

PERCEPTION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES BY BELIEVERS: AMBIVALENCE OF PRACTICES AND DIMENSIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Reference to this article: Jamanbalayeva Sh.O., Burova E.M. Perception of Digital Technologies by Believers: Ambivalence of Practices and Dimensions in the Context of Social Justice // SOCIOLOGY. KZ. – 2025. – №1(1). – P. 59 – 78. <https://doi.org/10.48010/2026.1/sskz.3>

Abstract. Digital technologies in Kazakhstan are becoming an integral instrument across various spheres and domains of activity. The technological affordances of the digital society expand the scope of religious practices through the virtualization of religious life. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have created the conditions for the emergence and functioning of digital religiosity. This phenomenon has undergone legitimation and institutionalization within both traditional and new religious movements. The range of digital religiosity is extensive: from the use of ICTs as a means of communication and access to diverse information, to the self-identification of a digital religious personality. The digitalization of Kazakhstani society exerts a significant influence on worldviews, reshaping the palette of religious mentality and contributing to multidimensional identity. The article presents selected findings concerning the understanding and perception of digital technologies among Kazakhstani believers. The research identified specific features of the informational culture of both believers and non-believers in Kazakhstan, and revealed the ambivalent perception and evaluations of the rapid development and functioning of the digital religious environment. The rationale and conclusions of the study are grounded in a factual base derived from Kazakhstani measurements.

Keywords: virtual religious practices, trust, social justice, digital religiosity, digital technologies, risks.

ДІНДАРЛАРДЫҢ ЦИФРЛЫҚ ТЕХНОЛОГИЯЛАРДЫ ҚАБЫЛДАУЫ: ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК ӘДІЛЕТТІЛІК КОНТЕКСТІНДЕГІ ПРАКТИКАЛАР МЕН ӨЛШЕМДЕРДІҢ АМБИВАЛЕНТТІЛІГІ

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ВОСПРИЯТИЕ ЦИФРОВЫХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ ВЕРУЮЩИМИ: АМБИВАЛЕНТНОСТЬ ПРАКТИК И ИЗМЕРЕНИЙ В КОНТЕКСТЕ СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ СПРАВЕДЛИВОСТИ

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Аңдатпа. Қазақстандағы цифрлық технологиялар әртүрлі салалар мен қызмет түрлерінде ажырамас құралға айналып келеді. Цифрлық қоғамның технологиялық мүмкіндіктері діни өмірді виртуаландыру арқылы діни тәжірибелердің мүмкіндіктерін кеңейтуде. Ақпараттық-коммуникациялық технологиялар (АКТ) цифрлық діндарлықтың қалыптасуы мен қызмет етуіне жағдай жасауға ықпал етті. Бұл құбылыс дәстүрлі және жаңа діндерде заңдастырылып, институционалданды. Цифрлық діндарлықтың ауқымы АКТ-ны қарым-қатынас пен жан-жақты ақпарат алу құралы ретінде пайдаланудан бастап цифрлық діни тұлғаның өзін-өзі айқындауына дейін кең көлемде байқалады. Қазақстан қоғамының цифрлануы діни менталитеттің палитрасын өзгерте отырып дүниетанымға тиімді әсер етеді және көпқырлы бірегейлікке ықпал етеді. Мақалада қазақстандық дінге сенушілердің цифрлық технологияларды түсінуі мен қабылдауының кейбір нәтижелері ұсынылған. Зерттеулер қазақстандық дінге сенушілер мен сенбейтіндердің ақпараттық мәдениетіндегі ерекшеліктерін анықтады, цифрлық діни ортаның жедел дамуы мен қызмет етуін амбивалентті қабылдау мен бағалауды ашып көрсетті. Зерттеудің негіздемесі мен қорытындылары қазақстандық өлшемдердің фактологиялық деректеріне сүйеніп жасалды.

Түйін сөздер: виртуалды діни тәжірибелер, сенім, әлеуметтік әділеттілік, цифрлық діндарлық, цифрлық технологиялар, тәуекелдер.

Аннотация. Цифровые технологии в Казахстане становятся неотъемлемым инструментом в разных сферах и видах деятельности. Технологические возможности цифрового общества расширяют возможности религиозных практик, благодаря виртуализации религиозной жизни. Информационно-коммуникационные технологии (ИКТ) способствовали созданию условий для формирования и функционирования цифровой религиозности. Этот феномен получил легитимацию, институционализацию в традиционных и новых религиях. Диапазон цифровой религиозности проявляется масштабно: от пользования ИКТ как средством общения и получения разносторонней информации до самоидентификации цифровой религиозной личности. Цифровизация казахстанского общества эффективно воздействует на мировоззрение и, меняя палитру религиозной ментальности, способствует многомерной идентичности. В статье представлены некоторые результаты понимания и восприятия цифровых технологий казахстанскими верующими. Исследования выявили особенности информационной культуры верующих и неверующих казахстанцев, раскрыли амбивалентное восприятие и оценки стремительного развития и функционирования цифровой религиозной среды. Обоснование и выводы исследования построены на фактологической базе казахстанских измерений.

