

Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)

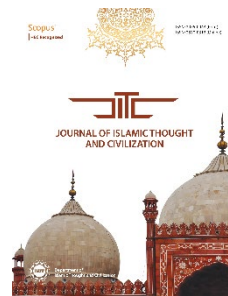
Volume 13 Issue 2, Fall 2023

ISSN_(P): 2075-0943 ISSN_(E): 2520-0313

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC>



Article QR



- Title:** Exploring the Intersections of Online and Offline Mediums: Navigating the Post-Pandemic Leisure Culture, Religious Dimensions, and Leisure Class in Kazakhstan
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- DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.132.19>
- History:** Received: August 09, 2023, Revised: November 12, 2023, Accepted: November 24, 2023, Published: December 06, 2023
- Citation:** Abildinova, Zhanar, Hakan Gülerce, Yerkin Aubakirov, and Manifa Sarkulova. "Exploring the Intersections of Online and Offline Mediums: Navigating the Post-Pandemic Leisure Culture, Religious Dimensions, and Leisure Class in Kazakhstan." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 2 (2023): 291–308. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.132.19>
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- Conflict of Interest:** Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



A publication of

Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization, School of Social Science and Humanities
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

Exploring the Intersections of Online and Offline Mediums: Navigating the Post-Pandemic Leisure Culture, Religious Dimensions, and Leisure Class in Kazakhstan

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Abstract

With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, digitalization has accelerated in all areas of life. Each person as a social being strives to gain freedom at least during their leisure time, which was one of the reasons for thousands of anti-Covid protests around the world, including Kazakhstan. It shows the need for a deep analysis of leisure practices in the online medium and offline medium of modern society. The main thesis put forward in this paper concerns the urgent need for the modernization and regulation of offline leisure practices in Kazakhstan in accordance with the appropriate legal, cultural, moral, and religious dimensions. There were two inevitable processes taking place in the period of the Covid-19 pandemic: the digitalization of leisure practices and social distancing and personal isolation. Although in most cases the main concern during the pandemic was on issues of converting of practices to unusual conditions, fundamental themes affecting the very core of each of the religious traditions came to the fore from time to time. In this article the digitization of everyday life via leisure practices in the online medium and offline medium are also discussed.

Keywords: digitalization, isolation, online medium, offline medium, post-pandemic, religious dimensions

Introduction

According to media reports, under the influence of the pandemic in terms of self-isolation, sales of board games increased by two and a half times.¹ However, this is only a small and increasingly redundant aspect of leisure in a 21st century society where more and more forms of leisure involve virtual worlds and even alternative realities. A prominent example is the digital yacht bought in Metaverse by an anonymous person for \$650,000 in one of the online games, despite the fact that this yacht does not even exist in real life.²

The Covid-19 pandemic that spread around the world in 2020 has radically transformed the usual life of society as well as religious understanding. The statistics of diseases forced the world

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¹Irina Logvinova, "Kazakhstan in Quarantine Began to Meditate More, Watch TV Shows and Study - Analysis," *InAlmaty.kz*, March 31, 2020, <https://www.inalmaty.kz/news/2713034/kazahstancy-na-karantine-stali-bolse-meditirovat-smotret-serialy-i-ucitsa-analitiki>.

²"Anonymous Paid \$650,000 for a Virtual Yacht in the Metaverse," *News.ru*, December 1, 2021, <https://news.ru/world/anonim-zaplatil-650-000-za-virtualnuyu-yahtu-v-metavselennoj/>.



community to take unprecedented wide scale measures such as closing borders, introducing quarantine, announcing self-isolation regimes, cancelling mass events, closing educational institutions, reorganizing culture, leisure and entertainment, transferring employees to a remote work mode, and so on.³ Although the world knows examples of epidemics in which similar measures were applied, nevertheless, events of this scale were implemented for the first time.

The emergence in the scientific sociological community of the idea of a “leisure society” (“leisure civilization”, “leisure era”), which found supporters and opponents, is based on the understanding of a society in which the dominant role in the life of individuals belongs to leisure, while the significance of work is lost.⁴

Leisure theorists tend to divide cultural and leisure practices according to the functions they perform from a sociocultural point of view. Three main functions are usually distinguished: the first is entertaining, the second is developing, and the third is recreational.⁵ These functions are also important in the performance of this study.

Veblen was one of the first to draw attention to the differences in the way of life of representatives of different social groups and the role in these differences of the specifics of consumption and the choice of certain forms of leisure activity.⁶ Long before Veblen, forming a simple understanding of the instruments of power in the effective management of the people of the Roman Empire, D. Juvenalis said that it is enough to give the people bread and circuses and they will never rebel.⁷ Our assumption is also that during the lockdown, Kazakhstanis did not have enough circuses.

