

METTĀVERSE

FEASIBILITY STUDY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

This study tests the feasibility of, and discovers the best way to develop, an online platform or tool that enables the creation and growth of online and real world communities based on loving kindness, what is called "Mettā" in Buddhism.

The proposed platform, MettāVerses, is a direct response to online social isolation and the increasing lack of social cohesion due to the fragmentation and breaking up of online and real world environments into "silos"; what is known as "social atomization". Social atomization in online environments refers to the fragmentation and isolation of individuals within digital spaces, leading to diminished social connections and a lack of cohesive communities. MettāVerses will attempt to address this growing social and personal isolation and also respond to increasing atomization triggered by online engagement, especially with social media.

To determine the social, financial and technological feasibility of an online community platform based on loving kindness, the study conducted an online survey and a financial and technical viability analysis to determine whether or not the type and form of platform suggested by the survey was viable. The survey was made up of 13 questions divided into two categories: 1). Questions to determine the types of preferred platforms for MettāVerses, and 2). Questions to determine the types of content to include on the platform.

Participants were selected based on willingness to participate, namely individuals already concerned by the social isolation and atomization caused by social media platforms and who have an interest in loving-kindness, both in a secular sense and from a Buddhist context. Participants were sourced through existing Buddhist and well-being-focused networks, such as NTI alumni, colleagues and friends, the extensive Fo Guang Shan network and through widely distributed email noticeboards and social media.

The survey ran from 12th December 2023 to 15th February 2024. The survey was completed by 212 respondents.

FINDINGS

The majority of responses (67%, n=142) indicated that the preferred platform for MettāVerses was an **online** rather than in-person or live platform. For more detail of the responses see Q2 on page 5.

Furthermore, the majority of responses (56%, n=119) indicated that the preferred form of online platform for MettāVerses be a **website** or blog. For more detail of the responses see Q4 on page 7.

The preferred content for the proposed website was **guided meditations**, which received 65% of the responses (n=138). Other preferred types of content were **stories or personal reflections** (n=127) and **kindness resources** (n=126). For more detail of the responses see Q9 on page 12.

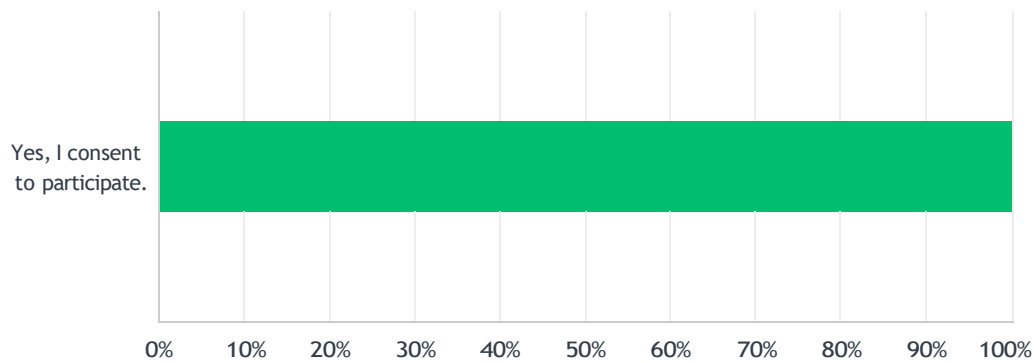
A significant number of responses also indicated that **live online events** were desirable content for MettāVerses (46%, n=96). For more detail of the responses see Q4 on page 7. Of the in-person or live online options the most popular by far was **workshops**, which received 65% of the responses (n=138). For more detail of the responses see Q7 on page 10.

In summary, the preferred platform for MettāVerses is a website that includes guided meditations, stories or personal reflections, and kindness resources, with the capacity to host live online events such as workshops using tools such as Zoom.

QUESTION ONE

As is evident below, all 212 participants consented to participate in the survey. Consent to participate in the survey was an essential aspect of the ethical clearance, which was granted by Nan Tien Institute (HREA number ID#0013).

