

GENDERED DYNAMICS IN THE FORMATION OF MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES IN DIGITAL SPACE

¹L.N. Toktarbekova, ²I.Ozdemir

ABSTRACT

This article examines how gender shapes the formation, transformation, and representation of multiple religious identities in digital environments. It responds to the growing significance of social media, online communities, and blogging platforms as spaces in which religious subjectivity is constructed, negotiated, and publicly recognized. Digital media environments reshape modes of religious expression, forms of authority, visual practices of piety, and the boundary between private and public religiosity. The article aims to clarify how gender structures the representation of religious identity online and what forms of multiple religious identities emerge on social media. The study is conceptual-theoretical in nature and draws on an interdisciplinary synthesis of religious studies, the sociology of religion, digital culture studies, gender studies, and Islamic feminist thought. It analyzes digital religion, lived religion, multiple religious identities, visual religiosity, women's religious agency, and platformed self-presentation as interrelated analytical categories. The article develops the argument that gender should be understood not as an external variable of religious identity, but as a constitutive mechanism shaping regimes of visibility, embodiment, authority, normativity, and public recognition. Particular attention is paid to digital Islam, women's religious self-presentation, the hijab, modest fashion, blogging culture, and emerging forms of religious agency in platformed environments.

Keywords: Digital Religion, Multiple Religious Identity, Gender, Digital Islam, Visual Religiosity, Women's Religious Agency, Social Media.

¹ Institute for Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies of the CS MSHE RK, Almaty, Kazakhstan

² Uskudar University, Istanbul, Turkiye

Corresponding author:

L.N. Toktarbekova,
lauratoktarbekova@gmail.com

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Цифрлық кеңістіктегі көпқырлы діни бірегейліктің қалыптасуындағы гендерлік факторлар

Аңдатпа. Мақалада цифрлық кеңістіктегі көпқырлы діни бірегейліктердің қалыптасуына, өзгеруі мен жаңғыруына гендерлік фактордың ықпалы қарастырылады. Зерттеудің өзектілігі қазіргі әлеуметтік желілердің, онлайн қауымдастықтар мен блогерлік платформалардың тек діни коммуникация арналары ғана емес, сонымен қатар діни субъектілікті құрастыратын дербес ортаға айналуымен айқындалады. Цифрлық орта сенімін көрсету тәсілдерін, діни бедел формаларын, тақуалықтың визуалды тәжірибелерін, сондай-ақ жеке және ашық діни өмір арасындағы шекараларды өзгертеді. Мақаланың мақсаты – гендердің цифрлық кеңістіктегі діни бірегейлікті жаңғырту тәсілдеріне қалай әсер ететінін және әлеуметтік желілерде көпқырлы діни бірегейліктің қандай формалары көрініс табатынын ашып көрсету. Зерттеу концептуалды-теориялық сипатқа ие және дінтану, дін социологиясы, цифрлық мәдениет зерттеулері, гендерлік зерттеулер және ислам феминизмі бағыттарының пәнаралық синтезіне негізделеді. Мақалада цифрлық дін, күнделікті дін, көпқырлы діни бірегейлік, визуалды діндарлық және әйелдердің діни агенттігі сияқты категориялар талданады. Гендер діни бірегейліктің сыртқы өзгермелі пішіні емес, діни субъектінің көріну режимдерін, дене бітімі, беделі, нормативтілігі және қоғамдық мойындалуын айқындайтын негізгі механизмі ретінде қарастырылуы қажет екені негізделеді. Ғылыми зерттеуде цифрлық исламға, әйелдердің діни өзін-өзі танытуына, хиджабқа, қарапайым сәнге, блогерлік мәдениетке және діни агенттіктің жаңа формаларына ерекше назар аударылады.

Түйін сөздер: цифрлық дін, көпқырлы діни бірегейлік, гендер, цифрлық ислам, визуалды дінилік, әйелдердің діни агенттігі, әлеуметтік желілер.

