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The Effects of Digital Culture and New Media on Religious Identity in The Postmodern Age: The Case of Türkiye

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Abstract

Postmodernism emerged as a reaction to the intellectual thought and values of the new modern era, particularly as modernist orientations reached an impasse. Critiquing various aspects of modernism, the concept of postmodernism has gained even greater significance in the contemporary era under the influence of digitalization. It embraces online existence, globalization, objective reality, hyperrealist movements, and, broadly, digital culture. With the impact of digital culture, religious life, teachings, tendencies, and practices have increasingly shifted to virtual platforms, and beliefs are progressively integrated into cyberspace. This study aims to discuss the influence of digital culture and new media on the processes of religious identity formation among individuals in Turkey during the postmodern era. Employing a literature review, the research highlights the digitalization of society, culture, and religion and their significant effects on individuals' religious experiences and identities. Consequently, it seeks to expand discussions within the postmodernism-Islam-digitalization triangle. The analysis underscores how the blurring boundaries between the virtual and the real have led to virtual reality encompassing all aspects of life, fostering the integration of religious identities into digital culture.

Keywords: Digital Culture, Digital Religion, New Media, Religious Identity, Postmodernism

Postmodern Çağda Dijital Kültür ve Yeni Medyanın Dini Kimlik Üzerindeki Etkileri: Türkiye Örneği

Öz

Postmodernizm, modernist yönelimlerin çıkmaza girmesine istinaden yeni modern dönemin entelektüel düşünce ve değerlerine karşı bir tepki olarak ortaya çıkmıştır ve modernizmi çeşitli yönleriyle eleştirmektedir. Postmodernizm kavramı, dijitalleşme sürecinin etkisiyle günümüzde daha da önem kazanmıştır. Çevrim içi olmayı, küreselleşmeyi, nesnel gerçekliği, hiperrealist akımları kısacası dijital kültürü desteklemektedir. Dijital kültürün etkisiyle birlikte de günümüzde dini yaşam, öğretiler, eğilimler ve pratikler sanal ortama taşınmakta, inançlar artan oranda siber uzama entegre olmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı, postmodern çağda dijital kültür ve yeni medyanın Türkiye'de bireylerin dini kimlik oluşturma süreçleri üzerindeki etkilerini tartışmaktır. Literatür taramasının uygulandığı araştırmada toplumun, kültürün ve dinin dijitalleşmesi, kişilerin dini deneyimleri ve dini kimlikleri üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olmaya başlaması ve buna bağlı olarak da postmodernizm, İslam ve dijitalleşme üçgeninde mevcut duruma yönelik tartışmaların genişletilmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Yürütülen tartışma, sanal ile gerçeklik arasındaki sınırların giderek bulanıklaşması ve bunun sonucu olarak sanal gerçekliğin yaşamın tüm yönlerini kuşatmasıyla beraber dini kimliklerin artan oranda dijital kültüre entegre olduğuna dair çıkarımlara zemmin hazırlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Din, Dijital Kültür, Dini Kimlik, Postmodernizm, Yeni Medya

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Introduction

In the digital age, the digitalization of societies, cultures, and religions significantly affects believers' religious identities, practices, and how they experience religion. Therefore, topics within the scope of postmodernism, Islam, and digitalization have become one of the areas on which academicians and intellectual circles in Türkiye and abroad have conducted numerous researches in recent years. Besides, virtual spaces have become an area where everyday life is being constructed today, and especially in the last twenty years, new media have made a significant contribution to this transformation process. From this point of view, it is possible to state that in the postmodern age, individuals have entered a new socialization process through new media (Yeniyoğlu & Karakaya, 2022). Briefly, media is one of the most efficacious and functional tools of the digital age, and the decisiveness and functionality of the media have reached such a high level that the phenomenon of media is in use now as mass media. Beliefs, directly or indirectly influence a significant part of human actions. Therefore, faith-based actions determine the overall structure of societies and everyday life in most cultures. According to Arslan (2015b), there is a return to the sacred in the postmodern period. In this context, religion has begun to show itself everywhere in the public sphere rather than being stuck in a narrow area, as in the modern period. However, according to Marxist assertion, religion is the domination of one part of society over another (Plantinga, 2023). Based on these debates, the objective of this study is to explore the role of religious beliefs and identity in the digital media age, defined as postmodern and a relatively new era, and the impact of these on today's spiritual world. In the upcoming sections of the study, it will first discuss the concepts of modernism and postmodernism. In the research in which literature review was applied, the abundance of research in field studies directly related to terms such as identity, religious identity, belief and new media of modern or postmodern phenomenon draws attention. However, the digitalization of society, culture and religion has begun to have a significant impact on people's religious experiences and religious identities, and accordingly, explaining the situation in the triangle of postmodernism, Islam and digitalization is important for our understanding of today's understanding of religion.

Then, it will delve into the topics of virtual spaces, digital religion, and digital culture. It will next explore the impact of new media on Islamic identity. Lastly, it will emphasize how digital media is affecting Muslims in Türkiye in the postmodern age.

The Concepts of Modernism and Postmodernism

The "modernism" is derived by adding the "-ism" suffix to the "modern" and the word was used in 1737 to mean "deviation from the ancient and traditional approach" and from 1830 to 1924 to mean "modern ways and contemporary style." It has been used as the means of "being away from classical, prototypical or conventional styles" since 1924 (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2024). On the other part, the "postmodernism" is a word that was coined in the mid-20th century in the United States by adding the prefix "post" to the modern. Since its emergence, many different definitions of the term postmodernism have been made. Therefore, the lack of a clear definition of postmodernism causes individuals to interpret postmodernism according to their thoughts (Yıldız, 2015). When the definitions of postmodernism in various dictionaries are examined, for instance, in the Oxford English Dictionary, postmodernism is defined as a movement that involves deliberately

combining varied styles in art (Waite & Hawker, 2009). Apart from this, in the Turkish Language Association Online Turkish Dictionary (2024), it is defined as the name of various modes and trends that emerged after the mid-20th century, after the modernist search lost its liveliness.

To properly understand the postmodernism phenomenon, it is necessary to examine the concept of modernism in detail. The term modernism refers to the changes that occurred in the scope of art, culture, and science in the mid-19th century. The technological advancements and economic growth experienced in Europe in the 17th century drove societies into a course of institutional and cultural alteration termed modernism. In consideration of the foregoing, the progressions in the Age of Enlightenment form the basis of the thought of modernity, which emerged in the 18th century (Bayhan, 2006). Also, according to Giddens (2015), modernity is a concept that refers to the styles of social life and organization that emerged in Europe in the 17th century and subsequently had effects worldwide. On the other hand, according to centered on humanity and the mind, and as a result, religion began to lose its value while the human mind started to be sanctified. Postmodernism means beyond or after modernism, which shows that postmodernism is defined by looking at modernism, and there is continuity rather than a difference between modernism and postmodernism (Tekin, 2000). For this reason, postmodernism is not an epistemological or radical break from modernism. French philosopher and literary theorist Jean-François Lyotard is one of the pioneering writers of the contemporary period who popularized the concept of life is the new perception of identity. In the postmodern phase, identities appear as a structure that transforms as a part of a timeless and spaceless space with a fluidity that transcends borders and displays multiple characteristics (Güven, 2015). In particular, it teaches us to express our values and commitments and adapt them to life by reshaping postmodernism and postmodern philosophy. According to Lyotard's (2005) hypothesis, the circumstance of knowledge has changed as cultures enter the postmodern age and societies enter the postindustrial age. In simple terms, the period we live in now represents a media and information age. Therefore, scholars use the concept of information society to name the post-industrial society.

In this respect, digital media and information are the distinguishing characteristics of postmodern society (Arslan, 2015a). Giddens (2015) states that today's societies have come up against situations that exceed modernity, and Vattimo (1988) defines this situation as postmodern and states that the media is the leading actor in the postmodernization process. In this regard, Arslan (2015) also supports Vattimo and confirms that the forming power of the postmodern society is the media. To summarize the above, media in general and digital media in particular is a phenomenon with dynamics that create new meanings, habits, symbols, lifestyles, and cultures. Consequently, developments that create a new social situation, culture, or form of knowledge are called postmodern.

One of the important benefits of postmodern them, by drawing attention to how we are affected by the axity of cultural, social and political differences in life (Stone-Mediatore, 2002). It is obvious that identity experiences differences depending on the events that occur in every period of history and finds new ways for itself with new meaning paradigms according to these differences. Identity in traditional life; While it is mentioned with concepts such as family and lineage, with the transition to modern life, the individual has become the center of social life, and the phenomenon of identity has now taken on a multiple and mobile structure (Möngü, 2013). However, it is not possible to find traces of the sense of belonging in the understanding of identity

in the structure of modernity in postmodernity. Postmodern identities built on a fragmented self find themselves with differences. During the modernization process, the individual's perception of identity has changed with the addition of 'worldly' elements to the individual's search for meaning and definition in symbolic systems, which has caused ruptures in the perception of the world of existence (Erkan, 2013). With the development of these processes, it is seen that questions about modernism have increased and the perception of identity has undergone a rapid change and taken on a dynamic and pluralistic understanding. Postmodernism also takes individualism to a new level, unlike modernism. According to this postmodern understanding, it offers individuals seemingly endless options to differentiate themselves from others, instead of relying solely on protecting borders as in modernity. In this direction, individuals can constantly acquire new identities forever. It can create new universes of reality to satisfy an insatiable search for meaning, belonging, and identity (Yin, 2018). In addition, in the postmodern process, all of the thought and value quotations of the modern period have been questioned, instead of terms such as difference, diversity and pluralism, the rejection of the other manifested with the postmodern understanding, that is, by going beyond the rational boundaries of modernity.