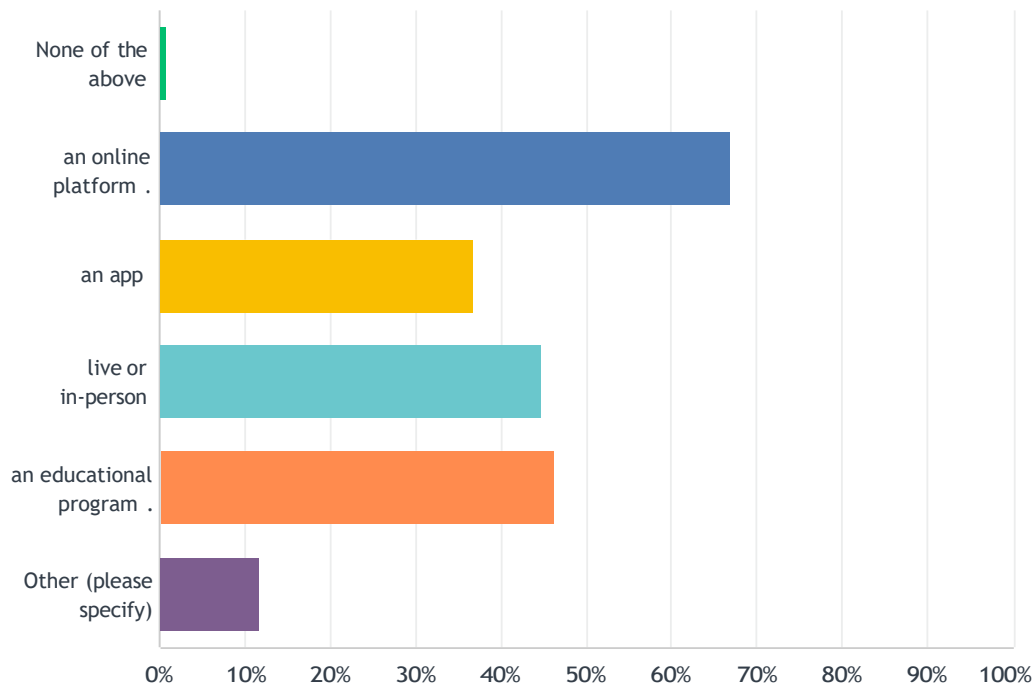
Q1 Do you consent to participate in this survey and feasibility study?



QUESTION TWO

The responses to this question reveal that the most preferred platform for MettāVerses is an **online** one. It is interesting to note that live events and an educational program were also preferred options.

Q2 In order to meet the aim of increasing loving-kindness and connection as an antidote to the negative impacts of social media, which of the following forms would you prefer MettāVerses to take?



The survey results indicate a strong preference for online platforms like websites (66.98%) and apps (36.79%) to facilitate the aim of increasing loving-kindness and connection. Additionally, there's significant interest in live or in-person events (44.81%) and educational programs such as short courses or workshops (46.23%). Only a small fraction (0.94%) preferred none of the listed options, while 11.79% suggested other unspecified forms.

QUESTION THREE

Why did you make your choices above?

The survey responses to this question highlight three recurrent themes regarding why respondents preferred a specific platform for MettāVerses. The themes are listed in order of the frequency they were mentioned:

1. convenience and accessibility
2. the value of in-person interaction
3. the importance of offering diverse modalities for engagement.

Convenience and Accessibility: Many respondents who selected an online platform expressed a preference for online due to their ease of access and availability. They appreciate the flexibility of being able to engage with content at any time, anywhere, using devices they already use regularly. For example, one respondent mentioned, "Websites are easy for anyone to access," highlighting the accessibility aspect.

Value of In-Person Interaction: Despite the convenience of online platforms, there's a recognition of the unique value provided by in-person events. Many respondents who selected live in-person events made comments suggesting that these type of events foster deeper connections, a sense of community, and more meaningful interactions. Respondents emphasized the importance of face-to-face communication in building relationships and cultivating empathy. That being said, many respondents noted that live events could be part of an online experience. As one respondent put it, "Live or in-person events to establish the initial connections."

