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Beyond the Mat: AI Yogic Avatars as Agentic Leaders in Shaping Consumer Online Food Choices and Digital Well-Being

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ABSTRACT
Artificial intelligence (AI) and immersive metaverse technologies are opening up novel areas of leadership and digital well-being. In this paper, the concept of AI Yogic Avatars is proposed intelligent, empathic and adaptive AI characters which function as digital leaders to enable individuals to achieve physical, psychological and spiritual balance. Research on yoga in the metaverse currently revolves around human-led approaches like live or pre-recorded yoga sessions that suffer from restrictions of accessibility, scalability and engagement with emotions. Simultaneously, there has been a shift towards online food delivery services whereby the convenience, promotions and stress involved often compel people to order calorie-rich and nutrient-poor foods. Yogic principles regard food (aahara) as an essential component of yoga, yet digital well-being systems fail to integrate yoga guidance and food consumption habits of the user. Based on the leadership theories, concepts of emotional intelligence, philosophy of yogic practice and digital nudging, it is suggested that AI Yogic Avatars utilizing emotion recognition, pose detection and adaptive communication may become a consistently empathic virtual leader not only during the physical yoga practice but even at the point of online food ordering. Qualitative study involving 34 participants familiar with yoga, digital wellness practice, metaverse and AI was performed via semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the participants appreciate the empathy and adaptation capabilities of the avatar; connect it with decreased stress level, increased mindfulness and resilience; and believe that human teachers are indispensable for providing authentic and spiritually oriented learning experience. Based on the results of the study and existing literature on online food environment and mindful eating, the conceptual model is extended with the fourth outcome Mindful Online Food Behaviour including sattvic food choice and less stress-based ordering behavior, mediated by integration of the avatar with online food platforms. The paper provides the research propositions and the interview module to validate this extension along with the discussion of the ethical considerations regarding the collection of the emotional and dietary data.
Keywords: AI avatars, Agentic leadership, Metaverse, Digital well-being, Yoga, Online food delivery, Mindful eating, Sattvic diet.

1. INTRODUCTION

The quick advancements in AI and metaverse technologies have altered the way individuals interact with digital wellness sources, educational sources, and behavioural support programs (Kaur et al., 2025). As individuals continue their health and mindfulness activities virtually, scholars have started exploring the ways through which AI-enabled avatars can act as guides providing emotional support and guidance (Wang et al., 2025). Nevertheless, there is a lack of literature on how the duties of leadership, yoga, and emotional intelligence integrate with AI-enabled wellness programs.

A similar transformation has occurred in relation to people's eating habits. Food delivery websites have emerged as the common source from which people procure their food: in a study of close to 19,400 participants from five different countries, 15% had availed themselves of a food delivery website in the past seven days (Keeble et al., 2020). Studies into the food delivery platforms reveal that there is an overrepresentation of popular choices on websites offering discretionary, energy-dense foods (Partridge et al., 2020) and that unhealthy foods are often incentivized using combination offers and prominence on the site (Morrison et al., 2026). In India, a study conducted among 439 emerging adults in Delhi-NCR revealed junk or fast food as the most commonly ordered type (74.3%), convenience as the main reason behind using the app, and compulsion to use the

food delivery app as the factor leading to an unhealthy diet (Singh et al., 2024). As stress results in increased consumption of pleasurable and high-calorie foods (Adam & Epel, 2007), the digital stress that wellness systems seek to alleviate could emerge as impulsive food ordering online.

The concept of food has been a constant aspect of yogic philosophy from its very beginnings. The Bhagavad Gita divides food products by three gunas (sattva, rajas and tamas) and their influence on one's body and mind (Easwaran, 2007). The Hatha Yoga Pradipika recommends mitahara, or moderate eating, as a base of yoga practice (Muktibodhananda, 1998). In addition, the Ayurveda knowledge correlates food with mental state and an individual constitution (Payyappallimana & Venkatasubramanian, 2016). Empirical evidence supports the connection regular yoga practice is correlated with high mindful-eating score (Framson et al., 2009); in addition, yoga practitioners tend to be vegetarians and to consider yoga a lifestyle, not only physical activity (Cramer et al., 2018). At the same time, AI wellness applications focus on movements, breathing exercises and mood management, while food choices belong to delivery services which have their recommendations and promotions defined by commercial interests, not by health concerns.