The way has been paved for it to be shaped in a heterogeneous and diverse manner (Möngü, 2013). In the postmodern understanding, identity has a very mobile and dynamic structure compared to the modern understanding. A fixed or static understanding of identity cannot find a place in a postmodern process. Therefore, the postmodern identity structure goes through a rapid evolutionary process and continues its life in a cycle of consuming itself and re-existing.

It is stated that one of the frequently stated criteria of postmodern life is 'return to religion and traditional understanding'. With postmodern thought, the process is supported by traditional-community and spiritual revival, instead of the collapse of the positivist, rationalist tradition (Arslan, 2015). This situation has paved the way for the emergence of new paradigms in religious identity with postmodern life. The concept of 'religion', which has a direct impact on individuals and societies in current thoughts as well as in historical narrative, has found a place for itself in 'identity'. This understanding shows that one of the important parameters of the identity element is 'religious identity' (Pısdıl, 2022).

However, modernism, which embraces worldly social life, attaches importance to the idea of purifying society from religion and magic, and expresses that socialization takes place by getting rid of the domination of religion (Erkan, 2013). Important sociologists of the period, such as Marx, Durkheim, Engels and Weber, also argued that the influence of religion on social life would completely disappear with modernism (Delibaş, 2008). Therefore, it is predicted that modernism, which wages war on the dogmatism of religion, will dissolve religious identities and render them ineffective. Because of this thought, which worries a certain segment of the society, the understanding of postmodernism, which attaches importance to freedom and individualism, has positioned itself as a solution for the salvation of religious identity for individuals. Postmodernity comes into play from this point.

Postmodernism is seen as a manifestation of the postmodern structure as the address of the effort to return to religion and see religious identity as an important factor of social life, with the understanding of returning the world to its old mystery and "making it magical again" (Bauman,

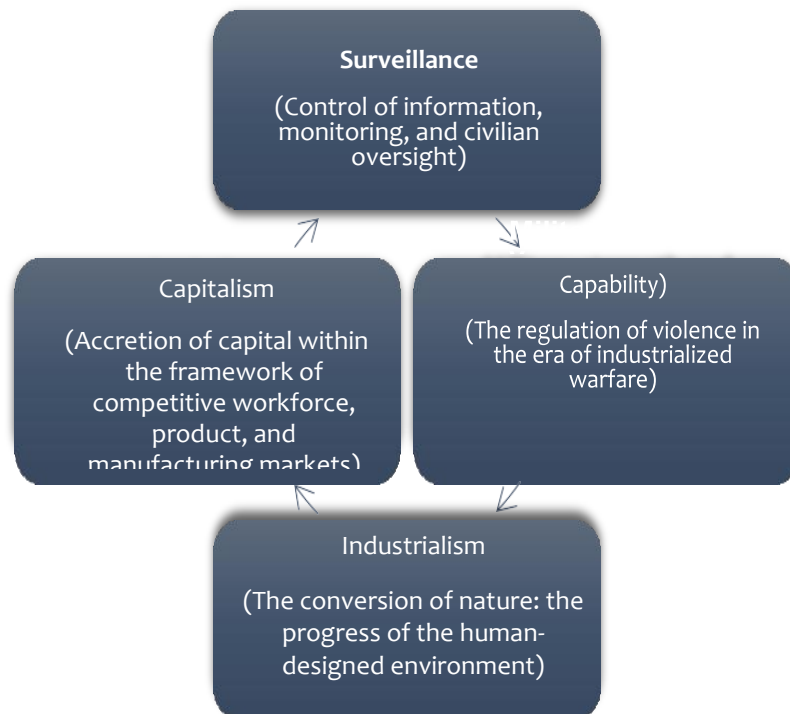
1998). However, postmodernity does not have a libertarian attitude towards religion. Postmodernity includes religions into its system at the expense of distorting their own nature (Tekin, 2015). Because in postmodernity, religion is seen as the representation of the call for justice in the lap of barbarism (Perşembe, 2003). Therefore, it does not seem possible that the future of religions will be solid in the understanding of postmodernity, which anathematizes any overdeterministic identity, term and system, in other words, the "meta narrative" (the idea that claims that everything can be explained) and is based on relativity (Erkan, 2013).

The fact that the postmodern understanding puts the traditional understanding of community at the forefront is not the re-establishment of religious belief, nor is it a policy of reviving any ritual. Because the postmodern understanding reduces God to one dimension, like grand narratives (Perşembe, 2003). As a result, the chaos that started with modernism in societies as a result of the capitalist system continues, reaching more extreme levels with postmodernism. While postmodernism objects to the rational mind of the modernist enlightenment and the authority it imposes on the universal attitude towards truth within its own framework;

Postmodernism has a syncretic character where religion and religious identity are redefined by rejecting universal truth and abandoning the idea of integrity through its own process (Tekin, 2015).

According to Giddens (2015), the four key systemic factors of modernity can be listed as in Figure 1.

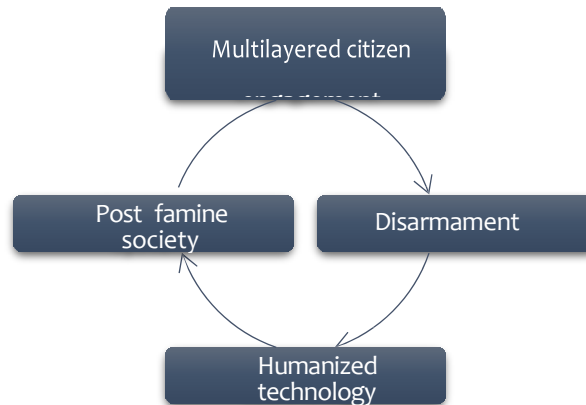
Figure 1. The Systemic Factors of Modernity



Technological innovations, cultural changes, increases in information, globalization, digitalization, digital culture, and numerous other factors and circumstances have paved the way for the formation of postmodern society. In other words, as the structure, social fabric, and

institutions of modern industrial society become old-fashioned and weaken, new social conditions have begun to emerge, and postmodernism is, in a sense, an extension of new social conditions. Against this background, according to Giddens (2015), the main lines of the postmodern world order can be listed as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Outlines of the Postmodern World Order



To summarize the above information, some fundamental differences between the concepts of modernism and postmodernism can be briefly listed as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Main Differences between Modernism and Postmodernism

Modernism	Postmodernism
It represents the mindset that accompanies the social change initiated by the Industrial Revolution.	It criticizes modernism and interrogates modernist ideologies.
It separates the contemporary from the traditional.	According to postmodernism, reality is relative so there is no such thing as a universal reality.
It is a process that includes individual-religion-state and society relations	Postmodernism is pluralistic and it supports all kind of ideas, freedom, equality, and similar tendencies in society.
It is the expression of a process that includes individual-religion-state and society relations.	It is a prominent feature of contemporary society, which is prone to digitalization and globalization.
Capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, democracy, rationality, scientific knowledge, secularism, and the national state are the fulcrums of modernism.	It is not a fully understood phenomenon and therefore there is no clear definition of it.

In conclusion, introductory level explanations of the concepts of modernism and postmodernism can be briefly given as above, and since there is no clear definition of postmodernism, it will be beneficial for researchers to first consider modernism in detail.

However, postmodernism is based on consumption and the masses who have lives that are seen as valuable as they consume (Mazıcı and Can, 2021), where individual wishes and desires are prioritized, therefore religious identity progresses in a fluid structure from collective processes to

individual lives, and is reinvented in the form of an individualized life rather than a shared social lifestyle. We can explain postmodernism as a structure based on the fundamental role played by culture in the centralized global network of today's multinational capitalism, where culture is rapidly spreading all over the world by transforming everything in our lives into 'cultural' (Featherstone, 2013).

Digital Religion and the Impacts of Digital Culture on Religious Identity

While a new understanding of consumption emerges with the personalized interactive structure of new communication tools, unlike traditional communication tools (Mazıcı and Can, 2021), the applications of new digital media tools provide significant support to this feeling of fragmentation of postmodernism, which also deals a blow to the integrity structure of modernism. Thus, individual religious identities that are fragmented but feel free within themselves have opened the door to the concept of 'digital religion' due to the digital contents that provide seamless connection by transcending the concept of time and space. The concept of 'digital religion' began to be expressed as a result of the studies of various conferences, symposiums and research centers held after the 2010s. Especially with Campbell's editorial work called "Digital Religion", this concept has been used permanently. Campbell states that the most important difference of the concept of digital religion compared to the uses of cyber religion and virtual religion is that it allows thinking of online religious practices as a bridge connecting offline religious practices, online space and the offline world (Dereli, 2019).

Moreover according to Campbell (2013), to better understand the concept of digital religion, the term digital religion should first considered from a terminological perspective, and then the nomenclature used in the past to describe the relationship between religion and the Internet should be examined. The term cyber religion was used in the 1990s to describe the importation of religion into the new boundary of cyberspace or the insufficiently realistic world generated by virtual reality technologies. In the beginning, figurative framing invoked images of allegorical surreal and anti-utopian religion, where religious worship could be reimagined beyond the screen and freed from conventional limitations and traditional religious patterns (Campbell, 2013). Furthermore, over the past few decades, numerous academics, subject matter experts, and researchers during the course of naming the term cyber religion as digital religion have proposed different definitions of the term cyber and digital religion. For instance, some definitions concerning the cyber religion and phenomenon of digital religion can be outlined as follows: Bauwens (1996) associated cyber religion with new religious practices and communities and proposed that a new affiliation between information and communication technologies and religion was appearing as individuals attempted to move their spiritual lives into cyberspace. On the other hand, Helland (2000) approached the phenomenon of cyber religion from a different standpoint and drew attention to the distinction between the speculative framing of online religion and religion online. In that respect, religion-online, a methodical endeavor to harness conventional embodiments of communication to present religion rests on a vertical idea of control, authority, and status. In contrast, online religion depicts a new development in religious practices, mirroring the nature of the Internet environment itself (Helland, 2000).

