The religious factor of national self-identification in the context of digital transformation

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the analysis of the religious factor's peculiarities of national self-identification in the context of digital transformation. The relevance and novelty of the study lies in the actualization of the problem of the real state and potential possibilities of preserving national and religious identity by Ukrainian migrants using the Internet in the conditions of a full-scale Russia's invasion to Ukraine. The role of the religious factor in the formation of the Ukrainian people's national self-identification is analyzed. It is noted that the study of identity can also include the analysis of using language, symbols, religious rites and other cultural manifestations that affect the perception of self and others by Ukrainians. Characteristic features of the Ukrainian national character are identified - peacefulness, disinclination to aggression and violence, high appreciation of one's inner freedom. The role of religious identity as a means of counteracting psychological trauma caused by war is determined. The challenges and dangers to national and religious-cultural identity that Ukrainian migrants face are analyzed. Internet communities of Ukrainian religious denominations in social networks, their fields of activity and fields of constructive activity for the preservation of national and religious-cultural identity by Ukrainian migrants are characterized.

Introduction

National self-identification is closely related to religious beliefs, especially in culturally diverse societies. In the context of digital transformation, there are new opportunities for expressing religious identity through the Internet and social media, but this process also faces challenges related to changing perceptions of religiosity, interaction with other cultures and religions. Challenges of the full-scale invasion of Russia into the Ukrainian state caused the global migration processes of Ukrainians, which threaten the loss of their national and religious identity in a different religious and cultural environment. Research in this sphere is key to understanding the processes of formation of national self-awareness in the conditions of the modern digital environment. The purpose of the scientific article is to analyze the impact of digital transformation on the religious factor in the formation of national self-identity, to identify key problems and prospects for research in this sphere. The purpose involves the following tasks: determining the peculiarities of the relationship between national and religious identities in the conditions of global threats of modernity; elucidation of the religious factor's specificity in the preservation of national identity; determining the role of social networks in preserving the national and cultural identity of Ukrainian communities.

Research methods

The research methodology is based on a combination of the following methods: source analysis – at the stage of forming the research source base; comparative analysis – in the comparison of different scientific approaches to the essence of the specified problem; statistical analysis – in the clarification of quantitative indices of the national and religious orientation of Ukrainian migrants; content analysis – in the analysis of media resources related to research issues. The scientific novelty of the study consists in actualizing the problem of the real state and potential possibilities of preserving national and religious identity by Ukrainian migrants with the help of the Internet in the conditions of the global Russian invasion.

Results and Discussion

Religion is one of the oldest forms of social consciousness, one of the forms of the world's reflection, but a unique reflection. This reflects the understanding of religion as an ancient and important component of social consciousness. Religious beliefs and practices can reflect the world in a unique way, taking into account religious symbols, myths, rites and rituals. They provide a framework for people to understand the world, their place in it, and their relationships with others. In addition, religion can provide answers to the basic questions of life, such as the origin, purpose, and meaning of existence.

However, it is important to note that the religious representation of the world may differ depending on specific religious traditions, cultural contexts, and individual experiences. It is also worth emphasizing that with the development of society and science, religious consciousness may

change, but religious traditions and thoughts remain an important component of the cultural and social identity of many groups and individuals.

Analyzing the views of Edmund Burke, an English political philosopher and parliamentarian of the 18th century, in religion and its role in the formation of society, we note that religion is not only the basis of personal morality, but also the basis of civil society and social stability. Burke saw religion as a source of moral values, social cohesion and solidarity. He believed that religious beliefs can be the basis for the formation of moral norms and rules that promote stability and peace in society. In addition, he saw religion as an important element that contributes to the maintenance of social order and structure (*Berk, 2000:146*).

M. Babiy, a well-known Ukrainian sociologist and culturologist, devoted many studies to the religious factor in Ukrainian society. His works provide a unique perspective on the essence of religiosity and its functional manifestations in the context of Ukrainian culture and society. One of the main aspects of his research is consideration of religion as an important factor in the formation of the national self-awareness and identity of the Ukrainian people. He considers the influence of religion on the mentality and socio-cultural development of Ukrainians through the prism of their beliefs, rituals and values. In their turn, religious communities contribute to the formation of mutual understanding, tolerance and cooperation between different socio-cultural groups, thereby contributing to the strengthening of the social order and unity of Ukrainian society (*Babiy, 2004: 3-12*).