The current study thus relates the research findings from four different fields that are supportive of the concept of AI Yogic Avatars: metaverse well-being platforms, AI avatars as virtual leaders, mixed human-AI well-being paradigms, and the combination of yoga, emotional intelligence, and mindful eating for digital well-being (Kaur et al., 2025; Laffier et al., 2025). These theoretical gaps have been identified in this literature review, and a need for a new framework has been proposed in this paper. The study is guided by the following research objectives:

RO1: To explore the potential of AI Yogic Avatars to enhance users' digital wellness and motivation in the metaverse through leader-like interaction.

RO2: To investigate how collaboration between AI Yogic Avatars and human educators affects user involvement and lasting wellness in virtual settings.

RO3: To conceptualise how AI Yogic Avatars can extend agentic leadership to users' online food choices, guiding them towards mindful, sattvic (yogic) eating on digital food platforms.

1.1 The Rise of AI and the Metaverse in Well-Being Ecosystems

With the rise of the metaverse and AI-driven immersive environments, people have acquired a number of additional opportunities to acquire health-related information, learn and grow. Mukund and Tripathi (2024) With the metaverse, one is able to practice breathing exercises, yoga and mindfulness in an environment with high levels of physical and social presence comparable to reality (Kaur et al., 2025). At the same time, the metaverse and AI are changing the process of education, as more and more universities and educational establishments attempt to use immersive AI-based learning (Piña & Acosta, 2024). The pandemic and increasing reliance on technology have also made it possible for people to receive emotional, behavioural and health-related assistance from virtual systems. However, the existing metaverse-based health interventions rely on either live professionals or pre-recorded classes which lack dynamic adaptation, emotional intelligence and behaviour-changing capabilities. In this study, I will try to find out whether it is possible to extend mindfulness and well-being practices via embodied AI avatars (Jiang et al., 2025).

1.2 AI Avatars as Emerging Digital Leaders

AI avatars are moving from programmed assistants to interactive relational agents that communicate, adapt and engage emotionally with users. Advances in natural language processing, emotion detection and behavioural learning now allow them to assist and even lead the learning process (Kohistani et al., 2025). Leadership research increasingly recognises non-human agents as contributors to behaviour change, autonomy, self-motivation and engagement, which are central elements of agentic leadership (Banks et al., 2022). Positioning AI Yogic Avatars as agentic leaders is consistent with current developments in AI agents, human-machine interaction and digital behaviour support (Hughes et al., 2025). This section relates directly to RO1, which explores whether AI Yogic Avatars can act as emotionally intelligent, always-available leaders in metaverse environments.

1.3 Hybrid Human-AI Wellness Models

There is growing research to show that the best digital well-being tools do not comprise either an AI-only system or a human-only approach, but rather a hybrid ecosystem where human teachers work alongside AI agents (Shin, 2025). The former have the advantage of offering personalization, accessibility, and consistent monitoring, whereas the latter offer an emotional element, sincerity, cultural competence, and spirituality which is required in tradition-based practices like yoga (Tamizhmalar et al., 2025). Research in the fields of digital learning and fitness education has shown how the combination of AI and human coaches can result in better engagement, trust, and consistency (Huang & Poon, 2025; Jebara et al., 2025). This is consistent with RO2, which measures the collective impact of AI avatars and human teachers on engagement and wellness outcomes.

1.4 Yoga, Emotional Intelligence and Well-Being in Digital Practice

Yoga includes physical, cognitive and emotional dimensions. It is therefore suitable for digital adaptation, provided that guidance is interactive and responsive (Ranganathan et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence matters in any teaching relationship, whether the teacher is human or AI: it supports motivation, trust, retention and willingness to engage in deeper, transformative practice (Lyanda & Owidi, 2025). Research on digital well-being highlights personalisation, adaptive communication and perceived emotional support as factors that foster resilience, mindfulness and stress reduction (Büchi, 2024). Embedding emotional intelligence in AI-based instruction may help close the relational gap between users and digital environments, allowing AI avatars to act

as presence-based leaders rather than only as sources of instruction (Jebara et al., 2025).

1.5 Online Food Environments, Stress Eating and Yogic Aahara

Now, online food delivery platforms have created an electronic food environment of their own. The interface, rankings, and promotion determine which offerings users will first see and consider to be worth ordering. Anchala (2026) Studies from Australia and New Zealand indicate that the most popular offerings on these platforms are mostly dominated by discretionary food products (Partridge et al., 2020), and in a systematic review done recently, it has been concluded that unhealthy food is more often promoted via various promotions compared to healthy food in meal delivery applications (Morrison et al., 2026). This has also been seen to be the case for India (Singh et al., 2024).