In other words, the fundamental difference between online religion and religion online is that online religion is associated with a non-hierarchical and non-configured communication protocol. Additionally, according to Højsgaard's (2005) assessments, cyber religion as a theoretical notion is

a term that mirrors the characteristics of postmodern cyberculture. Ultimately, digital religion; It can be listed on a continuum ranging from media designed with specific logic and for religious purposes and containing only religious content, to general digital media (e.g. social media) that are not only for religious purposes but can also contain religious content and can be used by members of religious communities (Müller and Friemel, 2024).

In the modern period, the dominance of positivist thought by going to extremes in rational understanding has led to a move away from spirituality and this has led to a 'loss of meaning'. In addition, due to the factors of 'religious pluralism' that emerged with the weakening of the institutional structure of religions by prioritizing the phenomenon of individualization, the increase in the desire to return to the sacred is in a decisive position in the construction of new religious identities in the field of religion (Arslan, 2015). The postmodern approach, which designs a new world free from the turmoil that occurs in the field of religious identity, as in many areas with modern life, has built new areas that center on individuals (Yeniyol and Karakaya, 2022). The price of accessing these constructed areas is to adopt the new consumption approach, which is a necessity of postmodern life (Mazıcı and Can, 2021). While technological developments that emerged with the modern understanding transformed all life practices, we can state that these practices were reconstructed by moving to digital environments with postmodern life (Yeniyol and Karakaya, 2022). Thus, in addition to life practices such as socialization, marketing, communication and interaction, the concept of 'digital religion' with faith-based religious practices has also taken its place in digital media.

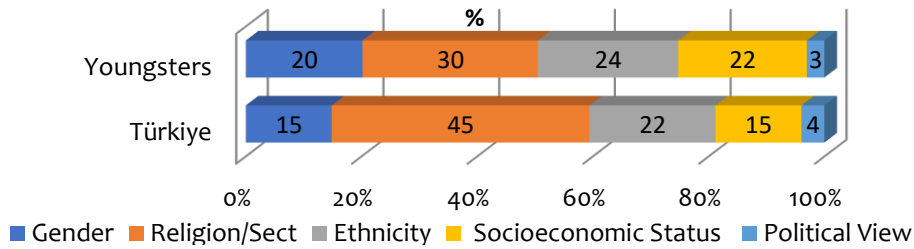
Digital religion does not only refer to religion with the practice of practicing online, but also functions as religious meaning-making and religious social connection (Müller and Friemel, 2024) by providing signs of how digital media and spaces shape religious practice and are shaped by religious practices (Dereli, 2019). offers the opportunity to fulfill According to Campbell, four different layers of authority emerge on the internet. Religious hierarchy, religious structure, ideology and text. With the layer of religious ideology, Campbell states that religious groups and communities take part in the internet world to confirm their religious identities, while Wagner argues that fragmented online religious identities will be formed in the digital world as a result of the multi-window environments of cyberspace (Dereli, 2019). In addition, by allowing individuals to experience instant changes in their own identity in digital processes, it supports the claims made by the postmodern structure that identity is not singular but multiple, not holistic but fragmented, not centered but decentered, not fixed but dynamic (Yin, 2018). As a result, it can be seen that digital religion is actively involved in every platform, from the decentralized, fluid and uncertain MUD environments of the early periods of the internet to today's social media networks. At the point where these two components meet, digital religious identity determines its position as an important concept that corresponds to the religious sensitivities of individuals in cyberspace. The important point here is that whether we consider online religious identity as a subcomponent of identity or as an extension of digital religion, it is remembered that it is a remarkable and important element in both understandings (Dereli, 2019).

In today's postmodern world, new identities represented in popular culture are emerging. In other words, unlike the modern world, media causes the formation of new identities in the postmodern world (Arslan, 2015a). In a survey conducted by KONDA Research and Consultancy

Company (2024) in March 2024, 3147 respondents from 78 provinces in Türkiye were asked, "Which identity is more important to you?" Most respondents answered that their religious identity was more important to them.

In today's postmodern world, new identities represented in popular culture are emerging. In other words, unlike the modern world, media causes the formation of new identities in the postmodern world (Arslan, 2015a). In a survey conducted by KONDA Research and Consultancy Company (2024) in March 2024, 3147 respondents from 78 provinces in Türkiye were asked, "Which identity is more important to you?" Most respondents answered that their religious identity was more important to them.

Figure 3. Prominent Identities of Individuals in Türkiye

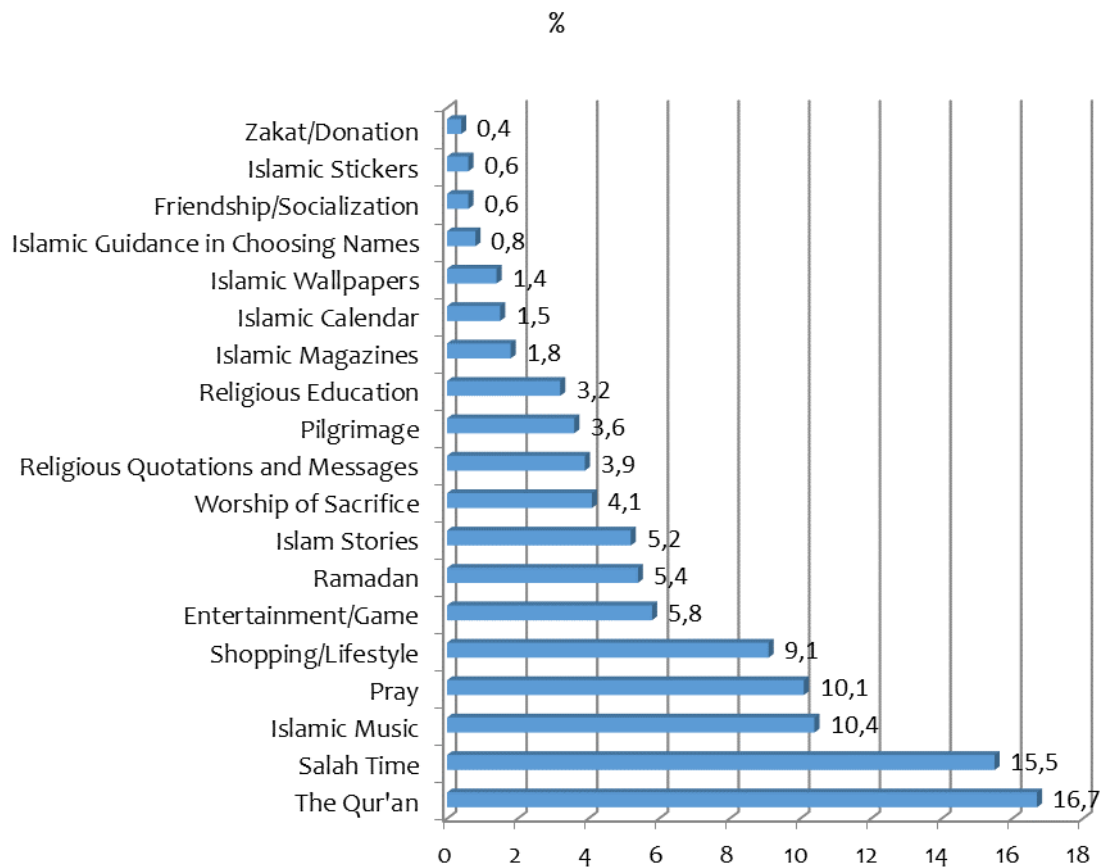


As seen in the Figure 3 (KONDA, 2024), the rates of young people who consider their gender, ethnic origin, and financial status as the significant source of their identity are higher than those in Türkiye as a whole is too much. Nevertheless, while 45 percent of the overall Turkish population considers religious or sectarian identity significant, this percentage drops to 30 percent among the youth. Despite this decrease, it is still evident that religious identity remains the most embraced element of identity among young people.

Digital media has banalized the phenomenon of culture by making cultural and artistic activities an ordinary part of daily life. Consequently, people today have had the opportunity to access activities such as going to a concert, cinema, or theater from home, work, or anywhere. In this context, digital culture has created a new social ecosystem that influences how people communicate and interact with each other and machines. From this perspective, digital culture has blurred the boundaries between real and virtual and human and robot. In addition to that, in the postmodern era, data of all types and for all purposes - public services, social services, the insurance system, the banking system, credit arrangements, real estate, travel, entertainment, education, health, law, employment, and personal data - is now primarily in digital form. Therefore, most of the tools used by individuals, governments, and organizations are based on digital technology, and even physical currency is nothing more than digitized data transformed into matter (Gere, 2008). On the other hand, the concept of digital religion has led to traditional religious interpretations, understandings, and hypotheses being explored in different ways through digital media platforms and has led people to question sacred practices in certain aspects. The widespread use of smart devices and the popularity of customizable smartphone applications have led to the digitalization of religion to a certain extent. In other words, the number of Islamic mobile applications on well-known electronic media distribution/sales platforms such as the Google Play Store and Apple Store, where applications developed for smart devices are stored, is increasing (Aygül et al., 2022).