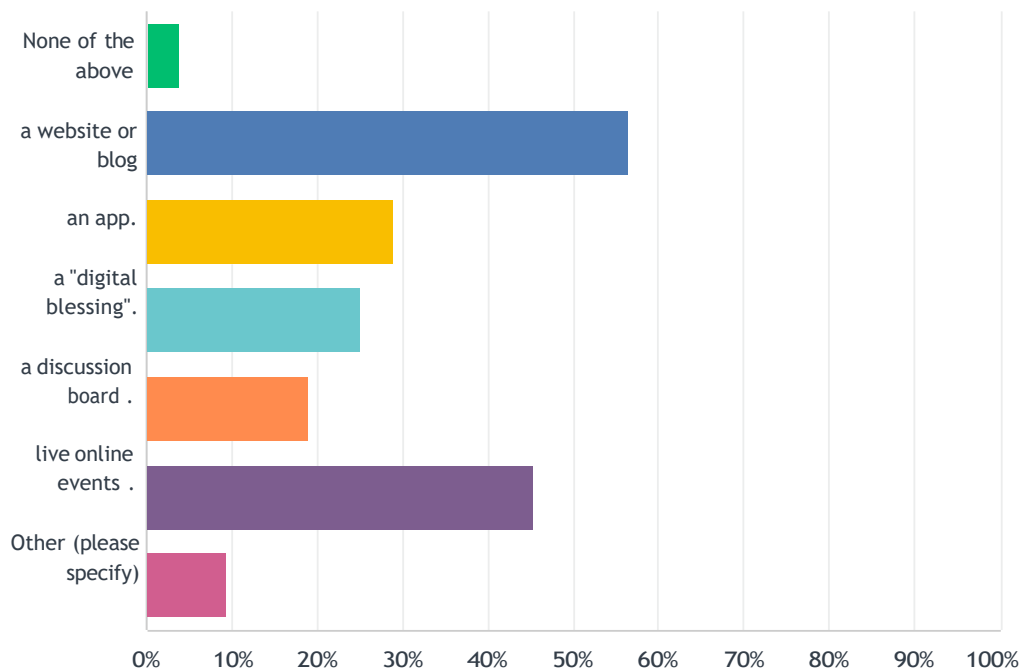
Offering Diverse Modalities: There's a consensus among respondents that a multi-channel approach is necessary to cater to diverse preferences and learning styles. They advocate for a combination of online resources, such as a website, along with live events and educational programs. This approach ensures broader accessibility and engagement. For instance, one respondent mentioned, "As much as I enjoy live, in-person training and events, a website is more accessible."

Overall, these three key themes underscore the importance of striking a balance between digital convenience and the human connection provided by interpersonal interactions, while also offering a variety of modalities to accommodate different preferences and needs within the community. This suggests that a website with the capacity to host online events would be the most likely to meet the stated needs.

QUESTION FOUR

The responses to this question reveal that the most preferred online platform for MettāVerses is a **website**. Live online events were the second most preferred option, meaning that it would be wise to develop a website with the ability to host live Zoom sessions and recordings of past events.

Q4 Which of the following online or app based options for MettāVerses are you more likely to use?



The survey results show a strong preference for utilizing a website or blog (56.40%) for MettāVerses engagement, followed by live online events (45.50%). Additionally, a notable interest exists in a "digital blessing" feature (25.12%), while a smaller proportion expressed interest in an app with a "kindness index" (28.91%) or a discussion board (18.96%). Only 3.79% preferred none of the listed options, with 9.48% suggesting other unspecified preferences.

QUESTION FIVE

Why did you make your choices above?

The survey responses highlight three recurrent themes regarding why respondents preferred specific online or app based platforms for MettāVerses. The themes are listed in order of the frequency they were mentioned:

1. preference for accessibility and ease of use
2. desire for human connection and interaction
3. skepticism towards measurement and gimmicks

Preference for Accessibility and Ease of Use: A recurring theme among respondents is the preference for options that are easily accessible and convenient to use. This is why the greater majority of respondents chose a website or blog as their preferred option. Example responses include: "websites are easier and only need internet connection to work," "websites are easy for anyone to access," and "I like being able to access things at my own convenience." This indicates a desire for platforms that fit seamlessly into users' daily routines without requiring significant effort or time investment.

Desire for Human Connection and Interaction: Many respondents express a preference for options that facilitate human connection and interaction. This includes features like live online events, discussion boards, and platforms that allow for direct engagement with others. Responses such as "I want to be able to connect with others," "discussion board will help me to see what others are doing," and "Zoom events are good for reality linking" highlight the importance of interpersonal engagement in the context of MettāVerses.

Skepticism towards Measurement and Gimmicks: Some respondents expressed skepticism towards features perceived as gimmicky or intrusive, such as tracking kindness levels or receiving digital blessings. Example responses include: "measuring kindness sounds punitive," "kindness index seems self-centered," and "index or digital blessing seem a bit gimmicky". These responses suggest a reluctance to engage with tools that feel artificial, judgmental or intrusive, such as apps, emphasizing a preference for authenticity and genuine connection that is user-controlled.