From the psychological perspective, stress enhances the reward value of delicious food and leads to emotional eating (Adam & Epel, 2007). Mindfulness programs have been reported to decrease binge eating and emotional eating (Katterman et al., 2014), while mindful eating, including paying attention to hunger, satiation, emotions and stimuli, is related to positive effects of yoga (Framson et al., 2009). There is some qualitative data indicating that yoga influences healthy eating through increased body awareness, emotional control, and social support (Ross et al., 2016). Yogic foods are defined as sattvic (fresh and light), rajasic (agitating) and tamasic (lethargic) (Payyappallimana & Venkatasubramanian, 2016; Easwaran, 2007). These themes point to a natural fit for an AI Yogic Avatar. The avatar that can detect stress and modify its recommendations during a yoga session can extend this detection to the time of placing online orders for food, detect stress-related food orderings, advise a pause and a breath, and propose sattvic foods available for ordering by the user. Yan et al. (2025) Personalised dietary recommendations using AI is a relatively new field with promising but limited research evidence (Wang et al., 2025), while digital nudging using user interface design to shape choices is a technique known to impact food choices (Weinmann et al., 2016; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), for example through positioning and visual presentation of foods (Bucher et al., 2016; Starke et al., 2021). This chapter is related to RO3.

1.6 Gaps in the Existing Literature

Although there have been advancements in the use of AI for personalization, metaverse interactions, and digital wellness solutions, several areas still require attention:

Gap 1: The role of AI wellness avatars as leaders who can lead and influence the well-being of users is not well understood (Shin, 2025).

Gap 2: Convergence of yoga, emotional intelligence, and AI leadership theories is not well explored as a conceptual framework (Dwivedi, 2025).

Gap 3: Hybrid forms of leadership, where human trainers and AI avatars act together to help in building long-term well-being, are less discussed (Huang & Poon, 2025).

Gap 4: Theoretical foundations of digital wellness solutions and online food platforms are not examined together although in yogic tradition, aahara is an important element of the practice (Morrison et al., 2026; Payyappallimana & Venkatasubramanian, 2016).

These are the gaps in the existing literature that explain the need for the conceptual framework presented in this paper.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Leadership Theory and Agentic Digital Guidance

The theory of leadership has evolved from hierarchical and traits-focused theories into more participatory, empowering and influential approaches (Horner, 1997). Thus, transformational leadership deals with inspiring and developing employees, whereas the servant one emphasizes empathy and assistance. These perspectives imply agentic leadership as the means to foster people's transition from dependence on the leadership guidance to self-directed learning (Baker et al., 2024). Contemporary studies on leadership in the era of digitalization confirm the influence of technologies on who, when and how lead (Banks et al., 2022). The researchers state that artificial intelligence will perform many of the tasks that leaders usually perform (Van Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023). Moreover, there are novel approaches offered for leading in the era of artificial intelligence (Paiuc, 2025). In this research, AI Yogic Avatars should not only guide users but also inspire and establish an emotional connection like a leader. Nanduri and Jain (2025) RO1 aims at revealing whether such leadership functions (not mere information provision) help enhance motivation and digital well-being of users (Ranganathan et al., 2024). It is relevant for RO3 as well because an agentic leader will not decide what users should consume but will develop their ability to do so mindfully.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence Theory and Affective Computing

The emotional intelligence (EI) is a person’s capacity to perceive, comprehend, express, and regulate emotions in himself/herself and others (Cherniss et al., 2006), and there are personal and social aspects of this phenomenon. Emotional intelligence facilitates social connections, emotional attachment, and loyalty in health and educational environments (Habib et al., 2023). Affective computing technology allows emotion-aware AI systems to identify the user’s emotional state using voice intonation, textual signs, physical signals, and behavioural interaction. Such AI avatars can then change their communicative style to create interactions that are more similar to the ones in human-to-human dialogue (DiPaola & Yalçın, 2019). Emotionally intelligent avatars used in yoga and mindfulness interventions can support the users’ stress release and emotional resilience, thus creating a link between the EI and the well-being effects of AI (Sturgill et al., 2021). In terms of food, the same feature lets the avatar detect when the user orders because of stress, boredom or tiredness but not because of real hunger, which is the moment the mindful eating intervention becomes relevant (Adam & Epel, 2007; Katterman et al., 2014).