Consequently, the reach of mobile applications is expanding daily, fostering the rapid spread of digital culture among faith-based living people.

Figure 4. Distribution of Islamic Mobile Applications Developed in Türkiye in Google Play Store



As seen in Figure 4 (Aygül et al., 2022), there is an interest in the development of mobile Islamic smartphone applications in Türkiye. Digital applications such as prayer time reminders, Qibla finding compass, mosque/masjid finders, halal food locators (restaurant, cafe, market, etc.), Islamic banking and finance tools, and translation apps are in many ways facilitating the lives of Muslims and bringing about changes in their religious lifestyle. At the end of the story, in the postmodern era, digital culture has the potential to directly influence religious rituals and lifestyles, both positively and negatively.

Religion in the Digital Space in Postmodern Society

In the 21st century, people spend a significant part of their lives in digital spaces close to reality. In other words, digital environments are digital spaces where people socialize, exchange information, follow the agenda, and organize their business and private lives. In this sense, digital spaces are environments where real-time interactions occur online, and therefore these spaces constitute cyber societies. In addition, digitality is one of the basic concepts adopted by the postmodern paradigm due to the features it implies (Rotaru et al., 2010). In current conditions, new media, digital spaces, digital reality and artificial intelligence technologies shape the postmodern

paradigm. More clearly, media technologies create multi-layered communication, paving the way for significant changes in the socio- cultural and religious structure of society.

In addition, according to the narrative in question, which is built on the discourse that new media supports religious identities due to the phenomenon of digitalization, it is seen as an important field for the revival of religious identities and assigning a position or role or roles to religion (Dereli, 2019).

Figure 5. A Cartoon Drawing Highlighting the Impact of Virtual Spaces on Digital Natives



Figure 5 (Hudson, 2011) presents the interaction of digital natives with technology in a metaphorical perspective. Even though human beings live in a physical world, the latest point reached by the Internet and technology has caused people to need digital experiences alongside their physical needs because people have acquired a digital identity in addition to their real identities in the digital worlds they have created. In other words, digital worlds contain material and spiritual values because in these digital worlds, which gain visibility beyond the real world, a digital life created by real people is created, similar to life in the physical world (Yiğitoğlu, 2022). In summary, people have transferred their numerous practices, traditions, and acts from the physical world to the digital world owing to time, space, and other difficulties and constraints. In this regard, when the subject is religion, the permissibility of religious worship in the digital world has begun to be discussed. The Internet, social media, and digital realms have expanded the scope of people's religious practices. The simplest example is that a person who is a part of any religious community or sect in the world can establish websites, blogs, forums, and video-sharing accounts to engage with others in digital networks, either as individuals or representing their religious organizations.

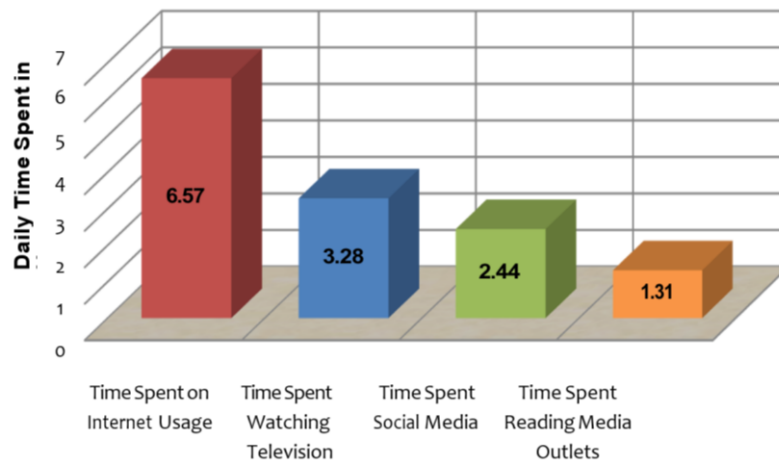
The Influence of New Media on Islamic Identity and Muslim Community

People identify and situate themselves in society through their identities. Therefore, identity is about what people internalize, and people will continue to search for identity as long as they exist. In this respect, religion is one of the crucial issues in human beings' search for identity because religion is one of the leading actors in individuals' efforts to make sense of what is happening around them and in the universe. In short, although the place and position of religion in people's lives have weakened from time to time, in the postmodern world, religion is still an

element that significantly affects people's search for meaning and propiarte striving. In the postmodern age, most Muslims learn religious information through new media channels, and this is like searching for meaning in a digital sea. From this perspective, it is true to say that new media, and especially social media, has a depth of cultural, sociological, psychological, and philosophical importance for Muslims in their search for Islamic identity.

Reports on social media usage, published regularly by various institutions annually, demonstrate that a growing number of people across the globe use social media tools. In direct proportion to this, users' time spent on social media tends to increase gradually. For example, according to the most up-to-date data in the Digital 2024 April Global Statshot Report published in partnership with We Are Social and Meltwater, 69.7% (5.65 billion) of the world's population (8.10 billion) uses mobile phones, and 67.1% (5.44 billion) uses Internet, and 62.6% (5.07 billion) uses social media (Thompson, 2024). Moreover, according to the report mentioned above, as of April 2024, people in Türkiye spent an average of 6 hours and 57 minutes on the Internet. The figure below (Thompson, 2024) illustrates the average daily media consumption for main media elements on a global scale.

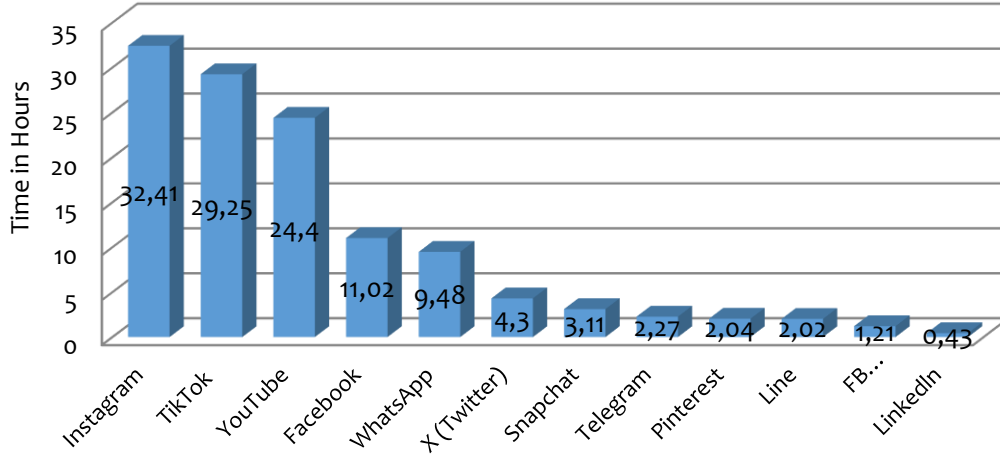
Figure 6. Daily Media Engagement Time in Türkiye - April 2024



According to a report by We Are Social and Meltwater (Thompson, 2024), people also spend 1.34 hours a day listening to music streaming services, 59 minutes on a game console, 42 minutes listening to broadcast radio, and 43 minutes listening to podcasts. Based on the We Are Social and Meltwater analysis of the data, a straightforward calculation demonstrates that the average daily time individuals allocate to media consumption amounts to 16.38 hours. In other words, these findings point out that individuals allocate approximately two-thirds of their daily time to digital media consumption. Given this significant portion, it is evident that new media channels play a perceptible role in shaping religious identities. On the other hand, based on the findings of the Household Information Technologies (IT) Usage Survey Report carried out by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), as of 2023, the percentage of individuals using the Internet in Türkiye has climbed to 87.1%, and the proportion of households with Internet access has risen to 95.5% (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2023). Current TUIK statistics indicate that the Internet usage rates in Türkiye are pretty

high on both a household and individual basis, and it is expected that these rates will increase further in the coming years.

Figure 7. Average Monthly Time Spent Using Social Media Applications in Türkiye by Platform



The figure above (Thompson, 2024), shows the average amount of time spent on the popular Android apps in Türkiye between June and July 2023. In this context, it is evident that the amount of time people spend on social media in Türkiye is significantly high. Also, according to the Statista data portal, as of 2024, the number of social network users in Türkiye is 71.43 million, and this rate is projected to reach 77.42 million by 2029 (Dierks, 2024). According to data from multiple sources, it is forecasted that a typical internet user today will engage with an average of 6.7 to 9.2 social media platforms monthly (Dean, 2023). In summary, Türkiye is one of the countries with the highest use of social media worldwide. As social media use and addiction increase in Muslim societies, the postmodern digital consumer culture and acculturation will reshape Islamic identity.

New media environments have had a profound impact on the way services and worship are performed. For instance, some social media applications and television channels allow religious worship to be broadcast in real-time. Thus, people can attend the worship service remotely, even physically absent. In other words, digital networks have now become an essential source of information for many believers. Nowadays, YouTube has become a prominent religious education platform used by large audiences both in the world and in Türkiye, and the number of people actively using the YouTube platform to share religious content is increasing daily. In this regard, Kutlu (2024) refers to Muslim religious influencers who share religious content on YouTube as "social media preachers" and states that the importance and popularity of Muslim social media preachers on YouTube has increased against Islamophobic posts on Western social media.

On the other hand, a study conducted in the US found that three in ten US adults use digital channels to learn about religion. In other words, digital networks have become an essential source of information for many believers. For example, a study conducted by Faverio et al. (2022) in the US found that three-tenths of US adults use digital channels to obtain information about religion.