Max Weber went even further and made this concept the basis for the division of status groups.⁸ However, the main indicator in most cases is the way they organize their free time, which the recognized scholars of sociology considered not only a resource, but also “the highest wealth.”⁹

Rojek calls modern leisure culture the magic of our time, a means of distraction from pressing problems.¹⁰ Thus, the need for each person (and society as a whole) to be involved in a variety of forms of self-expression and self-improvement today clearly reflects the importance of leisure culture. Rojek also believes that leisure is an important component of the cultural life of society.¹¹

³Oksana Lastochkina, “Cultural Online Leisure: Population Behavior during the Covid-19 Pandemic,” *Beneficium* 40, no. 3 (2021): 93-102.

⁴Jose Ortega-y-Gasset, *La Rebelión De Las Masas* [The Revolt of the Masses], trans., A. Geleskul Heirs, <https://dn790005.ca.archive.org/0/items/TheRevoltOfTheMasses/The%20Revolt%20of%20the%20Masses.pdf>.

⁵Joffre Dumazedier, *Sociology of Leisure*, Trans., Marea A. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1974), 215, 122; Yury Streltsov, *Culture of Leisure* (Moscow: MGUKI, 2002).

⁶Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). – trans., Introductory article by S. G. Sorokina, V. V. Motylev (Moscow. // Electronic publication: Center for Humanitarian Technologies. 2012), <https://gtmarket.ru/library/basis/5890>.

⁷Kazimezh Kumanetsky, *Cultural History of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Moscow, 1990).

⁸Anastasya Karavay, “Leisure Activity of Russian Youth: Main Types and Factors of Choice,” *Bulletin of Public Opinion. Data. Analysis. Discussions* 130, no. 1-2 (2020).

⁹Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. Ye Samarskaya (Centre for Humanitarian Technologies, 2006), <https://gtmarket.ru/library/basis/3464>; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Essays*. T. 25. Part III., 1956, <http://www.uaio.ru/marx/07.htm>.

¹⁰Chris Rojek, *Leisure and Culture* (Macmillan, 2000).

¹¹Ibid.

The same important component as, for example, raising children, protecting borders, caring for the elderly or remembering the dead. Rojek is a researcher who has built an impressive theoretical base in the study of the topic of leisure. Especially since many people of our time fail to fully feel the satisfaction of all mental, physical, and psychological needs for self-expression and improvement only during working hours.¹²

Religion also has an important role in the leisure culture. For all religious communities, as well as all other social groups, the pandemic created many practical inconveniences and direct material losses, which grew and became critical.¹³ Any "practical" question, such as the methods and the feasibility of performing a ritual under conditions of sanitary restrictions, could, due to its inclusion in a transcendental perspective, reach a high level of metaphysical tension.¹⁴ Religious activities, alongside social and sportive leisure pursuits, significantly enhance the quality of life among the elderly.¹⁵ Such activities also boost social cohesion and community support.¹⁶ The majority of Kazakhstanis - 67.4% - consider themselves believers.¹⁷ At the same time, 40.5% of Kazakhstanis limit themselves only to holidays and observing certain rituals, and only 26.9% described themselves as practicing believers who strictly observe religious instructions and rituals.¹⁸

Religion and religious leaders contributed considerably towards the fight against the pandemic by being part of effective solutions to contain the spread of the virus, taking an active role in explaining and supporting rational scientific discoveries to save lives globally. On this issue, and via the unity of medicine and faith, Muslims around the world have quoted the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) to promote quarantine and travel bans during the pandemic. Thus, Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) said: "If you hear about an outbreak of plague in a country, do not enter it; and if a plague breaks out in any place while you are in it, do not leave that place."¹⁹

Too much leisure time online has a negative impact on the psychological and physical health of a person. However, the online format for the provision of cultural and leisure events, which was also actively used in other countries during lockdown, helped to mitigate the negative effects of the Covid-

¹²Will Dahlgreen, "37% of British Workers Think Their Jobs Are Meaningless," *YouGov*, August 12, 2015, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2015/08/12/british-jobs-meaningless>

¹³Alexander Agadzhanian, "Pandemic and Religion: Interpretations and Practices. Introduction," *State, Religion, Church in Russia and Abroad* 39, no. 1, (2021): 7-11. doi:10.22394/2073-7203-2021-39-1-7-11

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Joo Hyun Lee, Ji Hyun Lee and Soo Hyun Park, "Leisure Activity Participation as Predictor of Quality of Life in Korean Urban-dwelling Elderly," *Occupational Therapy International* 21, 3 (2014): 124-132. <https://doi.org/10.1002/oti.1371>.

¹⁶Jinwei Wang, Liyan Zhang, Yue Sun, Guangjuan Lu, Yanbin Chen, and Sai-Yin Zhang, "Exploring the Impacts of Urban Community Leisure on Subjective Well-being during Covid-19: A Mixed Methods Case Study," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, No. 14 (2022): 8514. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19148514>.