These recurring themes indicate that users prioritize accessibility, genuine human connection, and authenticity in their preferences for online or app-based options for MettāVerses. Platforms that align with these values are likely to resonate more strongly with users and encourage sustained engagement and participation.

QUESTION SIX

Based on your own experience what online or app-based tools are better suited for the MettāVerses concept?

After analyzing the survey responses, three recurrent themes emerge regarding the online or app-based tools better suited for the MettāVerses concept. The themes are listed in order of the frequency they were mentioned:

1. preference for interactive platforms
2. focus on mindfulness and meditation
3. diverse social media platforms

Preference for Interactive Platforms: Respondents often expressed a preference for interactive platforms that facilitate connection and engagement with others. This includes platforms like Zoom for hosting events, Discord for group discussions, and closed Facebook groups for community interaction. Example responses include: "I like anything that allows synchronous or asynchronous discussion," "I do like apps that are interactive, so something with daily practices and a way to connect with others," "A website that hosts webinars and invites people to live events is also appealing to me."

Focus on Mindfulness and Meditation Apps: Many respondents mentioned the usefulness of mindfulness and meditation apps for promoting MettāVerses. They highlighted features such as guided meditations, daily affirmations, and reminders for practicing loving-kindness. Example responses include: "A meditation app with built-in alarm clock to make reminders by using calm and soothing sound," "An app with guided Metta Meditation will help people generate loving-kindness," "Practical tools such as guided meditations, & access to an online database of teachings."

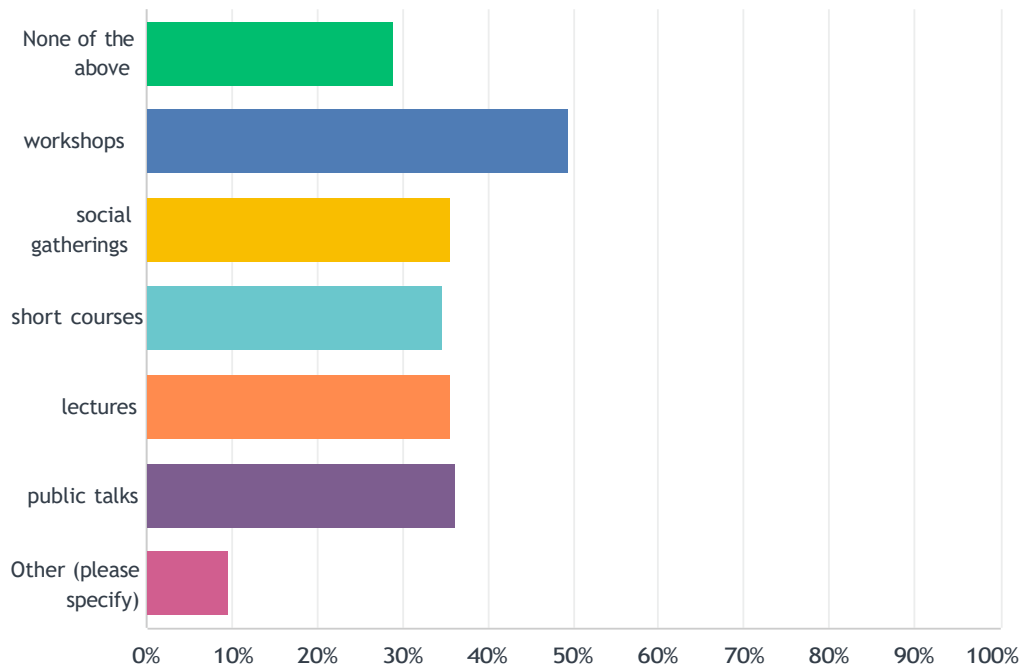
Diverse Social Media Platforms: While some respondents expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of sharing verses online, others suggested leveraging various social media platforms for spreading kindness messages. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter were mentioned for their potential reach and ability to engage diverse audiences. Example responses include: "The social media platform such as Facebook, WhatsApp and WeChat are better suited," "Creating a profile on a social media platform such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook would increase individuals to follow the website or app," "Instagram (for sharing a diverse range of media), Padlet (for interactive Q&A), Zoom."

These recurrent themes emphasize the importance of interactivity, mindfulness practices, and leveraging diverse online platforms for promoting the MettāVerses concept effectively. This can be achieved through a website that includes a Zoom portal for live events and social media accounts to promote the MettāVerses website and its events.