Figure 8. Percentage of US Adults Seeking Religious Information Online

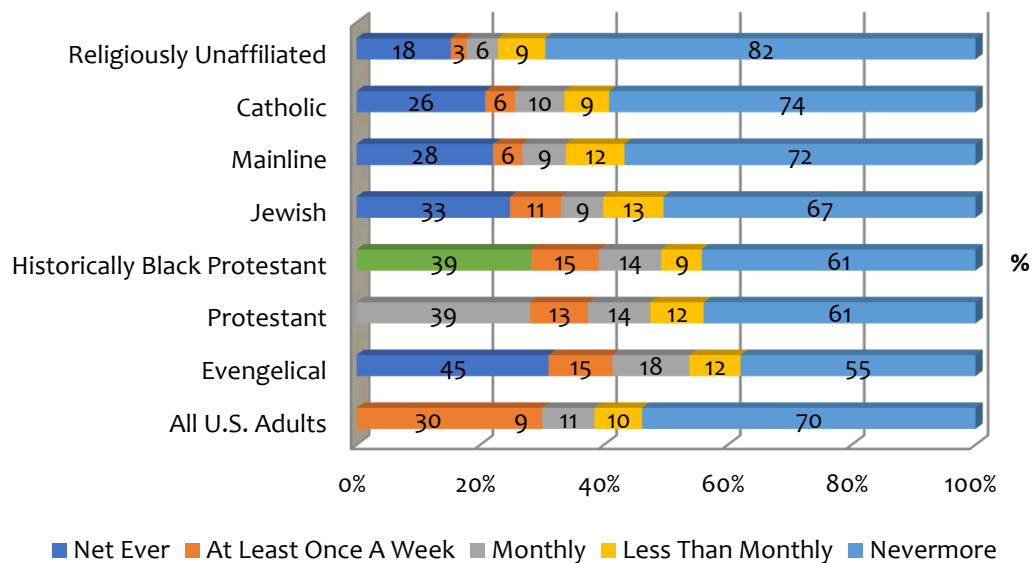
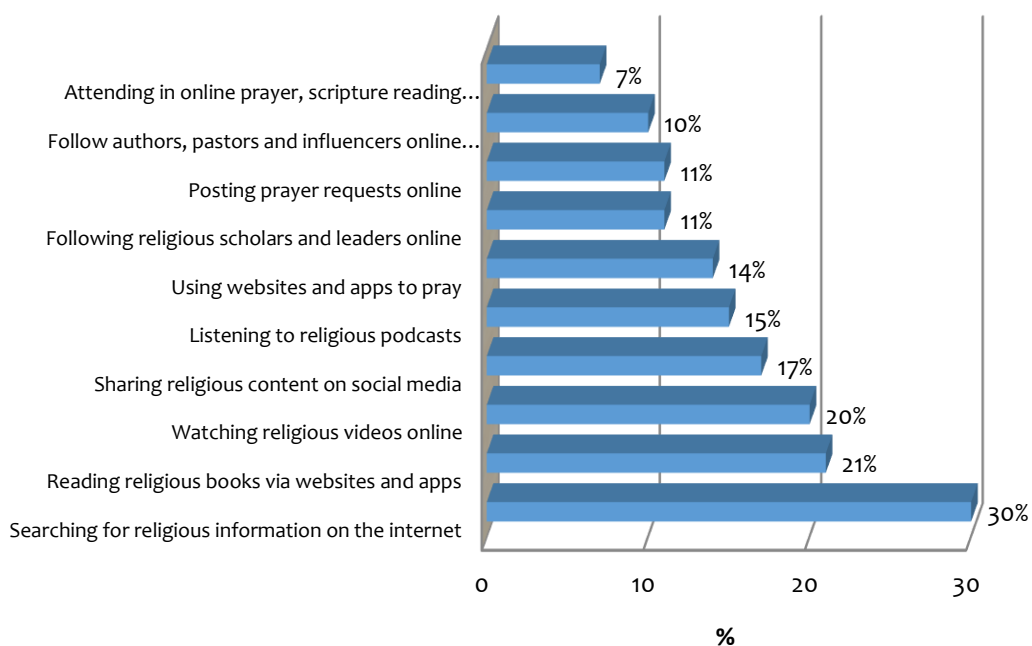


Figure 8 (Faverio et al., 2022) shows that a significant percentage of US adults of different religious beliefs reported using online resources to access religious information, even if only once a week. With the development and widespread use of the Internet and social media technologies, people have found the opportunity to access religious services through various smartphone applications and web pages.

Figure 9. Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Engage with Religion Using Any of the Following New Media (Faverio et al., 2022, p.46)



According to Figure 9 (Faverio et al., 2022), a notable proportion of US adults engage with religion through new media channels and considering the 21st-century global circumstances, it is possible to say that religion is at least as effectual and functional as the media. Against this background, the relationship between media and religion is quite complex, interdisciplinary, and multidimensional. From Derrida's (2001) perspective, media is strengthening religion, and this development is the revival of religion. However, it is critical to consider how media transforms religion at this point. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the Islamic identity within the triangle of religious identity, digital media, and postmodernism.

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that Muslims around the world who use the Internet are substantially more likely than other Muslims to have an optimistic view of Western movies, music, and television. Similarly, Muslims who use the Internet are also more probably to see similarities between Islam and Christianity than Muslims who do not use the Internet (Liu, 2013). In other words, the abovementioned Pew Research Center study reveals that Muslim Internet users are much more welcoming to Western popular culture and are more likely to think that Western entertainment culture does not harm the morality of Muslims. Besides, İsmail Çağlar (2019), the Media and Society Research Director for the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), believes that while it is natural for foreign media organizations to operate in Türkiye, however, the excessive interest of foreign media organizations in the country should be questioned. That's because, according to Çağlar (2019), foreign media organizations broadcasting in Türkiye follow a monophonic broadcasting policy in Türkiye, and this situation is in no way compatible with the media standards they set for their own countries. In summary, what Çağlar wants to express here is that foreign media organizations can manipulate the Muslim community in Türkiye in line with their interests through the media, and this may have negative consequences.

In consequence, the most modern communication tool of the postmodern age is social media, and accordingly, social media has many benefits for the Muslim community but also some adverse effects. For example, learning/teaching the Quran, spreading the Quran, hadith, and Islamic references, and spreading the message of Islam are some of the positive effects of social media on the Muslim community. On the other hand, the spread of disinformation about Islamic issues on social media, the spread of Islamophobia, inappropriate content that is incompatible with Islamic values that disrupts the family structure of Muslims, recruitment of militants by some harmful organizations that identify themselves as Muslims, and social media addiction are some of the adverse impacts of social media on the Muslim community (Islam, 2019). In light of this information, Muslims need to improve their digital literacy and use social media more consciously in terms of Islamic identity and Islamic society to benefit from new media better.

Being a Muslim in a Postmodern World: The Case of Türkiye

In the transition from a modernist culture of calculation to a postmodernist simulation culture (Dereli, 2019), interpreting religious and spiritual revival together by calling for a return to religion and traditions from the structure of modernity, which proposes and implements distance from religion that centers the individual, and (Arslan, 2015) re-religious We are in a process that continues towards the postmodern structure, which predicts that the phenomenon will take its place in social life. It is seen that with modernism, religious life was interrupted and lived among neighborhoods, and societies that wanted to get rid of this shallow period clung to the rope of the

postmodern structure in order to reveal the meaning in their belief systems. Postmodernism's criticism of modernity and its discourses on religion and freedom found a significant response among Muslims (Tekin, 2015). However, it is understood that world religions have no future in the postmodernist structure, which rejects the meta-narrative, that is, the idea that claims that everything can be explained, and centers on relativity. Because postmodernism sees religions as a symbolic part of the whole in a fragmented culture where everything is seen as permissible (Erkan, 2013).

In parallel with the development of technology and postmodernism, we witness that a significant part of social life flows through digital media tools that have no boundaries of space and space. 'Media' plays a leading role in the presentation of identity or religious identity phenomena of the postmodern structure. However, as Dereli states, he argues that the media, identity and religion triangle has a direct impact on each other (Pisdil, 2022). Moreover, trying to explain the structure of digital religion in terms of real and virtual leads to a reductive or one-sided stance that symbolizes offline life as inherently authentic, whereas digital encounters are inherently false or unreal (Campbell & Connelly, 2020).

The difference between online and offline spaces that emerged with the internet that emerged in the postmodern period has also directly affected the issues of religion and religious identity. We witness that both structures mutually transform each other in a cultural sense, in return for religion gaining a place for itself in cyberspace through people. Dereli uses the expression 'fluidization' for this transformation. Fluidization resembles the tides during which the phenomenon of mutual transformation continues. In other words, it is seen as the manifestation of the structure that emerges as a result of the close relationship between online and offline spaces (Pisdil, 2022). This negotiation between offline and online space expands our understanding of what religious practices mean in the current century (Campbell & Connelly, 2020).

In today's digital age, simulation has started to replace reality, so in postmodern society, simulation is now considered more real than reality (Ata, 2023). Within this culture of consumption, religion has become a part of the digital culture industry and commoditized (Özbolat, 2017). In this process, postmodernity has hurt large religious systems. However, at the same time, it has led to the emergence of new individual and communal religious forms (Solmaz, 2006). From this point forth, Atay (2004) discusses religion in three stages according to social periods:

- In a traditional agrarian society, religion is at the center of life.
- In modern society, religion is objectified and is no longer at the center of life.
- In postmodern society, religion came to the fore again in the culture of consumption and became the chief determinant of daily life.

