THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION IN THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND DIGITALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

There are three events in the history of mankind that have led to fundamental changes in religion and religious life. The first is the distribution of books and other media through printing houses, the second is the development of publishing (newspapers, magazines, etc.) and urbanization as a result of industrialization, and the third is the Internet or digital applications. Printing and urbanization have changed religious thought, lifestyle, and forms of belief not only in Europe or in Jewish, Islamic, and Christian societies, but also in Buddhist, Shinto, and Taoist societies. When the Internet became the most widely used source of information in the 2000s, people's beliefs, thinking, and lifestyle underwent a transformation. If the modern era is marked by the printing press, then television, radio and digitalization have become symbols of postmodernity. In the so-called "virtual, cyber, digital, online" world, humanity's mind, emotions, behavior, and conversations are transferred from real life to a virtual process.

Artificial intelligence and digitalization are among the most important transformative tools of our time, leading to profound changes in how people understand religious identity. This article aims to explore the impact of these processes on religious beliefs and practices, as well as identity. While new communication tools and virtual platforms offered by digitalization facilitate access to religious information, they also alter traditional religious structures. Conversely, the role of artificial intelligence in interpreting religious teachings and shaping people's spiritual experiences is becoming increasingly evident.

This study not only examines the long-term impact of these technological changes on religious identity and society but also offers a multidimensional solution to the innovative and challenging aspects of the digital age pertaining to religious identity.

Key words: Artificial Intelligence, Religiosity, Religious Identity, Digitalization, Transformation.

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Жасанды интеллект және цифрландыру дәуіріндегі діни бірегейліктің трансформациясы

Аңдатпа. Адамзат тарихында дін мен діни өмірге түбегейлі өзгерістер әкелген үш жаңалық бар. Оның біріншісі – баспахана арқылы кітап пен өзге баспасөзді тарату, екіншісі – басылымдардың (газет, журнал және т.б.) дамуы мен индустрияландырудың нәтижесіндегі урбанизация, үшіншісі – интернет немесе цифрлық негіздегі қосымшалар. Баспа басылымдары мен урбанизация тек Еуропада немесе еврей, ислам және христиандық қоғамдардағы ғана емес, сонымен қатар буддистік, синтоистік және даолық қоғамдардағы діни ойды, өмір салты мен сенім формасын өзгертті. Ғаламтор 2000-шы жылдары ең жиі қолданылатын ақпарат көзі болған кезде адамның сенімі, ойлауы және өмір салты трансформацияға ұшырады. Модерндік кезеңнің көрсеткіші – баспахана болса, постмодерндіктің символы – теледидар, радио мен цифрландыру болды. «Виртуалды, кибер, цифрлық, онлайн» әлем деп аталатын жерде адамзаттың ақыл-ойын, эмоциясын, мінез-құлық пен әңгімелесуін шынайы өмірден виртуалды процеске тасыды.

Жасанды интеллект және цифрландыру қазіргі заманның ең маңызды трансформация құралдарының бірі және адамдардың діни бірегейлік туралы түсінігінде терең өзгерістерге алып келді. Бұл мақала аталмыш процестердің діни сенім мен тәжірибеге және бірегейлікке әсерін зерттеуге бағытталған. Цифрландыру ұсынатын жаңа коммуникация құралдары мен виртуалды платформалар діни ақпаратқа қол жеткізуді жеңілдеткенімен, дәстүрлі діни құрылымдарында да өзгерістер туғызады. Екінші жағынан жасанды интеллекттің діни ілімдерді түсіндірудегі және жеке адамдардың рухани тәжірибесін қалыптастырудағы рөлі барған сайын айқын бола түседі.

Зерттеуде осы технологиялық өзгерістердің діни бірегейлік пен қоғамға ұзақ мерзімді әсерін қарастыруымен қатар цифрлық дәуірдің діни бірегейлікке қатысты инновациялық және проблемалық аспектілеріне көп өлшемді шешім ұсынады.

Түйін сөздер: жасанды интеллект, діндарлық, діни бірегейлік, цифрландыру, трансформация.