2.3 Yogic Philosophy, Aahara and Holistic Well-Being

In Yoga, there is a philosophy that says that good health is when the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual components of life are balanced (Patel et al., 2019). In traditional yoga education, the teacher plays an important role since he not only teaches postures and poses but also the yogic values like mindfulness, presence, compassion, balance and self-awareness. In contemplative traditions, there is an understanding of how the practices of ethics, breath regulation, concentration and meditation build self-awareness, self-regulation and self-transcendence (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Food is also an important component of this process. According to the Bhagavad Gita (17.8-10), the sattvic food is defined by its contribution to vitality, health and contentment and is contrasted with rajasic and tamasic foods (Easwaran, 2007), and in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika it is recommended to practice mitahara or moderate and pleasant eating (Muktibodhananda, 1998). Ayurveda adds one more important principle according to which suitable food should depend on person's constitution, digestive powers and environment.

Through the principles utilized by the AI Yogic Avatars during their adaptive reactions via breathing techniques, contemplation, pacing, or even a sattvic recommendation during meal times, they could create more meaningful interaction and motivation internally rather than mere conformity to the rules. In this perspective, AI not only helps as a body posture adjuster but also an accompaniment that nourishes the whole individual (Ranganathan et al., 2024).

2.4 Digital Nudging and Food Choice Architecture

The core principle of the Nudge Theory is that presentation of alternatives determines a decision and does not limit choices (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Digital Nudging is a practical application of the concept in the form of choice architecture design within user interface (Weinmann et al., 2016). In the realm of food, positioning affects choice (Bucher et al., 2016), and in food recipe search on the Internet, it is possible to make use of visual appeal as a means of nudging people into choosing healthy recipes (Starke et al., 2021). Choice architecture exists in online food-related platforms, yet, its primary purpose is commercial (Morrison et al., 2026). The AI Yogic Avatar becomes a corresponding tool for health, providing an empathic and trustworthy guide whose nudges are based on users' wellness objectives. As an agentic leader, the Avatar should ensure transparency and user choice in the process.

2.5 Integrative Theoretical Positioning

Leadership theories, emotional intelligence, yogic philosophy and digital nudging form the foundation for understanding AI Yogic Avatars as digital wellness counselors who can transform the entire system. Leadership theories help us understand the impact of a leader on his/her followers in terms of motivation and behavior, emotional intelligence helps us understand the influence of relationship quality on participation and performance, yogic philosophy gives the cultural, ethical and spiritual justification, along with the importance of food (Sangodkar & Bhandari, 2025), while digital nudging helps us understand how guidance can be given to the users at the point of decision-making. All these perspectives help us understand why AI Yogic Avatars need to be considered as leaders.

3. KEY CONSTRUCTS AND DEFINITIONS

The conceptual model consists of six constructs: AI Yogic Avatars, Agentic Leadership, Digital Well-being, Yoga Practices, Emotional Intelligence and Mindful Online Food Behavior. Collectively, these constructs explain how AI-guided intervention influences users' motivation, engagement, and well-being (Tiwari et al., 2024).

3.1 AI Yogic Avatars

The term AI Yogic Avatars refers to AI-powered digital assistants for teaching yoga, calming down and providing communicative skills training within virtual spaces (Kohistani et al., 2025). In contrast with traditional learning software programs, they can feel the users' emotions and adjust the learning process to suit every user individually (Jebara et al., 2025). The concept has two defining characteristics: empathy and adaptability. Empathy is defined by an understanding of the users' emotions while adaptability means how much the system adjusts the user's progress according to immediate feedback and performance (Colombo et al., 2021).

3.2 Agentic Leadership

The agentic leadership refers to the way the AI Yogic Avatars empower the user, motivate the user, and make the user independent in learning and wellbeing. This concept is derived from leadership theories based on the ideas of personal responsibility, self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation instead of compliance. Sub-dimensions of agentic leadership include empowerment of the users and motivation which plays the part of avatars' role in motivating the process.

3.3 Digital Well-Being

The concept of digital well-being is an equilibrium between humans and their usage of technology for the benefit of their physical and psychological health (Büchi, 2024). In intelligent environments for wellness through AI, digital well-being means the degree of impact intelligent interaction has on improving the psychological equilibrium of the users (Laffier et al., 2025). There are three sub-dimensions of digital well-being. First, stress reduction means low tension and digital exhaustion. Second, mindfulness means attention to the present moment during and after technology use. Third, resilience means the ability to adapt and recover from problems in the digital era (Khan et al., 2025).