Гендерный фактор в формировании множественных религиозных идентичностей в цифровом пространстве

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается влияние гендерного фактора на формирование, трансформацию и репрезентацию множественных религиозных идентичностей в цифровом пространстве. Актуальность исследования обусловлена тем, что социальные сети, онлайн-сообщества и блогерские платформы сегодня выступают не только каналами религиозной коммуникации, но и самостоятельной средой конструирования

религиозной субъектности. Цифровая среда меняет способы выражения веры, формы религиозного авторитета, визуальные практики благочестия и границы между частной и публичной религиозностью. Цель статьи – раскрыть, каким образом гендер влияет на способы репрезентации религиозной идентичности в цифровом пространстве и какие формы множественной религиозной идентичности проявляются в социальных сетях. Исследование имеет концептуально-теоретический характер и основано на междисциплинарном синтезе религиоведения, социологии религии, исследований цифровой культуры, гендерных исследований и исламского феминизма. В статье анализируются такие категории, как цифровая религия, повседневная религия, множественная религиозная идентичность, визуальная религиозность и женская религиозная агентность. Обосновывается, что гендер следует рассматривать не как внешнюю переменную религиозной идентичности, а как конститутивный механизм, определяющий режимы видимости, телесности, авторитета, нормативности и публичного признания религиозного субъекта. Особое внимание уделяется цифровому исламу, женской религиозной самопрезентации, хиджабу, скромной моде, блогерской культуре и новым формам религиозной агентности.

Ключевые слова: цифровая религия, множественная религиозная идентичность, гендер, цифровой ислам, визуальная религиозность, женская религиозная агентность, социальные сети.

Introduction

In contemporary religious life, digital environments can no longer be understood merely as auxiliary channels through which religious institutions, leaders, or believers disseminate pre-existing meanings. Social media, online communities, blogging platforms, and visual media have become relatively autonomous environments in which religious identity is formed, represented, debated, and publicly recognized. In the context of digital culture, religious belonging is increasingly expressed not only through participation in the institutional life of a community or adherence to a confessional tradition, but also through visual images, personal narratives, subscriptions, comments, hashtags, online rituals, practices of self-presentation, and interaction with an audience. Therefore, the analysis of religion in the digital age requires attention not only to the content of religious messages, but also to the platform conditions that determine the visibility, authority, and social significance of religious expression [1, 2, 3].

This issue is particularly significant for religious studies and the sociology of religion because digital media reshape the very logic of religious identification. In classical models, religious identity has often been described through a relatively stable relationship between belief, practice, tradition, institution, and community. However, contemporary digital practices show that religious belonging increasingly multilayered and hybrid. An individual may retain a primary confessional self-identification while simultaneously turning to various religious, spiritual, cultural, and moral resources circulating in digital environments. In this respect, the concept of multiple religious identity helps describe more accurately those forms of religious subjectivity that cannot be reduced to exclusive belonging to one tradition, yet do not necessarily imply a rejection of that tradition [4, 5].

At the same time, the analysis of digital religiosity remains incomplete without consideration of the gender dimension. In the religious sphere, gender is not a secondary or external feature added to an already formed identity. It functions as one of the structural categories through which religious authority, public voice, bodily normativity, moral responsibility, and permissible forms of visibility are distributed. The classical understanding of gender as an analytical category proposed by J. Scott enables us to understand it not as a simple distinction between men and women, but as a way of organizing social relations and producing power [6]. In religious life, this means that gender affects who receives the right to speak on behalf of religion, which forms of piety are recognized as normative, how the body of the believing subject is evaluated, and which types of public presence are considered legitimate [7]. Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality, helping us understand how different aspects of identity, such as gender, race, class, religion, and sexuality, intersect and shape our experiences of discrimination and privilege [8].

The theoretical interpretation of this process is associated with several research directions. Studies of digital religion show that the internet and social media transform religious communication, the structure of authority, forms of community, and modes of publicly expressing faith. The concept of lived religion enables an analysis of religiosity not only through doctrine and institution, but also through everyday practices: family relations, embodiment, emotional experience, domestic space, childrearing, moral decisions, and individual forms of piety [9]. It is precisely here that the key theoretical problem of this article emerges. Digital space does not merely reflect already existing religious and gender identities; it actively participates in their construction. It establishes regimes of visibility, formats of expression, aesthetic standards, al-

gorithmic conditions for the circulation of content, and modes of interaction with an audience. As a result, religious identity in the digital environment is produced at the intersection of religious norm, gender expectations, visual culture, and platform logic. This is especially evident in women's religious self-representation, where the hijab, modest fashion, family rhetoric, motherhood, spiritual mentorship, Islamic education, entrepreneurship, and blogging activity become not separate topics, but interconnected elements of digital religious subjectivity.