A postmodern standpoint paved the way for the diversification of mainstream religious views in Türkiye, a framework consisting of new political movements, habits, attitudes, and cultural developments, and thus, new social designs began to emerge.

The Internet provides online resources that create new forms of religious identity, which can be seen as problematic for religious communities as personalized religious identities are promoted over traditional or institutional religious identities. (Campbell & Connelly, 2020). In general, the

ultimate emphasis on individual autonomy and individual-social duality in both the modern and postmodern construction of western philosophy has made it impossible to conceptualize a self-concept that is sensitive to social solidarity, social good, equality and justice (Yin, 2018). In this way, one of the most remarkable and contentious societal models emerging from postmodernism is the one based on Islam, as the relationship between Islam and civil society prompts cultural inquiry. In addition, postmodernism has affected various Islamic principles based on faith and moral values in Türkiye, causing the breaking of some taboos, and consequently, some differences have begun to be observed in the functioning of the social order. In this context, the changes that came with postmodernism led to a religious awakening process in Türkiye, and Islamic social movements began to become more on the agenda. From Zeybek's (2017) perspective, postmodernism offers people a new way of life that is disconnected from the past and does not care about the future, and insists that this form of life is the most compatible with the digital age we live in. In simpler terms, the postmodern view looks at life from a new perspective outside of tradition and argues that the postmodern lifestyle is the most suited lifestyle for the age of digitalization and globalization.

Religion assumes a prominent function in human life, and the postmodern perspective further complicates many contentious religious issues. For example, there are similarities and differences among sects regarding the requirements of the pilgrimage/hajj, a significant sacred practice in Islam and one of the five pillars of the faith. However, apart from all these discussions, virtual and augmented reality technologies developed in recent years have brought new dimensions to the understanding of worship. For instance, in 2021, Saudi Arabia launched a new initiative called the "Virtual Black Stone Initiative" so that people can experience touching the Hajr Aswad stone in virtual reality, a black and shiny stone located on the wall of the Kaaba and considered sacred by Muslims. This initiative, led by the Exhibitions and Museum Affairs Agency and Umm Al-Qura University, to showcase historical and religious artifacts in Saudi Arabia, emerged as part of an exhibition to utilize virtual reality and digital experiences and has created several discussions among Muslims worldwide (Kızılaslan, 2022). An example that can be given in these discussions is the worship performed in the metaverse virtual worlds because questions such as whether it is permissible to perform a virtual pilgrimage in the metaverse are among the religious questions whose answers are sought in Türkiye. Türkiye's Directorate of Religious Affairs states that the Kaaba visit can be carried out virtually, but the virtual pilgrimage will never be accepted as a real pilgrimage (Erbaş, 2022). In other words, real pilgrimage is a form of worship that only Muslims can perform by physically going to the holy city of Mecca.

According to Kömeçoğlu (2012), the postmodern understanding is trying to update itself. In this context, the efforts of religious actors to transform public spaces and change their usage habits are part of the updating process. This period, in which complex motifs and new forms of expression emerged between the traditional and the modern, is controversial in many respects. For example, according to Biçer (2011), the understanding of mosque architecture and Islamic identity in Türkiye are interrelated, and based on her perspective, two main trends in mosque architecture design are popular in Türkiye today. The first of these is the classical Ottoman style mosque design that continues the tradition, and the second one is mosques with diverse structures, being built in a modern style that combines mosque designs from different periods or cultures in an eclectic manner. The first of these is the classical Ottoman style mosque design that continues the tradition, and the second one is mosques with diverse structures, being built in a modern style that combines mosque designs from different periods or cultures in an eclectic manner. Üsküdar Şakirin Mosque,

which was planned in a modern style at the beginning of the project but was seen as a postmodern mosque by some segments of the society when the construction process was completed, can be shown as an example of the postmodern mosque understanding in Türkiye (Biçer 2011). Şakirin Mosque has caused various controversies due to its architectural structure. In an interview with Hüsrev Tayla, who designed the architectural project of the mosque but later withdrew from the project, Hüsrev stated that mosques are not ordinary buildings, and he expressed concern that Şakirin Mosque lacks the traditional values that a mosque should embody. Along with these arguments, Tayla asserts that mosques should not be designed with exaggerated decorations and irrelevant concepts, such as wedding halls, casinos or public houses (Tayla, 2009a). In addition, according to Biçer (2011), Şakirin Mosque is a mosque that does not have a cultural identity and richness that reflects the past. In this respect, Şakirin Mosque typifies the deterioration in Turkish social identity, Islamic identity, and Islamic tradition. To summarize the above information, the postmodern interpretation of mosques in Türkiye is strongly associated with the erosion of Turkish Islamic identity and customs by some architects, politicians, academics, and citizens who may or may not be competent in their field. The idea that the construction process of mosques built in a postmodern style is handled with a museum approach rather than a place of worship forms the basis of the criticisms mentioned above. In other words, according to Tayla (2009b), an architect who specialized in mosque design, Şakirin Mosque emerged as a result of an eclectic manner, and certain postmodern places of worship built in an eclectically do not adequately reflect the traditional and cultural values of Turkish-Islamic identity¹.

Figure 10. Şakirin Mosque – İstanbul

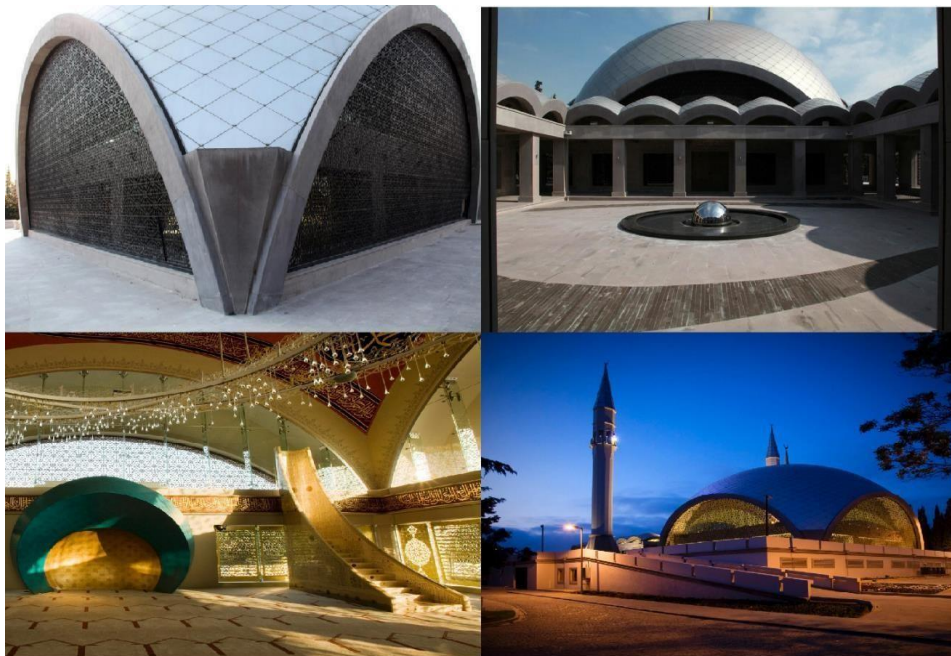


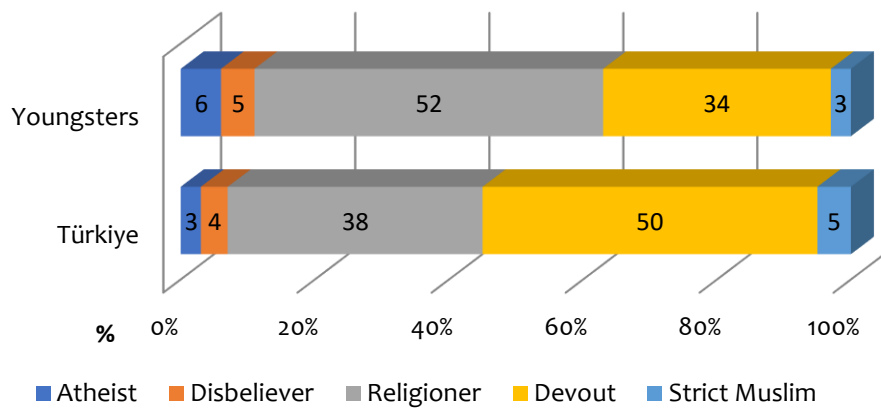
Figure 10 (Archnet, 2024) shows some images of the Şakirin Mosque and the Şakirin Mosque is an example of postmodern orientation. This orientation rearranges Islamic patterns by combining phenomena such as Islam and consumption, fashion and conservatism, show and

privacy, headscarf, and career on an axis. These combinations were not traditionally thought to come together for Muslims in Türkiye (Özbolet, 2017). For example, in Islam, wearing a hijab is a religious obligation, and there are formal guidelines on how to wear it. However, in social media, social environments, and other media outlets, hijab clothing is often promoted as a fashion trend. As a result, the modest attire, when integrated with fashion, becomes a symbol of modern Islamic identity. In addition, Meşe (2015) argues that expensive and flashy hijab dressing styles and hijab clothing fashion shows commodify hijab, and Meşe briefly summarizes this situation with the words "urban, modern but true to its essence." While the process of commodification of hijab is perceived as Islamization by some Islamic pressure groups, it is perceived as capitalization and postmodernization by others. In short, the postmodern tendencies of Islamic circles create some paradoxes, and some devout within the Muslim society in Türkiye perceive this situation as Western imitation and the degradation of spiritual identity.