3.4 Yoga Practices

Yoga activities are the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of yoga practice, which combined ensure good health. Yoga practice traditionally needed the presence of a yoga teacher, but in recent times it is more often conducted using video recordings or virtual classes (Ranganathan et al., 2024). Physical balance and spiritual balance are the sub-dimensions representing the

biomechanical and contemplative aspects of yoga practice. AI avatars can make yoga an interactive process (Tamizhmalar et al., 2025).

3.5 Emotional Intelligence

The emotional intelligence of an avatar, being a systemic property, refers to its ability to recognize, comprehend and properly react to the user's emotions. The process of emotional recognition involves understanding the emotions of a person by analyzing his/her voice, written text or actions, whereas adaptation includes adjusting the tone, pace and content of the messages according to the user's state (Binwal, 2024).

3.6 Mindful Online Food Behaviour

Mindful food behavior online is defined in the present research as the extent to which a user's selection of food items online is guided by the awareness of their hunger, satiety, emotions and quality and yogic nature of the food selected rather than being induced by stress, impulsive behaviors or advertisements. The mindful eating concept has been measured through awareness, disinhibition, emotional response, external factors and distraction (Framson et al., 2009). Mindful eating behavior has two underlying dimensions: first, sattvic (yogic) food selection referring to an individual's preference for fresh, healthy and moderate meals based on yogic and Ayurvedic practices (Easwaran, 2007; Payyappallimana & Venkatasubramanian, 2016) and secondly, stress-induced food ordering referring to reduced propensity of selecting calorie-dense food due to stress and emotions (Adam & Epel, 2007; Katterman et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2024).

Table 1: Summary of Key Constructs, Sub-Factors and Definitions

S. No.	Construct	Sub-factors	Definition	Citations
1	AI Yogic Avatar	Empathy; Adaptation	An AI-driven digital agent that provides personalised, interactive yoga and wellness guidance. Empathy is recognising and responding to the user's feelings while keeping a self-other distinction; adaptation is adjusting guidance in real time to the user's state and performance.	Kohistani et al., 2025; Colombo et al., 2021; Jebara et al., 2025
2	Agentic Leadership	Empowering users; Motivation	A leadership approach in which the avatar strengthens users' autonomy, ownership and self-direction. Empowerment provides tools and autonomy; motivation is the force that drives sustained, goal-oriented behaviour.	Banks et al., 2022; Van Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023; Pago, 2024; Hughes et al., 2025
3	Digital Well-being	Stress reduction; Mindfulness; Resilience	A balanced, intentional relationship with technology that supports health and quality of life, reflected in lower stress, present-moment awareness and the capacity to adapt to and recover from difficulty.	Büchi, 2024; Khan et al., 2025; Laffier et al., 2025
4	Yoga Practices	Physical balance; Spiritual balance	A holistic practice of postures, breathing and meditation. Physical balance is the ability to maintain bodily stability; spiritual balance is alignment of physical, mental and spiritual dimensions.	Ranganathan et al., 2024; Tamizhmalar et al., 2025; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012
5	Emotional Intelligence	Emotion detection; Adaptive communication	The ability to identify, understand and use emotions. Emotion detection identifies emotions from text, voice or facial cues; adaptive communication adjusts style, tone and content to the listener's needs.	Cherniss et al., 2006; Habib et al., 2023; Binwal, 2024
6	Mindful Online Food Behaviour (new)	Sattvic (yogic) food choice; Reduced stress-driven ordering	Making food choices on digital platforms with awareness of hunger, emotion and food quality. Sattvic choice prefers fresh, wholesome, moderate meals; reduced stress-driven ordering is a lower tendency to order energy-dense food in response to stress.	Framson et al., 2009; Katterman et al., 2014; Adam & Epel, 2007; Payyappallimana & Venkatasubramanian, 2016

The Table 1 below summarizes the constructs, sub-factors, and their definitions as used in the conceptualization of the model. The succeeding sections will discuss the methodology and the framework for these constructs.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on the way users view AI Yogic Avatars, which are used for yoga sessions and other wellness practices in a virtual setting. For this research, a qualitative research design was chosen to get the insights of participants on their personal experience, emotions, and evaluations of various scenarios. A sample of 34 individuals with expertise in yoga practice, digital wellness, metaverse, and artificial intelligence was selected based on purposive sampling technique (Wang et al., 2025). Participants regularly practiced yoga, used digital wellness applications, had access to virtual reality/metaverse platforms, and had an understanding of artificial intelligence and digital avatars. The purpose of selecting participants from the five expert categories is presented in Table 2 below.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which followed a guide while allowing participants to express themselves freely. Each interview lasted 25 to 30 minutes and was conducted face-to-face or online, as preferred by the participant. Questions covered opinions about AI-based yoga instruction, trust in AI systems for asana practice, expected emotional support from educational technologies, perceptions of human-AI instruction, privacy concerns, emotional connection with the system, and the perceived influence of AI on yoga practice and overall health. Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Dellafiore et al., 2025): recurring codes were identified and grouped into themes such as comfort with AI, expectations of empathy and privacy concerns. The AI-driven leadership framework was used to interpret how AI Yogic Avatars create motivation and digital well-being through empathetic and adaptive guidance (Shi et al., 2025).