This article aims to explore how gender impacts the development, change, and portrayal of various religious identities in digital settings. To achieve this, it tackles two research questions: How does gender shape the ways religious identity is represented online? And what types of multiple religious identities appear on social media?

Methodology

This is a qualitative study that combines concepts from religious studies, sociology of religion, gender studies, digital culture, and Islamic feminist thought through an interdisciplinary approach. This format was chosen because the article does not analyze a single empirical case, but develops an analytical framework for studying multiple religious identities in digital environments. The approach focuses not on accumulating isolated examples, but on identifying conceptual relationships between categories that are often studied separately.

The article's theoretical foundation is structured thematically. The analysis includes works that make it possible to address five interrelated research blocks: digital religion and the transformation of religious authority; lived religion and the biographical appropriation of tradition; multiple religious belonging and multiple religious orientation; gender as an analytical category of power, embodiment, and normativity; and visual culture, Islamic women's agency, microcelebrity, and platformed self-presentation. In addition, studies are used contextualize the post-Soviet and Central Asian specificity of religious identity.

The literature was chosen based on its significant relevance to the problem discussed in the article. The analysis covered studies that view religious identity not just as institutional membership, but also as a lived, visual, gendered, and mediated practice. Works unrelated to digital

religiosity, gender, multiple belonging, or visual self-presentation were excluded. While this approach is not a strict systematic literature review in the bibliometric sense, it helps build a conceptual framework for future empirical research.

The article employs categorical analysis to clarify key concepts such as "multiple religious identity," "digital religious space," "visual religiosity," "women's religious agency," "gender-religious identity," and "online religious self-presentation." These ideas are interconnected: digital environments amplify the multiplicity of religious identities; platform logics shape these environments; these logics influence men and women differently; and gender norms, in turn, influence how religious identities are made visible and legitimized.

A limitation of the study is that it does not include empirical testing of the proposed arguments using a particular set of accounts, publications, or interviews. Instead, its purpose is to create a theoretical framework and conceptual tools for future research on digital Islam, women's religious self-representation, and the coexistence of multiple religious identities in Kazakhstan and the larger Central Asian region.

Multiple Religious Identity and Digital Religiosity

The concept of multiple religious identities facilitates the description of forms of religious life that do not conform to the model of exclusive affiliation with a single tradition. Such identities may be articulated through concurrent engagement with multiple religious traditions, utilization of practices from diverse spiritual systems, the cultural inheritance of one religion combined with a personal affinity for another, experiences within interconfessional families, or hybrid spirituality where an individual integrates both institutional and non-institutional forms of religiosity. J. Diller, for example, suggests that having multiple religiosities can be seen not just as a social occurrence, but as an integral part of a person's unique «life of plan» [4, p. 338]. This methodology is significant within the digital landscape, as social media profoundly broadens an individual's exposure to diverse religious lexicons, imagery, rituals, and authoritative figures.

D. Hervieu-Léger's approach to religion as a "chain of memory" is, alternatively, significant for comprehending how the modern individual selectively appropriates tradition by associ-

ating inherited religious memory with personal choice, biographical narrative, and emerging communicative environments [10]. In the digital environment, diverse religious identities become increasingly evident. A user might follow Islamic theologians, attend lectures by Christian scholars, practice Buddhist meditation, share national and cultural rituals, engage in women's spiritual groups, while still maintaining their primary religious self-identification. This type of religiosity does not necessarily imply a rejection of tradition. More frequently, it suggests that religious belonging is perceived as a multilevel structure where doctrinal, cultural, familial, emotional, and digital aspects do not always align.

The metaphor of rhizomatic belonging is productive for analyzing this phenomenon. Discussing multiple religious belonging as a situation in which believers "participate in communities and practices of more than one religious tradition", P. Rajkumar and J. Dayam emphasize that contemporary religious identities increasingly acquire a "hyphenated" character, expressing "multiplicity, fluidity, and hybridity". In this sense, religious belonging is conceived not as a closed and fixed system, but as a space of intersecting traditions in which religions "abut, blend, supplement, and challenge one another" within individual experience and living communities [5, p. 1]. In online spaces, this rhizomatic quality is technically intensified: recommendation algorithms, hyperlinks, hashtags, reposts, short videos, and transnational networks allow the religious subject to move between different semantic worlds without the need for a complete institutional transition. Therefore, religious identity on the internet often has a networked character: it is assembled from fragments, but it is not reducible to a random set of fragments. It gains stability through repeated practices, an audience, visual style, and moral narrative.

