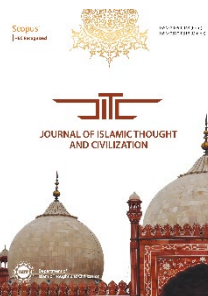
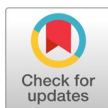


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Cyber-Islamic Environment in the Religious Field of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

Thanks to the rapid pace of digitalization and modern technological innovations, the boundaries between online and offline spheres of Muslim life are changing. The current study analyzed the emergence of a cyber-Islamic environment in the religious field of Kazakhstan. As a result of the content analysis, the problem of synthesis of secular and religious, national and confessional, traditional and innovative values as the main discourses of the Kazakh segment of the pan-Islamic religious process was revealed. There is low cyber activity of official Islam against rapidly-growing unofficial influence. According to the authors, secular Kazakhstan needs a balanced Islam in the relations of faith and reason, which recognizes modern human rights, the rule of law, social justice, and the priority of human capital development.

Keywords: cyber-Islam and security, digitalization of religion, internet, social networks, virtual Islam

Introduction

Before exploring cyber-Islamic problems in the religious field of Kazakhstan, it is necessary to clarify some of the main conceptual and methodological aspects of the stated topic. The key content included words and phrases, such as “cybernetics,” “cyberspace,” “cyberworld,” “cyberculture,” “cyberreligion,” and “cyber Islam,” which are quite often used in the modern lexicon. Initially, the prefix “cyber,” was used in relation to cybernetics, the subject of research of which is the patterns of information transfer and management processes in both inanimate machines and living organisms. The object of cybernetics research is considered to be any system from conventional technical equipment to complex dynamic systems that can be abstractly-analyzed and controlled.¹ This

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includes automatic regulators in engineering, computers, human brain and Artificial Intelligence (AI), biological populations, and human society.

In the course of the formation of information society and the development of digitalization processes, the prefix “cyber” already goes beyond scientific and philosophical terminology and extends to the fields of literature (fantasy genre) and art (cinematography). The metaphors of the cyberworld and cyberspace began to mean not only abstract concepts. However, these metaphors also meant how the virtual existence is associated with the Internet and social networks, with AI and games, with automation and security, as well as with education and business turned into a practical need in everyday life.

These are separate networks of the worldwide web, such as, digital religion, cyber-Islam, virtual Islam, cyber-Sufism, internet y, internet - umma, Muslim coaches, and Islamic security. These concepts have turned the former academic Islamic Studies and Orientalist Sciences into a new channel. Moreover, there was a demand for new quantitative and qualitative methods in the Sociology of Religion. The problems of cyber religion, virtual religion, online religion, and digital religion have increased most intensively since the last decades of the 20th century and the initial decades of the XXI century. Especially in Western countries, in the United States, Christian preachers, who initially actively used television as a means of Mass Communication, quickly adapted to the Internet. Religious communities can collaborate in one chat, site, or forum to discuss religious issues, support the Catholic Church's internet, and so on. “Living in a different dimension of being created by computer technology and in an artificial environment created by computer programs,”² gave birth to cyberspace.

Although the discussion regarding the foundations of faith on the Internet initially caused a dispute between representatives of traditional religion and online religions, due to the needs of neophyte believers, religious preachers had to quickly adapt to the requirements of the age of digital technology. In the 2000s, thanks to the interactivity of religious sites, pages in religious texts on the Internet reached million, web pages for churches 65 million, and the word “God” was used 83 million times.”³ The intensity of the penetration of religion into the World Wide

Web (WWW) has been rapid as well as the concept of digital religion. “If it is impossible for faith in the past tense, it is quite possible that it will be a harbinger in the future.”⁴

2. Methods

It is clear that the problem of online religion in the information society and on social networks today, due to its relevance and potential, creates a scientific demand, as well as a demand for methods and techniques to study this phenomenon. As a sacred space,⁵ discussion in scientific circles of

¹Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1948), 72.

²A. P. Zabiako, E. A. Voronkova, A. V. Lapin, D. A. Pratyina, *Kiberreligiya: nauka kak faktor religioznyh transformacij* [Cyberreligion: Science as a factor of Religious Transformations] (Blagoveshchensk: Publishing House of AmSU, 2012). (In Russian).

³Morten T. Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg, “Introduction: Waves of Research,” in *Religion and Cyberspace*, eds. Morten T. Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg (New York: Routledge, 2005), 25–40.