In the postmodern era, Muslim societies are influenced by other societies on many issues as it is easier for Muslim societies to come into contact with different beliefs and cultures. If this situation is considered from a Türkiye-centered perspective, new religious movements affect Turkish society, the majority of which is Muslim, in many positive or negative ways. For example, alcoholic beverages are forbidden for Muslims, and in this respect, the world and meaning frames represented by wine and grape juice are different from each other. In this context, for a Muslim to consume alcohol is inconsistent with his/her religion. However, in some television series, movies, and reality shows produced both in Türkiye and other Muslim countries, media producers who bring together Muslims, alcohol, and adultery paint an image that there is no inconsistency between them.

Therefore, one of the prominent characteristics of postmodernism in Muslim societies is the normalization of behaviors that are inconsistent with Islam through the media. In sum, based on Foucault's concept of heterotopia, postmodernism opens the door to the spread of theistic agnosticism or agnostic Islam in Türkiye (Tekin, 2011). According to the survey conducted by KONDA Research and Consultancy (2024) company with the participation of 3147 respondents, the percentage of atheists and non-believers among young people is higher than in Türkiye overall.

Figure 11. Distribution of Religiosity



As can be seen in the figure above (KONDA, 2024), the level of religiosity of the youth among the participants is lower than the level of religiosity in Türkiye in general. While 50% of the participants in Türkiye overall, characterize themselves as religious, this rate decreases to 34% among the youth. In conclusion, although the postmodern understanding has increased interest in religion to a certain extent in Türkiye, there seems to be a tendency towards secularization, especially among young people. In addition, the commodification of religion by postmodern tendencies is changing the characteristics of Islamic society in Türkiye in many other areas like Islamic attire, architecture, art, education, music, and worship practices.

Conclusion

It is seen that with modernism, religious life was interrupted and lived among neighborhoods, and societies that wanted to get rid of this shallow period clung to the postmodern structure in order to reveal the meaning in their belief systems. 'Media' plays a dominant role in the presentation of identity or religious identity phenomena of the postmodern structure. In parallel with the development of technology along with postmodernism, we witness that a significant part of social life flows through digital media tools that have no boundaries of space and space. In particular, internet and digital reality technologies have increased the recognition and visibility of religious believers and faith-based communities in society in the postmodern era. However, due to the difficult nature of controlling and monitoring these tools and venues (the internet and social networks), they turn into a tool of disinformation and propaganda.

Digital spaces promise a second life to their users, and whether the metaverse can truly offer an alternative life is seriously debated in many societies. In this context, it seems likely that discussions about the manifestation of digital religion will increase radically, for reasons such as hyperverses such as the metaverse offer people the opportunity to acquire a new religious identity. Relatedly, the way Muslims in Turkey interact with reality is gaining new dimensions with the developing technological landscape and the reflections of religious beliefs in a computer-simulated metaverse lead to the emergence of new concepts such as digital pilgrimage. In other words, interest and curiosity in digital versions of spiritual life are increasing in Turkey and around the world.

Religious identities, which tried to survive with an introverted behavior in the modernist structure, were transformed with the influence of digitalization along with the postmodern understanding and acquired new identities that enjoyed their partial freedom. Postmodern philosophy has allowed religious ideas to survive through certain stages. As a result of these stages, ways have been constructed for the individual to live in harmony with postmodern life by taking on the identity he desires among the fragmented multiple truths presented to his life. Therefore, religious identities continue their lives as part of an adventure that includes many options and is constantly changing and transforming.

The majority of Muslims in Turkey have successfully adapted to the digital age. This digitalization process has also brought significant changes to the religious identities, understandings, and practices of the Muslim community. In essence, could we speak of an "Internetization" or "Digitalization" of Islam in the postmodern era? This phenomenon has led to several transformations:

It has changed the spiritual life and certain religious practices of Muslims.

It has influenced the ways Islam is expressed in both private and public spheres.

It has reshaped Islamic religious teaching methods and practices.

It has accelerated interactions between groups with similar or different religious beliefs.

It has created new opportunities for religious organization and collective worship.

It has led to changes in traditional architectural forms of places of worship, including mosque architecture.

Finally, postmodernism's synthesis of concepts that were unlikely to come together in the past has been criticized by some social groups for causing paradoxes. In the postmodern age, the internet and new media form the backbone of societies. In addition, the increasing use of social media every year causes the amount of time people spend in virtual digital spaces to significantly increase, thus blurring the boundaries between virtual and reality. Such situations cause simulation to be perceived as more real than reality and, in parallel, cause people's religious identities to change.

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Postmodern Çağda Dijital Kültür ve Yeni Medyanın Dini Kimlik Üzerindeki Etkileri: Türkiye Örneği

Tuba IŞIK*

Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Dünyanın bugün geldiği noktada dijitalleşme, globalleşme, plüralizm ve sekülerleşme ile birlikte kültürler, dinler ve kimlikler önemli bir değişime uğramaktadır. Bu bağlamda postmodernizm, İslam, dijitalleşme ve küreselleştirmeyi aynı ekseninde kesiştiren konular da akademisyenlerin ve entelektüel çevrelerin ilgi gösterdikleri ve bilimsel çalışma ürettikleri popüler bir araştırma alanı haline gelmiştir. Ayrıca postmodern dönemin en etkin ve işlevsel araçlarından biri olan yeni medya da bu süreçte ayrı bir statü kazanmıştır, çünkü dijital medya postmodern dönemde dini inanç ve kimliği şekillendiren en temel unsurlardan biridir. Literatür taramasının uygulandığı çalışmada alan çalışmalarında modern veya postmodern olgunun kimlik, dini kimlik, inanç ve yeni medya gibi terimlerle doğrudan bağlantılı araştırmaların çokluğu dikkat çekmektedir. Ancak toplumun, kültürün ve dinin dijitalleşmesi, kişilerin dini deneyimleri ve dini kimlikleri üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olmaya başlaması ve buna bağlı olarak da postmodernizm, İslam ve dijitalleşme üçgeninde durumun izah edilmesi günümüz din anlayışını anlamamız açısından önem arz etmektedir. Bu minval üzere de bu çalışmada ilk olarak modernizm ve postmodernizm kavramları ele alınmış ve bunun ardından sanal alanlar, dijital din ve dijital kültür konularına değinilmiştir. Bunun akabinde ise yeni medyanın İslami kimlik üzerindeki etkisi incelenmeye çalışılmış ve son olarak da postmodern çağda dijital medyanın Türkiye'deki Müslümanları nasıl etkilediği üzerinde durulmuştur.

Modernizm ve Postmodernizm Kavramları

Postmodernizm, 20. yüzyılın ortalarında Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde ortaya çıkmış bir kavramdır ve ortaya çıkışından bu yana birçok farklı tanımı yapılmıştır. Dolayısıyla postmodernizmin herkesin üzerinde uzlaştığı net bir tanımı bulunmamaktadır. Ancak genel itibarıyla, 20. yüzyılın sonlarına doğru hareketliliğini yitiren modernist arayışların yerini almaya başlayan muhtelif yeni üslup ve yönelişlerin ortak adı olarak ifade edilmektedir. Bu bağlamda postmodernizm olgusunun tam olarak anlaşılabilmesi için öncelikle modernizm kavramının ayrıntılı biçimde ele alınmasında fayda vardır, çünkü modernizm 17.yüzyılda Avrupa'da temelleri atılmaya başlanan Sanayi Devrimi'nin 19. yüzyıldaki bilim, kültür ve sanat alanlarında meydana getirdiği değişimleri ifade etmektedir. Diğer taraftan modernizmin din merkezli bir dünya görüşü yerine insan ve akıl merkezli

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bir yaklaşım sunması modernizm kavramını dini açıdan önemli kılmaktadır, çünkü bu dönemde Tanrı ve din yerine insan akli kutsallaştırılmaya başlanmıştır.

Postmodern yaşamın önemli getirilerinden biri de yeni kimlik algısıdır. Postmodern evrede kimlikler, sınırları aşan bir akışkanlıkla zamansız ve mekânsız bir uzamın parçası olarak dönüşüme uğrayan ve çoklu özellikler gösteren bir yapı olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır (Güven, 2015). Özellikle, yaşantı içerisindeki kültürel, sosyal ve politik farklılığın eksenliğinden nasıl etkilendiğimize dikkat çekerek, değerlerimizi ve bağlılıklarımızı ifade etmeyi ve onları yeniden şekillendirerek hayata adapte etmeyi öğretir (Stone-Mediatore, 2002).

Postmodern Toplumda Dijital Uzamda Din

Geleneksel iletişim araçlarındaki pasifliğin aksine teknolojinin getirisi dijital medya araçlarıyla aktif bir üne kavuşan toplumlar, yeni iletişim araçlarının etkileşimli yapısı ve bireyselleşme özellikleriyle yeni bir kültürel ortamın oluşmasını sağlamıştır (Mazıcı and Can, 2021). Bu yeni alanda bir araya getirme/bütünleştirme özellikleriyle ön plana çıkan din, bireyselleşen dijital mecralarda kendini yeniden inşa etme çabasına girmiştir. Diğer bir ifadeyle postmodern dünyada din, kolektif alandan bireysel yaşamlara doğru yeni biçimlenişlerin veçhini aramaya koyulmuştur (Yeniyol ve Handan, 2022).