However, the variety in digital religiosity should not be seen as complete freedom of choice. Digital platforms set their own visibility rules, promoting visually appealing, emotionally engaging, concise, and easily shareable content. As a result, religious identity on social media naturally conforms to platform dynamics. Religious experience shifts from being solely a personal or institutional matter to a publicly expressed practice aimed at an audience, reception, and algorithmic dissemination.

Gender as an Analytical Category of Religious Identity

In religious studies, gender is best seen not just as a binary between men and women, but as a complex system of social, cultural, and symbolic norms that allocate roles, authority, visibility, and acceptable behaviors. J. Scott's classical definition of gender as a useful category of historical analysis permits it to be regarded as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power" and "a constitutive element of social relationships" [6, p. 1067]. In the religious sphere, this means that gender affects who has the right to speak on behalf of religion, which forms of piety are considered normative, how the body of the believing subject is evaluated, and which forms of public visibility are considered legitimate.

L. Woodhead notes that religion may both reinforce gender hierarchies and provide resources to groups whose social power is limited [7, p. III]. In digital space, this duality is especially visible. On the one hand, social networks perpetuate conventional notions regarding women's modesty, motherhood, familial responsibilities, and moral discipline. Conversely, they provide women with platforms to publicly discuss religious experiences, develop educational initiatives, establish support communities, emerge as visible experts, and engage in conversations on issues that traditionally stayed within the private domain.

In a number of digital practices, one can observe a tendency toward a differentiated distribution of regimes of religious visibility. Men's religious self-presentation is often associated with public mentorship, the interpretation of norms, and the authority of knowledge. Women's religious self-presentation, especially on visual platforms, often connects religious ethics with embodiment, the aesthetics of modesty, domestic space, motherhood, fashion, emotional experience, and everyday morality. This is not a universal distinction, but a tendency shaped by cultural expectations, gender norms, and the media logic of social platforms. Rather, it concerns dominant regimes of visibility that are shaped by cultural expectations, gender norms, and the media logic of social networks.

Judith Butler's theory of performativity is particularly useful for analyzing digital religious self-presentation because it shifts attention from identity as possession to identity as repeated practice. According to Butler, gender is not an

inner essence, but an “act” formed through the effects of a “subtle and politically enforced performativity”; it is the repetition of such acts that creates the impression of their naturalness, although in their excessiveness they reveal their “phantasmatic status” [11, p. 187]. In this context, wearing the hijab, choosing a camera angle, publishing family photographs, using religious quotations, speaking about motherhood, displaying modest clothing, or participating in charitable activities may be understood as performative acts through which the subject confirms and reproduces religious and gender belonging.

Simultaneously, women’s religious self-representation should not be solely characterized by submission to established norms. Mahmood’s scholarly contributions are significant in this regard, as they contest the presumption that agency must inherently manifest as opposition to religious norms. In her study of Muslim women’s practices, Saba Mahmood emphasizes that they did not perceive adherence to “*authorized models of behavior*” as an external social compulsion limiting individual freedom; on the contrary, “socially authorized forms of performance” became the grounds through which the “self is realized” [12, p. 31]. From this perspective, piety, bodily discipline, modesty, and following religious prescriptions are not merely signs of passivity. Instead, they represent forms of religious subjectivity. In online spaces, this subjectivity is expressed through women’s capacity to select their self-representation language, build communities, interpret their religious experiences, and articulate their moral stance publicly.

Visual Religiosity and Online Self-Presentation

Visual religiosity plays a significant role in how people present themselves online, serving as a powerful way to express their faith online. On platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, religious identity is expressed not only through words but also through clothing, color choices, decor, gestures, editing, music, visual quotes, family scenes, and symbols. Visual elements don’t just depict religiosity; they actively shape it into a socially recognizable image.

