

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON CHANGING RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS

Kadirova Dildora Sabirdjanovna

Senior Lecturer, Department of "Social Sciences and Sports,"

Fergana State Technical University

Email: d.kadirova@ferpi.uz

Abstract

This article provides a scientific analysis of the impact of digital technologies on religious practices. In the 21st century, technologies such as the internet, social networks, mobile applications, and virtual reality have created new forms of religious life. Religious ceremonies (online worship, virtual hajj and pilgrimages), religious education (electronic Quran and Bible, online lessons, religious platforms) and the acceptance of religious values in the consciousness of society have undergone a significant transformation. The research methodology is based on the analysis of literature, a historical-sociological approach, comparison, empirical observation, and content analysis. The obtained results showed that religious traditions are not disappearing in the digital environment, but are taking on a new form in an adaptive way. Digital technologies ensure the openness of religious knowledge to the general public and expand the possibilities of global communication. At the same time, it creates problems such as the simplification, commercialization, and spread of misinterpretations of religious values. Analysis of research by foreign and domestic scientists shows that the rational use of digital technologies is important for the preservation of religious values and maintaining their relevance in modern society.

Keywords: Digital technologies, religious traditions, online worship, virtual Hajj, religious education, social networks, global communication, religious values.

Introduction

It is no coincidence that the 21st century is called the "digital age." In the history of mankind, the rapid development of information technologies has penetrated deeply into all spheres of social, political, economic, and cultural life. Today, people's lifestyles, communication methods, sources of knowledge, and even the forms of fulfilling traditions and values are closely connected with the digital environment. In particular, the changes taking place in religious life are one of the most interesting and controversial aspects of this process. Because religion and religious customs have formed the spiritual basis of society for centuries, ancient traditions, historical events, cultural heritage, and local customs played an important role in their formation. Digital technologies are bringing a new spirit, new forms, and new possibilities to these ancient practices.

Digital technologies influence religious traditions mainly in three directions: firstly, in the form of dissemination and study of religious knowledge; secondly, in the practice of performing religious rites and prayers; thirdly, in the process of accepting religious values in society. For example, while previously religious education required visiting mosques, madrasas, or religious centers, today the possibility of reading electronic copies of sacred texts such as the Quran and



Bible through various mobile applications, and even listening to their audio translations and annotations is expanding. At the same time, religious ceremonies are also moving from traditional to online format. During the pandemic, this process accelerated even more: many religious communities began broadcasting prayers in mosques or churches live.

How do such changes affect the essence of religious customs? This question is at the center of today's research. On the one hand, digital technologies have made it possible to popularize religious knowledge, increase interest among young people, and develop global religious dialogue. On the other hand, the commercialization, simplification of religious values, and sometimes the spread of misinterpretations, posed a danger. Therefore, the transformation of religious traditions should be considered as a two-sided process: it includes both opportunities and problems [1].

From a historical point of view, the formation of religious customs has always been inextricably linked with social and technological factors. For example, after the invention of printing, the widespread dissemination of sacred texts led to the popularization of religious knowledge. During the era of radio and television, religious ceremonies reached a wide audience. Now, technologies such as the internet, social networks, mobile applications, and virtual reality are becoming an integral part of religious life. This changes not only the method of disseminating religious knowledge, but also the form of religious practices.

Sociological approaches play an important role in the study of the influence of digital technologies on religious life. Because the function of religion in society is to strengthen not only spiritual, but also social unity, preserve values, and ensure spiritual balance in society. The digital environment forces these functions to be implemented in a new form. For example, if previously participation in collective prayers was a symbol of social solidarity, now such a feeling of solidarity is also created in virtual form in online worship. This creates a new socio-philosophical content of religious traditions.

The years of the pandemic have become a vivid example of the influence of digital technologies on religious traditions. When visits to mosques, churches, and other religious sites were restricted, many people were forced to perform prayers at home and watch religious ceremonies online. Thus, the main element of religious life, associated with the holy place, temporarily transitioned to a virtual form. Although this process was temporary, as a result, many people began to adopt online religious practices as a habit.

At the same time, digital technologies have expanded the geographical boundaries of religious traditions. For example, not everyone has the opportunity to visit rituals such as Hajj and pilgrimage, but thanks to virtual reality technologies, it has become possible to "travel" to holy places from anywhere in the world. This contributes to the spread of religious values at the global level.

Another important aspect is the expansion of religious propaganda on social networks. Today, religious topics are presented in various formats on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, ranging from short videos to extended lectures. This directly affects the religious views of the younger generation. However, at the same time, there is a risk of the spread of incorrect or extremist religious content [2].