⁴S. Belorussova, “Religion in the Virtual Space,” *Etnografia/Ethnography* 4, no. 14 (2021): 94–118, [https://doi.org/10.31250/2618-8600-2021-4\(14\)-94-118](https://doi.org/10.31250/2618-8600-2021-4(14)-94-118).

⁵Stephen D. O'Leary, “Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (1996): 781–808, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/LXIV.4.781>; Heidi Campbell, “Internet and Religion,” In *The*

phenomena in the virtual religious world began in the mid-1990s. American Researcher, Heidi Campbell, talks about the existence of comparativist and typological, theoretical and methodological interdisciplinary approaches to the study of general and individual trends in cyberism in the decades since the Internet and religion met face to face.⁶

Taking into account the huge impact of global social changes on the spiritual situation, religion in recent decades, including the religion of Islam, as a general methodological basis, the “post-modern,” [J. F. Lyotard (1924-1998), J. Derrida (1930-2004), J. Lacan (1901-1981)], “post-secular,” [J. Habermas (b.1929-), J. Rawls)], “global” [A. Appadurai (b.1979-), I. Wallerstein (1930-2019), R. Robertson (11938-2022)], and “post-normative,” (Z. Sardar b.1951-), the works of theorists, who wrote about society, can be studied. Pakistani-British scientist, Ziyaaddin Sardar, introduced the concept of post-normative time. According to him, today is a time when old traditions are broken, new ones are not established, and changes are taking place. This is especially true of the Muslim community, which is unable to adapt to the amorphous processes in the post-modern society. As can be seen from the above methodological description, most of the studies are devoted to Western/Arabic content. The current study focused on Central Asia.

By the end of the second decade of the XXI century, the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the whole world, greatly contributed to the rapid adaptation of believers to the virtual space. On the peculiarities of the religious situation in the post-pandemic period, Elmira Muratova conducted a study in relation to the post-Soviet space.⁷ Elena Muzykina and Nurlykhan Alzhanova published a scientific article on the territory of Kazakhstan.⁸ The current study touched on the topic of cyber-Islam in the religious field of Kazakhstan. The underlying theme of the study is based on “how Islam in Kazakhstan adapts and confronts digitalization.” Therefore, the study used the content analysis approach of the sociological method. This method allows to quantify the data on social networks, especially Instagram. Content analysis relies on a limited sample of a larger body of information. The data collection period covered January-June 2023. The Instagram platform provides a more comprehensive view of religious activity than Facebook.

In the process of analyzing the information received, quantitative and qualitative methods are used.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Cyber Religion and Content Analysis of Selected Islamic Topics on Social Networks

In the world of technological progress and active involvement of citizens in information systems, the popularity of using social media tools is increasing. According to data from open sources of information, the number of internet users in Kazakhstan is growing from year to year. This indicates an increase in the penetration and accessibility of the WWW. Thus, as of the beginning of May 2023, there were 17.4 million cellular subscribers in the country with internet access. According

Handbook of Internet Studies, edited by Mia Consalvo and Charles Ess, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011), 232–250.

⁶Elmira Muratova, “Religious Rituals in Crimea during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Crimean Muslims,” in *Muslims of Central Eurasia Since the 19th Century: Daily Life, Identity, Intellectual Thought, and Education*, eds. Elmira Muratova and Elmira Akhmetova (Baku: “Idrak” Public Union, 2023), 324–335.

⁷Elena V. Muzykina and Nurlykhan Aldzhanova, “Имамы Казахстана в постковидных условиях адаптации к виртуальному пространству” [Adaptation of the Imams of Kazakhstan to the Virtual Space in Post-COVID Conditions: A Look into the Future], in *Virtual Islam in the Post-Soviet Space: Cyber Environment and Religious Authorities*, ed. Z. Khabibullina and E. Muratova (Baku: AVE Print, 2023), 205–231.

⁸Ibid.

to data published in the advertising planning tools of the leading social media platforms, at the beginning of 2023, 11.05 million people aged 18 years and older used social networks in Kazakhstan, which is equivalent to 86.3% of the total population in this group.⁹

Access to the WWW opens up new opportunities for the informational influence of external sources of information, foreign ideological meanings, as well as values and perceptions of life orientations, primarily for young people. The emergence of religious segment of the Internet is recognized as a natural stage in the development of information technologies and the virtualization of human activity, which gradually leads to a change in traditional forms of religious activity. The inclusion of religious denominations in the Internet sphere turned out to be stretched over time, and the religiously-active part of society went through a long stage of critical reflection on cyberreality. The religious discourse on the need to use the Internet and its purpose for the believers is still relevant due to the existence of both supporters and opponents of the use of digital technologies and communications.¹⁰ But in any case, it is impossible to deny the fact that information resources have become one of the powerful factors influencing the formation and development of the religious process in cyberspace.