Ключевые слова: виртуальные религиозные практики, доверие, социальная справедливость, цифровая религиозность, цифровые технологии, риски.

Introduction

The contemporary world, shaped by ongoing globalization, is closely connected with the dynamic development of the information sphere. The advancement of technologies and the widespread penetration of new digital and ICT tools have radically transformed not only the modern media space but also diverse forms of human activity, including the religious domain.

In present-day Kazakhstan, the digital society has become a reality: the achieved level of informatization and the ICT system have created the conditions for the development of infrastructure, the functioning, and the reproduction of digital religiosity. This phenomenon transcends boundaries, unfolds within the limitless space of the Internet, and attains legitimation within traditional religions, while in new religious movements it has long been rooted as an effective medium of interaction among actors in the religious process.

Cyber-religious discourse is multifaceted and multi-layered. It is represented by content generated by both confessional and non-confessional religious and quasi-religious entities, encompassing: a) electronic libraries with diverse content, ranging from sacred texts to methodological explanations and commentaries for their study, as well as publications by theologians and scholars; b) various forums, including dialogues with believers and discourses among them; c) online courses; d) blogs of clergy and quasi-religious coaches; e) cyber-excursions and pilgrimages to holy sites and memorials; f) cyber-rituals such as sermons, services, and religious practices in both offline and online formats; g) news dedicated to religious issues; h) interactive religious calendars, among others.

The digital ecosystem of Kazakhstan incorporates not only secular media content but also a religious segment. As a full-fledged participant in the global information ecosystem, Kazakhstan faces the task of formulating clear information and communication imperatives and value benchmarks that reflect the essence of its national interests in this sphere [1]. Whereas the secular segment of digital media contributes to shaping a holistic system of national values and a politico-social worldview amid historical turbulence, the religious segment of the digital community is responsible for the functioning and reproduction of a religious worldview.

The present study focuses on the perception of digital technologies by Kazakhstani believers and the understanding of their "embeddedness" in the paradigms of the digital society and in the functioning of digital religiosity.

Methodology

The research employs a mixed methodology, combining qualitative (focus-group discussions) and quantitative (a large-scale population survey) approaches.

Qualitative Research

The empirical basis of the article draws on materials from eight focus groups conducted in 2024 across cities and regions of Kazakhstan (Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, Atyrau, Turkestan, Akmola and Almaty regions, among others). Participants included practicing representatives of Christianity and Islam who are regularly engaged in religious practices. The field stage and primary data processing (transcription,

thematic grouping) were carried out by the BRIF sociological agency at the request of the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies (IPPRS). The interpretation, conceptualization, and theoretical reflection of the materials were undertaken by the authors of the present article.

The guide questions covered a broad spectrum of issues related to digitalization, ranging from everyday practices to moral and ethical evaluations. These questions were aligned with two key analytical frameworks: the ambivalence of digital practices and the category of social justice (see Table 1).

Table 1. Operationalization of research categories

<i>Analytical category</i>	<i>Empirical operationalization</i>	<i>Guide questions</i>
<i>Ambivalence of digital practices</i>		
Opportunities	Positive effects of digitalization: access to religious knowledge, new forms of participation, facilitation of everyday and religious practices.	– “In your opinion, what opportunities do ICTs provide for believers in general, and for religion in particular?”– “Under what conditions can the listed opportunities be realized?”
Risks	Negative effects of digitalization: dependency, loss of live communication, threats to family values, fraud, distortion of texts.	– “Do you think there are risks for religion resulting from the development of ICTs?”– “What happens to a person, in your view, when they become immersed in the ICT world?”– “Is it inevitable that a person becomes dependent?”– “What is the negative impact?”
<i>Dimensions of justice</i>		
Access	Opportunities to use ICTs in everyday and religious life; elimination or preservation of barriers.	– “Do you use ICTs in your daily life? How often? Why?” – “What do you usually use the Internet for? For which purposes most frequently?” – “Please share some concrete examples or situations from your life when you solved a problem/task with the help of ICTs.” – “In your view, how will ICTs be applied in religion (Islam/Orthodoxy) in the next 5–10 years?”
Integrity and reliability of the digital environment	Level of trust in digital sources, perception of authenticity, identification of concerns regarding fraud and distortions.	– “What advantages and disadvantages do you see in this?” (regarding the admissibility of ICTs in religion) – “Do you think there are risks for religion resulting from the development of ICTs?”
Fair distribution of responsibility	Perceptions of how responsibilities for regulating the digital environment should be distributed among the state, parents, religious institutions, and users themselves.	– “Do you think ICT use should be restricted for young people?” – “Up to what age should such restrictions apply?” – “In your opinion, how can ICT use be restricted?” – “What consequences could restrictions on ICT use have for the life of a believer?” – “What consequences could restrictions on ICT use have for the life of a non-believer?”

continuation of table 1.