RO3 - The food related online dimension was not included in the initial interview guide and has been developed theoretically by analyzing the literature discussed in Section 1.5, 2.3 and 2.4 and is presented as research propositions (Section 6.1). The interview module for validation of the same is provided in Appendix A

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Table 2: Profile of Experts Interviewed for the Study

Expert	Qualification	Expertise	No. (n)	Relevance to Online Food Dimension (RO3)	Source
Yoga Practitioner	Certified Yoga Instructor / Diploma in Yoga Studies	Traditional yoga practices, asanas, pranayama, mindfulness and spiritual balance	7	Yogic dietary principles (sattvic aahara, mitahara) and how practice shapes eating	Chittaro (2025); Yuen et al. (2025); Itzhak and Fuchs (2025)
Digital Wellness User	Graduate / Postgraduate	Digital wellness and mindfulness applications, stress management, motivation and digital well-being	7	Stress-driven and late-night ordering; acceptance of wellness prompts during daily app use	Laffier et al. (2025); Kaya et al. (2025)
Metaverse / VR User	Graduate / Technical certification in VR/AR	Immersive virtual environments, avatar-based interaction, spatial presence and metaverse wellness experiences	7	Carrying avatar guidance from the virtual session to real-world food decisions	Choi and Lee (2025); Shen et al. (2025); Kang and Lee (2025)
AI Tool / Avatar User	Graduate / Postgraduate in Technology, Management or related fields	AI assistants, chatbots, avatar interaction, emotional intelligence in AI and adaptive communication	7	Trust in AI recommendations, digital nudges and privacy of emotional and dietary data	Chung et al. (2025); Silacci et al. (2025)
Hybrid Wellness Experience User	Graduate / Postgraduate with exposure to human-led and AI-assisted programmes	Human-AI collaboration, hybrid leadership models, trust in AI guidance and sustained engagement	6	Shared roles of avatar, yoga teacher and nutritionist in food guidance	Kaur et al. (2025)
Total			34		

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 Development of the Model

The conceptual framework provides a representation of the process of digital leadership that is undertaken by the AI Yogic Avatars to enhance the well-being of the users in the digital and metaverse space. The AI Yogic Avatar forms the heart of the framework and has two abilities .

centred on the human experience. Empathy enables the avatar to understand the emotions and level of stress experienced by the users alongside motivational needs. Adaptation helps the avatar provide personalized yoga advice depending on the physical capacity, emotion and behavior of the individual

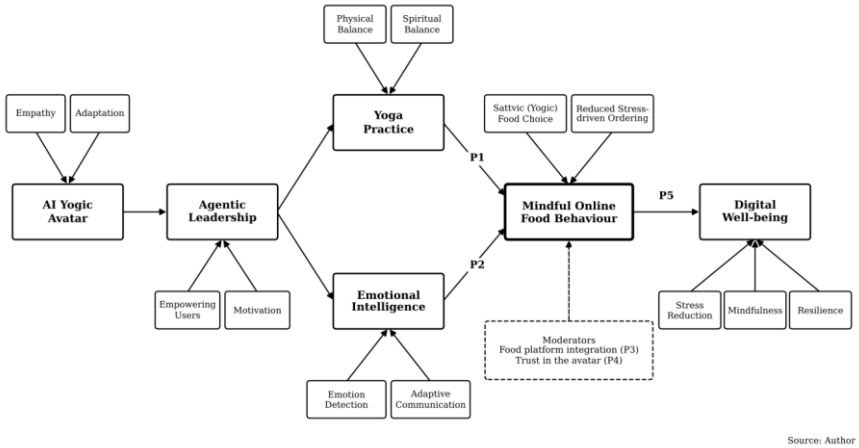


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The process through which the avatar can affect the four areas is agentic leadership. The first area is digital well-being, which manifests itself through reduced levels of stress, increased mindfulness and resiliency, which helps the users to be psychologically balanced while using technology. The second area is yoga practice, whereby physical stability and spiritual balance come together and yoga is established as a mind-body-spirit approach rather than just an exercise program. The last area is emotional intelligence, which is developed due to the emotional sensitivity of the avatar in relation to the emotions of the users.

