-script Japanese writing system and word processing. In H.K. Pae (Ed.) *Writing systems, reading processes, and cross-linguistic influences: Reflections from the Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages* (pp. 179–199). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
<https://doi.org/10.1075/bpa.7.09joy>
- Kalinock, S. (2006). Going on pilgrimage online: The representation of Shia rituals on the internet. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 2(1), 6–23.
<https://doi.org/10.11588/rel.2006.1.373>
- Karaflogka, A. (2002). Religious discourse and cyberspace. *Religion*, 32(4), 279–291.
<https://doi.org/10.1006/rel.2002.0405>
- Kiyota, M. (1991). 発見！パワースポット *Hakken! Pawāsupotto*. Ohta Publishing.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*. SAGE.
- Kurosaki, H. (2011). Preserving the dignity of Shinto shrines in the age of the internet: A social context analysis. In E. Baffelli, I. Reader, & B. Staemmler (Eds.) *Japanese religions on the internet: Innovation, representation and authority* (pp. 62–79). Routledge.
- Kuula, A. (2006). *Tutkimusetiikka: aineistojen hankinta, käyttö ja säilytys*. Vastapaino.
- Lövheim, M. (2014). Mediatization and religion. In K. Lundby (Ed.) *Mediatization of communication* (pp. 547–570). De Gruyter Mouton.
- MacWilliams, M. W. (2002). Virtual pilgrimages on the internet. *Religion*, 32(4), 315–335.
<https://doi.org/10.1006/rel.2002.0408>
- Makino, S. & Tsutsui, M. (1989). *A dictionary of basic Japanese grammar*. The Japan Times.
- McKee, H. A., & Porter, J. E. (2009). *The ethics of internet research: a rhetorical, case-based process*. Peter Lang.
- McLaughlin, L. (2013). What have religious groups done after 3.11? Part 2: From religious mobilization to “spiritual care.” *Religion Compass*, 7(8), 309–325.

- Miczek, N. (2008). Online rituals in virtual worlds: Christian online services between dynamics and stability. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 3(1), 144–173. <https://doi.org/10.11588/rel.2008.1.392>
- Nakada, M. & Tamura, T. (2005). Japanese conceptions of privacy: An intercultural perspective. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 7(1), 27–36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-005-0453-1>
- O’Leary, S. (1996). Cyberspace as sacred space: Communicating religion on computer networks. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 64(4), 781–808. <https://doi-org.libproxy.helsinki.fi/10.1093/jaarel/LXIV.4.781>
- Padoan, T. (2019). Reassembling the Lucky Gods: Pilgrim economies, tourists, and local communities in global Tokyo. *Journeys*, 20(1), 75–97. <https://doi.org/10.3167/jys.2019.200105>
- Radde-Antweiler, K. (2008). Virtual religion: An approach to religious and ritual typography of Second Life. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 3.1, 174–211. <https://doi.org/10.11588/rel.2008.1.393>
- Radde-Antweiler, K., Waltmathe, M., & Zeiler, X. (2014). Video gaming, Let’s Plays, and religion: The relevance of researching gameenvironments. *Gamevironments*, 1, 1–36.
- Radde-Antweiler, K., & Zeiler, X. (2015). Methods for analyzing Let’s Plays: Context analysis for gaming videos on YouTube. *Gamevironments*, 2, 100–139.
- Reader, I. (1991). What constitutes religious activity? (II). *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 18(4), 373–376. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18874/JJRS.18.4.1991.373-376>
- Reader, I. (2016). Problematic conceptions and critical developments: The construction and relevance of ‘religion’ and religious studies in Japan. *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions*, 3(1), 198–218.
- Reader, I., & Tanabe, G. J., Jr. (1998). *Practically religious: Worldly benefits and the common religion of Japan*. University of Hawai‘i Press.
- Roth, C. (2019). Essays in vagueness: Aspects of diffused religiosity in Japan. In F. Rambelli (Ed.), *Spirits and animism in contemporary Japan* (pp. 95–108). Bloomsbury.
- Rots, A. P. (2014). The rediscovery of “sacred space” in contemporary Japan: Intrinsic quality or discursive strategy? In J. Liu & M. Sano (Eds.), *Rethinking “Japanese studies” from practices in the Nordic Region* (pp. 31–50). International Research Center for Japanese Studies. <http://doi.org/10.15055/00001113>