<i>Analytical category</i>	<i>Empirical operationalization</i>	<i>Guide questions</i>
Ethical and value-based foundations	Moral and religious norms; admissibility of ICT use; changes in rules and moral guidelines under the influence of digitalization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Do you think it is acceptable to use ICTs in accordance with your religious views?” – “Do you think that, overall, Internet communication changes people’s attitudes toward the existing rules of society and norms of morality?” – “What is the positive impact?” – “What is the negative impact?” – “In your opinion, is it necessary to create new, special ethical rules for communication online, or are the existing ones sufficient?” – “Do ICTs influence believers? Do they affect the development of their personality?” – “If yes, in what way? Which ICTs may influence personality development?” – “Do ICTs influence non-believers? Do they affect the development of their personality?” – “If yes, in what way? Which ICTs may influence personality development?”

*Some guide questions are included in multiple analytical categories, as they simultaneously reveal several dimensions (for example, the ambivalence of practices and trust in digital information), which reflects the multidimensionality of the research indicators.

Quantitative Research

The empirical basis of the quantitative research is drawn from large-scale population surveys commissioned by the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies of the Committee for Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (IPPRS MES RK), and conducted by sociological agencies with a high professional reputation: in 2021 (during the pandemic) by BISAM Central Asia, and in 2024 by the BRIF agency.

1. Population survey (2021). Sampling: random multistage cluster sampling, representative of the regional (oblast), settlement, gender-age, and national characteristics of the general population, covering 14 regions of Kazakhstan as well as the cities of Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent. Sample size: 1,500 respondents. Data collection was carried out using a formalized personal interview technique (face-to-face), in compliance with sanitary and epidemiological measures, conducted near the entrances of apartment buildings and private houses at the respondents’ places of residence in both urban and rural settlements included in the sample. Fieldwork period: August 12 – September 9, 2021.

2. Population survey (2024). Sampling: representative stratified random sampling, covering 17 regions of Kazakhstan (including urban and rural settlements), as well as the cities of Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent. Sample size: 2,000 respondents (aged 18+). Data collection method: mixed technique (face-to-face interviews and online questionnaires). Fieldwork period: February–March 2024.

Both studies are based on a nationally representative sample; therefore, the results are regarded by the authors as commensurate and suitable for extrapolation to the general population. The authors of the article carried out the interpretation, visualization, reconstruction, and conceptualization of the materials (see Table 2).

Table 2. Operationalization of categories and semantic frames of quantitative research

<i>Analytical Category</i>	<i>Empirical Operationalization</i>	<i>Guide Questions</i>
Factors influencing the formation of worldview orientations and beliefs	<i>Subjective influence</i> Immediate environment (relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues) Conversations with priests, missionaries, other religious leaders, believers Self-determination <i>Institutional influence</i> Education and self-education Specialized literature and Internet resources <i>Influence of circumstances</i> Fashion trends and public moods Life circumstances	– “Which factors have had the greatest impact on the formation of your beliefs and worldview orientations?”
Influence of online information on the formation of beliefs	<i>Platforms (nature of information)</i> Social networks (exchange of opinions) Religious websites (information about religion, society, politics, family, upbringing, etc.) Watching religious TV and listening to radio (sermons by clergy, prayers, readings of sacred texts and religious books)	– “Does the information posted on the Internet (online resources, websites of religious associations, religious TV) influence the formation of your beliefs?”
General information culture	<i>Cognitive interest in the information field of the country and the world</i> <i>Sources of information about events in the country and the world</i>	– “Are you interested in the situation in the country and the world?” – “Which sources do you use to obtain information about events in the country and the world?”
Trust in information resources	<i>Trust in information resources</i> Social networks Bloggers, opinion leaders Kazakhstani news websites Foreign news websites Kazakhstani newspapers, magazines, TV news Foreign newspapers, magazines, TV news Analytical reviews, publications, and interviews with Kazakhstani experts Analytical reviews, publications, and interviews with foreign experts	– “Which sources do you trust in covering the situation in the country and the world?”

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Ambivalence of digital practices

Engagement with the information environment

The specificity of the digital society presupposes the involvement of ordinary consumers in the information environment. A comparison of interest in information about the country and the world, projected onto worldview identification, demonstrates that the cognitive interest shown in national and global events among different cohorts of believing respondents is higher (71.3%–81%) than the average value (66.6%), and significantly higher than among non-believers indifferent to religion (31.7%) and atheists (55%) (see Figure 1).