As for the “Islam Net,” (a term introduced by A.M. Reshetnyak), the Russian-language Islamic Internet is self-sufficient and meets the needs of a practicing Muslim. In this segment of the Internet, there are almost all analogues of the resources of the “ordinary” internet: from a dating site and clothing stores to search engines where a Muslim can find any information about Islam. There are more than a hundred websites of various *madhhabs* and target orientation in Islam Net. All of them broadcast the advantages of the Muslim way of life. Moreover, these websites also consider the problems faced by believers living under *Shari’ah* law in a secular state and publicly-demonstrating their religiosity.”¹¹

Discursive and ideological changes, both in Muslim practices and in the spiritual ministry of *imams* in Kazakhstan, indicate the penetration of a new, virtual reality into the daily life of Islam in this Central Asian Republic. However, according to Kazakhstani researchers, “it is too early to talk about the spread of cyber-advertising in this territory. Rather, it is possible to discuss the issue of its origin, weak signals of which, under certain conditions, can develop into stable trends.”¹² In general, it is necessary to recognize the low cyberactivity of official Islamic structures. Despite the fact that they have occupied their niche in the Muslim Internet, they are still in “catching-up,” positions and are inferior in competition to unofficial currents of Islam.¹³

The content analysis conducted in the Kazakh segment of the Internet shows a significant increase in the interest of social media users in thematic content of the Islamic format. The Islamic content of users is actively filled with new situational, traditionally-cultural video materials

⁹“How the Growth of Internet Consumption in Kazakhstan Affects the Quality of Communication,” *Forbes.kz*, August 24, 2023, https://forbes.kz/articles/kak_rost_potrebleniya_interneta_v_kazahstane_vliyaet_na_kachestvo_svyazi/.

¹⁰E. E. Taratuta, *Philosophy of Virtual Reality* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Press, 2007), 45.

¹¹A. M. Reshetnyak, “Islam on the Russian-Language Internet: Specifics and Statistics,” in *Materials of the All-Russian Scientific and Practical Internet Conference with International Participation*, 207, (Tomsk: Publishing House of TSU, 2009).

¹²Muzykina and Aldzhanova, “Имамы Казахстана в постковидных условиях адаптации к виртуальному пространству [Adaptation of the Imams of Kazakhstan to the Virtual Space in Post-COVID Conditions: A Look into the Future]”.

¹³M. F. Murtazin, “Islamic Internet in the Post-Soviet Space,” *Russia and the New States of Eurasia* 3 (2020): 126–138, <https://doi.org/10.20542/2073-4786-2020-3-126-138>.

promoting the Muslim values of faith, spiritual heritage, and answers to topical questions of the individual and the believing “*ummah*.”

Table 1. Virtual Ummah and *Imams*

No.	Name of the Author's Account	Name of the Authors	Number of Subscribers	Maximum Viewing	The Format of Materials
1	Nurlan <i>imam.kz</i>	Asanov Nurlan B. Chief <i>Imam</i> of the Yrysty Mosque, Astana, Kazakhstan	856 Thousand	2.1 Million	747 Publications, Stories, Rails
2	nurlan_ <i>imam_fan</i>	Asanov Nurlan B. Chief <i>Imam</i> of the Yrysty Mosque, Astana, Kazakhstan	107 Thousand	1,3 Million	371 Publications, Stories, Rails
3	kabylbek.ustaz	Zhumabekov Kabylbek, theologian	752 Thousand	1 Million	1350, Publications, Stories, Rails
4	kabylbek_alipbaiuly	Zhumabekov Kabylbek, theologian	100 Thousand	478 Fathoms	259 Publications, Stories, Rails
5	armanustaz.kz	Arman Kuanyshbayev, theologian, Director of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan Educational Center, Kazakhstan	812 Thousand	2,9 Million	1975 Publications, Stories, Rails
6	ustaz_erlan_aqataev	Yerlan Akatayev, theologian	186 Thousand	1 Million	1 335 Publications, Stories, Rails
7	nursultan_rysmaganbet	Nursultan Rysmaganbet, theologian, Naib <i>Imam</i> of the Nur-Mubarak Mosque, Almaty, Kazakhstan	563 Thousand	2,4 Million	257 Publications, Stories, Rails
8	rizabekustaz.kz	Rizabek Ilimbai, theologian, lecturer at Nur Mubarak University	45.1 Thousand	382 Thousand	651 Publications, Stories, Rails