¹⁷Ranking.kz, "2 out of 3 Kazakhstanis consider themselves as believers. at the same time, 2 out of 5 believers are limited to personal holidays and compliance with some formalities," April 16, 2021, <https://ranking.kz/reviews/other/2-iz-3-kazahstancsev-prichislvyayut-sebya-k-veruyushim-lyudyam-pri-etom-sredi-veruyushih-2-iz-5-ogranichivayutsya-lish-prazdnikami-i-soblyudeniem-nekotoryh-formalnostej.html>

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Zhansaya Kali, "Declaration of Spirituality in a Post-Pandemic World: What Else to Expect from a Religious Convention," *El.kz*, September 11, 2022, https://el.kz/ru/deklaratsiya-dukhovnosti-postpandemicheskogo-mira-chego-eshche-ozhidat-ot-religioznogo-sezda_49369/



19 pandemic associated with the deterioration of the psychological health of the population during the period of self-isolation (such as depression, fear, and panic).²⁰

In this article, the authors rely on the main concept of the “leisure class”, formed by Veblen back in the 19th century.²¹ Also, the theoretical and methodological basis is the concept of “mass culture” and “high culture” formed by J. Ortega-y-Gasset (1930).²² The description of how the trend of empty consumption and the depersonalization of the cultural needs of society has formed in modern society is the main idea in this work. Ortega-y-Gasset emphasizes the importance of understanding that the concepts of “rebellion” and “mass” cannot be interpreted only as a political phenomenon, but also as a development of spirituality in the culture of society.²³ Overcrowded hotels, overcrowded trains, and overcrowded theatres (we could add overcrowded cinema here too) - all somehow refer us to the mass nature of contemporary leisure practices. In this article it is aimed to find answer to the questions of in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in Kazakhstan, did the leisure class exhibit a discernible shift towards engaging in more mass culture leisure practices, and if so, what were the underlying factors and implications of this change in leisure preferences?

2. Materials and Methods

The empirical basis of this study was the data derived from an analysis of the scale, intensity and structure of online requests of Kazakhstani Internet users during the Covid-19 pandemic. The data source was the Google search engine. The time limits of the study are set by the onset of the pandemic's spread in Kazakhstan. From the onset, the study tracks changes in the online behavior of the population during a period when the in-person receipt of cultural and leisure services became impossible (from December 01, 2019, to November 30, 2020). The analysis was carried out according to the criteria of “legitimate forms” of leisure (the so-called high culture), “mass” forms (performing the function of entertainment) and developing forms of leisure (performing the function of development).²⁴

A similar study was conducted by Russian researchers regarding online leisure during the pandemic in Russia.²⁵ However, this study differs in many ways: qualitative research methods were also used, and in this case, we were interested in leisure practices and their transformations under the influence of the pandemic in Kazakhstan. Other leisure practices were chosen as the objects of this study, based on the mentality of the Kazakh people and taking into account the specifics of the cultural environment in Kazakhstan. Also, the scientific novelty of this work can be an attempt to compare offline and online formats of leisure activities through an interdisciplinary approach to the problem, by analyzing the data obtained during the study, as well as using other methods such as critical discourse analysis of the media.

With the help of the Google Trends service, an analysis of key search queries on the Internet was carried out within the framework of legitimate (high) and mass forms of culture. Based on the analysis of search words, the following groups of popular queries were identified:

– Google searches in the Kazakhstani segment for the following queries pertaining to mass forms of culture: “watch movies 2020”, “movies 2020”, “watch movies online”, “games online”,

²⁰Lyaylyya Tleumbetova, “The Impact of the New Coronavirus Infection Covid-19 on Human Mental Health,” *Internauka* 10, no. 1 (2021): 33–36.

²¹Ibid.

²²Jose Ortega-y-Gasset, *La Rebelión De Las Masas* [The Revolt of the Masses].

²³Ibid.

²⁴Dumazedier, *Sociology of Leisure*; Streltsov, *Culture of Leisure*.

²⁵Oksana Lastochkina, “Cultural Online Leisure: Population Behavior during the Covid-19 Pandemic,” *Beneficium* 40, no. 3 (2021): 93-102.

“read books online”, “series online”.

– Google searches in the Kazakhstani segment for requests in the field of art and entertainment: "online concert", "online exhibition", "online museum", "online theatre", "online opera".

– Google search in the Kazakhstani segment for queries in the field of self-development: “online courses”, “online webinar”, “online training”, “online education”, “online library”.

The data obtained and the results of the study can be used by state and regional authorities for the development of and implementation of socially significant programs for working with the population in the mode of anti-crisis management. Also, this study may be of interest to entrepreneurs and professionals in the field of online leisure and any other persons interested in the topic of leisure culture.

