THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL SACRALIZATION AND DIGITAL RELIGION ON THE FORMATION OF THE WORLDVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY YOUTH: THE CASE OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: This article examines technological sacralization and manifestations of digital religion as emerging socio-cultural phenomena shaping the values, behavioral practices, and identity formation of contemporary youth. Drawing on interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks from sociology of religion, media studies, and philosophy of technology, the study analyzes key mechanisms of influence, including algorithmic curation, ritualization of digital practices, and the mediatization of authority. Particular attention is paid to the digital context of Uzbekistan, characterized by high internet penetration and a demographically young population. The paper discusses both the risks and constructive potentials of digital sacralization for youth development and proposes practical recommendations for education, psycho-pedagogical support, and public policy.

Keywords: technological sacralization, digital religion, algorithms, youth, digital culture, Uzbekistan

Introduction

The rapid digitalization of social life has fundamentally transformed the mechanisms through which meanings, norms, and values are produced and transmitted in contemporary societies. Digital platforms, algorithms, and networked services increasingly perform functions that were previously associated with traditional social, cultural, and religious institutions. This transformation has given rise to the phenomenon of *technological sacralization*, understood as the attribution of normative, authoritative, or quasi-transcendental status to technological systems and digital infrastructures.

In scholarly discourse, technological sacralization is often examined in connection with the concept of *digital religion*, which describes the emergence of new belief systems, ritualized practices, and forms of authority within digital environments (Campbell, 2013). Unlike classical religious institutions, digital religion operates through algorithmic mediation, platform governance, and participatory media practices, blurring the boundaries between the sacred and the secular. Trust in data-driven systems, belief in the neutrality and objectivity of algorithms, and emotional attachment to digital platforms contribute to the sacralization of technology as a source of meaning and guidance.

Youth represent the social group most deeply embedded in digital environments. International studies consistently show that adolescents and young adults spend a substantial portion of their daily lives online, particularly on social media platforms and mobile applications (Pew Research Center, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2022). As a result, digital technologies play a decisive role in shaping their worldview, identity construction, and behavioral norms. Algorithmic recommendation systems reinforce specific values and preferences through

personalization, while *digital rituals* - such as continuous content consumption, participation in online challenges, and engagement metrics - structure everyday experience.

The relevance of this study is particularly pronounced in the context of Uzbekistan. According to recent estimates, internet penetration in the country reached approximately 80-89% by 2024, with mobile internet constituting the primary mode of access (DataReportal, 2024). At the same time, Uzbekistan has a markedly young demographic profile: nearly 60% of the population is under the age of 30 (UNICEF, 2020). This combination of widespread digital access and a youthful population creates conditions in which technological sacralization and digital religion can exert a significant influence on socialization processes and worldview formation.

Despite the growing body of international research on digital religion and algorithmic governance, there remains a lack of context-specific analysis addressing post-Soviet and Central Asian societies. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how global processes of technological sacralization intersect with local cultural, religious, and social norms in Uzbekistan. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective educational strategies, youth policies, and regulatory frameworks that balance the opportunities of digitalization with its associated risks.

Technological Sacralization as a Theoretical Concept

Technological sacralization can be defined as a socio-cultural process in which technologies, digital platforms, and algorithmic systems acquire the status of authoritative sources of meaning, norms, and trust. Unlike classical religious sacralization, which is grounded in transcendental belief systems, technological sacralization operates within secular societies while performing analogous functions: stabilization of beliefs, ritualization of practices, and emotional attachment to symbolic objects [3; 11].

In the sociology of religion, sacralization is traditionally associated with the separation of the sacred from the profane. However, contemporary scholars argue that modern societies increasingly sacralize secular phenomena, including science, data, and technology [11]. Digital platforms and algorithms are often perceived as neutral, objective, and rational systems, which reinforces their legitimacy and authority in everyday decision-making. This perception contributes to the emergence of a quasi-sacred status of technology, where algorithmic outputs are trusted more than human judgment.

From the perspective of the philosophy of technology, technological sacralization reflects a shift from instrumental to normative interpretations of technology. As Mitcham argues, modern technologies no longer function solely as tools but increasingly shape values, social relations, and ethical frameworks [11]. In digital environments, this shift is intensified by personalization mechanisms and automated decision-making systems that invisibly structure user experience.

