

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE ON SOCIAL NETWORKS AND ITS IMPACT ON POLITICS

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Abstract. *This article explores the growing influence of religion on social networks and its impact on political communication, civic engagement, and public opinion. Drawing on global research from the Pew Research Center, UNESCO, and the World Bank, the study examines how religious institutions and online faith communities shape digital discourse, mobilize followers, and affect political decision-making. The findings reveal that social media has become a new platform for religious expression and political activism, influencing state–society relations and digital governance.¹*

Keywords. *Religion, social networks, digital politics, online influence, media ethics, civic participation, political communication.*

Introduction. In the digital era, social networks have become one of the most powerful instruments of mass communication and political mobilization.² Alongside political parties, corporations, and civil society actors, religious institutions now actively use online platforms to share teachings, engage followers, and shape public debate.³ The intersection of religion and digital media creates new forms of spiritual expression and social engagement but also raises questions about political influence, radicalization, and information control.⁴

Theoretical Framework. Sociologists such as Manuel Castells and José Casanova have emphasized that digital communication networks reshape

traditional power relations, enabling new forms of collective identity.⁵ Religion, historically a source of moral authority, now extends its reach through online sermons, livestreamed prayers, and virtual religious movements.⁶ This digital transformation has made religious discourse more accessible, interactive, and politically relevant, blurring the boundary between faith and governance.

Religious Presence on Social Media. Religious leaders, institutions, and influencers use platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Telegram to reach millions of followers.⁷ They post motivational messages, organize online charity campaigns, and discuss moral aspects of social and political issues. The popularity of hashtags like #PrayForPeace or #IslamAndJustice shows how faith-based messages can mobilize users globally. In Uzbekistan and Central Asia, official religious boards and scholars actively publish educational content promoting tolerance and ethical citizenship online.⁸

However, the same platforms can also become tools for spreading misinformation or extremist narratives under the guise of religion. Governments and social media companies face growing challenges in ensuring that online religious content supports peace and social harmony rather than division.⁹

Religious Influence on Political Discourse. The relationship between online religion and politics is becoming increasingly dynamic. Through digital networks, religious communities can mobilize large audiences to support social causes, humanitarian actions, or political campaigns.¹⁰ In democratic contexts, this can enhance civic participation and moral responsibility. Yet in other cases, online religious influence may lead to ideological polarization or manipulation of beliefs for political gain.

In Muslim-majority countries, online fatwas and digital sermons can shape public opinion on legislation, elections, and foreign policy. Similarly, in Western societies, Christian or evangelical groups use social media to advocate for or against political issues such as family law, education, or human rights.¹¹ The digital public sphere has thus become a new arena where religion and politics interact directly and visibly.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations. While online religion contributes to civic awareness, it also raises questions about privacy, authenticity, and digital manipulation. Deepfake technology, algorithmic amplification, and echo chambers may distort religious messages and polarize societies. Governments and civil organizations must promote media literacy and interfaith digital dialogue to ensure that faith-based content supports peace, tolerance, and democratic values.

Conclusion. Social networks have transformed how religion interacts with politics and society. Religious voices now play an influential role in shaping political narratives, moral debates, and civic values online. This transformation requires responsible digital governance that protects freedom of belief while preventing misinformation and extremism. Religion's digital presence, if ethically guided, can become a powerful force for unity, empathy, and social stability in the modern world.

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