3. Findings and Analysis

3.1. Transformation of Practices of the Mass Form of Leisure Culture

According to the results of the queries of the "mass" form of culture "watch movies 2020", "movies 2020", "watch movies online", we can observe sharp jumps in the popularity of these queries between March 15 and 21, March 29 and April 4 and March 22 and 28 in 2020 by 17%, 70% and 90% respectively. This just coincides with the official introduction of a lockdown in Kazakhstan on March 16, 2020. A similar jump was observed in the period from December 29, 2019, to January 4, 2020 for all three mentioned requests (most likely this jump was associated with the New Year holidays). Throughout the period under review, there has been a trend of growing popularity of requests, which shows the increasing activity of Kazakhstani users towards the direction and tendency of the "mass" form of leisure. (Figure 1)

Graphs are presented in Cyrillic, as the main alphabet used in Kazakhstan is still Cyrillic. Each graph has explanations in English.



Figure 1. Dynamics of popularity for Google queries “watch movies 2020”, “watch movies online” and “movies 2020” (Retrieved from Google Trends)

Note. The numbers show the level of popularity of the request for the selected region and specified time frame. The numbers arranged vertically represent the level of demand among users. A score of 0 indicates insufficient data for the given query (From instructions given on Google Trends). “Watch movies 2020” - the blue line, “watch movies online” - the red line, and “movies 2020” - the orange line.

Figure 2 shows the data obtained with the help of Google Trends in Kazakhstan from December

01, 2019 to November 30, 2020, reflecting the requests of users who searched for "games online", "read books online", and "serials online". A significant gap between the query "games online" and the queries "read books online" and "series online" is visible from the graph with the naked eye; online games as a leisure practice among Kazakhstanis turned out to be an order of magnitude more popular than serials. Reading books was the least popular among these three queries. On average, the percentage of popularity over a given period of time is 57% for the query "games online", 9% for the query "series online" and 11% for the query "read books online". Just as in the first case, a sharp jump occurred from the middle to the end of March 2020: 96% - "games online", 13% - "series online" and 10% - "read books online".



Figure 2. Dynamics of popularity for Google queries "games online", "series online", and "read books online" (Retrieved from Google Trends)

Note. "Games online" - the blue line, "series online" - the red line, "read books online" - the orange line.

3.2. Transformation of Practices of a Legitimate (High) Form of Leisure Culture

The next set of requests in the "legitimate" or high form of leisure category, including "online concert," "online exhibition," and "online museum," is presented in Figure 3.

Among these three queries, the most popular was the query "concert online", which is an order of magnitude higher in popularity dynamics according to Google Trends. The second place in popularity among this group of queries of a high form of leisure is occupied by the query "online museum". For the query "exhibition online" in the Kazakh segment of trends, the data is so negligible that the yellow line of the chart, reflecting the result for this query throughout the entire period specified in this study, is a straight line at a level closer to zero. For the first two queries, from March to May 2020 (just during the lockdown in Kazakhstan) there was a sharp jump in searches for "online concert" and "online museum", with the indicators for online concerts reaching 100% of the scale level. We see a smaller jump in the query "concert online" during the New Year holidays (slightly more than 50%). It is also interesting that in the time before the lockdown in Kazakhstan, the request for "online museum" was closer to 0%; with the onset of the pandemic, there arose a certain level of interest in online museums. The practice of online museums existed in the world even before the Covid-19 pandemic.²⁶

²⁶Darya Vasilina, "Virtual Museum as a Phenomenon of Modern Culture," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 24, no. 3 (2016): 96–102.

However, it is the pandemic that serves as a trigger for a sharp increase in interest in online museums. Figure 3 illustrates that the popularity of the "museum online" query was at 0% from December 1, 2019, until the start of quarantine. Yet, with the onset of the pandemic, the query about online museums consistently gained popularity throughout the specified period in this study. The interest of Kazakhstanis in online museum practices is thus directly related to the current pandemic.



Figure 3. Dynamics of popularity for Google queries "concert online", "museum online", and "exhibition online"(Retrieved from Google Trends)

Note. "Concert online" - the blue line, "museum online" - the red line, "exhibition online" - the orange line.

The next group of requests in the category of legitimate (high) forms of leisure are "online excursions", "online theatre" and "online opera" (Figure 4). After the announcement of the lockdown in Kazakhstan on March 16, according to the schedule, we can see that it is in March 2020 that interest in online theatres increases. The average level of popularity for Google queries for these online leisure practices for a given period was: "online excursions" - 3% "online theatre" - 22% and "online opera" - 16%. Thus, over the period specified in the study, online theatre turned out to be the most popular among these online practices.



Figure 4. Dynamics of popularity for Google queries "excursions online", "theatre online", "opera online" (Retrieved from Google Trends)

Note. "Excursions online" - the blue line, "theatre online" - the red line, "opera online" - the orange line.