21. yüzyıl dünyasında küresel çapta insanların önemli bir bölümü özellikle gençler zamanlarının büyük bir bölümünü gerçeğe yakın sanal dünyalarda geçirme eğilimindedirler, çünkü sanal uzamlar artık sadece bir eğlence ortamı olmaktan çıkarak kişilerin sosyalleştikleri, gündemi takip ettikleri, kamuoyu oluşturdukları, bilgi alışverişinde buldukları, iş ve özel hayatlarını organize edebildikleri çok katmanlı bir yapıya bir yapıya evrilmişlerdir. Bu bağlamda da siber toplumlar ortaya çıkmaya başlamış ve dolayısıyla sanal uzamlar postmodern paradigmanın temel unsurlarından biri haline gelmiştir. Diğer bir deyişle, sanal ve arttırılmış gerçeklik teknolojileri, hiperevrenler, yeni medya ve yapay zekâ postmodern paradigmayı şekillendiren başat faktörler haline almıştır. Bu durumun doğal bir sonucu olarak da toplumların sosyokültürel ve dini dokularında birtakım değişimler gözlemlenmeye başlamıştır.

Dijital Din ve Dijital Kültürün Dini Kimlik Üzerindeki Etkisi

Geleneksel iletişim araçlarındaki pasifliğin aksine teknolojinin getirisi dijital medya araçlarıyla aktif bir üne kavuşan toplumlar, yeni iletişim araçlarının etkileşimli yapısı ve bireyselleşme özellikleriyle yeni bir kültürel ortamın oluşmasını sağlamıştır (Mazıcı and Can, 2021). Bu yeni alanda bir araya getirme/bütünleştirme özellikleriyle ön plana çıkan din, bireyselleşen dijital mecralarda kendini yeniden inşa etme çabasına girmiştir. Diğer bir ifadeyle postmodern dünyada din, kolektif alandan bireysel yaşamlara doğru yeni biçimlenişlerin veçhini aramaya koyulmuştur (Yeniyol ve Handan, 2022).

Postmodern dönemde dijital teknolojilerin geldiği son nokta göz önüne alındığında sanal ağların ya da başka bir ifadeyle dijital kültürün insanlara alışılmışın dışında dini ve kültürel deneyimler yaşatmasının yanında bireyler artık sanal bir üst kimliğe de sahip olmuşlardır. Buna bağlı olarak da Metaverse gibi gerçeküstü evrenlerin pek çok açıdan önemi artmış ve özellikle farklı dini inançlara, mezheplere mensup toplulukların birbirleriyle etkileşime girmeleri oldukça kolaylaşmıştır. Diğer taraftan kişilerin veya dini organizasyonların bireysel ve kurumsal bazda dini içerikler

paylaşabildikleri web siteleri, bloglar, forumlar, görüntü ve video paylaşımı yapabildikleri sosyal medya hesapları oluşturmaları ve kişiselleştirilebilir akıllı cihaz uygulamaları geliştirmeleriyle birlikte de sosyal ağlarda her türlü dini bilginin ve dezenformasyonun dolaşımı hızlanmıştır. Bu durumun doğal bir sonucu olarak da dijital kültür ve dijital din gibi kavramlar popülerlik kazanmaya başlamış ve böylece dijital kültür kişilerin dini yaşam ve kimlikleri üzerinde hem olumlu hem de olumsuz birtakım yenilikleri de beraberinde getirmiştir.

Yeni Medyanın İslami Kimlik Üzerindeki Etkisi

İnsanın kimlik arayışı sonu olmayan bir süreçtir ve bu arayış insan var olduğu sürece devam edecektir. Kimlik, insanın içselleştirdiği şeylerle ilgilidir ve dolayısıyla insanlar kendilerini toplumda kimlikleri aracılığıyla bir yerlere konumlandırmaktadırlar. Din de insanların hayatı anlamlandırma yolundaki başat faktörlerden biri olduğundan insanın anlam ve kimlik arayışında dinin oynadığı rol elzemdir. İçinde yaşadığımız postmodern çağda da çoğu Müslüman anlam, kimlik arayışı, dini bilgilere erişme ve bu bilgileri çevresindekilerle paylaşma noktasında internet ve yeni medya teknolojilerinden faydalanmaktadır. Dijital ağların birçok Müslüman açısından vazgeçilmez bir bilgi kaynağı haline gelmesi yeni medyanın insan hayatındaki önemini arttırmaktadır ancak medya ve din arasındaki çok boyutlu ilişkiler oldukça karmaşıktır ve bu bağlamda yeni medyanın dini ve kimliği nasıl dönüştürdüğünün araştırılması kritiktir. Son yıllarda yapılan geniş çaplı bazı araştırmalar internet kullanıcısı Müslümanların Batı kültürüne iyimser yaklaşma, Batı kültürünü benimseme ve İslam ile Hıristiyanlık arasında daha fazla benzerlik olduğunu düşünme olasılıklarının internet kullanmayan Müslümanlara kıyasla daha yüksek olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Sonuç olarak postmodern çağın en modern iletişim aracı olarak görülen sosyal medya ve diğer dijital iletişim kanalları İslam'ın mesajının yayılması ve Müslüman toplumların dini öğrenmesi/öğretmesini kolaylaştırabileceği gibi dezenformasyon ve İslamofobi'nin yaygınlaştırılması amacıyla da kullanılabilirler.

Postmodern Dünyada Müslüman Olmak: Türkiye Örneği

Postmodernliğin modernliği eleştirmesi ve postmodernliğin din ve özgürlüğe dair söylemleri, Müslümanlar arasında önemli bir karşılık bulmuştu (Tekin, 2015). Ancak meta- anlatıyı yani her şeyin açıklanabileceği iddiasında olan düşünceyi reddeden ve göreceliği merkeze alan postmodernist yapıda dünya dinlerinin geleceğinin olmadığı anlaşılmaktadır. Çünkü postmodernizm, dinleri her şeyin mübah görüldüğü parçalanmış bir kültürde bütünü sembolik bir parçası olarak görmektedir (Erkan, 2013).

Postmodern çağda sanal olan artık gerçekten daha gerçek olarak algılanabilir hale gelmiştir ve bu durum İslamiyet de dâhil olmak üzere diğer büyük dini sistemlere zarar vermeye başlamıştır. Ayrıca sanal ile gerçek arasındaki sınırlar muğlaklaştıkça da yeni bireysel ve toplumsal dini formlar ortaya çıkmaya başlamıştır. Örneğin, sanal gerçeklik teknolojileri tarafından tetiklenen Türkiye'deki ve dünyadaki postmodern yönelimler sonucu İslam'ın şartlarından biri olan hac ibadetinin Metaverse ortamında yapılıp yapılamayacağı bir tartışma konusu haline gelmiş ve dijital hacılık gibi bazı yeni kavramlar doğmaya başlamıştır. Ayrıca İslam'daki postmodern yönelimler Türkiye'deki cami mimarisi ve İslami giyim kuşama da yansımıştır ve bu bağlamda geleneği sürdüren Osmanlı dönemi cami mimarisi yanında postmodern cami mimarisi anlayışı da ciddi oranda popülerlik kazanmıştır. Ancak Türkiye'deki bazı kesimlere göre postmodern cami mimarisi anlayışı geleneksel İslami değerlerden yoksundur ve postmodern tarzdaki camiler dini ve kültürel açıdan Türkiye'nin

toplumsal ve dini kimliğini yansıtmamaktadır. Diğer bir deyişle, postmodern anlayış sonucunda gelişen yeni cami mimarisi üslubu, bireylerin değişen yaşam/giyim tarzı ve Türkiye'deki kamusal alanların dönüşümü bazı İslami topluluklar tarafından Türkiye'de İslami kimliğin tahribata uğraması olarak görülmekte ve eleştirilmektedir. Ancak Türkiye'deki bazı gruplara göre ise postmodern eğilimlerin etkisiyle mimari üslup, ibadet usulleri, giyim, sanat, eğitim ve müzik anlayışında meydana gelen değişimler İslami kimliği zedelemekten ziyade İslam'ın daha da tanınması ve yayılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Sonuç

Postmodern dönemde İslam'ın internetleşmesi Müslümanların dini hayatını, ritüellerini, İslam öğretisini değiştirmiş, farklı dinlere mensup topluluklar arasındaki etkileşimi hızlandırmış, İslami görüş bakımından geçmişte bir araya gelmesi pek mümkün olmayan kavramları sentezlemiş, yeni imkanlar oluşturmuş, İslami toplulukların toplum içindeki görünürlüklerini arttırmıştır yani kısacası İslam'ın ifade biçimlerini değiştirmiştir. Bu değişim bazı Müslümanlar tarafından dini kimliğin bozulması olarak algılandığından eleştirilmekte iken başka bir kesim tarafından ise postmodern bir imkân olarak değerlendirilip İslam'ın mesajının yayılmasına katkı sunduğu gerekçesiyle desteklenmektedir. Postmodern çağda internet ve yeni medya toplumların omurgasını oluşturmaktadır, çünkü hem sanal ağlar üzerinden yapılan iletişim günümüzün en modern iletişim yöntemi olarak ön plana çıkmakta hem de internet ve yeni medya teknolojileri yediden yetmişe herkes tarafından gündelik hayatın vazgeçilmez bir parçası olarak sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, yürütülen tartışma, sanal ile gerçeklik arasındaki sınırların giderek bulanıklaşması ve bunun sonucu olarak sanal gerçekliğin yaşamın tüm yönlerini kuşatmasıyla beraber dini kimliklerin artan oranda dijital kültüre entegre olduğuna dair çıkarımlara zemmin hazırlanmıştır.

Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

The research was conducted by a single author.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

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Notes

¹ For further reading, it is possible to access the construction contract of Şakirin Mosque, its project design, and many other similar documents and books from the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) Atatürk Library and other IMM Libraries