When analyzing the transformation of religious traditions, it is necessary to take into account its positive and negative aspects. The positive side is the openness to religious knowledge, the entry



of religious practices into global dialogue, and the opportunity to attract the attention of young people. The negative side is the risk of simplification, commercialization, and widespread misinterpretation of religious values. Therefore, it is important to study this process on a deep scientific basis, to analyze its social, cultural, and spiritual consequences.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of digital technologies in the process of changing religious traditions, to identify the positive and negative aspects of this process, and to develop scientific recommendations for the preservation of religious values in the digital environment. The methodology of the research is the analysis of literature, the method of comparison, empirical observations, and sociological approaches. Through this, the role and influence of digital technologies in religious life are comprehensively covered.

Thus, digital technologies lead not to the disappearance of religious traditions, but to their adaptation to new conditions. Importantly, this process should serve to preserve the relevance of religious values in the life of modern society without losing their true essence.

The Impact of Digital Technologies on Religious Customs

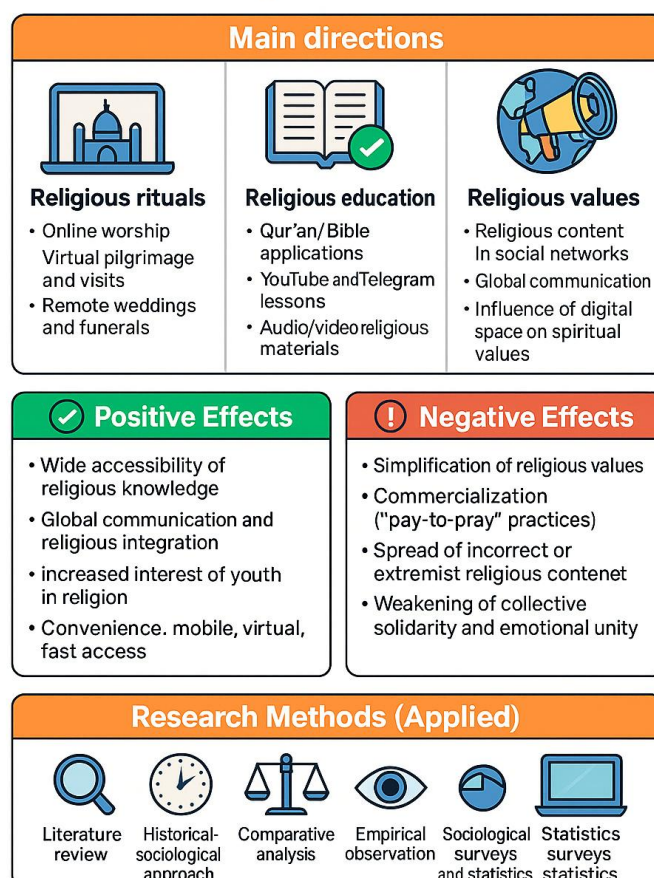


Figure 1. The impact of digital technologies on changing religious practices

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study is based on complex approaches of modern social sciences and is aimed at a deep scientific analysis of the influence of digital technologies on religious

traditions. For the study of the transformation of religious life, a single theoretical approach is not enough, but the use of multifaceted and systematic methods is required. Therefore, this article combines several methods: literature analysis, historical-sociological approach, comparison method, empirical observation, and content analysis. Each method illuminates from different angles how religious traditions are formed in the digital environment.

First of all, the method of literature analysis was used. This method became the basis for studying local and international research on the transformation of religious life and customs. Although the interaction between digital technologies and religion is not yet fully understood, in recent years, numerous articles, reports, and monographs have been published by various universities, research centers, and researchers. Through this literature, valuable scientific information was obtained on the historical formation of religious traditions, changes in the era of technological progress, and transformation processes under the influence of modern digital platforms. For example, the expansion of religious propaganda in the era of radio and television, and the popularization of religious knowledge in the era of the Internet and social networks were studied. On this basis, theoretically summarized how digital technologies influence religious traditions [3].

