

ISLAMIC CULTURE IN THE DIGITAL DIMENSION

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the impact of digital technologies on religious culture of modern Islam. The Internet is seen as a means transformation of forms of expression of religiosity, helping Muslims adhere to the precepts of their religion. On the example of the analysis of various online services, websites and applications (educational, entertainment, information) it is proved that virtual innovations organically are embedded in a religious context and become part of the "digital religious identity of Muslims. Constant replenishment assortment of digital religious paraphernalia (rosaries, prayer rugs, etc.) also speaks of the significant role of electronic technology not only in the process of modernizing Islamic culture, but also in preserving it traditions.

KEYWORDS: *Traditional Religions on the Internet, Islam, Digital Religious Identity, Digital Religious Paraphernalia.*

INTRODUCTION

The centuries-old history of Islam shows an example of the optimal ratio of traditions and innovations in the development of religious culture. The ability to borrow external signs of the modern way of life does not prevent representatives of the Muslim society from carefully preserving the originality of the spiritual world. Islam demonstrates the widespread use of digital, Internet technologies and, excluding radical currents, considers them as a blessing.

For example, the Council of Muftis of Russia approves the use of social networks to develop a dialogue between ethnic and religious communities, to combat prejudice against Islam. Spiritual leaders are guided an important rule in Islam, based on the hadith of the prophet Muhammad: "Action is judged by intention." With a good intention, any modern technology is appropriate [1]. One of the main sources of modernization of Islamic culture is the Internet. Muslims actively use its capabilities in broadcasting the traditional foundations of their religion. The Internet opens up a wide range of opportunities for the user: interest forums, scientific sessions and chats greatly facilitate communication processes. For example, in 2009, a search engine I'm Halal appeared on the Internet specifically for Muslims. The main feature of the service was that it selected only "approved" results - that is, those that are permitted by Islamic law - Sharia. About 100,000 requests per day were processed (relatively few for the "giants" of this direction), but quite a lot for a novice service. As stated by the developers, the goal of creation is to attract as many Middle Easterners as possible to the World Wide Web, to be able to represent a variety of

languages (Farsi, Urdu, and Arabic) on the network. At the same time, everything that is haram (prohibited) is not shown to the user. In June 2010 in Kuala Lumpur, the Kasehdia Best Innovation Award. However, at the end of 2011, I'm Halal had to be closed due to lack of funds [2].

Another major Internet project is World-muslim - a worldwide social network for Muslims (also has its own pages in other networks: Facebook - 120,716 subscribers, VKontakte - 2620 subscribers). It works in English, Turkish, Russian and Arabic, which can significantly increase the audience of users [3]. The site allows you to download books and videos, including the text of the Koran with translation and audio recording. The sections "Acquaintances" and "Announcements", "Parable of the day", the schedule of prayers are actively functioning. There are links to news channels and Internet TV.

The issue of financing the project is solved by attracting advertisers representing targeted, Muslim-oriented information: travel agencies, organizing trips to holy places for Muslims, shops of halal products (from food and clothing to perfume and cosmetics). Another Internet project is the virtual multi-user network Muxlim Pal (currently in test mode), which acts as a "game universe" for Muslims. It allows players adhering to the norms of Islam, choose a virtual character, create an avatar and interact with other players. You can also visit virtual offices, shopping centers, concert halls. Muxlim Pal is generally similar to the Western counterpart of The Sims, but has a religious shade, is based on the fundamental principles of Islam. The creators of this project focused on Muslims living in Western countries, as well as anyone who is interested in Muslim culture and Muslim lifestyle.

The mobile application for Muslim dating Mydiaspora is also gaining popularity. The official page emphasizes that this is "the world's first Eastern dating app. Every day the system offers you three new interesting people, taking into account mutual requirements in seventeen parameters. The dating algorithm complies with the Halal principles" [4]. This development caused ambiguous assessments: the council of muftis of Russia approved it, but the president of the Union of Diasporas of Russia V. Mushegyan expressed the opinion that the peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia do not tend to trust virtual means of communication. At the moment, Russian-speaking users (not too numerous) not only the official website is available, but also the possibility of registering on the pages on Facebook (306 subscribers) and VKontakte (237 participants).

It should be noted that Internet technologies penetrate and actively participate in the life of Muslims from an early age. Muslim forums (for example, Atfal) have been created for children, with the help of which they can learn Arabic, religious texts; discuss animated series based on Qur'anic stories or the clothes of Muslim dolls. Computer games are also popular, in which, in order to make the next move, you need to learn a surah from the Koran, learn the meanings of ninety-nine names of Allah. You can remember the architectural appearance of mosques with the help of various online puzzles. In order to transfer knowledge about Islam, its culture and history to future generations, Muslims are beginning to actively use the concept of "electronic madrassas" - learning programs at home [5].