QUESTION SEVEN

The responses to this question reveal that the most preferred in-person option for MettāVerses is **workshops**. We can partially fulfill this need by hosting live online workshops.

Q7 Which of the following in-person options for MettāVerses are you more likely to use?



The survey results indicate that workshops are the most favored in-person option for MettāVerses, with 49.52% of respondents expressing a likelihood to use them. Social gatherings, lectures, and public talks also garnered significant interest, ranging from 35.71% to 36.19%. However, nearly a third (29.05%) opted for "None of the above," suggesting a notable portion may not find these options appealing.

QUESTION EIGHT

Why did you make your choices above?

Three recurrent themes emerged regarding which live or in-person events respondents preferred and why they preferred them. The themes are listed in order of the frequency they were mentioned:

1. preference for interactive and engaging formats
2. time constraints and practical considerations
3. desire for meaningful human connection

Preference for Interactive and Engaging Formats: A significant number of respondents express a preference for workshops, courses, or interactive sessions over lectures or public talks. They appreciate the opportunity for hands-on learning, group activities, and discussions. For instance, one respondent stated, "I like workshops because they are more interactive and engaging as compared to lectures." Another mentioned, "I prefer attending events where I can learn something and contribute."

Time Constraints and Practical Considerations: Many respondents cited time constraints, scheduling conflicts, and practical considerations as factors influencing their choices. Some expressed difficulty attending live events due to busy schedules or geographical limitations. For example, one respondent stated, "live things are difficult to fit in my schedule," while another noted, "I live interstate." Additionally, preferences for shorter, more focused events were highlighted by comments such as, "I like the idea of workshops or short courses to enable group guided meditation."

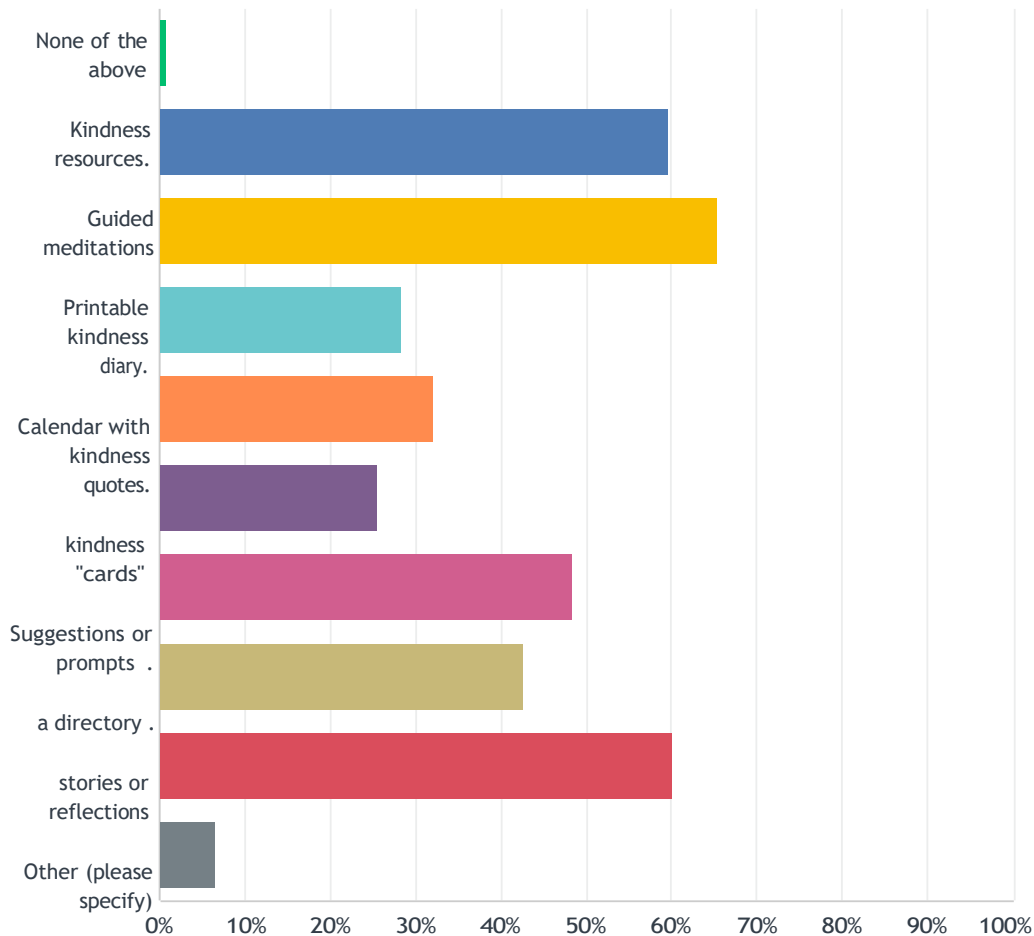
Desire for Meaningful Human Connection: Several respondents emphasized the importance of in-person events for fostering meaningful human connections and social interactions. They value the opportunity to engage with like-minded individuals, learn from others, and build a sense of community. As one respondent put it, "Meaningful in-person interaction is the key to social cohesion." Another mentioned, "Focus of in-person gatherings should be building connection and learning/transmission of knowledge."