Искусственный интеллект и трансформация религиозной идентичности в эпоху цифровизации

Аннотация. В истории человечества есть три события, которые привели к фундаментальным изменениям в религии и религиозной жизни. Первая – это распространение книг и других средств массовой информации через типографии, вторая – развитие издательского дела (газет, журналов и т. д.) и урбанизация в результате индустриализации, а третья – это Интернет или цифровые приложения. Книгопечатание и урбанизация изменили религиозную мысль, образ жизни и формы верований не только в Европе или в иудейских, исламских и христианских обществах, но также и в буддийских, синтоистских и даосских обществах. Когда в 2000-х годах Интернет стал наиболее распространенным источником информации, убежде-

ния, мышление и образ жизни людей претерпели трансформацию. Если эпоха модерна отмечена печатным станком, то символами постмодерна стали телевидение, радио и цифровизация. В так называемом «виртуальном, кибер, цифровом, онлайновом» мире разум, эмоции, поведение и разговоры человечества переносятся из реальной жизни в виртуальный процесс.

Искусственный интеллект и цифровизация являются одними из важнейших трансформационных инструментов нашего времени и привели к глубоким изменениям в понимании людьми религиозной идентичности. Целью данной статьи является исследование влияния этих процессов на религиозные убеждения и практику, а также на идентичность. Хотя новые инструменты коммуникации и виртуальные платформы, предлагаемые цифровизацией, облегчают доступ к религиозной информации, они также вносят изменения в традиционные религиозные структуры. С другой стороны, роль искусственного интеллекта в интерпретации религиозных учений и формировании духовного опыта людей становится все более очевидной.

Это исследование не только изучает долгосрочное влияние этих технологических изменений на религиозную идентичность и общество, но и предлагает многомерное решение инновационных и проблемных аспектов цифровой эпохи, касающихся религиозной идентичности.

Ключевые слова: искусственный интеллект, религиозность, религиозная идентичность, цифровизация, трансформация.

Introduction

The process of social change that we have experienced with the development of science and technology has become a widespread phenomenon along with the social consciousness that has developed from the past to the present. The additional tools that have appeared together with the technique, which are reflected in all spheres of public life, always interact with all the structures that make up society. This society and technological interaction, which took place at different times in history, spread widely with the advent of the artificial intelligence concept and took on a completely different dimension. Artificial intelligence technologies, one of the most important discoveries in human history, have formed a new global vision for people, from engineering to medical science, from economics to media, from sports to art, from transport to communications, from culture to politics. Undoubtedly, many will be interested in how this new worldview, represented by artificial intelligence technologies, affects religion, one of the most important institutions of the traditional social structure. While artificial intelligence is seen by some as a threat to religions, the opportunities it offers can generate positive opinion when functionally used in religious services. In this sense, it is necessary to study the relationship between artificial intelligence and the religious attitudes and behavior of people.

Religion communicates with people through its symbols and customs within the context of the period in which it lives, and is an important phenomenon that affects the general social and psychological development and change of people. Religious attitude, on the other hand, is a way of defining a person's feelings, thoughts, and behavior in relation to religion as positive or negative. The development of systems that allow the use of artificial intelligence technologies in the religious sphere (religious guidance, issuing fatwas, etc.) may affect the religious views of individuals, as well as the religious structure of society. It is not surprising that systems such as "interpreters, fatwa servers, advisors, virtual instructors, mobile booths" will soon develop, serving society in religious matters through artificial intelligence.

The 21st century can be defined as an era of transformation, where technological developments have profoundly affected social dynamics. Artificial intelligence technologies, while bringing about radical changes in almost all areas of human life, have raised new questions about the perception of the individual and social roles. In this context, religious identity has emerged as an important element that shapes not only the beliefs of individuals, but also their social and cultural connections. The impact of artificial intelligence on religious identity is a topic of debate at both the theoretical and practical levels. This area of influence, which ranges from the digitalization of faith practices to the redefinition of the religious leaders' roles, requires a multidimensional approach to the relationship between religion and technology. For example, AI-powered worship applications, the creation of religious groups in digital environments, and ethical debates are some of the current manifestations of this relationship. This article aims to analyze the intersection of religion and technology in contemporary societies by examining the impact of artificial intelligence technologies on religious identity. It also aims to provide an interdisciplinary perspective to understand the changes that artificial intelligence is causing in religious beliefs and practices. From this perspective, our research examines various aspects of the topic, both with a theoretical framework and case studies.