Part of these programs often become video lessons (about the rules of prayer, fasting, etc.), which are simultaneously placed on YouTube hosting. The above facts confirm the willingness and ability of Islam, on the one hand, to organically integrate into globalization processes, on the

other hand, to preserve its identity. Thanks to the opportunity to participate in various online communities, a believer acquires a "digital religious identity": in addition to being a member of a real religious community, he becomes a member of a virtual religious community in which he satisfies not only religious, but also secular needs, without joining at the same time contrary to the canons of Islam. A feature of all Muslim sites is the design in a traditional way: there are elements of ornament and calligraphy. Often there is a schedule and a call to prayer notification system is organized, interesting hadiths, sayings from the Koran are published, there is access to electronic libraries where you can read and download traditional texts and works of modern Islamic authors. Significant assistance in the implementation of religious needs is also provided by specialized Islamic online stores, which all appear and function more actively.

They offer a huge selection of products. The main place is given to literature on religion, which is represented by editions in various languages. They also offer to buy phones designed specifically for Muslims. For example, a Samsung smartphone Galaxy Duos contains extensive functionality on Islamic topics [6]. This is the text of the Koran, hadiths, and sermons, lessons in audio and video format. Additional built-in applications: games, azan programs and nasheeds. Some phone models have a built-in electronic compass, which allows you to show the direction to Mecca during prayer, remind the time prayers. If necessary, believers can install additional applications on their phones.

For example, HalalGid.ru. This is a project declared by the developers as "a helper for every devout Muslim." He will allow you to find mosques, prayer houses, grocery stores and clothing stores for Muslims, religious paraphernalia and literature, halal cafes and restaurants, organizations that exist in Russia. Also HalalGid.ru will give answers to questions related to finding places that comply with Sharia law. At the same time, each user has the opportunity to add a new point on the halal map of Russia. Thus, the "digital image" of Muslims and the new means of communication they use indicate that innovative technologies can become a good medium for expressing one's religious consciousness. An analysis of the offers of online stores showed that they enable believers to order not only everyday items with Islamic themes, but also to purchase all kinds of religious paraphernalia in digital format.

For example, new technologies are used to create such cult attribute as a rosary for tasbeeh (repeated praise of Allah). Traditionally, they consist of 99 beads, which correspond to the number of names of Allah. Electronic rosaries have a different look: they are worn on the finger with a special strap. On the dial, the believer is shown the number of prayers read, because after each one you need to press the "count" button, it is possible to reset the number of clicks ("reset" button).

An interesting option for using digital gadgets is presented in the form of the text of the Koran, which comes with an electronic pen. The user just needs to touch the pen pointer to any ayat or sura, title or page number and the pen will "read" the selected material. Also it is possible to listen to it again, voice recording and playback (including mp3 files), and change the volume. All this, according to the manufacturers, will facilitate the study of the Koran, which is an important part of the religious activities of Muslims. Also, believers can purchase a high-tech prayer rug, but it is not represented in the assortment of Russian stores. History of appearance of such a device is associated with Canada, where a Toronto programmer Waela Abulsaadat [7] developed a prayer mat, which was equipped with sensors, illumination and a screen displaying the text of

the Koran. Electronic sensor keeps a count of kneeling, special modes warn about the time of the next prayer and religious holidays. There is also a compass in it, which helps to determine the location of the Kaaba.

Another tool to help you follow the religious practices of Islam is a watch. Its use is associated with the prescription to perform five obligatory prayers a day, for which strictly defined chronological intervals are established: "Verily, prayer is prescribed for believers in certain time" (Quran, Sura An-Nisa', Ayat 103). Since the prayer time is calculated based on the position of the sun and changes throughout the year, the believers need a gadget that will do this automatically. The choice of watch options is very wide: wall, table, wrist (youth, sports, men's, and women's). As an important functionality, manufacturers and sellers note: the pronunciation of the azan for all prayers, setting the time of shuruk (sunrise, taking into account the region), determining the direction of the qibla using the built-in compass, Hijri dates and the Gregorian calendar.

Some watches can set three alarms - for prayer, daily, one-time. Display the number of minutes after the current adhan (up to 30 minutes). Possibility to watch the phase of the moon. Have Bookmarks of the Quran - to record the name of the sura and the verse on which you stopped when reading the Quran.

Another pillar of Islam that can be realized digitally is zakat (compulsory donation). A mobile application for donations in Ramadan appeared which was released by Russian Muslim fund "Zakat". With the help of this service, Muslims will be able to make daily donations to those in need and follow the reports of charitable organizations. In addition, app users will receive real-time updated news newsletters about projects and current events in the field of charity. The application is available for iOS and Android [8].

Thus, against the backdrop of Islam phobic campaigns raging in the real world, some Muslims turned to the virtual world in order to explain the teachings of Islam to everyone (including non-Muslims) and refute false stereotypes. This issue is given serious attention: preparation and holding of round tables, webinars, online competitions, creation and support of information projects. The issue of establishing the first Islamic Internet award, which would become another incentive for the development of Islamic spaces on the internet. In general, the Islamic Internet has great growth potential, the "market of Muslim websites" and digital technologies is not yet fully saturated, but the trend is already obvious: all innovations are organically integrated into the religious context and used to preserve traditions.

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