As part of the monitoring of social networks, quantitative and qualitative aspects of the religious situation are traced, which is expressed in the number of views and “likes.” Kazakhstani users of the social network “Instagram,” represented by the theologians of the “Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan” (SAMK), due to objective and subjective reasons, methods, knowledge,

skills and competencies, post the following thematic videos: *imam* Nurlan Asanov, focuses the attention of his audience on “online” meetings, responds in the “online” format to the questions of the Internet audience. The Naib *imam* of the Nur-Mubarak mosque, Nursultan Rysmaganbet, focuses his attention on the youth audience of social media users (Table 1). Empirical data on the religious activities of prominent Kazakh *imams*, statistics of subscribers, and engagement indicators indicate that digital religious life is thriving in Kazakhstan in the post-normative period.

In Kazakhstan, especially during the pandemic and in lockdown conditions, *imams* had to actively begin to master messengers, use interactive forms of education, as well as the Internet forums with discussions of theological “renewal” issues. Thanks to the active placement of their sermons, the *imams* contributed to an increase in the Kazakh-speaking segment of the social network.

The most acutely-discussed topics among the Internet users are problems related to the relationship between secular and religious, national and confessional, traditional and neo-Salafi values, as well as their possible conflicting situations and finding a balance. Maintaining the balance of these values in Kazakh society would stimulate the preservation of the stability of religious situation as well as would serve as a condition for the successful improvement of state policy in the field of confessional relations. As a recommendation, the study suggested encouraging official Islamic institutions, such as SAMK to professionalize digital outreach activities and to promote media literacy among youth in order to counter destructive ideologies.

3.2. Traditional Religious Values and *Imams* in the Virtual Space

Traditional religion is a religion formed historically in the cultural tradition of Kazakhstan. Such a traditional religion is Sunni Islam, formed as Islam of the classical version with the integration and adaptation of cultural characteristics of the Turks, that is, the ancestors of the Kazakhs. A significant role in its dissemination was played by the Hanafi *madhhab*, the founder of which was Abu Hanifa, a native of the Persian-Turkic environment. The essence of the *madhhabs* was that thanks to them, Islamic legal science and the legal system were formed. The *madhhabs* provided the mechanism of action of the *Shari'ah* and formed legal consciousness of the Muslim *Ummah*.

Today, the Hanafi *madhhab* is the basis for the legal provision of religion in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. An analysis of the religious situation in secular states, in which *Sunni* Islam and Hanafi *Madhhab* are the traditional practices of religion, shows the presence of stable religiosity within the established Islamic landscape and stable tolerance towards other faiths and cultures. These components are important in the implementation of the policy of deradicalization of the Islamic *Ummah* and Islamic consciousness.

Currently, the secular Kazakhstan faces the threat of possible Islamist reformatting. The trend of emancipation (*imān* – faith) in recent years has come into conflict with the emancipation of Islam and emancipation in Islam, marking a new trend – the Islamization of society. The population of Kazakhstan positions itself mainly as Muslims. Moreover, religiosity is increasing, which can be judged by sociological and visual measurements (Friday prayers, in which the younger generation takes part). The increasing role of Islam and the Islamization of secular consciousness are associated not only with socio-economic problems: poverty, unequal access to educational resources, the lack of universal mechanisms for the functioning of social elevators, but also with the fact that religious policy is imperfect, one-sided, with distortions towards absolute liberalism, then towards strict “prohibitionism.” The Muslims of Kazakhstan should not only be clearly aware of their right to freedom of religion of Islam, they should be sure that the state protects them from radicalism and terrorism, forming a policy of balancing Islam and secularism.

Kazakhstan, as a state of the Central Asian region, actively develops the cultural values of its people, supports the positive initiatives of creative, educated youth in the field of information technology (IT), as well as the development of new methods of filling the content space of social

networks. There are many pages and user communities on the Instagram, advertising the synthesis of spirituality and traditions, culture, and mentality of the Kazakh nation (Table 2).