The research topic on the religious identity transformation in the era of artificial intelligence and digitalization is becoming a relevant issue in the context of the rapid technologies' development that are becoming an integral part of everyday life. Artificial intelligence is actively used in education, medicine, economics and other areas, but its impact on the sphere of spirituality and religious identity has not been sufficiently studied yet. However, digitalization and technology are transforming traditional forms by creating new forms of religious knowledge and religious practice. The purpose of our study is to analyze the impact of artificial intelligence and digitalization on the formation and change of the religious identity of an individual in modern society. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set: to analyze the role of artificial intelligence in changing traditional religious practices and perceptions of spirituality, and to identify the potential risks of artificial intelligence merging with the religious sphere.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research method to analyze the relationship between artificial intelligence and religious identity. Due to the nature of the subject, an approach that includes sociological and philosophical dimensions was adopted to understand the impact of artificial intelligence on religious identity and an interdisciplinary approach was followed. A literature review method was used in the data collection process that formed the basis of the study. In this context, academic articles, books, reports, and current research published in international scientific databases dealing with the issues of artificial intelligence and religious identity were reviewed. A comprehensive framework on the impact of artificial intelligence on religious identity was developed, especially based on data from academic sources indexed in Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar and provided by the Committee for Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The study examined the interaction between artificial intelligence and religious identity in detail using the conceptual analysis method. In the process of conceptual analysis, the definition of religious identity and the transformative potential of artificial intelligence for this identity were studied within a theoretical framework. In addition, using the qualitative content analysis method, the main themes in academic research, articles and reports on this topic were identified, and the main trends explaining the impact of artificial intelligence on religious identity were identified. The methodological framework used in the study aimed to address the impact of artificial intelligence on religious identity in historical, social and ethical dimensions. In order to better understand the impact of artificial intelligence on religious identity, an interdisciplinary approach was adopted, combining research in the fields of sociology of religion, ethics and technology. Thus, the aim was to provide a comprehensive analysis of how artificial intelligence creates transformation in the context of religious identity.

Main part

Religious Identity and Artificial Intelligence: Changes in Society

Currently, there is a rapid development of digital technologies, which pose many questions for humanity. One of these questions is the human identity formation, including the formation of religious identity in the context of digitalization. According to Russian researchers such as A.V. Koneva and A.A. Lisenkova, who study the impact of digitalization on the individual, today, using modern digital technologies, "a person, on the one hand, forms his identity, and on the other hand, digital technologies themselves provide new opportunities and means of self-realization in social and virtual space" [1, p. 14].

Artificial intelligence is developing at an extraordinary pace and is beginning to play a major role in many areas of human activity, such as production and medicine, the financial sector, culture and science. Among them, we see that artificial intelligence is also beginning to affect the religious sphere. According to world scientists, two different futures await religion and believers: either the gradual «technologicalization» of religions will occur, or a new «global digital religion» will be created based on the worship of artificial intelligence, which will eventually be able to replace traditional religions.

Also, artificial intelligence began to actively influence the formation of religious identity of society at the beginning of the 21st century. Thus, in our opinion, artificial intelligence, in addition to being a useful addition to the traditional factors of personality formation and spiritual and moral education, a person gradually begins to interact only with artificial intelligence in order to find an answer to the main question of his life "Who am I?", to solve his spiritual problems and to gain his own knowledge. At this time, he displaces the society of mankind and such traditional factors of self-formation as family, education, people, history, culture (love, faith, hope). Such changes can worry modern researchers in the field of identity formation. Therefore, many modern researchers are faced with the question "How does artificial intelligence understand the concept of "religious identity?" What is the role of artificial intelligence in the formation of a person's religious identity in the 21st century?

Before we begin our study, it would be useful first to define the word identity. The word identity (Latin İdentificare – to identify, to assimilate) in the dictionary of sociolinguistic terms is "the individual's identification with various social groups and communities (ethnic, demographic, religious, political, professional, etc.)" [2, p. 72]. Identity includes such aspects as personal, social, cultural, ethnic, national and religious characteristics. Identity is also formed under the influence of the environment, history, education and experience, and personal views. Thanks to identity, a person can correctly answer the question "Who am I?"