The historical-sociological approach was used as the second important method. This approach is aimed at studying the historical formation of religious customs and their social functions in society. For centuries, religious rites have served not only as a means of satisfying spiritual needs, but also as a means of uniting members of society, strengthening social solidarity, and transmitting values from generation to generation. The historical approach shows how religious traditions adapted to technological processes: for example, the widespread dissemination of sacred texts after the invention of the printing press, the broadcasting of religious ceremonies on radio and television, and now the transition of worship and education to digital form via the internet. Thus, the change of religious customs was considered as a continuous historical process. The comparison method was also one of the main research methods. With the help of this method, traditional religious customs were compared with new religious practices formed in the digital environment. For example, if previously a wedding ceremony or funeral was held only with physical participation, now many families or communities are holding these ceremonies online or participating remotely. Or if reading the Quran was traditionally done through the holy book, today this process has become much easier through mobile applications and the internet. Through the comparison method, it was revealed that although the essence of religious customs remains unchanged, their form undergoes a significant transformation.

Through the use of the empirical observation method, the implementation of religious practices in the digital environment was directly studied. During the pandemic, online prayers and online broadcasts of religious ceremonies held in mosques, churches, and other religious institutions were observed and analyzed. Also, based on observation, the consumption of religious content on social networks, the activities of religious leaders on online platforms, and the attitude of young people towards religious information were studied. Empirical data have shown that digital technologies influence religious traditions not only formally, but also semantically.

In addition, the content analysis method was used. Materials on social networks, online lessons, mobile applications, and virtual pilgrimage content on religious topics were analyzed. Through this method, the form in which religious content is presented, its impact on the audience, and its



positive and negative aspects were clarified. Content analysis showed that the digital environment contributes to the rapid spread of religious knowledge, but at the same time causes the dissemination of incorrect or false religious information to a wide audience. Therefore, the identification and analysis of reliable sources in the study of religious traditions in the digital environment was considered as an important methodological requirement [4].

Another important aspect of the methodology is the use of sociological surveys and statistical data. Global surveys show that a large number of young people receive religious information not from traditional sources, but from the Internet and social networks. This confirms the influence of digital technologies on religious traditions based on specific figures. Statistical data show the rate of distribution of religious content on the Internet, the use of mobile applications, and the number of participants in online religious ceremonies.

In general, the methodology of this study is based on multifaceted approaches and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of digital technologies on religious traditions. The analysis of the literature established the theoretical foundations, the historical-sociological approach showed the continuous transformation of religious traditions, the comparative method revealed the differences between traditional and modern forms, empirical observation illuminated real practices, and content analysis revealed the features of religious content in the digital environment. At the same time, statistical data and sociological surveys further strengthened the methodology. Such a comprehensive approach helps to gain a deeper understanding of how religious traditions change under the influence of digital technologies and to draw scientific conclusions.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS

The interaction between digital technologies and religion is one of the most pressing issues for contemporary social sciences. While religion has historically been one of the main pillars of social life, the formation of the digital environment has a significant impact on the external appearance and acceptance of religious customs in society. Research conducted by foreign and domestic scientists on this issue illuminates different aspects, their scientific approaches complement each other and expand the general scientific understanding. In foreign studies, the concept of "digital religion" or "digital religion" has been formed. For example, Heidi Campbell's work deeply explored the impact of the internet and social networks on religious identity, religious communication, and community. According to him, the internet is becoming a new "sacred space," where online worship, virtual pilgrimage, and religious education are becoming an integral part of collective life. Similar ideas are put forward by Christopher Helland: he distinguishes between the concepts of "online religion" (practice of religion on the Internet) and "online for religion" (use of the Internet as a means of propaganda and education). These theoretical views were especially relevant during the pandemic, as they showed that many religious practices were carried out via the Internet. Stewart Hoover studied the process of popularization of religious values through the media and their mixing with mass culture, thereby focusing on the process of simplifying religious discourse. At the same time, the Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan studied the trend of young people receiving religious education through the digital environment and, along with its positive aspects, highlighted the risks: religious literacy increases, but the risk of religious knowledge spreading in a superficial and concise form



increases. From a statistical point of view, a comprehensive survey conducted by the Pew Research Center also confirms this situation: more than half of the world's Muslims consume religious content online, and in Christian communities, the habit of online worship has become a permanent form after the pandemic [5].

Research by local scholars is mainly focused on issues of religious and spiritual stability, influence on the minds of young people, and the protection of religious values. Uzbek scholars, in particular Abdukodir Muminov, note the risk of misinterpretation of religious values in the digital environment and emphasize the need to develop reliable religious platforms. Shuhrat Sattorov, studying the relationship between religious consciousness and virtual communication, shows that online religious practices, along with positive opportunities, can weaken the sense of collective solidarity. Scientists from the Tashkent Islamic Institute analyzed the effectiveness of using mobile applications and online courses in teaching the Quran and hadiths, but warned that the traditional teacher-student relationship may weaken. Sociological research shows a high reliance on internet resources in obtaining religious knowledge among the youth of Uzbekistan. More than 70 percent of young people admit that they primarily use platforms such as YouTube and Telegram in search of answers to their religious questions. While this allows for the widespread dissemination of religious values, it can also lead to the popularization of superficial knowledge and misinterpretations.