Table 2. Tradition and Religion in the Social Network

Account Name	Social Orientation (content)	Number of Users Covered
kz_iman_nury	Some topical issues on the topic of family and moral values are posted.	693 thousand subscribers
imandi_zhyrek_official	Explaining the spiritual values of Muslim culture through the prism of tradition and customs.	14.5 thousand subscribers

Certain breaks with the traditional habitual routine of religious ministers have been made by changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In conditions of self-isolation, believers were forced to comply with the demands of the secular authorities, and *imams* had to conduct services online. Quarantine restrictions led to ambivalent situations in the religious field of Kazakhstan. They contributed to the processes of virtualization and digitalization. Especially “Islam, despite its so-called tendency to fundamentalism, the protection of tradition turned out to be more open to the introduction of digital products and IT technologies into religious and everyday practice.”¹⁴ On the one hand, this is due to Islam's search for “its own modernity,” on the other hand, to the formation of such a phenomenon as a global virtual Ummah, within which religious identity is formed in cyberspace and strives for greater individualization of a Muslim.¹⁵

The active “cyberlife of Muslims”¹⁶ leads to the fact that cyberspace (including social networks (pages, groups, blogs), messengers, forums, hosting) becomes a source, a place to search for information about religion and creed, a place to discuss controversial religious issues (within which the “queer community of Muslims,” “offline and online ulema” are actively involved¹⁷ in associations of communities of believers, the implementation of the most important religious prescriptions, etc. “The use of the Internet and social networks for the benefit of the faith has become the norm. However, there is also a polar position calling for abandoning technical innovations, thereby preserving “traditionalism.” Although, it should be recognized that even the traditionalist, fundamentalist-minded part of the Muslim community participates in cyber discussions and defends

¹⁴N. Chesnova, “Digitalization of Religion: Islam,” Humanitarian Vedomosti TSPU Named after L. N. Tolstoy 40, no. 4 (2021): 70–79; Lola N. Dodkhudoeva, “Secularism and Islam: Some Results of Interaction,” *Islamovedenie* 12, no. 2 (2021): 91–112, <https://doi.org/10.21779/2077-8155-2021-12-2-91-112>.

¹⁵ibid

¹⁶Z. R. Habibullina, “Selfie in Mecca: Haram or the Venerable Hajj?” *Siberian Historical Research* 2 (2019): 85–107.

¹⁷Sofya. A. Ragozina, “Благочестие, Авторитет и «Народный Иджтихад» в Онлайн-Среде Российских Мусульман в Период Пандемии (Piety, Authority and “Popular Ijtihad” in the Online Space of Russian Muslims During the Pandemic),” *State, Religion, Church in Russia and Abroad* 39, no. 1 (2021): 76–100, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4311073>; R. F. Patteev, “Conceptual Problems of Modern Islamic Studies: On the Basis of the Paradigm of Transformation of Islamic Communities,” *Islamic Studies* 4 (2016): <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kontseptualnye-problemy-sovremennogo-islamovedeniya-poisk-paradigmy-transformatsii-islamskih-soobshchestv-1>

its position in the Internet space. “Islamic discourse”¹⁸ covers online and offline reality, leaving a digital footprint.

According to the assessment and analysis of data from the official website of SAMK (www.muftyat.kz.) during the lockdown, there was no active virtualization of religious life in Kazakhstan. Online projects that had already been launched before the quarantine continued to work. The weekly Friday sermon of the Supreme Mufti of Kazakhstan was broadcasted online, *imams* of mosques preached sermons “30 conversations for 30 days,” live broadcasts of lectures were conducted, the topics of which included prayer (dua), dietary norms in Islam during fasting (oraza), the Koran and its place in the life of a Muslim, the *Sunnah* and the history of the prophets, as well as the ethics of a Muslim (*akida*). In 2020, the YouTube channel and Instagram SAMK gained about 3.4 million views.