3.3. Transformation of Practices of the Developing Form of Leisure Culture

Figure 5 shows the dynamics of the popularity of Google trends among leisure practices that perform the developing function "online courses", "online webinar", and "online learning". E. Sokolov (1977) defines leisure as a special time when a free choice of activities is possible, in which rest is interspersed with physical and mental activity.²⁷ As it was already mentioned in the Introduction to this article and the methods and materials part, three main functions are usually distinguished for leisure practices: the first is entertaining, the second is developing, and the third is recreational.²⁸ These functions are also important in the performance of this study. Many leisure researchers include self-education in the structure of leisure as a special element of leisure activities.²⁹ The English word 'school' comes from the Greek 'schole' (leisure), which suggests the ultimate combination of leisure and education.³⁰ Self-education queries in Google can show the behavior of Kazakhstanis as tending in the direction of personal development in leisure time.

The request "webinar online" in a given period of time turned out to be the least popular: this

²⁷Elmar Sokolov, *Leisure Time and Leisure Culture* (Lenizdat, 1977).

²⁸Joffre Dumazedier, *Sociology of Leisure*; Yury Streltsov, *Culture of Leisure*.

²⁹Zhiwei Chen, and Ying Liu, "The State of Leisure Life Situation and the Meaning of Leisure Education for College Students in China," *International Journal of Educational Research*, 102 (2020), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0883035520304912>, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101613>; John Datillo, *Leisure Education Program Planning: A Systematic Approach* (Venture Publishing Inc., 2008).

³⁰Daciana Lupu, "What the Preschool Children Prefer: Computer, TV or Dynamic, Outdoor Activities," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 82, (2013): 7-11, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042813012846>

may be due both to the rare use of this concept in Kazakhstani society, and to the fact that a certain part of Kazakhstani society may be completely unfamiliar with such a concept as "webinar." The average value that Google Trends gives us is 27% for the query "training online" and 35% for the query "online courses." At the same time, a sharp jump in the graph was noticed for online learning; precisely during March-May 2020 (during a hard lockdown in Kazakhstan), reaching 100% popularity for the other two queries in this group.

курсы онлайн: (Казахстан), вебинар онлайн: (Казахстан) и обучение онлайн: (Казахстан)



Figure 5. Dynamics of popularity for Google queries "online courses", "online webinar", "online learning" (Retrieved from Google Trends)

Note. "Online courses" - the blue line, "online webinar" - the red line, "online learning" - the orange line.

The next group of queries in the category of leisure practices that perform the function of development are Google queries for "online library" and "online education" (Figure 6). Libraries and education have been inextricably linked with each other in the culture of society for more than one millennium. The dynamics of the popularity of these requests in the period chosen for this study only increases after it has passed (as we can see from the Figure 6). Before the announcement of the lockdown in the Republic of Kazakhstan the popularity of these requests was relatively lower; however, they are characterized by sharp upward jumps following the lockdown announcement. The average value for a given period was 43% for the query of "library online" and 26% for the query "online education". The query "library online" in the Kazakhstan segment reached its peak of 100% in the period from March 29 to April 4, 2020. This may be due to the unavailability of offline visits to libraries during this period, along with the needs of students for the necessary learning materials. In turn, the popularity of the query "education online" reached its maximum in the period from September 20 to September 26, 2020, gaining by 84%. Such data may indicate the beginning of the educational calendar over the entirety of Kazakhstan. It was at this time that training in most educational institutions began in the country. The number of applicants wishing to study online during the pandemic is naturally growing. This has several advantages: online learning allows people to receive a quality education according to international standards without leaving home, without any expenses for flights, travel and accommodation in expensive countries, and also to combine study with the main activity.

библиотека онлайн: (Казakhstan) и образование онлайн: (Казakhstan)



Figure 6. Dynamics of popularity for Google queries "online library" and "online education" (Retrieved from Google Trends)

Note. "Online library" - the blue line, "online education" - the red line.

The data obtained by comparing mass forms of leisure and legitimate (high) forms of leisure by groups of Google queries separately give very expected results. This is because offline leisure practices in Kazakhstan were completely un-adapted to the new realities associated with the coronavirus pandemic. A floating cinema in France, a booth theatre in Japan, a bar with individual pavilions in Russia, a touchless park in Australia, a domed yoga studio in Canada, an outdoor gastrozone in the Czech Republic - this is not the whole list of modernized leisure culture practices emerging in the post-pandemic period.³¹ So, everywhere in the world people are ready today for quality leisure in an offline format, in case the lockdown scenario is repeated. However, this question remains open in Kazakhstan. During the lockdown in Kazakhstan, many entrepreneurs lost their income, workers lost their jobs in the leisure industry, and ordinary people could not access a full-fledged offline pastime. However, entering these queries into Google-Trends randomly, we get the dynamics of the popularity of various leisure practices during the Covid-19 pandemic which is presented in Figure 7; what is shown here is that the average value of the popularity dynamics, in percentage terms, favors "mass" leisure culture practices. On the other hand, the average percentages of the dynamics of the popularity of Google queries for "legitimate" ("high") forms of leisure practices are relatively low (theatre online - less than 1% on average, museum online - less than 1% on average, online library - 1% on average, cinema 2020 – 34% on average, games online - an average of 57%).