Importantly, technological sacralization does not imply blind faith in technology by all users. Rather, it manifests through routine practices of trust, reliance, and habitual engagement, which gradually normalize the authority of digital systems. Over time, this normalization produces stable belief structures that resemble religious orientations in their social effects, even if they lack explicit theological content.

Digital Religion: Forms and Interpretations

The concept of *digital religion* refers to a complex set of practices, beliefs, and institutional forms emerging at the intersection of religion and digital media. According to Campbell, digital

religion encompasses both the migration of traditional religious practices into online spaces and the emergence of new forms of spirituality and sacralization native to digital environments [3].

Scholars typically distinguish several analytical dimensions of digital religion. First, digital media function as channels for transmitting traditional religious content, including online sermons, streamed rituals, and religious education platforms. Second, digital environments enable the formation of hybrid practices that combine religious symbolism with participatory media culture, such as interactive prayer communities and algorithmically curated religious content. Third, and most relevant to this study, digital religion also includes secularized forms of sacralization centered on technology itself [3].

In this secularized dimension, technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and recommendation algorithms become objects of belief and trust. Users attribute to these systems the capacity to "know better," predict behavior, and offer optimal solutions. This belief is reinforced by the opacity of algorithmic processes, which enhances their perceived transcendence and authority [7].

Digital religion, therefore, should not be understood solely as an extension of institutional religion into cyberspace. Rather, it represents a broader transformation of meaning-making processes in which digital infrastructures assume functions traditionally associated with religious or moral authorities.

A critical component of technological sacralization is the economic and institutional logic underpinning digital platforms. Zuboff's concept of *surveillance capitalism* emphasizes that contemporary digital economies are based on the extraction, analysis, and commercialization of behavioral data [7]. Platforms collect vast amounts of user data to predict and shape future behavior, thereby transforming human experience into a source of economic value.

This economic logic reinforces the sacralization of algorithms in several ways. First, predictive accuracy is framed as evidence of algorithmic superiority, strengthening trust in data-driven systems. Second, personalization creates the illusion of individual care and relevance, fostering emotional attachment to platforms. Third, the opacity of data-processing mechanisms limits critical scrutiny, positioning algorithms as unquestionable authorities [7].

For young users, who are socialized in digital environments from an early age, algorithmic authority becomes a normalized aspect of everyday life. Recommendation systems guide content consumption, aesthetic preferences, social interactions, and even career aspirations. As a result, algorithms function as invisible moral and cultural regulators, shaping norms and expectations without explicit coercion.

Empirical studies indicate that adolescents often perceive algorithmically curated content as more relevant and trustworthy than alternative information sources, particularly when such content aligns with peer validation and engagement metrics [4; 5]. This dynamic contributes to the consolidation of algorithmic authority and deepens the sacralized status of digital platforms.

Algorithmic curation plays a central role in the formation of youth worldviews by structuring information environments. Through ranking, filtering, and recommendation mechanisms, platforms create personalized informational spaces that prioritize certain narratives, values, and behavioral models [4].

While personalization enhances user engagement, it also increases the risk of cognitive closure. Continuous exposure to congruent content reinforces existing beliefs and limits

encounters with alternative perspectives, contributing to confirmation bias and ideological polarization [5]. For young people, whose identities and value systems are still forming, such environments can significantly influence moral judgments, political attitudes, and social behavior.

At the same time, algorithmic curation facilitates the ritualization of digital practices. Daily content consumption, repetitive interaction patterns, and participation in trending formats create temporal structures analogous to religious rituals. These practices provide a sense of belonging and continuity, reinforcing collective identities within digital communities.

Digital Rituals and the Ritualization of Online Practices

One of the central mechanisms through which technological sacralization manifests itself is the ritualization of digital practices. Rituals, in sociological terms, are repetitive, symbolically loaded actions that structure time, reinforce collective identity, and stabilize systems of meaning. In digital environments, similar functions are performed by routine online activities, including daily scrolling, content sharing, liking, commenting, participation in challenges, and engagement with live streams [3; 4].

These practices acquire ritual characteristics through their regularity, formalization, and emotional significance. For many young users, the day begins and ends with engagement on digital platforms, transforming online presence into a normalized temporal framework. Algorithmic reminders, notifications, and streak-based mechanics further institutionalize these rituals, embedding them into everyday life. As a result, digital rituals increasingly substitute or supplement traditional social and cultural rituals.