The work of Kazakhstani researchers E. Muzykina and N. Aljanova, dedicated to the adaptation of domestic *imams* to the virtual space, is of genuine interest. They conducted an online survey among the *imams* of Kazakhstan twice during the general isolation and in the post-retirement period (in 2020 and 2021, respectively). The most significant results obtained are highlighted as: 1) about a little more than ¼ indicated that their service as an *imam* had changed significantly due to the outbreak of coronavirus and quarantine measures, and most felt the new circumstances slightly; 2) the duration of quarantine played the role of an adaptation trigger, there was an increase in attention to marital and family relations and a decrease in interest in eschatological problems; 3) in the question of the need for additional knowledge in certain areas of service, *imams*, along with *Aqida* and *Fiqh*, put modern electronic means of communication to the fore, while knowledge in the field of Arabic, *Tafsir* and *Tasawwuf*, psychology and interpersonal communication lost some importance; 4) most *imams* had to switch to virtual means of communication, fulfilling the duty of the minister of worship forced many to master new technologies; 5) the appearance of additional time for self-education and communication with family.

Thus, in new conditions, in the context of the emergence of cyber-Islam with its virtual reality and “non-human actors,”¹⁹ it may be necessary to rethink and redefine this key concept for Muslims. If you think about it in time, then you can avoid many of the complications that are beginning to manifest themselves today.

It is clear that, in the conditions of post-secularism and mass digitalization of religion, grassroots and individual theologians are becoming more active in the Internet space. In order to resist destructive influences, especially of the Wahhabi-Salafi persuasion, it is necessary to strengthen Kazakh Hanafi traditions through creative digital content.

3.3. Destructive Content on Social Media

Ensuring information security is one of the important elements of state national security. The Republic of Kazakhstan has adopted laws on “Informatization,” on “Electronic document and

¹⁸Patteev, R. F. 2016. “Conceptual Problems of Modern Islamic Studies: On the Basis of the Paradigm of Transformation of Islamic Communities.” *Islamic Studies* 4. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kontseptualnye-problemy-sovremennogo-islamovedeniya-poisk-paradigmy-transformatsii-islamskih-soobschestv>

¹⁹Sakina Fatima, “Saudi Arabia: Robots to Deliver Sermons, Adhan at Makkah’s Grand Mosque,” *Siasat.com*, updated September 11, 2022, <https://www.siasat.com/saudi-arabia-robots-to-deliver-sermons-adhan-at-makkahs-grand-mosque-2409921/>..

electronic digital signature.” Regulation in this field of activity requires non-negative legal, organizational, personnel, and technological measures.²⁰

The daily and regular use of social networks to a certain extent affects the risks associated with the spread of destructive ideology on the Internet. The official website of the Committee for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan (the authorized state body in the field of religious activity) contains information on monitoring the Internet space for the 4th quarter of 2023. The content of 291 Internet resources was analyzed, of which 128 links containing illegal materials were identified.²¹

A number of materials were announced in the country’s information resources on the danger of destructive ideology. Former Deputy Chairman of the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan Ruslan Seisembayev said that in 2023, an explosion in the mausoleum of Khoja Akhmet Yasawi in Turkestan and a terrorist attack in Astana were prevented, and in general, an increased terrorist danger remains stable in Kazakhstan. It also became known that almost 80 thousand members of destructive groups were identified among the youth of Kazakhstan since the beginning of the year.²²

The legislative aspects of responding and preventing the spread of ideas of destructive, radical ideology are fixed in the country’s normative legal acts. The current legislative acts and programs of Kazakhstan, for instance “On access to information,” “On mass media” are aimed at creating democratic and social information opportunities to access and obtain knowledge and information in the cyberspace.

At the same time, to a certain extent, there are risks of involving young people in the orbit of destructive ideology via the Internet. According to the estimates of the monitoring of the Internet space, there is a certain line of mechanisms for involving Kazakhstani users in destructive content, for instance:

- through the created neutral accounts on social networks, foreign preachers of non-traditional movements of Islam conduct lectures, video lessons to increase the number of followers;
- foreign preachers using methods of neuro-linguistic programming are trying to influence the religious consciousness of neophytes (new followers) and subscribers in the mental field;
- using information business methods (targeted advertising), they try to acquire the most popular social media accounts in order to involve the user audience in the propaganda ideology of religious movements;
- active missionary activity can be traced through the messengers “Telegram,” “WhatsApp.” with the help of these communication messengers, groups and user chats are opened in order to send dubious, distorted forms of religious teachings.

Several years ago, deputies of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of Kazakhstan took initiatives to regulate the registration of accounts on social networks for underage youth of the country.

²⁰Sh. Zhandosova, and O. Auelbekov, “Cyberlankestik Kazakhstan Republikasyn Akparattyk Kauipsizdigine Kauip Retinde.” KazUU Khabarshysy. The Philosophy of the Series. Madeniettanu Seriyasi. Sayasattanu Seriyasi 37, no. 2 (2011): 200–203.