³¹Vera Lunkova, "From Toronto to Moscow: What Architects Invented to Protect against COVID-19," *Realty.rbc.ru*, February 15, 2021, <https://realty.rbc.ru/news/60212e579a794704af9b31c6>.

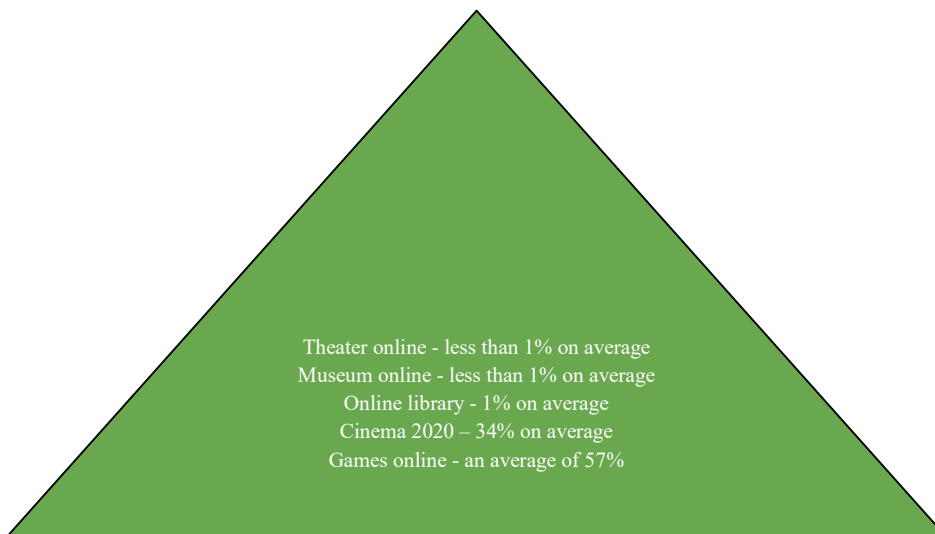


Figure 7. Pyramid of the dynamics of the popularity of various leisure practices during the Covid-19 pandemic (compiled by the author using the Google-trends tools).

Note. If we enter Google queries from this pyramid into Google Trends, specifying the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan during the quarantine period (the period specified in this study is the time frame from December 01, 2019 to November 30, 2020), then the average value of the dynamics of popularity in percent is in favour of "mass" practices of leisure culture. Whereas the average percentages of the dynamics of the popularity of Google queries for "legitimate" ("high") forms of leisure practices are relatively low.

3.4. Online and Offline Leisure Practices During the Pandemic in the Mass Media

The media played an important role, if not a key one, in the dissemination of diverse information - from fakes to sensations, from panic articles to calls for isolation in the spatio-temporal period chosen for this study. The main news in the media about leisure culture during the pandemic was the emergence of a variety of online movie leisure practices, such as online cinemas, streaming services and other online leisure practices.³² At the same time, the traditional offline formats of the cinemas were in a very difficult position due to the influence of quarantine, and even after the quarantine relief, when it was already permitted to go to the cinema, Kazakhstanis increasingly began to choose streaming services instead of going to a traditional offline cinema.³³ In the post-COVID era, the offline format of leisure time in cinemas is being transformed: entrepreneurs are trying to come up with more and more new types of practices that, according to Reznik, have not changed in the field of cinema since the time of the Lumiere brothers.³⁴

³²Nailya Galejeva, "How Has the Pandemic Affected Cinemas and the Film Distribution System in Kazakhstan?," *Steppe*, April 23, 2021, <https://the-steppe.com/razvitie/kak-pandemiya-povliyala-na-kinoteatry-i-sistemu-kinoprokata-v-kazahstane>.

³³Svetlana Romashkina, "'It Has Never Been Worse than Now': What Is Happening with Cinemas," *Vlast.kz*, September 3, 2021, <https://vlast.kz/biznes/46457-huze-cem-sejcas-ne-bylo-nikogda-cto-proishodit-s-kinoteatrami.html>.

³⁴Anna Reznik, "Happy Ending for the Film Market: A Kazakh Startup Figured out How to Reform the Cinema of the Post-COVID Era," *Columnist for Forbes Kazakhstan*, November 18,

Online games are not such a simple field as it might seem at first glance. Offers for this demand are ranked and replicated, modified and subdivided into a wide range of different and assorted games. These range from the notorious solitaire games and children's games to fully equipped metaverses with virtual lots and houses, as well as yachts that have a real value³⁵. According to the functions, these games can also be divided into several types. Some game manufacturers position their product as educational games, developing games, training or entertainment games. According to media reports, in addition to the growth in popularity of such offline leisure practices as table games in Kazakhstan,³⁶ the pandemic also provoked an increase in the popularity of online gambling, with income in 2020 from such games increasing 6 times when compared with the year 2019.³⁷