The ritualization of online practices contributes to the formation of collective identities within platform-based communities. Participation in shared formats, trends, and symbolic actions reinforces a sense of belonging and mutual recognition. At the same time, deviation from these practices may result in social invisibility or exclusion, highlighting the normative power of digital rituals. This normative dimension is a key indicator of sacralization, as it establishes implicit rules of participation and value alignment.

Another significant dimension of technological sacralization is the transformation of authority in digital environments. Traditional sources of authority - such as family, educational institutions, and religious organizations - are increasingly complemented or replaced by digitally mediated figures, particularly influencers and content creators [4; 5].

Influencers function as opinion leaders whose authority is constructed through visibility, engagement metrics, and algorithmic amplification rather than formal credentials. Their recommendations shape aesthetic standards, consumption patterns, lifestyle choices, and moral attitudes. For young people, influencer guidance often appears more authentic and relatable than institutional discourse, especially when reinforced by peer validation and platform algorithms.

This process can be described as the *mediatization of authority*, whereby legitimacy is derived from media presence and algorithmic endorsement. Platforms play an active role in this transformation by prioritizing content that maximizes engagement, thereby reinforcing the authority of certain figures while marginalizing others. Over time, this creates a hierarchical structure of symbolic power that mirrors religious systems of leadership, albeit in a secularized form [3].

Importantly, influencer authority is closely tied to commercial interests. Sponsored content, brand partnerships, and monetization strategies blur the boundaries between personal belief,

moral guidance, and economic incentives. Nevertheless, for many young users, these distinctions remain opaque, further reinforcing trust in digital figures as credible sources of meaning.

Technological sacralization is also supported by the symbolic and affective dimensions of digital platforms. Interface design, visual aesthetics, interaction patterns, and user experience collectively contribute to the creation of emotionally engaging environments. Platforms employ symbolic elements - icons, badges, metrics, and progress indicators - that function as markers of achievement and recognition.

These symbolic systems foster emotional attachment and reinforce habitual engagement. From a socio-cultural perspective, such attachment resembles religious devotion insofar as it involves loyalty, trust, and affective investment. Users may experience anxiety in response to platform exclusion, loss of visibility, or negative feedback, indicating the depth of emotional dependence on digital validation [7].

For youth, whose self-esteem and identity are particularly sensitive to external evaluation, platform symbolism plays a decisive role in shaping self-perception. Quantified indicators of popularity and approval become proxies for social value, reinforcing the normative authority of digital systems. This dynamic further consolidates the sacralized status of platforms as arbiters of recognition and success.

The Digital Context of Uzbekistan: Youth and Cultural Specificity

The processes described above unfold within specific socio-cultural contexts. In Uzbekistan, digital practices coexist with strong traditional, familial, and religious norms, creating a hybrid environment in which technological sacralization interacts with established value systems [2; 6].

According to recent data, the number of internet users in Uzbekistan reached approximately 29-30 million by 2024, with mobile access as the dominant mode of connectivity [1; 9]. Government initiatives aimed at expanding digital infrastructure and online education have further integrated digital technologies into everyday life, particularly among young people.

At the same time, Uzbekistan's demographic structure amplifies the societal impact of digitalization. With nearly 60% of the population under the age of 30, youth constitute the primary agents and recipients of digital transformation [2]. This demographic reality increases both the opportunities and risks associated with technological sacralization.

Digital platforms in Uzbekistan are used not only for entertainment and communication but also for religious education, civic engagement, and informal learning. Online religious content, educational channels, and discussion forums illustrate how traditional practices are being reconfigured through digital media. This dual dynamic - simultaneous reinforcement and transformation of cultural norms - highlights the importance of context-sensitive analysis.

Implications for Youth Worldviews and Social Behavior

Extended immersion in algorithmically curated digital environments has significant implications for youth worldview formation. Empirical research indicates that prolonged exposure to personalized content is associated with increased confirmation bias, heightened anxiety, reduced tolerance for ambiguity, and dependence on external validation [4; 5].

Algorithmic personalization also contributes to social polarization by limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and weakening shared public spaces for dialogue. For young people, this can result in fragmented worldviews and reduced capacity for critical reflection. At the same time,

digital environments offer substantial benefits, including expanded access to educational resources, opportunities for civic participation, and pathways for professional development [1; 10].

The coexistence of these risks and opportunities underscores the ambivalent nature of technological sacralization. Rather than framing digitalization as inherently detrimental or beneficial, this study emphasizes the need for balanced analytical and policy approaches that address structural mechanisms of influence.