In this context, the hijab occupies a special place. It functions simultaneously as a religious symbol, a gender marker, an element of bodily discipline, an aesthetic object, and a sign of pub-

lic Muslim identity. In the digital environment, the hijab does not exist as a static attribute: it is incorporated into practices of photography, video recording, fashion positioning, educational content, discussions of modesty, and debates about the boundaries of what is permissible. Therefore, the hijab on social media should be analyzed as a visual-performative act in which religious norm, gender subjectivity, and platform aesthetics intersect.

This logic is clearly developed in E. Baulch and A. Pramiyanti’s study of hijab-wearing Muslim women actively representing themselves on Instagram. The authors demonstrate that the visual “enframing” of posts uncovers a specific form of public self-creation among Muslim women - what they term their “*front-stage self-making*”. This process is linked to both the transnational culture of Instagram usage and the evolution of Islamic communication [13, p. 4]. On the one hand, photographs taken in particular socio-geographical spaces mark such women as representatives of consumer culture and include them in the logic of microcelebrity culture. On the other hand, religious captions and da’wah-related messages allow them to position themselves as “authentically pious” and as bearers of knowledge, rather than merely as consumers of visual fashion [13, p. 4]. Thus, the hijab on Instagram becomes not simply an item of clothing, but part of a complex “*composite habitus*” in which piety, visual aesthetics, consumption, religious instruction, and public female presence are combined [13, p. 4].

Modest fashion refers to styles of dress that blend religious norms of modesty with modern aesthetics and consumer trends. This shows that religious expectations and visual culture can co-exist without conflict. For many Muslim women, it becomes a way to combine piety, aesthetic self-expression, professional activity, and entrepreneurial initiative. In this sense, digital space not only commercializes religious symbols, but also creates new forms of women’s presence in the public sphere. A woman wearing the hijab may be simultaneously a believer, a mother, an entrepreneur, a teacher, an influencer, a public activist, and a bearer of national culture [14].

However, visual religiosity also contains contradictions. Platforms require constant visibility, regular posting, visual attractiveness, and emotional engagement with the audience. This may intensify pressure on women because religious self-presentation begins to be evaluated not only in terms of piety, but also in terms of aesthetic

success, commercial effectiveness, and conformity to followers' expectations. Thus, digital religiosity simultaneously expands the possibilities of subjectivity and creates new forms of normative control.

The visual research methods developed by S. Pink make it possible to consider the image not as secondary material, but as an independent carrier of social meaning [15, p. 25]. This is especially important for the analysis of digital religiosity: visual practices do not simply accompany religious discourse; they shape it. Through visual images, ideas are constructed about the "proper" Muslim woman, the pious family, permissible publicity, religious beauty, and moral discipline.

Women's Religious Agency and the Transformation of Authority

Digital space changes the structure of religious authority. In traditional institutional forms of religious life, authority has more often been associated with education, position, religious office, belonging to a religious hierarchy, or recognition by the community. In the digital environment, these foundations remain significant, but they are no longer the only ones. Authority may be formed through followers' trust, the regularity of content, personal story, the persuasiveness of explanation, the visual coherence of an image, emotional closeness, and the ability to respond to the audience's everyday questions.

This is why women's religious agency on the internet acquires particular significance. Women who are often excluded from formal religious authority can use digital platforms to create alternative spaces of knowledge, support, and interpretation. They discuss childrearing, marital relations, women's education, psychological well-being, religious discipline, questions of what is permissible and impermissible, the experience of wearing the hijab, and the balance between family and work. These themes are not "secondary" in relation to religion. On the contrary, they show how religion is lived in everyday life and how the norms of faith are translated into practices of life.

Digital women's agency is also connected with Islamic feminist thought. Z. Mir-Hosseini shows that Islamic feminist thought emerges not as a project external to Islam, but as a critical rethinking of patriarchal interpretations within the Islamic tradition itself [16]. A. Wadud, developing a woman-centered reading of the Qur'an, emphasizes the need for a hermeneutical approach

that takes into account the ethical dimension of equality and justice [17]. In the digital age, these ideas acquire new channels of dissemination: lectures, podcasts, videos, online courses, discussion communities, and social campaigns.