In addition to the Muslim religious understanding of society, Article 11 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan titled "On Gambling Business" prohibits the operation of online casinos in Kazakhstan. The country does not issue licences for such activities. Also, their advertising is legally prohibited in the country. However, online casino owners obtain licences in foreign countries and involve residents of the country through Internet sites. According to media reports, more than 4,000 online casino websites have been blocked in Kazakhstan, but this does not help much.³⁸ The problem of youth involvement in online gambling has gained such proportions that it was even raised by deputies in Kazakhstan. They propose to ban payments in online casinos with payment cards.³⁹ This measure could be a timely response to the impact of the pandemic, which contributes to the spread of such illegal online leisure practices. However, according to media reports, the number of players is growing largely under the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Without taking such measures, it is easy to imagine what awaits such leisure practices in Kazakhstan: in the era of the post-pandemic, one can only expect them to flourish. This reason is not only quarantine. Advertising of online gambling casinos very often flickers in commercial breaks while people watch movies online. Thus, one online leisure practice contributes to the growth of another, creating a precedent in the online leisure culture of Kazakhstan.

The cultivation of watching various serials as a leisure practice began long before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. This type of pastime is very popular among Kazakhstanis and during the possible future lockdowns, it will undoubtedly become even more popular due to the forced long isolation within 4 walls. Today, perhaps, it is difficult to find an active Kazakhstani Internet user who has not watched "Game of Thrones" or "Supernatural". In the capital of Kazakhstan, in 2021, an ice town was even built in the Triathlon Park with dragons, a throne and a castle from the "Game of

2021, https://forbes.kz/process/businessmen/heppi-end_dlyakinoryinka_1637204077/.

³⁵"Anonymous Paid \$650,000 for a Virtual Yacht in the Metaverse," *News.ru*, December 1, 2021, <https://news.ru/world/anonim-zaplatil-650-000-za-virtualnuyu-yahtu-v-metavselennoj/>.

³⁶Irina Logvinova, "Kazakhstanis in Quarantine Began to Meditate More, Watch TV Shows and Study - Analysis," *InAlmaty.kz*, March 31, 2020, <https://www.inalmaty.kz/news/2713034/kazahstancy-na-karantine-stali-bolse-meditirovat-smotret-serialy-i-ucitsa-analitiki>.

³⁷Anel' Edilkyzy, Ayat Duisembayev, and Erzhan Rakhmanberdiyev, "The Pandemic has Triggered an Increase in the Popularity of Online Gambling," *Khabar 24*, June 21, 2021, <https://24.kz/ru/news/social/item/481509-pandemiya-sprovotsirovala-rost-populyarnosti-azartnykh-onlajn-igr>.

³⁸Ol'ga Ushakova, "More than 4,000 Links to Online Casinos Have Been Blocked in Kazakhstan," *Inbusiness.kz*, March 25, 2022, <https://inbusiness.kz/ru/news/bolee-4-tysyach-sylok-na-onlajn-kazino-zablokirovali-v-kazahstane>.

³⁹Kazininform.kz, "Deputies Are Calling for a Ban on Payments at Online Casinos Using Credit Cards," December 15, 2021, <https://www.inform.kz/ru/zapretit-platezhi-v-internet-kazino-s-pomosch-yu-kreditnyh-kart-prizyvayut-deputy> a3874754.

Thrones” series.⁴⁰ This became a leisure location that attracted many residents and guests from the capital and thus functioned as an offline pastime in the wake of relaxed quarantine restrictions.

The first online museum project during the pandemic in Kazakhstan started literally the next day after the whole country went into quarantine. For example, on March 16, a lockdown was announced, and on March 17, the Kasteyev museum posted its first online broadcast; the tour of the Kasteyev Hall was an improvisation, filmed on a phone, and even edited on it. This video received several comments and a lot of feedback, including criticisms like “why are the owner's hands shaking?”, “why are other sounds there?” etc.⁴¹ In the first month of quarantine, the museum developed several professional online video tours. Quarantine made it possible for many museums to use new projects that are alternative to a “physical” visit to the museum. Due to these online projects, many Kazakhstani museums promoted their social networks.⁴² An online museum, as a practice of high culture, should have already been a focal point in the cultural and leisure sphere in Kazakhstan before the pandemic, like many museums in the world.