Mindful online food behavior, the fourth and final domain of the model, brings the use of AI Yogic Avatar all the way up to the moment where the user selects the food on digital food ordering platforms. In this case, too, the avatar uses the same empathy and adaptability: it can suggest a user to take some time for conscious breathing and checking his/her actual hunger level before selecting an order; it can offer a user to look at more balanced options; and, finally, it can help the user to identify personal ordering patterns. The effectiveness of this process will be based on integration of online food ordering platforms, i.e. on whether the avatar will have access to the menus and nutritional data and can present its recommendations on the stage of ordering.

6. FINDINGS

The primary result is that the study participants viewed the AI Yogic Avatar-driven approach to leadership as an alternative to traditional digital wellness solutions (Kaya et al., 2025). In addition to technical skills, the importance of the empathy and adaptability of the avatar allowed participants to see it as empathic enough to understand their feelings and modify recommendations depending on their emotional state. The above traits are related to the concept of agentic leadership, as participants go from being passive receivers to active drivers of their wellness improvement (Zall et al., 2025).

It turned out that emotional intelligence became the primary social link between the avatar and user. Adaptive communication that involves the modification of the avatar's speaking pattern depending on voice, behavior and text cues became the basis for trust and psychological safety, without which participants could not stay motivated (Ma et al., 2025).

Theme analysis led to three themes regarding the outcomes. First, the participants were assured about better digital wellness due to reduction of stress, increase of mindfulness, and increased ability to cope with digital fatigue. Second, they appreciated the avatar as an enduring practice buddy who helped them practice physically during several sessions (Lee et al., 2024). Third, they recognized the importance of reflective prompts of the avatar in emotional regulation and self-awareness (Zavari & Mahmoudi Mozaffar, 2024). In general, the findings show that yogic principles must be purposely connected to emotion-sensitive AI for a digital wellness system which could make a difference. The participants were sure that the metaverse system would motivate people to practice regularly and pursue wellness goals; however, all of them agreed that human trainers were indispensable for genuine spiritual practice (Gupta et al., 2025).

6.1 Research Propositions for the Online Food Dimension

Further expanding on the research that was done in these studies, as well as literature about online food environment, mindful eating and digital nudging, the following hypotheses have been developed:

P1: Empathy and adaptability of AI Yogic Avatars are positively related to users' receptivity to avatar guidance about foods on online platforms through trust (Ma et al.,

2025; Framson et al., 2009).
P2: Guidance provided by Avatars that incorporates stress detection along with a mindful pause prior to ordering helps to minimize stress-induced ordering of high-energy foods (Adam & Epel, 2007; Katterman et al., 2014).
P3: Presentation of sattvic items in a prominent and attractive manner within the order journey leads to greater sattvic food selection than the regular presentation of the platform (Bucher et al., 2016; Starke et al., 2021).
P4: The impacts discussed in P2 and P3 will be more pronounced if the avatar is combined with the online food portal and when the user does yoga frequently with the avatar (Cramer et al., 2018; Morrison et al., 2026).
P5: Mindful behavior of the user regarding online food activities adds positively to digital well-being and strengthens the stress relief and mindfulness impacts of the model (Ross et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2025).