- Rots, A. P. (2019a). Strangers in the sacred grove: The changing meanings of Okinawan utaki. *Religions*, 10(5), 298. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10050298>
- Rots, A. P. (2019b). “This is not a powerspot”: Heritage tourism, sacred space, and conflicts of authority at Sēfa Utaki. *Asian Ethnology*, 78(1), 155–180. <https://asianethnology.org/articles/2173>
- Rots, A. P., & Teeuwen, M. (2017). Introduction: Formations of the secular in Japan. *Japan Review: Journal of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies*, 30, 3–20. <http://doi.org/10.15055/00006730>
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Shields, J. (2010). Beyond belief: Japanese approaches to the meaning of religion. *Studies in Religion*, 39(2), 133–149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008429810364118>
- Shimazono, S. (1998). 日本における「宗教」概念の形成-井上哲次郎のキリスト教批判をめぐって Nihon ni okeru “shūkyō” gainen no keisei: Inoue Tetsujirō no Kirisutokyō hihan o megutte. In T. Yamaori & T. Osada (Eds.), *日本人はキリスト教をどのようにに受容したか Nihonjin wa kirisutokyō o dono yō ni juyō shita ka* (pp. 61–75). Kokusai Nihon Bunka Kenkyū Sentā.
- Shimazono, S. (1999). “New age movement” or “new spirituality movements and culture”? *Social Compass*, 46(2), 121–133.
- Shimazono, S. (2012). From salvation to spirituality: The contemporary transformation of religions viewed from East Asia. *Religious Studies in Japan*, 1, 3–23
- Sipchen, B., & Weisman J. (1987, August 12). Harmonic Convergence: A braver new world?: People around the globe expected to help kick off mysterious New-Age event. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-08-12-vw-338-story.html>
- Siuda, P. (2021). Mapping digital religion: Exploring the need for new typologies. *Religions*, 12(6), 373. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060373>
- Smith, J.S. (1996). Japanese writing. In P.T. Daniels & W. Bright (Eds.), *The world’s writing systems* (pp. 209–2017). Oxford University Press.
- Suga, N. (2010). パワースポットとしての神社 Pawāsupotto to shite no jinja. In K. Ishii (Ed.), *神道はどこへいくか Shintō wa doko e iku ka* (pp. 232–252). Perikansha.

- Sui, W., Sui, A., & Rhodes, R. E. (2022). What to watch: Practical considerations and strategies for using YouTube for research. *Digital Health*, 8.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/20552076221123707>
- Suzuki, D. (1972). *Japanese Spirituality* (N. Waddell, Trans.). Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. (Original work published 1944)
- Tsukada, H., & Ōmi, T. (2011). Religious issues in Japan 2010: A deluge of “religious” information on new religions, power spots, funeral services, and Buddhist statues. *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture*, 35, 24–47.
<https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/journal/3/issue/35/article/118>
- Tsuria, R. & Campbell, H. A. (2021). Introduction to the study of digital religion. In H. A. Campbell & R. Tsuria (Eds.), *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in digital media* (2nd ed.) (p. 1–21). Routledge.
- Turtiainen, R., & Östman, S. (2013). Verkkotutkimuksen eettiset haasteet: Armi ja anoreksia. In S.-M. Laaksonen, J. Matikainen, & M. Tikka (Eds.), *Otteita verkosta: verkon ja sosiaalisen median tutkimusmenetelmät* (pp. 49–67). Vastapaino.
- Uchikawa, K. (2016). パワースポット社寺参詣の研究 Pawāsupotto shaji sankei no kenkyū. *Contents Tourism Review*, 3, 41–48.
https://doi.org/10.34400/contentstourism.3.0_41
- Uchikawa, K. (2017). パワースポットを活用した観光地域づくりの研究: 青森県の取り組みを中心に Pawāsupotto o katsuyō shita kankōzukuri no kenkyū: Aomoriken no torikumi o chūshin ni. *Kantō Toshigakkai Nenpō*, 18, 59–66.
https://doi.org/10.24682/ksurb.18.0_59
- UK Government Digital Service. (2018). *Romanization systems. Romanization of Japanese kana: Modified Hepburn system BGN/PCGN 1976 Agreement*. Ministry of Defence. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/romanization-systems>
- Wakimoto, T. (1986). パワースポット Pawāsupotto. In *現代用語の基礎知識 Gendaiyōgo no kisochishiki* (p. 690). Jiyū Kokuminsha.
- Wang, S. S. (2016). To tweet or not to tweet: Factors affecting the intensity of Twitter usage in Japan and the online and offline sociocultural norms. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 2637–2660. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/5004>
- Williams, A. M. (2013). Surfing therapeutic landscapes: Exploring cyberpilgrimage. *Culture and Religion*, 14(1), 78–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2012.756407>

- Yamato, Y. (2015). 雑誌記事における明治神宮・清正井のパワースポット化の過程
Zasshikiji niokeru Meiji Jingū Kiyomasanoido no pawā supottoka no katei.
Kokugakuin Zasshi, 116(11), 87–108.
- Yasuda, S. (2021). Spiritual legitimacy in contemporary Japan: A case study of the power spot phenomenon and the Haruna Shrine, Gunma. *Religions*, 12(3), 177.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12030177>
- Zeiler, X. (2018). Coding comments on gaming videos: YouTube Let's Plays, Asian games, and Buddhist and Hindu religions. In V. Šisler, K. Radde-Antweiler, & Z. Zeiler (Eds.), *Methods for studying video games and religion* (pp. 189–203). Routledge.
- Öhman, C., Gorwa, R., & Floridi, L. (2019). Prayer-bots and religious worship on Twitter: A call for a wider research agenda. *Minds and Machines*, 29, 331–338.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11023-019-09498-3>

Software

- ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH. (2021). *ATLAS.ti* (Version 9.1.7.0) [Qualitative data analysis software]. <https://atlasti.com>
- DeepL SE. (2024–2025). *DeepL Write* [Large language model].
<https://www.deepl.com/write>
- Microsoft. (2025). *Copilot* [Large language model]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>
- OpenAI. (2024–2025). *ChatGPT* [Large language model]. <https://chat.openai.com/>
- Rieder, B. (2015). *YouTube Data Tools* (Version 1,31) [Software]. Available from
<https://tools.digitalmethods.net/netvizz/youtube/>