These themes collectively underscore the significance of interactive experiences, the impact of practical constraints on attendance, and the value of human connection in fostering personal growth and community building within the context of MettāVerses events.

QUESTION NINE

The responses to this question reveal that the most preferred content for MettāVerses is **guided meditations**, followed by **stories or personal reflections** and **kindness resources**.

Q9 The MettāVerses content for either online, app or in-person programs will be informed by the Buddhist concept of unconditional kindness. What kind of content would you prefer?



The survey findings indicate a strong preference for guided meditations (65.40%) and kindness resources like posters and shareable content (59.72%). Additionally, there is considerable interest in stories or personal reflections (60.19%) and suggestions for random acts of kindness (48.34%). Other options such as printable kindness diaries and a directory of kindness-based organizations also garnered notable interest, reflecting a diverse range of preferences among respondents.

QUESTION TEN

Why did you make your choices above?

The responses regarding preferences for the content of MettāVerses programs, whether online, through an app, or in-person, reveal several recurring themes. The themes are listed in order of the frequency they were mentioned:

1. Practical Applicability and Usability
2. Personal Connection and Engagement
3. Accessibility and Relevance

Practical Applicability and Usability: A significant number of respondents prioritize content that they find practical and easily usable in their daily lives. Guided meditations, kindness prompts, personal reflections, and stories are particularly favored for their potential to facilitate real-life application of the principles of unconditional kindness. For instance, one respondent mentioned, "Guided meditations: Always good. Kindness 'cards': It's great to use hand-written notes to share kindness and love." Another highlighted, "A practice of loving kindness... must also foster and encourage the voices of those who are disadvantaged."

Personal Connection and Engagement: Many respondents express a preference for content that fosters personal connection, engagement, and meaningful interaction. They appreciate resources like stories and personal reflections for their ability to evoke emotions, inspire, and facilitate user engagement. As one respondent put it, "Nothing more moving than a personal story." Another mentioned, "Stories are inspirational. Quotes are useful in times of need."

Accessibility and Relevance: Respondents also prioritize content that is accessible, relevant, and resonates with their interests and values. They seek resources that align with their preferences and provide opportunities for self-reflection, growth, and connection with others. For example, one respondent stated, "Because they are the most familiar to me," while another mentioned, "They all sound something I could do daily."

These themes collectively underscore the importance of practicality, personal connection, and relevance in the development of MettāVerses content. Respondents value resources that they can easily integrate into their lives, which foster emotional engagement and support personal growth while remaining accessible and aligned with their values and interests.

QUESTION ELEVEN

Q11 Are there any other forms of content you think would be better for MettāVerses? Why?

The responses regarding suggestions for additional forms of content for MettāVerses reveal several recurring themes. The themes are listed in order of the frequency they were mentioned:

1. tailored content for different cohorts
2. visual and multimedia content
3. interactive and community features

Tailored Content for Different Cohorts: The majority of respondents propose the inclusion of content tailored to specific cohorts or groups, such as workplaces, adolescents, students, parents, psychologists, and emergency service workers. They believe that customized themes and practical approaches would better serve the diverse needs of these groups. For instance, one respondent suggests, "It would be great to have topics or themes tailored to different cohorts/groups... These themes give practical and achievable ways for spreading kindness." Another emphasizes, "Identify areas... can benefit from kindness provide ways for members to instantly perform a kind act online."

Visual and Multimedia Content: Many respondents express an interest in incorporating visual and multimedia elements, such as images, photos, videos, and podcasts, alongside traditional text-based content. They believe that visual content can engage users more effectively and convey messages with greater emotional impact. For example, one respondent mentions, "Some images of kindness would be good... images might engage my heart more quickly." Another suggests, "Videos documenting living kindness acts... Films."