4. Discussion

During lockdown, people were placed in isolation from each other; resultantly fear of the virus, panic, and depression appeared.⁴³ Although these concepts tend more towards psychology or psychotherapy, it is important to use an interdisciplinary approach. According to previous research, the fear and panic caused by the coronavirus during the pandemic also significantly impacted the quality of sleep. Consequently, during such times, individuals may require psychosocial support.⁴⁴

In almost 90% of cases people do not have an opportunity to express themselves at work.⁴⁵ The Internet has burst into our lives rapidly and digitalization covers so many aspects of our lives today that it cannot be unnoticed. The current pandemic has only contributed to the even faster development of digitalization, including the digitalization of leisure. The leisure online has become a new type of leisure in the mass culture.⁴⁶

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Natal'ya Sokolova, and Ul'yana Fatyanova, “What Virtual Tours Have Become Popular during the Pandemic,” *Kursiv*, May 19, 2021. <https://kz.kursiv.media/2021-05-19/kakie-virtualnye-ekskursii-stali-populyarnymi-vo-vremya-pandemii/>.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Gerald Giesbrecht et al., “Fear of COVID-19, Mental Health, and Pregnancy Outcomes in the Pregnancy during the COVID-19 Pandemic Study: Fear of COVID-19 and Pregnancy Outcomes,” *Journal of Affective Disorders* 299 (2022): 483–91, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2021.12.057>; Anders Hakansson and Emma Claesdotter, “Fear of COVID-19, Compliance with Recommendations against Virus Transmission, and Attitudes towards Vaccination in Sweden,” *Helion* 8, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e08699>; Zhi Su, Peng Liu, and Tong Fang, “Pandemic-induced fear and stock market returns: Evidence from China,” *Global Finance Journal* 54 (C), (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfj.2021.100644>.

⁴⁴Kubra Yeni, Zeliha Tulek, and Murat Terzi, “A Year with the Fear of COVID-19 in Multiple Sclerosis Patients: Examination of Depression, Sleep Quality and Quality of Life before and after the Pandemic,” *Multiple Sclerosis and Related Disorders* 57 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.msard.2021.103370>; So Young Kim et al., “Lack of Sleep is Associated with Internet Use for Leisure,” *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0191713>.

⁴⁵Anton Jager, “Why ‘Post-Work’ Doesn’t Work,” *Jacobin*, 2018, https://jacobinmag.com/2018/11/post-work-ubi-nick-srnicek-alex-williams?fbclid=IwAR1tdoFsnlMkkd19Ph3VQ_ZfkhGlthOpG1nqJZASjFv-iw91fz0fcZBr-PI.

⁴⁶Li Yi, “Leisure on the Internet: A New Type of Mass Leisure,” 2009.

Any phenomenon, no doubt, has both positive and negative dimensions. There is a negative consequence of spending time on the Internet, such as "Internet addiction."⁴⁷ A. Burykina (2021) in her article on Japanese engravings of the 19th century, illustrating the rules and security measures during outbreaks of measles and cholera in that period, writes about transformations in public consciousness of the then Japanese society, and about the negative attitude of people towards the workers of entertainment culture and the condemnation of idle and habitual pastimes.⁴⁸ However, any processes should still be considered versatile. Thus, the author of the above article writes about the modernization of theatres that occurred because of epidemics.

Thus, the main concept of the "leisure class", formed by T. Veblen (1984) back in the 19th century, on which the authors rely in this article, accurately reflects the essence and content of online leisure when it is consumed by Kazakhstani society. Even in the days of the ancient Roman Empire, D. Juvenalis said that it is enough to give the people bread and circuses and they will never rebel.⁴⁹

The findings and results of this study point out crucial insights into the multifaceted repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic. The study unveils the profound psychological toll of lockdowns, exposing prevalent fears, panic, and depressive tendencies. Significantly, it highlights the swift integration of digitalization, particularly in online leisure, reshaping the cultural fabric of Kazakhstani society.

5. Conclusion

The sharp jump of the popularity of online leisure practices shows the complete unpreparedness and inferiority of offline leisure practices in accordance with the realities that have come during the pandemic. There is an urgent need for offline leisure practices in Kazakhstan to be reorganized within the framework of the post-pandemic future. Also, there is a need for online leisure practices to be regulated in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan is a Central Asian country with a rich tapestry of ethnicities and religions such as Islam and Christianity. We assume that religious dimensions deeply intertwine with leisure activities, with some activities being influenced by religious practices, while others challenge religious beliefs. Especially in regions where religion dominates daily life, the relationship between leisure and religious beliefs reveals insights into societal values and community dynamics.

During the period of rapid development of social life, science, and the transition from one period to a completely new one in general, its important component, leisure culture, is inevitably transformed, which becomes especially noticeable in the post-pandemic period, when its differentiation and transformation becomes an urgent problem. Therefore, the relevance and novelty of this topic of work is beyond doubt, and the need to analyse this important cultural problem, which requires deep interdisciplinary research, inevitably arises with the advent of unusual conditions that affect the transformation of culture and the formation of completely new practices that have yet to be explored.

Conflict of Interest

Author(s) declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Funding Details

This research did not receive grant from any funding source or agency.

⁴⁷Ibid

⁴⁸Alexandra Burykina, "Epidemics as Leisure Killers: The Transformation of Japan's Entertainment Industry in the Second Half of the 19th Century," *Russian Journal of Philosophy and Humanities* 31, no. 2 (2021): 195–217.

⁴⁹Kazimezh Kumanetsky, *Cultural History of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Moscow, 1990).

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