At the same time, women's religious agency does not necessarily take the form of open confrontation with tradition. In many cases, it manifests as a tactical maneuvering among religious norms, family expectations, national culture, and modern opportunities for self-realization. A woman may maintain a commitment to traditional values while simultaneously using digital platforms for education, business, mentorship, and public participation. Such a configuration undermines the simplified opposition between the "traditional" and the "modern".

An intersectional perspective is especially important for analyzing Muslim women. K. Crenshaw demonstrated that a person's social position is formed at the intersection of several axes of identity and power [8]. In the case of Muslim women, digital self-presentation may simultaneously include gender, religion, nationality, class, language, family status, and the experience of post-Soviet modernization. Therefore, their religious identity cannot be explained solely through the category "woman" or solely through the category "Muslim woman". It is formed at the intersection of multiple social and symbolic coordinates.

Platform Specificity: Instagram, TikTok and YouTube

Different platforms have distinct standards for religious visibility. Instagram emphasizes visual consistency, aesthetic appeal, and building a public image. For Muslim women, it serves as a key space for showcasing the hijab, modest fashion, family life, motherhood, home decor, and daily piety. On this platform, religious identity is frequently expressed through the visual harmony of the profile and a story that blends faith, family, beauty, and social engagement.

TikTok, on the other hand, is all about short videos, trends, musical styles, quick edits, and viral sharing. Here, religious identity often comes alive as a dynamic act: whether it's explaining a norm in a quick video, engaging in a public discussion, showing an image change, replying to a comment, or joining a trend with religious significance. This platform really highlights the performative side of religiosity, making religious

self-expression more emotional, situational, and conversational.

Meanwhile, YouTube offers a diverse range of content, including long lectures, interviews, educational courses, sermons, documentary videos, personal stories, and expert explanations. In this space, establishing religious authority often comes from engaging audiences over time and having the skill to explain topics clearly and systematically. Therefore, YouTube continues to be a vital platform for theological learning and religious education. Women can also hold important roles, particularly in areas such as family ethics, women's education, spiritual encouragement, childrearing, and practical devotion

The media logic of platforms influences which types of religiosity are visible. S. Hoover highlights that media do not just deliver religious content but also play a role in shaping how religion is imagined within global culture. The media logic of platforms affects which forms of religiosity become visible. S. Hoover emphasizes that media do not simply transmit religious content, but participate in imagining religion in global culture [18]. Consequently, religious studies analysis of digital identity must take into account not only the content of posts, but also the technical architecture of platforms: algorithms, publication formats, comment systems, livestreaming capacities, visual filters, monetization, and follower culture.

It's interesting to see how blogging culture really boosts self-branding. T. Senft's idea of microcelebrity sheds light on why religious bloggers often blend personal authenticity, expertise, and carefully managed publicity to connect with their audience [19]. For the religious subject, this creates a complex situation: one must simultaneously demonstrate piety, preserve the audience's trust, and conform to the logic of digital popularity. As a result, religious identity becomes not only an internal belonging, but also a publicly maintained media project.

The Kazakhstani and Central Asian Context

The context of Kazakhstan and the greater Central Asian region holds particular significance for the analysis of gendered digital religiosity. Most theoretical models of digital religion have primarily been based on Western societies or Middle Eastern Islamic contexts. In contrast, Central Asia presents a distinct trajectory characterized by the Soviet experience of secularization,

a post-Soviet religious revival, the reconstruction of national cultural traditions, and ongoing integration into global digital networks. As A. Khalid emphasizes, "Soviet understandings of culture and identity remain dominant in Central Asia" [20, p. 3]. This point is fundamental for religious studies analysis because Islamic identity in Kazakhstan and other countries of the region is formed not only through theological norms, but also through Soviet legacy, national culture, secular state order, family morality, and post-Soviet forms of public religiosity.

In the Central Asian context, multiple religious identities are formed not as a simple combination of several religious belongings, but as a mobile configuration of Islamic, ethnocultural, national, familial, and gendered self-identification. After the collapse of the Soviet system, religion in the region became one of the key resources for a symbolic return to "one's own" roots; however, this return is neither homogeneous nor linear [21, p. 170]. This is particularly crucial when analyzing gender, as women's religious identity in Central Asia develops at the crossroads of Islamic values, local customs, post-Soviet secularity, family and clan norms, and emerging digital self-presentation practices.