Interactive and Community Features: Several respondents suggest incorporating interactive and community-oriented features, such as discussion forums, webinars, online groups, and platforms for user-generated content. They emphasize the importance of fostering engagement, collaboration, and connection among users. For instance, one respondent proposes, "A place people can put in questions and they are answered by the community or an expert... This will help with engagement and user-generated content."

These themes collectively underscore the importance of customization, visual appeal, and community engagement in enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of MettāVerses content. Respondents value content that caters to diverse audiences, utilizes multimedia formats for greater engagement, and fosters active participation and collaboration within the community. Integrating these suggestions could enrich the MettāVerses platform and promote its mission of spreading kindness and compassion effectively.

QUESTION TWELVE

Q12 Do you have any tips to help us evaluate the feasibility of any of these options or would you like to recommend other options?

The survey responses regarding tips for evaluating feasibility and recommending other options for MettāVerses reveal several recurrent themes that are listed in order of the frequency they were mentioned:

1. user testing and feedback gathering
2. community engagement and participation
3. start small and iterate

User Testing and Feedback Gathering: A significant number of respondents emphasize the importance of user testing and feedback gathering at various stages of development. They suggest conducting trials, workshops, beta testing, and pilot programs to evaluate the effectiveness and feasibility of different options. For example, one respondent suggests, "User testing of any resources, apps, etc., at the scoping stage," while another recommends, "A test or focus group workshop or a pilot program with a survey afterwards."

Community Engagement and Participation: Many respondents stress the need for engaging the existing community and fostering participation to assess feasibility. They propose involving community members in decision-making processes, seeking feedback through surveys, and encouraging interaction through social media platforms. For instance, one respondent suggests, "Maximize social media... The number of shares will speak about its possibility," while another recommends, "Ask participants to provide brief feedback."

Start Small and Iterate: Several respondents advise starting with smaller, manageable features or options and gradually expanding based on feedback and evaluation. They highlight the importance of scalability, cost-effectiveness, and adaptability over time. For example, one respondent suggests, "Features could be added later so perhaps start with a smaller set of features and expand on that later," while another recommends, "Experiment in real life and ask the participants to report the outcome."

These themes collectively underscore the significance of user-centered design, community engagement, and iterative development processes in evaluating feasibility and refining options for MettāVerses. Respondents emphasize the need for practical testing, continuous feedback loops, and a flexible approach to implementation to ensure the platform's effectiveness and sustainability. Incorporating these suggestions into the development strategy can enhance the platform's relevance, usability, and impact in promoting loving-kindness and compassion.

QUESTION THIRTEEN

Q13 If you wish to hear more about or participate in this project please leave your email address:

A total of 109 of the respondents indicated that they would like to hear more about MettāVerses as it progresses. These contacts will provide the foundation for engagement and communication around the MettāVerses project moving forward. These 109 respondents will be the foundation of the MettāVerses community.

FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL VIABILITY

The survey results indicate that the preferred platform for MettāVerses is a **website** that includes guided meditations, stories or personal reflections, kindness resources and the capacity to host live online events such as **online workshops** using Zoom. A website with a built-in Zoom portal is not technologically unusual or difficult, meaning that it is technically feasible. As the project team has expertise to build and maintain websites, the budget to establish the preferred form of MettāVerses (shown below) is reasonable. The project team intends to apply for a grant to cover these costs through the Hsing Yun Education Foundation (HYEF). If that grant is not successful the team will seek other funding sources. Either way, the estimated budget is not prohibitive, meaning that this form of MettāVerses is financially feasible.

MettāVerses Budget	
ITEM	UNIT PRICE
Website development (Yola subscription)	1,000.00
Marketing	2,500.00
Incidental costs such as travel reimbursement	2,000.00
Tech support (subscriptions etc.)	1,000.00
General administrative costs (postage, phone etc.)	500.00
TOTAL	7,000.00

CONCLUSION

The survey responses show that the preferred platform for MettāVerses is a website that includes:

- guided meditations
- stories or personal reflections
- kindness resources

The survey responses also show that the website should have the capacity to host live online events such as online workshops using tools such as Zoom.

The cost for creating and maintaining MettāVerses in this form is minimal, as the budget in the previous section shows, which means that MettāVerses is certainly feasible.

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