In the 1950s, the American sociologist Erik Erikson described the term "identity" in detail in his work "Identity: Adolescence and Crisis" and was able to introduce it into scientific circulation. According to E. Erikson, "Identity is the socialized part of our "I"" [3, p. 12].

According to the American researcher, identity is a dynamic and evolving aspect of life that can change over time and as a result of new life experiences. Erikson argued that the formation of identity is a complex process that continues throughout life.

There are many types of identity. The main types of identity are national, territorial, regional, professional, religious and ethnic. We will try to cover the topic of our article, religious identity, in a multifaceted way. In scientific sources, religious identity is defined as "a form of self-identification based on belonging to a religion, understanding one's beliefs and identifying oneself with a certain model." There are those who associate religious identity with religiosity. Unlike the concept of religiosity, religious identity describes a person's iden-

tification with group values, rather than feelings. Religious identity includes not only formal membership in a particular religion, but also personal beliefs, behavior, customs and practices. It can be based on personal experience, religious beliefs or cultural traditions, passed down from generation to generation. Religious identity can affect a person to a certain extent, determining his worldview, moral principles and attitude to society as a whole.

Domestic scientists M. O. Nassimov and G. O. Nassimova interpret religious identity as a complex, multifaceted concept and category that requires in-depth study by scientists of various fields. It also stated that religious identity involves the way individuals and communities understand, practice, and express their religious beliefs and views. The study of this term is important for understanding social phenomena such as political behavior and inter-group relations, cultural integration and individual psychological well-being etc., and conveys that the study of this has gained momentum in the country over the past few decades [4, p. 4].

Among Kazakhstani researchers, A.D. Tastanbekova and O.H. Aimaganbetova noted that religious identity is especially strengthened in historical periods of uncertainty, characterized by the rise of religious fundamentalism. In this case, religious identity helps to overcome the state of hopelessness and uncertainty about the future, ensuring the integrity of one's self-knowledge. While religious identity, used as a means of exercising political interests, can lead to the clash of representatives of different cultures, religious identity, which is superior to political interests, can contribute to harmony between civilizations [5, p. 67].

We have already mentioned that religious identity interacts with all spheres of society. Among Kazakhstani scientists, G. Abdiraimova and A. Saimasaeva in the section "Identity and religion" of their study, refer to many world scientists and convey the words of the domestic scientists Zh.D. Kabidenova and Sh.S. Rysbekova, who said that religious identity was an integral part of social identity and an important category of social and humanitarian sciences [6, p. 9].

In the history of mankind, there were four main types of industrial revolutions [7]. The first industrial revolution in 1765 was related to coal, the second revolution in 1870 to gas, the third revolution from 1969 to electronics and nuclear power, and the fourth revolution in 2000 to the internet and renewed energy. In addition to these four industrial revolutions as we know them, a fifth was also carried out. Starting around 2021 it was based on the deepening of integration between "homo sapiens" and technology [8].

Changes and challenges in the era of digitalization

In recent years, many changes have taken place that can be considered within the framework of digitalization. In addition to the internet and computer technology, which are used as information access services, we can also talk about technologies that process information, generate new information and ideas and even perform activities similar to the human mind (reading, explaining, solving problems, seeing, perceiving, etc.). It is generally known to mankind that this new phenomenon, called artificial intelligence, will bring significant changes to human life. The first conceptualization of artificial intelligence as a field of study, established as a result of the computer science development and efforts to create systems that mimic human intelligence, was made by John McCarthy at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, USA, founded in 1769. This event, assembled in 1956 and known as The Dartmouth Conference, was a long-term seminar that lasted almost two months with the participation of researchers from various fields [9, p. 87].

The goal of the first studies carried out within the framework of artificial intelligence is to develop a machine that can think like a person and even have human qualities. Initially carried out with the aim of creating an artificial brain, however, since it did not achieve the expected results, it was instead focused on the expansion of intelligent programs with the development of computer science. Approximately, the next stage of work in this process, corresponding to the 1980s and 2000s, was the effort to produce programs, intelligent systems that act like a person [10, p. 101-102].