7. IMPLICATIONS

The study offers implications for researchers, technology developers, health professionals, food platforms and policymakers working in digital health and metaverse environments. Participants' positive response to emotionally intelligent and adaptive AI Yogic Avatars indicates potential for integrating AI-driven leadership into wellness platforms, with empathy, contextual awareness and safe posture guidance as core design features (Lee et al., 2024). The strong preference for hybrid human-AI models implies that AI should complement rather than replace human instructors, providing continuous, personalised support that sustains motivation and long-term behaviour change. Such a model can extend practitioners' reach and reduce their workload while keeping users engaged between sessions (Kojić et al., 2024).
In the case of food ecosystem, the model proposes that wellness and food platform can work together instead of being isolated from each other. The online food platform can label one of the meal categories as “sattvic” or “yogic” and along with that information, nutrition information can be provided in addition to the avatar of the user suggesting meal within the app. It can become an added advantage for restaurants and cloud kitchens targeting the health-conscious customers. In the case of health practitioners and yoga instructors, the avatar of the user becomes a carrier of dietary knowledge imparted in the classes in everyday decisions of ordering.
Participants have also expressed fears which would require stronger ethical rules and transparency in the use of emotions data (Gupta et al., 2025). The fear is higher when emotions data are used together with ordering and dieting data. Users need to be given total control over their data, clarity about when and why food recommendation is provided, no commercial nudges in the form of wellness information, and ethical treatment of emotions data. AI-based dietary recommendation needs to be approached with skepticism due to the current small sample size and follow-up period (Wang et al., 2025); users with any medical condition or eating disorders should be referred to professionals instead of AI systems.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research studies users' perception of AI Yogic Avatars as leaders and guides in the online and metaverse wellness spaces. It deals with user attitudes and motivations and emotions, without checking the performance of any AI system (Laffier et al., 2025). The qualitative data have been gathered from yoga practitioners, digital wellness users and those with experience in virtual reality and AI (Dagar et al., 2024). The research does not involve any experimental testing, clinical wellness assessment or big data, and it does not evaluate any commercial product either. It gives a context-bound result, which cannot be generalized to other populations. It deals with adults only and does not touch upon digital wellness for kids, rehabilitation yoga and medical treatment. The online food aspect is hypothetical in nature: it has not been addressed in the interviews and requires further verification, e.g. by using the interview module described in Appendix A, field experiments in food apps or surveys involving validated mindful-eating scale (Framson et al., 2009). Despite these limitations, the study sets a starting point for development of the AI yogic leadership system in the online environment (Shi & Petrakaki, 2026).

9. SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

Future research might go beyond perception to experimentation, wherein AI Yogic Avatars are pitted against human trainers and measured for accuracy in instructions, correction of poses, and compliance on the part of users (Laffier et al., 2025). The context-sensitive themes gathered through interviews from yoga practitioners, digital wellness users, and individuals who have experience using VR and AI technology (Dagar et al., 2024) could be transformed into survey questions that can be administered to larger samples and across cultures for reliability. Research may look at the possibility of conducting longitudinal studies involving clinical supervision to determine the impact of avatar-assisted training on stress, sleep, and wellbeing of participants. The food aspect online, which is at present hypothetical, requires empirical confirmation via the interviews in Appendix A, food app experiments, and surveys using the Mindful Eating Questionnaire (Framson et al., 2009). A comparative assessment of commercial metaverse wellness platforms might illustrate the role of avatar, culture, and customization in building user trust. Ultimately, participatory research with the involvement of yoga teachers, tech professionals, and ethicists can be conducted based on this work to devise a responsible framework for AI yogic leadership in online settings (Shi & Petrakaki, 2026).

10. CONCLUSION

This research focused on the possibilities of utilizing AI Yogic Avatars as empathic, flexible, and motivating guides for people using metaverse-based platforms for well-being. By applying leadership theories, emotional intelligence, and yoga philosophy, it demonstrated that AI avatars can serve as leaders and not just as instructional assistants. Based on the results obtained through qualitative research, it was found that people will accept

the help of an AI yoga guide if it demonstrates emotional intelligence, contextual awareness, and secure, personalized assistance. It is also important that participants identified the capacity of an avatar to boost motivation, decrease stress, enhance mindfulness, and practice regularly, while still pointing out the importance of human instructors.

This paper also broadens the framework to include online food behavior, which is a realm in which people's daily wellness is influenced more and more by digital technologies. Given that food is also an important component of yoga practice according to the yogic tradition and online food behavior is associated more with unbalanced and stress-related behaviors, the creation of the AI Yogic Avatar that can bring mindfulness to food ordering is also a relevant development. Privacy issues, concerns about collection of dietary and emotional data, and technology reliance make the need for AI ethics clear.

Appendix A: Interview Module for Validating the Online Food Dimension

The below questions are posed with the help of the participant profile in Table 2 to test Propositions P1 to P5:

First, How frequently do you order food via online platforms and at what times of day?

Second, Can you describe a situation recently when you ordered food due to stress, tiredness or boredom, not hunger?

Third, What is your opinion of influence of your yoga practice on food choices?

Fourth, if your yoga avatar recommends you a sattvic or lighter choice during the process of ordering, how will you react to that recommendation? What factors can influence you to accept or deny the recommendations?

Fifth, would the recommendation of short breathing pause before ordering be useful or disturbing? Why?

Sixth, what issues would you consider while the avatar uses your mood and previous ordering to recommend food?

Seventh, whom could you expect to give you food recommendation: the avatar, your yoga teacher, nutritionist, or all of them

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