²¹Committee on Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan. *The Official Internet Resource*. <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/din>

²²“Interim Results of the Measures to Combat Terrorism and Separatism Summarized by the RATS SCO Council in Astana,” Kaztag.kz. Accessed December 2024. <https://kaztag.kz/ru/news/promezhutochnye-itogi-mer-borby-s-terrorizmom-i-separatizmom-podvel-sovet-rats-shos-v-astane>

The government has developed a comprehensive plan for the protection of children from violence, suicide prevention and ensuring their rights and well-being for 2023-2025. One of the points of this program is a ban on children registering on social networks without parental permission. Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Vkontakte platforms are planned to introduce innovations in order to restrict the registration of minors without the permission of legal representatives.”²³

Considerable issues are occupied by disputes and open attacks on representatives of the Muslim clergy and their preachers on the Internet, from the so-called “neo-Tengrian cult,” on social networks, especially on “Tik Tok.” Disputes are actively conducted, disputes denying of Muslim culture and its presence in the historical and cultural heritage of the Kazakh people.

Separate groups have opened on Telegram to organize opinions on the increasing incidence of Islamophobia on social networks. Debates on this topic are being held in a group called “Stop Islamophobia,” and video lectures on the term “Islamophobia” are being organized. The ideological influence of foreign Islamic centers on the formation of Islamic consciousness and the development of Islam is still associated with the Soviet displacement of Islam from public life. During the period of independence, the “religious ferment” contributed to the Islamic Renaissance, which had a very dual character. Having freed itself from total atheism, this movement reconstructed those currents in Islam that carried an alien ideology, foreign traditions, and practices of the Islamic faith. The reverse side of this process led to undesirable results. For instance, young people began to criticize the confessional traditions formed over a thousand-year period, considering them syncretic, eclectic, “unclean,” which needed to be cleansed.

At the same time, there is also the ideological influence of jihadism as well as the incessant attempts to deconstruct the Islamic tradition that has developed in Central Asia as a whole. The spiritual significance of Hanafism as an ideology of opposition to radicalist doctrines could be actualized through the enlightenment of Hanafism, demonstrating its positivity, practicality, correlation with universal values. Digital Islam poses subtle political issues related to national security, religious liberalization, and radicalization. In this regard, it is necessary to control the behavior of preachers by authorized state bodies in order to prevent destructive digital content, disinformation, and legal frameworks.

4. Conclusion

In general, the emergence of a cyber-Islamic environment in the virtual space of Kazakhstan demonstrates the high adaptive abilities of Islam to the global network. This shows new cognitive and mobilization opportunities for the modernization of Islamic culture and religious practice. At the same time, it creates new challenges as well as challenges the authority of traditional (official) forms of religious life.

Against the background of the development of IT and the virtualization of Muslim life, an attempt is being made to transform the local traditional Hanafi model of Sunni Islam into an Arab-Salafi version. This trend would increase in the context of liberalization of religious policy. It can be said that the radicalist ideology and its promotion in Kazakhstan is a challenge from the globalist Islamist ideology, which seeks to unify the Islamic tradition in Kazakhstan according to its own model.

The process of Islamization in Kazakhstan and Central Asia is still incomplete. However, before the beginning of the XXI century it was spontaneous, today it is rather organized. Moreover, it is not a self-organizing process, it has political technologists. The revival of Islam as the return of the intellectual Islamic heritage of Kazakhstan is a desirable revival. However, the revival of “pure

²³“LSBS Social Network Ban,” *Kursiv. Media*, Accessed December 2024. <https://kz.kursiv.media/2023-05-25/lsbs-socsetizapret/>

Islam" and its introduction into the Islamic Ummah of Kazakhstan is already a threat to national security.

Authors' Contribution

Kupeshov Kanat: data curation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. **Bakhytzhon Satershinov:** conceptualization, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project administration, validation, visualization, writing – original draft. **Almasbek Shagyrbay:** conceptualization, methodology, project administration, software, visualization, writing – review & editing. **Nurmukhammed Meymankhozha:** conceptualization, supervision. **Zhanat Aldiyarova:** data curation, formal analysis, resources, software, writing – review & editing. **Tutinova Nurgul:** formal analysis, investigation, supervision, validation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

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