While there is growing interest in artificial intelligence technology in the literature, like many emerging technologies, there is no common definition of artificial intelligence. However, there are definitions that indicate its main features. Considered from this point of view, artificial intelligence is a system with the ability to interpret data, learn from data and use these abilities within specific purposes [11, p. 1]. According to a similar definition, it can be considered as a computer system that reproduces human knowledge using data that is accessed in different ways [12, p. 145.]. In addition, the literature lists such concepts as machine learning, natural language processing, and deep learning as the main components of artificial intelligence [13, p. 29].

The number of researches focused on artificial intelligence is growing day by day in many areas. Among them is the field of theology (religious studies). The main concerns regarding the interaction of artificial intelligence with the field of religion can be expressed as an ethical, moral dimension, a dimension of how artificial intelligence is interpreted by humans and its use in education and research activities in the field of religion, because it is known that various studies have been done in the literature related to artificial intelligence and religion. Since the 1650s, when the concept of artificial intelligence first came into use, there have been many studies focused on artificial intelligence and religion. It can be said that by the end of 2024, 739 scientific publications in the Web of Science (WoS) system, which is an important academic indicator, are devoted to the topic of artificial intelligence and religion. If we are guided by this information, we will witness the accumulation of some information on the topic of artificial intelligence and religion.

It should be noted that at a time when the concepts of artificial intelligence and religion were intertwined, there was also a threat that the former would distort religious understanding and reduce the role of teachers. Research shows that addiction to artificial intelligence is leading to the loss of creativity in learners and changes in the traditional dynamics between teacher and students [14, p. 29]. In addition, the use of artificial intelligence in Islamic Religious Education requires care to ensure that ethical and traditional values are maintained while adapting to technological advances [15, p. 10-18].

We have already noted that digitalization and artificial intelligence are the most powerful transformation tools of our time. In addition to generating large-scale effects on people, from their social roles to their cultural affiliation, these technologies also lead to fundamental changes in the perception of religious identity. Since religious identity is a structure formed by people's belief systems, values, and social connections, the impact of digitalization in this area is deeply felt. It is clear that applications that work with artificial intelligence can make religious practices more accessible and personal development as well. For example, prayer guides, Quranic translations, or applications with artificial intelligence service that remind you of prayers offered on digital platforms can add a new dimension to people's religious lives and strengthen their religious identity. However, while these technologies simplify the religious customs of individuals, they can also run the risk of replacing community-oriented worship with private practices.

In the era of digitalization, religious identity has gone beyond physical boundaries and become global. While online religious groups, communities bring together different geographical personalities, new digital personalities are emerging that cast doubt on the authority of traditional religious leaders. In the age of digitalization and artificial intelligence, the protection of religious identity and the use of these technologies in a way that respects freedom of faith will play a key role in ensuring peace and harmony in future societies. Therefore, changing religious identity needs to be considered not only as a technological issue, but also from a social, cultural and ethical point of view.

Conclusion

The development of artificial intelligence technologies has led to significant changes not only in the field of science and technology, but also in the social structure, cultural values and the concept of identity. Religious identity is considered one of the most sensitive and multifaceted themes of the impact of these changes. The analysis and examples considered in the article show that the influence of artificial intelligence on religious identity causes significant changes not only in the practice of individual beliefs, but also in collective religious associations and public relations. Worship apps powered by artificial intelligence, the formation of digital religious groups, and the use of artificial intelligence for leading roles are reshaping the future of religious life. Nevertheless, this technological transformation brings some ethical and practical problems. The ability of artificial intelligence algorithms to interpret religious texts or give fatwas can generate debate among religious groups. The digitization of religious information and its processing by artificial intelligence may also raise doubts about the role of religious leadership. Not only that, the impact on religious identity differences arise between people in terms of the experience of faith and the concept of identity. In this context, it is necessary to address the relationship between artificial intelligence and religious identity in a multi-level way.

While technological advances have the ability to facilitate and shape people's religious life as a person, on the other hand, they also carry the risk of reducing religious values to algorithmic processes. The management of these risks and the use of artificial intelligence technologies in a human-centered way are critical to public consent.

In conclusion, the interaction of artificial inset and religious identity has become one of the most complex and important problems facing modern societies. This interaction requires a rethinking of not only technological innovations, but also ethical, social and cultural values. That is why future interdisciplinary research in this area will contribute both to a deeper understanding of the impact of artificial intelligence on religious identity and to guide these processes within the framework of public peace and harmony.

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