Summarizing and analyzing the works of foreign and domestic scientists, we see that, along with differences, there are also commonalities between them. The works of foreign scholars cover more conceptual, theoretical, and global processes, with their main focus on the form of religious practices and the issue of collectivism under the influence of digital technologies. The research of local scholars is more focused on ensuring religious and spiritual stability, protecting young people from incorrect religious influences, and preserving national values. Their approach is aimed at ensuring practical and social security, which complements global theoretical views. Thus, as a result of scientific analysis, the following conclusion is formed: digital technologies bring both opportunities and problems to religious traditions. Opportunities include the accessibility of religious knowledge to the general public, global dialogue, and increased religious interest among young people, while problems include the simplification of religious values, the spread of incorrect content, and the weakening of commercialization and collective solidarity. Consequently, in order to preserve religious values in the future and ensure their relevance in modern life, a comprehensive approach is required, combining foreign theoretical views and domestic practical experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results showed that digital technologies significantly influence not the essence of religious customs, but their external formation and methods of implementation. While religion and religious practices have been one of the main pillars of the spiritual and social life of society for centuries, the digital environment is reshaping their appearance in the modern context. The results confirmed that digital technologies influence religious life in three main directions: the form of religious ceremonies, the dissemination of religious education and knowledge, and the perception and evaluation of religious values in the consciousness of society. These three directions are closely interconnected, and together they determine the transformation of religious



traditions in the new era [6].

As the first result, a formal transformation of religious rites was observed. While previously the main characteristics of religious ceremonies were physical participation, dependence on a specific space, and collective solidarity, now many of them are carried out through a digital environment. The pandemic became the most striking example of this process. For example, Friday prayers or Sunday Christian prayers were broadcast online. People began participating remotely in ceremonies such as weddings and funerals through Zoom, YouTube, or other platforms. This phenomenon changed the form of religious customs, but did not lose its essence. Digital rituals also played an important role in ensuring social solidarity, except that this solidarity has now emerged in a virtual environment. In this respect, the main goal of religious rites - spiritual unity, social support, and the expression of values - has been preserved, only the form of its implementation has changed.

The second result is related to the spread of religious education and knowledge. Digital technologies contributed to the rapid dissemination of religious knowledge to the general public. Electronic copies of the Quran, the Bible and other sacred texts, mobile applications, audio and video formats facilitated the process of religious education. Young people are now attending religious lessons not only in madrasas or religious centers but also through social networks, YouTube channels, and Telegram groups. This led to the popularization of religious education. At the same time, digital education has created the opportunity for the global exchange of religious knowledge. For example, an imam or priest in a country can be watched by a listener from anywhere in the world. This gave rise to a new form of global religious dialogue. However, at the same time, the results show that the spread of religious knowledge in the digital environment also creates some risks: misinterpretations, the spread of extremist views, and the commercialization of religious values. Consequently, this process includes both positive opportunities and negative consequences [7].

The third result showed that significant changes are taking place in the perception and evaluation of religious values in the consciousness of society. Social networks have become the main platform for religious propaganda. On platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, religious topics are often presented in light, concise, and visual form. While this method increases interest among young people, it also leads to the simplification of religious values. For example, instead of a deep scientific explanation of a religious issue, short and emotional videos are being accepted more quickly by a wider audience. This creates a risk of reducing the content richness of religious values. Nevertheless, the results show that social networks ensure the rapid spread of religious values at the global level, and this process cannot be denied.

One of the debates is that digital technologies do not destroy religious traditions, but rather adapt them. Religion, by its nature, is a dynamic system: it has adapted to various social, political, and technological changes throughout history. Even with the invention of printing, the spread of religious knowledge underwent a transformation, and mass manifestations of religious rites emerged in the era of radio and television. Today's internet era is a continuation of such a process, changing the form of religious traditions. It is important that this process does not violate the true meaning of religious values.

The results of the study also showed that digital technologies have expanded the geographical boundaries of religious life. For example, if rituals such as Hajj and Umrah traditionally required



visiting a specific area, today there is an opportunity to "virtual visit" holy places through VR technologies. Of course, this cannot replace real Hajj, but it expands the possibility of experiencing religious feelings and gaining spiritual experience. On the other hand, this process can also lead to the commercialization of religious customs. Because there is a possibility that virtual pilgrimage services will be provided in paid form [8].