In Kazakhstan, Islamic identity is warmly woven together with the rich tapestry of national culture, family values, respect for tradition, the secular state context, and modern ways of living and consuming. This blend creates a vibrant and enduring sense of community and identity. Therefore, digital religiosity here cannot be adequately described through a simple opposition between the "secular" and the "religious" or the "traditional" and the "modern". In this respect, M. Laruelle's position is especially important: she considers religion not as an immutable essence, but as a socially and culturally constructed form of belonging: "Religion is not a given but a construct that appears alongside other aspects of life" [22, p. 4]. Consequently, religion in the Central Asian context exists alongside other regimes of identity - national, familial, linguistic, gendered, generational, and digital. Moreover, Laruelle notes that "Central Asian Islamic communities are now deeply plural" [22, p. 6], which allows Islamic identity to be understood not as a single normative type, but as a multiple field of practices, interpretations, and strategies of self-representation.

In the case of the Kazakhs, this multiplicity is also connected with collective memory and local

forms of religious culture. B. Privratsky shows that the religiosity of Kazakhs has historically been mediated not only by Islamic doctrine, but also by ancestral memory, Sufi heritage, and nomadic tradition: “religious belief and behavior are mediated by a vibrant memory” [23, p. 1]. Therefore, the digital religiosity of Kazakhstani women frequently integrates Islamic symbols, ancestral memory, national aesthetics, reverence for tradition, and modern visual modes of self-presentation. This hybridity should not be interpreted as superficial religiosity; rather, it demonstrates that religious identity is constructed at the nexus of multiple regimes of belonging.

Kazakhstani Muslim women on social media often merge their religious identity with various elements like wearing the hijab, valuing family and motherhood, engaging in entrepreneurship, using the Kazakh language, highlighting national aesthetics, participating in educational initiatives, and incorporating aspects of global Islamic visual culture. An empirical study focusing on their visual religious identity on Instagram confirms that the platform serves not only as a space for representation but also as a setting for shaping a new female religious subjectivity. The authors note that “Instagram platform offers Muslim women novel opportunities to express their religious identity, visually demonstrate piety and consolidates their position in public space” [14, p. 1]. In this sense, Instagram functions as a mediated space in which religious identity is not simply displayed, but visually constructed through clothing, bodily modesty, language, family narratives, educational content, and the aesthetic codes of everyday life.

A woman may represent herself as a Muslim, a Kazakh woman, a mother, a specialist, a mentor, an entrepreneur, a blogger, and a participant in a women’s community. It is precisely this multiplicity that makes digital religious identity analytically complex and requires attention to the gender dimension. In this sense, digital religiosity not only transmits already existing norms, but also creates new forms of women’s agency. B. Abdilkhakim, analyzing Kazakhstani female religious influencers, emphasizes that “female bloggers in Kazakhstan now influence a substantial segment of women spiritually and religiously” [24, p. 84]. Therefore, women’s accounts on social media are becoming not a peripheral, but a significant space of religious socialization, where authority may be built not only on formal theological education,

but also on visual persuasiveness, personal story, emotional closeness, and the ability to speak to the audience in the language of everyday life.

At the same time, digital space reproduces and intensifies patriarchal interpretations of religion. A. Tasbolat rightly notes that “religious discourse plays an active role in defining women’s gender roles on social media in Kazakhstan” [25, p. 4540]. Therefore, gender and multiple religious identities in Central Asia must be considered not only through the prism of women’s self-realization, but also through the struggle of discourses: between institutional Islam, traditionalist ideas about the family, feminist and Islamic-feminist readings, and the everyday practices of women themselves. At the same time, the weak institutionalization of gender studies in the region complicates the theoretical interpretation of these processes. A. K. Sabitova concludes that “the project of institutionalizing gender studies has not been successful in Central Asia” [26, p. 14]. For this reason, the analysis of women’s digital religiosity in Central Asia requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines religious studies, gender studies, visual anthropology, and digital culture studies.