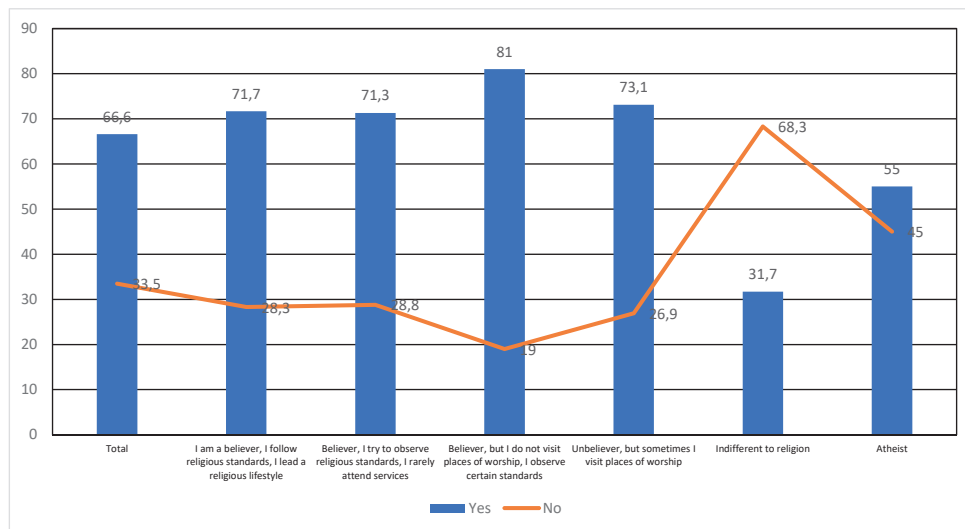


Figure 1. Distribution of responses to the question: “Are you interested in the situation in the country and the world?” (Population, religious self-identification, N = 2000, %, 2024)

A comparative analysis of the preferred sources of information revealed that:

- the prioritization of information channels varies depending on respondents’ worldview typology;
- for all respondents, regardless of their religious self-identification, social networks prevail (ranging from 28 %-47,3 %);
- Kazakhstani news websites, domestic newspapers, magazines, TV news, as well as other information sources (foreign news websites, bloggers, opinion leaders, foreign newspapers, magazines, TV news, analytical reviews, publications, and interviews with both Kazakhstani and foreign experts) show a variation of preferences (ranging from 8 %- 31,63%).

Specific feature: Respondents who are believers leading a religious way of life, as well as non-believing respondents who occasionally attend places of worship, demonstrate an increased interest in all sources of news information (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Information sources on the situation in the country and the world (Population, religious self-identification, N = 2000, %, 2024)

Trust in Information

According to the level of trust in news sources, depending on ideological preferences, a range of ratings is recorded. Among all cohorts of respondents, social networks, Kazakhstani news sites, Kazakhstani newspapers, magazines and news TV are the most trusted: in the range of values from 8% among atheists to 35.9% among believers. Foreign news sources are in a fairly equal position with opinion leaders and bloggers. (Figure 3).

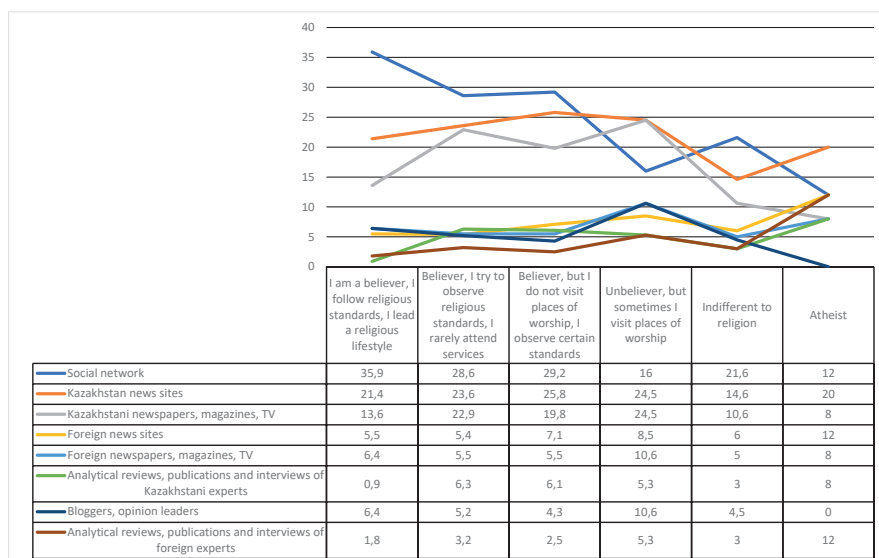


Figure 3. Distribution of responses to the question: “Which sources do you trust in covering the situation in the country and the world?” (Population, religious self-identification, N = 2000, %, 2024)

Influence of ICTs on worldview and beliefs

The role of ICTs in the context of digitalization is significantly increasing and exerts an impact on the formation of worldview. Comparable data for various cohorts of believers demonstrate the greater importance of Internet resources and specialized literature in comparison with the influence of religious actors such as clergy, missionaries, and fellow believers (see Figure 4).