Educational, Policy, and Pedagogical Implications

The growing influence of technological sacralization and digital religion on youth worldviews necessitates a comprehensive response at the levels of education, public policy, and psycho-pedagogical practice. Given the structural power of algorithms and digital platforms, individual-level interventions alone are insufficient. Instead, systemic and preventive measures are required to strengthen youth resilience, critical thinking, and ethical awareness in digital environments.

One of the most effective responses to technological sacralization is the integration of digital and media literacy into formal education systems. Beyond basic technical skills, such curricula should emphasize *algorithmic literacy* - an understanding of how recommendation systems, ranking mechanisms, and data-driven personalization operate [3; 7].

Research demonstrates that awareness of algorithmic influence enhances users' capacity for critical reflection and reduces uncritical trust in digital systems [5]. For youth, early exposure to these concepts is particularly important, as it enables them to contextualize digital authority and recognize the economic and institutional interests underlying platform design.

Educational programs should therefore include:
- critical analysis of digital content and sources;
- ethical dimensions of data collection and surveillance;
- the social consequences of personalization and platform governance.

Such approaches are especially relevant in Uzbekistan, where digital education initiatives have expanded rapidly in recent years [6; 9].

Teachers, psychologists, and social pedagogues play a key role in mediating youth interactions with digital environments. However, many professionals lack formal training in digital culture, platform dynamics, and the psychological effects of algorithmic systems.

International experience suggests that targeted professional development programs improve educators' ability to identify signs of problematic digital engagement, including internet addiction, anxiety related to online validation, and social withdrawal [4; 5]. In the context of technological sacralization, such training should also address the symbolic and normative dimensions of digital practices.

Strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration between educators, psychologists, and IT specialists can enhance the effectiveness of preventive and supportive interventions. This approach aligns with UNICEF's recommendations on youth well-being in digitally transforming societies [2].

At the policy level, technological sacralization raises questions about platform accountability and transparency. While digital platforms operate as private entities, their societal

influence increasingly resembles that of public institutions. As such, regulatory frameworks should encourage responsible platform behavior without undermining innovation.

Key policy directions include:

- promoting transparency regarding basic principles of algorithmic ranking and personalization;

- supporting ethical standards for youth-oriented content;

- encouraging platforms to provide users with greater control over recommendation settings [7; 10].

International organizations emphasize that transparency and accountability are essential for mitigating the social risks associated with algorithmic governance [10]. For Uzbekistan, developing context-sensitive regulatory approaches can help balance global digital trends with national cultural priorities.

Another strategic response to technological sacralization is the promotion of high-quality local digital content. Educational, cultural, and value-oriented resources in Uzbek and Russian can provide meaningful alternatives to global platform narratives and reduce dependence on external symbolic authorities [1; 6].

State support for local content creation - through grants, partnerships, and public-private initiatives - can enhance cultural sustainability and strengthen national informational ecosystems. Such efforts are particularly important for youth, whose value systems are shaped through everyday digital consumption.

Addressing the complex effects of technological sacralization requires coordination among multiple institutions, including ministries of education, digital development agencies, youth organizations, and religious bodies. Collaborative frameworks enable the development of balanced strategies that account for cultural, ethical, and psychological dimensions of digital life.

In societies with strong cultural and religious traditions, such as Uzbekistan, inter-institutional dialogue can help integrate digital innovation with established value systems, reducing social tension and enhancing policy legitimacy [2; 6].

Conclusion

Technological sacralization and the phenomenon of digital religion represent complex and multifaceted processes that significantly influence the formation of youth worldviews and behavioral practices. Through algorithmic curation, ritualized digital practices, and the mediatization of authority, digital platforms increasingly function as normative centers of meaning in everyday life.

In Uzbekistan, these processes are amplified by high levels of internet penetration and a youthful demographic structure. At the same time, the coexistence of digital practices with traditional cultural and religious norms creates a distinctive socio-cultural landscape in which global digital dynamics are locally refracted.

This study demonstrates that technological sacralization is neither inherently detrimental nor unequivocally beneficial. Its impact depends on the interplay between platform structures, individual agency, and institutional responses. A multi-level strategy - combining education, professional training, regulatory measures, and support for local content - is essential for minimizing risks while harnessing the positive potential of digitalization for youth development.

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