Central Asian perspectives enrich our understanding beyond Western theories. While Western discussions often view the hijab through the lenses of freedom, oppression, or resistance, in Kazakhstan it can represent a variety of meaningful concepts. It might stand for personal piety, family values, aesthetic preference, a connection to the global ummah, national and cultural identity, or even a digital way of expressing visibility. This diversity of meanings highlights the importance of considering local contexts to fully appreciate the diverse significance of the hijab. Consequently, one and the same visual practice may have different meanings in different social and historical contexts. This is why the Kazakhstani context should be considered not as an illustration of ready-made Western or Middle Eastern theories, but as an independent case for research. It enables show how multiple religious identities are formed under conditions in which Islamic tradition interacts with post-Soviet secularity, national culture, family morality, the state discourse of moderation, and global platform aesthetics. For this reason, the Kazakhstani case should be treated not as a local illustration of existing theories, but as a site from which digital religion and gendered religious subjectivity can be re-theorized.

Conclusion

This article has developed a conceptual model of digital religious identity that involves four connected dimensions: platform logic, visibility, gender normativity, and religious agency. Platformedness defines the technical and algorithmic factors that influence the visibility of religious expression. Visuality makes religious identity into an image that is socially recognizable. Gender normativity establishes the boundaries of permissible body, voice, authority, and public presence. Religious agency shows how the subject acts within tradition, reinterprets its language, and translates the norms of faith into everyday practices.

In digital environments, multiple religious identities should not be treated as marginal or exceptional. They increasingly represent ordinary forms of religious subjectivity under conditions of global communication and platformed visibility. It is becoming an ordinary form of existence for the religious subject under conditions of global communication. A user may preserve a stable confessional self-identification while simultaneously turning to various religious and spiritual resources. Therefore, religious studies analysis must distinguish between institutional belonging, cultural identity, everyday practice, visual self-presentation, and digital religious consumption.

In this process, gender functions not as an external variable, but as a constitutive dimension of religious subjectivity. It affects visual self-presentation, embodiment, moral narrative, family rhetoric, forms of digital authority, and strategies of agency. It is especially significant that women in online spaces receive new opportunities for religious expression, community formation, interpretation of norms, and public participation in religious discourse. However, these opportunities are accompanied by new forms of normative control associated with aesthetic expectations, algorithmic visibility, commercialization, and the demand for constant publicity.

The Kazakhstani and Central Asian context shows that digital religiosity cannot be explained by universal models without considering local history. Here, Islamic identity is formed at the intersection of post-Soviet experience, national culture, family morality, secular statehood, and global digital Islam. Therefore, the analysis of women's religious self-representation in Kazakhstan must take into account not only religious norm and platform aesthetics, but also language,

ethnicity, tradition, family status, educational capital, and social expectations.

Prospects for further research are connected with the empirical study of specific digital platforms and accounts, the comparison of men's and women's strategies of religious self-presentation, the analysis of audience comments, the study of visual codes of the hijab and modest fashion, and the development of a methodology for studying digital Islam in the post-Soviet and Central Asian context. Such an approach will make it possible to understand more deeply how religious identities change under conditions of digitalization, without losing their connection to tradition, while acquiring new forms of public visibility and subjectivity.

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INFORMATION ABOUT AUTHORS

Laura Toktarbekova

Leading Researcher, PhD, Institute for Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies of the CS MSHE RK, Almaty, Kazakhstan, email: lauratoktarbekova@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4063-8255

Ibrahim Ozdemir

Professor, PhD, Uskudar University, Istanbul, Turkiye; American Islamic College, Chicago, USA, email: ibrahim.ozdemir@uskudar.edu.tr, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3839-9606

Лаура Ниязбекқызы Тоқтарбекова

жетекші ғылыми қызметкер, PhD, ҚР ҒЖБМ ҒК Философия, саясаттану және дінтану институты, Алматы, Қазақстан, email: lauratoktarbekova@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4063-8255

Ибрахим Өздемир

профессор, PhD, Ускүдар университеті, Стамбул, Түркия; Америкалық ислам колледжі, Чикаго, АҚШ, email: ibrahim.ozdemir@uskudar.edu.tr, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3839-9606

Лаура Ниязбековна Токтарбекова

ведущий научный сотрудник, PhD, Институт философии, политологии и религиоведения КН МНВО РК, Алматы, Казахстан, email: lauratoktarbekova@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4063-8255

Ибрахим Өздемир

профессор, PhD, Университет Ускюдар, Стамбул, Турция; Американский исламский колледж, Чикаго, США, email: ibrahim.ozdemir@uskudar.edu.tr, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3839-9606