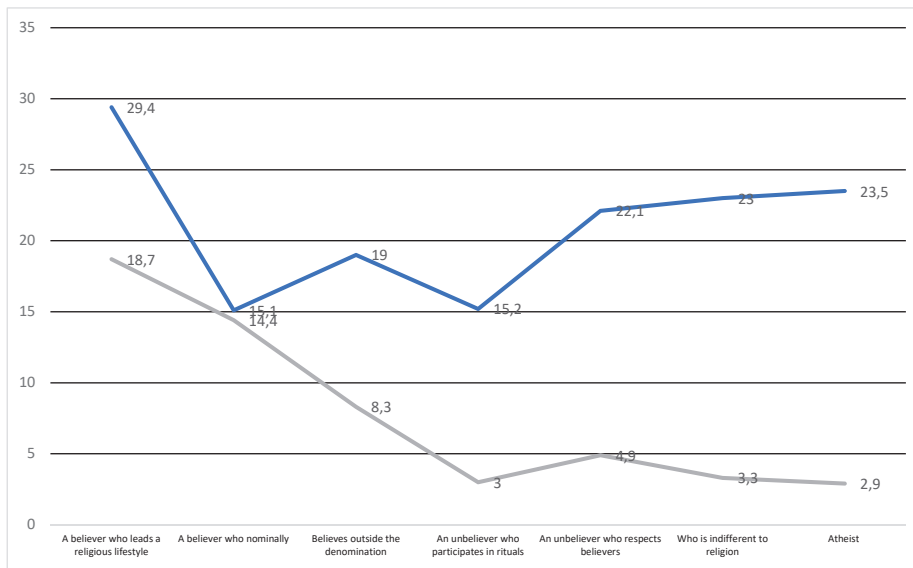


Figure 4. Influence of the internet and interaction with religious actors on worldview (Respondents, religious affiliation, N = 1500, %, 2021)

The majority of respondents consider that information technologies make it possible to disseminate their faith as well as religious knowledge among the population. Believers engaged in a religious way of life more frequently (38%) than other cohorts (ranging from 5.9% to 12.3%) indicate that various Internet resources and the opportunities they provide (exchange of opinions in religious social networks; listening to prayers and sermons; watching sermons of clergy; accompanying information about society, family, upbringing, values; listening to religious books) influence religious beliefs (see Table 3).

Table 3. Does Information Posted on the Internet Influence Religious Beliefs?
(Population, religious self-identification, %, N = 1500, 2021)

Statements / Worldview Self- Identification	<i>Believer, leading a religious way of life (RLW*)</i>	<i>Nominal believer</i>	<i>Believer outside confessions</i>	<i>Неверующий, уважаю верующих</i>	<i>Неверую- щий, уважаю верующих</i>	<i>Non- believer, respecting believers</i>	<i>Indif- ferent to religion</i>
No, on the Internet I am interested in other issues	48,1	73,8	80,8	90,9	85,2	88,5	94,1
Yes, it does: in social networks there is an exchange of opinions on religious issues	38	7,4	7,9	0	12,3	8,2	5,9
Yes, I listen to prayers and sermons	12,8	9	5,6	3	0,8	1,6	0
Yes, I watch sermons of clergy	9,1	3,1	2,5	0	0,8	0	0
Yes, religious websites provide much interesting information not only about religion, but also about family, upbringing, traditions	8	11,8	6,7	6,1	0,8	0	0
Yes, I listen to texts of religious books	7	2,4	3,3	0	0,8	3,3	0
*RLW – religious way of life							

Focus group participants note that the use of ICTs for religious purposes is a common practice and is actively applied in various forms of activity: communication, obtaining information, increasing knowledge, supporting religious organizations, and engaging in charitable activities.

Religious relations of an individual are not always publicly expressed. Many believers feel embarrassed to ask questions in person, fearing to appear ignorant. Social networks provide the opportunity to address clergy anonymously, without disclosing one's identity. This factor makes social networks attractive for those seeking spiritual answers online, while avoiding the public display of their religious status.

Opportunities for Using ICTs in Religious Experience

Virtual excursions and 3D cameras allow believers to visit holy sites without leaving their homes.

“What I like about the development of information technologies is that from home you can turn on the live broadcast from Mecca. For example, the Kaaba in Mecca—what is happening there, you can watch directly from home. This is also due to technological development. For this, I really like it. At home, on the television, you can watch live what is happening.” – Shymkent, practicing Islam.

Believers independently find sermons or educational lectures and listen to them at a convenient time.

“The same sermons, the same lectures, now all of this can be found on the Internet.” – Kaskelen, practicing Christianity.

“For example, I can spiritually enrich myself, enjoy it at the moment when I am struggling and it is difficult for me, and I can simply turn on a sermon or a prayer for myself. Before going to bed, I can listen to it when it is read in the well-trained voice of a priest, or simply by a representative of some religion. For me, this is very important. I simply need it. I try to go to church, but I cannot always find time for it. I do not always have the time to do it.” – Astana, practicing Christianity.

Clergy of various denominations maintain blogs and social media pages, where they provide advice on child-rearing, explain religious norms, and outline the rules of behavior for believers in different situations.

“Nowadays even priests are online. You can ask questions, and they answer them.” – Almaty, practicing Christianity.