The results also showed that religious leaders and religious organizations have begun to actively use digital technologies. They communicate with their audience on social networks, answer questions, deliver lectures, and even issue online fatwas. This expanded the influence of religious leaders in society, but also increased their responsibility. Because in the online space, every word quickly spreads to a wide audience, and this can lead to misinterpretations.

Another controversial aspect is that the transition of religious traditions to the digital environment also affects social relations in society. In traditional religious ceremonies, it was important to gather collectives, communicate face-to-face, and support each other. In digital ceremonies, however, this sense of unity can be weakened. Religious organizations need to find ways to combine online and offline rituals so that this does not lead to a cooling of social ties.

The results showed that religious traditions are not fundamentally changing under the influence of digital technologies, but are adapting to new conditions. In the discussions, the positive and negative aspects of this process were revealed: the positive aspects are the openness of religious knowledge, global communication, convenience; the negative aspects are the simplification, commercialization of religious values and the spread of misinterpretations. Therefore, in the future, religious organizations and society face an important task: to preserve the true meaning of religious values by effectively using digital technologies [9,10].

CONCLUSION

The research results show that digital technologies radically change the form of religious customs in modern society, but do not destroy their essence. Religion and religious values have been an integral part of human life, serving as an important factor in ensuring spirituality, spiritual stability, and social cohesion. The rapid development of information technologies, the transformation of the Internet into a global platform, and the widespread use of digital platforms create the opportunity to implement religious traditions in a new context. This process should be considered not as a denial of religious values, but as their adaptation to modern life.

The transformation of religious rites is a vivid confirmation of this. For example, during the pandemic, when the possibility of praying in mosques and churches was limited, many religious communities continued to pray through online broadcasts. This showed the transition of religious traditions from physical space to virtual space. Virtual Hajj and pilgrimages, online weddings and funerals also confirm the penetration of digital technologies into religious life. Although these rituals differ from their traditional form, their main function - satisfying spiritual needs and strengthening collective solidarity - remains.

In the sphere of religious education, digital technologies have also brought revolutionary changes. Electronic copies of the Quran, the Bible and other holy books, mobile applications, audio and video formats served the rapid and convenient dissemination of religious knowledge to the general public. The provision of lessons, lectures, and advice on religious topics on platforms such as YouTube, Telegram, and Instagram has increased young people's interest in



religious knowledge. At the same time, global communication has also expanded: a person from any point in the world has the opportunity to listen to a religious scholar or leader from another country. This brought religious education beyond national borders to a global scale.

At the same time, changes were observed in the perception of religious values in the consciousness of society. Social networks have become the main means of religious propaganda. This, on the one hand, serves the rapid and widespread dissemination of religious values, and on the other hand, leads to their simplification and commercialization. Short videos and emotional posts cannot reveal the deep essence of religious issues, and as a result, the content richness of religious values may decrease. At the same time, the risk of misinterpretations and the spread of extremist content is also increasing.

The study shows that digital technologies, along with expanding the possibilities of religious traditions, also bring new problems to them. Positive aspects include openness of religious knowledge, global dialogue, increasing religious interest of young people, convenience and speed. Negative aspects are associated with the simplification, commercialization of religious values, the spread of incorrect religious content, and the weakening of a sense of collective solidarity. Therefore, religious organizations and society face an important task: the rational use of digital technologies, preserving the relevance of religious values in modern life without losing their original meaning.

Also, religious leaders should learn to effectively use digital technologies, thereby strengthening communication with their community. But this process also increases their responsibility, because any opinion expressed on the Internet quickly spreads to a wide audience. Therefore, it is very important to use clear criteria, control, and reliable sources in the dissemination of religious knowledge in the digital space.

In general, digital technologies lead not to the disappearance of religious traditions, but to their adaptation to the requirements of the modern era. Importantly, this process must preserve the core essence of religious values, their spiritual and social functions. Just as religion has adapted to various technological changes throughout history, it is natural for today to embrace the possibilities of the digital age. However, this adaptation must be carried out with caution, a scientific approach, and social responsibility.

Thus, the final conclusion of the study is that digital technologies allow us to reshape religious traditions and continue them in a new context. Managing this process, expanding its positive opportunities, and reducing its negative consequences is the responsibility of religious organizations, scholars, and society as a whole. In the future, the preservation of the role and significance of religious values in the life of modern society will depend on this responsible approach.

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