“There is an application called Sajda—you can read everything there. It has the Qur'an, and on YouTube there are rules on how to perform namaz; all these rules can also be read there. But ideally, one should receive information directly from mentors in the mosque. Still, the application can also provide the necessary information.” – Kurmangazy village (Atyrau region), practicing Islam.

“During Ramadan, the ustaz goes live every day, and people can ask them questions directly regarding fasting. For example: ‘I did this, will my fast be broken because of it?’ and so on. In this sense, it makes religious life easier. Previously, people went to the mosque to ask the ustaz such questions in person.” – Atyrau, practicing Islam.

“If we talk about the application used to track prayer times, information technologies have greatly facilitated our lives. In the past, our ancestors looked at the sunrise to determine the time for prayer. Now a special application has been created: all surahs of the Qur'an are available in electronic format, with explanations of each ayah.” – Atyrau, practicing Islam.

Religious organizations and clergy use ICTs for educational and enlightening purposes.

“The Church itself now uses information technologies, because it necessarily has a blog that it maintains. Nowadays, on behalf of the Church, clergy run blogs on Instagram, explaining how to behave correctly, what needs to be done in particular situations.” – Astana, practicing Christianity.

“They can also give good advice, for example, on how to raise children or what we are doing wrong. I personally subscribe to several of them.” – Kaskelen (Almaty region), practicing Christianity.

“I think this is right, since nowadays a lot of young people are on social networks. On TikTok, advice from mentors is shared in short clips, and on YouTube one can watch full interviews. This is the right approach, as there is an understanding that everyone is on social networks now.” – Kurmangazy village (Atyrau region), practicing Islam.

Accessibility and inclusiveness for believers

Various information technologies allow believers to access religious services and guidance remotely. This is particularly important for those who find it difficult or do not have time to attend places of worship in person.

“For example, for some elderly or infirm believers, there is no need to go additionally to the church. One can simply open the phone and see everything there.” – Kabambai Batyr village (Akmola region), practicing Christianity.

“I agree that these could be sermons. And also, there are some books that are turned into audiobooks. For instance, if you do not have time to read, you can turn on the audio.” – Kaskelen (Almaty region), practicing Christianity.

“For example, even if you come to the church and want to buy something there, there is always a QR code through which you can make the payment.” – Almaty, practicing Christianity.

Access to religious knowledge via the Internet, including sermons, lectures, audiobooks, and online broadcasts, enables believers to maintain spiritual connection regardless of their location. Applications for reading and studying sacred texts (Qur'an/Bible) help believers improve their spiritual condition and knowledge.

“You can listen—my sister also sends me something because she lives in Russia. She regularly attends church, she visits the temple for different holidays, and she constantly sends me these videos: the ringing of church bells, when the priest sings something, and so on, like how they blessed kulichi on Easter. Honestly, these videos also touch the soul. Sometimes you even get goosebumps, but still, the church is something completely different.” – Astana, practicing Christianity.

“You can read the Qur'an and its translation. Holding the Qur'an in your hands, you learn to pronounce the words correctly while listening online.” – Turkestan, practicing Islam.

“There are special applications where you can use QR codes to read the Qur'an and its translation.” – Turkestan, practicing Islam.

The dilemma of religious practices: offline or online?

Most believers still prefer live dialogue with clergy rather than online communication. In their view, personal presence and participation in religious rituals cannot be fully replaced by virtual contacts.

“I do not approve of this. Behind the screen, anyone can sit, and no one knows whether what they are saying is correct. There are madrasas specifically for learning and deepening knowledge of Islam. A person who sincerely seeks knowledge of Islam should go to mosques, to madrasas. Obtaining knowledge online is wrong.” – Turkestan, practicing Islam.

“Live communication, precisely with a priest, with a minister of the Church, penetrates you more deeply, and you become more liberated.” – Astana, practicing Christianity.

“For me, communication through the phone (specifically regarding religion) is unacceptable, I also do not understand it.” – Astana, practicing Christianity.

“I think that one should not search about religion on the Internet but rather go to the mosque and learn from the imam. One can read surahs online, but nothing more.” – Kurmangazy village (Atyrau region), practicing Islam.

Some respondents emphasize the inadmissibility of imposing religious content (especially in aggressive advertising), considering freedom of religious choice to be a personal right.

“I believe that advertising imposition of religion is unacceptable. Or some public groups. I think all of this is unacceptable. If a person wants, they will find it themselves, but endless broadcasts, advertising, and attracting people through such advertising—I believe this is unacceptable.” – Almaty, practicing Christianity.

Respondents from the capital and major cities articulated the position that, overall, information technologies for modern believers are merely a tool; technologies themselves cannot affect “the essence of a person” or the worldview stability of a believer.

“I think this does not affect believers in any way. If a person is a believer, they generally do not bother with all these information technologies and innovations. A person remains in their faith, and, in fact, does not really care about all of this.” – Almaty, practicing Christianity.

Risks and negative consequences of ICT use

Some participants expressed concerns that electronic versions of religious texts may be distorted, and they therefore prefer traditional printed books, considering them a more reliable source of religious knowledge.

“When you take a printed Bible, you know that what is written there is correct. But if you take an electronic one, you do not know in which direction the text might lead you.” – Almaty, practicing Christianity.

Reading religious texts from screens may negatively affect memory and attention, as noted by some respondents who prefer paper books.

Muslim respondents voiced concerns that electronic versions of the Qur’an might be used improperly, for example, in unclean places. There are also worries about the incorrect use of electronic prayer beads and religious applications.

Distribution of responsibility

According to respondents in the focus groups, the Internet increasingly emerges not only as an environment of particular risks for users—both adults and youth—but also as a sphere requiring control and responsibility.

“It is good that information technologies exist and are developing. We must know how to use them correctly. There are only two aspects here, whether it is small children or teenagers. First, parents must provide the right upbringing, and then the state: whether it sets boundaries or something else. But control must come from both sides. Therefore, first of all, we as parents must start with ourselves. Simply, sometimes after work, when a child asks, ‘What is this?’, we say, ‘Oh, leave it.’ This is wrong.” – Shymkent, practicing Islam.

“The state itself, that is, every state, should control those videos on YouTube and not allow anything superfluous to be posted, especially for our youth. At the very least, some restrictions should be introduced until adulthood, certain limitations placed on TikTok, and likewise restrictions on phones for our children.” – Kaskelen (Almaty region), practicing Christianity.

Control over access to content exists among all believers, but it may be more flexible depending on specific confessions and values.

“In the past there was just one model of behavior. And now, you go on the Internet and see at least ten. And for a person it becomes very difficult to make a choice in any one direction. But a truly faithful believer, whether Christian or Muslim, is difficult to lead astray.” – Astana, practicing Christianity.

In the opinion of some respondents, control over the content of Internet resources and the accessibility of ICTs should be exercised by the state. At the same time, other respondents emphasize that restricting the use of technologies is no longer possible, and that in order to protect children, parental care, involvement in upbringing, and overall parental responsibility are most essential.

Muslim respondents place greater emphasis on filtering content that may contradict religious beliefs, moral norms, and traditions. Christian respondents also support control and filtering, but their approach is more focused on general safety and the development of the child, as well as on parental responsibility for the moral upbringing and behavior of children.

Participants in the focus-group discussions agreed that strict religious prohibitions or new ethical rules for online behavior alone would not be effective without family upbringing.

Discussion

A comparison of the results of the Kazakhstani study with descriptive characteristics of the digitalization of religion and trends in digital religiosity in global practice leads to the conclusion that the Kazakhstani segment of cyber-religiosity is subject to similar algorithms of development and functioning.

Religion and the Internet first intersected in global practice in the early 1980s, after which religion underwent several stages of change in its perception of the virtual world, which was initially unknown and even seen as threatening to “undermine religious knowledge” [2]. The institutionalization of digital religion in Kazakhstan began in the late 1990s–early 2000s with the mass emergence of new religious organizations, which, compared to traditional confessions, more intensively explored the virtual space. Since the 2010s, Kazakhstani priest-bloggers have been actively working online, followed somewhat later by religious bloggers and coaches.

The process of institutionalization of digital religion in Kazakhstan unfolded in accordance with classical characteristics and algorithms [3].

In contemporary research, the phenomenon of digital religion in Kazakhstan is conceptualized in the context of how digital media and Internet platforms transform religious practice in the digital age, as well as the impact this has on the religious culture of modern society. This approach is consistent with contemporary theoretical reconstructions [4].

The Kazakhstani segment of the Internet hosts a relatively limited number of religious portals compared to international volumes, yet they are well known among domestic believers. At one point, the Committee for Religious Affairs presented at least ten online resources positioned as officially recommended sources of religious knowledge on Islamic teachings: «e-islam.kz», «muftyat.kz», «azan.kz», «muslim.kz», «ummet.kz», «sunna.kz», «fatua.kz», «islam-atyrau.kz», «mazhab.kz» and «islam.kz».

The official website of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (www.muftyat.kz) offers a wide informational spectrum, covering a variety of themes, interests, and issues of concern to believers: news of Islam in Kazakhstan and worldwide, chronologically and thematically classified articles, religious-legal information, a media library with video and audio lessons on Islam and sermons, an electronic library, a question-and-answer section, a presentation of the structural organization of the SAMK with personnel details, and an interactive map indicating the locations of mosques and religious educational institutions.

The official website of the Metropolitan District of the Republic of Kazakhstan (<https://www.mitropolia.kz/>) covers events taking place in the Orthodox sphere in Kazakhstan and abroad, providing detailed information on the organization of the Kazakhstani Orthodox Church and its personnel, sacred sites, and religious institutions, including educational ones. The portal hosts an archive of articles dedicated to religious issues and sermons, as well as a question-and-answer section. It also offers the option of virtual tours of Orthodox cathedrals in Kazakhstan, as well as an online communication function through which users may ask questions of interest.

At present, religious resources of KazNet combine various types of online platforms - streaming, educational, immersive, news-thus being polyfunctional [5].

Kazakhstani bloggers among clergy members have accumulated millions of views, reflecting a trend of the blogosphere becoming an alternative channel for obtaining religious information.

Digital applications developed by Kazakhstani specialists have gained popularity beyond the country's borders and can be used not only by believers but also by non-believing consumers [6].

Technological processes of “delivering” religious content to the individual transform the consciousness of the believer, reshape the phenomenon of religiosity, and form a digital religious identity. Digital religiosity provides believers with the possibility of choice.

The majority of believing respondents objectively assess the introduction of technologies into everyday life and religious activity, emphasizing that religious institutions are keeping pace with progress.

Kazakhstani believers are integrated into various formats of digital society and demonstrate greater interest in contemporary information resources (both domestic and foreign) compared to their non-believing compatriots. In everyday life, believing respondents representing major confessions actively use information and digital technologies, without perceiving contradictions with their worldview. Among Kazakhstani believers of different confessions, social networks and platforms for acquiring religious knowledge and consultations are particularly popular. They watch and listen to lectures and sermons on YouTube, ask questions in comments on Instagram, and use live broadcasts and personal messages to receive answers from clergy. The use of audio for listening to books and prayers, as well as video broadcasts in various formats, has become accessible for people with disabilities and different preferences.

Among believers of Kazakhstan's traditional confessions there is no unanimous acceptance of information and communication technologies as prevailing in various religious discourses. Only a certain part of believers, representing the major confessions, positively perceive the legitimization of digital opportunities in relation to religious practices, even though this occurs with the approval of religious leaders.

Believing respondents tend to perceive ICTs in their personal religious experience as a means of technological connection with like-minded people and as a way to expand informational, communicative, educational, and consultative opportunities.

Respondents believe that in the future digital technologies will allow for a deeper study of the foundations of religion, broaden access to information for more people, and thereby have a positive impact not only on religion but also on interpersonal relations in general.

In matters of perception and attitudes toward information technologies, certain distinctions exist between Christians and Muslims. A common feature is that practitioners of either faith actively use information technologies in their everyday lives.

In religious practice, Muslims rely on information resources to access religious knowledge and practices, such as reading and studying the Qur'an through applications, tracking prayer times, and using electronic prayer beads. Christians, by contrast, more often turn to ICTs for participation in services, receiving spiritual guidance, and consultations with clergy. Online sermons and lectures are regarded as important for spiritual development.

For purposes of upbringing, Muslims place greater emphasis on strict adherence to religious traditions and norms of behavior in accordance with the prescriptions of Sharia, which encompasses all aspects of life, including the use of ICTs. Christians, meanwhile, focus more on general access to religious knowledge and social interaction.

Despite the overall positive influence of information technologies, believing respondents from different confessions emphasize the necessity of limiting negative informational content, which has become both accessible and often aggressive. Restrictive measures on the use of information technologies are deemed necessary primarily for children and adolescents, owing to their insufficient experience.

According to respondents, the problem of dependency on information technologies is today more pressing than the distancing of individuals from religion. The risks

may lead to more detrimental consequences, such as the destruction of traditional values, including family; the underdevelopment of critical thinking (especially among youth); and the substitution of reality and face-to-face communication by the virtual environment and mediated interaction. Digital reality is interpreted and accepted by believers in an ambivalent manner.

Conclusions

Technological means of modern communication reproduce the conditions for continuous informational interaction, influence worldview socialization, shape beliefs, and generate and amplify digital religiosity. The spatial environment of digital religion has no geographical or temporal boundaries and provides opportunities for both mediated and direct “inclusion” of an individual or group in the religious process.

User skills and sufficient information culture, the provision of Kazakhstanis with modern technical means, the availability of domestic and international communication channels, and the diversity of the informational space with religious content render both believing and non-believing citizens full-fledged subjects of digital religiosity, expand cognitive possibilities, and transform spiritual experience.

The phenomenon of cyber-religiosity not only produces but also extensively reproduces a new reality - digital religions. The virtual environment and ICTs function as instruments for the development of various functions of religion: informational, cognitive, educational, retranslational, guiding, regulatory, and others. They exert a formative influence on religious worldviews and contribute to the development of digital religious individuals and communities.

The process of digitalization of religion in contemporary Kazakhstan is synchronized with global trends. Kazakhstani believers, having accepted the paradigms of digital religion as an objective reality, treat it with moderate pragmatism; they demonstrate a certain degree of critical perception and recognize risks for the formation of a comprehensive digital culture of the individual. The axiological perception of digital religion is emphasized by Kazakhstani believers in the context of trust in this phenomenon, responsibility of actors engaged in digital religious discourses, and their positions regarding social justice as it functions in the digital age.

Source of funding for the research (Acknowledgement)

The research was conducted within the framework of funding from the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Grant №BR28713047-Artificial Intelligence and the Ethics of Social Justice: A Conceptual Reflection on Opportunities and Risks in the Processes of Modernization of Society in Kazakhstan).

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