S. Huntington's theory about the "clash of civilizations" suggests that cultural and civilizational differences have become the main sources of conflicts in the world. According to this theory, identity plays a key role in shaping these differences and determining the priorities and behavior of individuals and groups. The general idea is that identity is a complex and changing concept that includes various aspects of the individual and his communication with the surrounding world. Ukrainian researchers, using Huntington's concept, can analyze identity through the prism of cultural and religious influences, which is especially important for Ukrainian society with its complex historical, cultural and religious dynamics (*Huntington, 2006: 476*).

In February 2023, scientists of the Department of Mass and Community Psychology at the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine performed an empirical study, the purpose of which was to reveal the peculiarities of community identities' interaction in war conditions. Based on the results of the mentioned research, when determining their belonging to the community, the respondents were more likely to choose civic identity – 80.9% (for only 8.6% it is unimportant, and 10.4% hesitate or cannot decide), local – 54.5%, European –54.5%, professional –54.1%, while religious and East Slavic is only important for 16.9% and 22.4% of respondents, respectively. The highest indices of civic identity among other identity options clearly demonstrate the importance for respondents of identifying themselves as citizens of Ukraine in such a difficult period for the state (*Vinkov, 2023a: 83*).

At the same time, in the context of the war in Ukraine, which began in 2014, the analysis of identity through the prism of religious and cultural differences can reveal the deep causes of the conflict and the dynamics of relations between different groups. The study of identity can also include the analysis of using language, symbols, religious rites and other cultural manifestations that influence the perception of self and others by Ukrainians. Therefore, Huntington's theory and its application by Ukrainian researchers provides an opportunity to better understand the relationship between identity, cultural differences and conflicts in modern Ukrainian society.

In certain periods of its history, humanity needs a new ideological orientation, and then religious ideology appears as a militant system with unified members and goals; the weakest expression is a certain way of life or worldview. Religious identity is interconnected with the degree, level and nature of inter-religious confrontations: the religious identity of individual individuals can exacerbate existing inter-religious conflicts or become a catalyst for their emergence (*Lomachinska, Alekseienko, 2023: 56*).

The results of a sociological survey performed by the sociological service of the Razumkov Center in 2022 permits to claim that the war strengthened religious sentiments among Ukrainians. With the beginning of full-scale Russian aggression, the share of citizens who identify themselves as believers increased from 68% at the end of 2021 to 74% in November 2022. If in 2020, 40% of respondents noted the positive role of the Church in Ukrainian society, then in 2021 the share of such increased to 49.5%, and in 2022, after the beginning of Russia's full-scale aggression, an even greater increase was recorded – up to 59%, which is the highest index since 2000. The interviewees also emphasized the strengthening of the social service's role among religious denominations (psychological support, material assistance to refugees, finding shelter, etc.) (*War and the Church…, 2022*).

The appearance of a new flock - refugees - faithful in a temporary status for a limited time - creates a new canonical reality. Ukrainian citizens who found themselves face-to-face with the frankly terrible experience of the war and were forced to flee from shelling and occupation abroad, today are in dire need of spiritual rehabilitation support and pastoral care. Practice shows that refugees are looking for a mentally and linguistically close community. However, the absence of appropriate religious communities in most settlements and regions where Ukrainians have migrated creates serious spiritual and religious challenges for them, associated with the threat of erosion or complete loss of their religious identity. The psychological factor also works negatively, because in a situation of anxiety, despair, loneliness, and in the absence of constant pastoral support, the risks of leveling, or even the final loss of religiosity as such, increase. In connection with the absence (according to Tomos) of own parishes of the OCU outside Ukraine, the influence of anti-Ukrainian church structures is increasing (mainly russian or pro-russian) that operate abroad and turn Ukrainian immigrants into the object of their own ideological sabotage and attacks. Proselytic tendencies on the part of those denominations that are not traditionally characteristic of Ukrainian immigrants, but use the language, cultural identity, aesthetic appeal, logistical advantage, etc. convenient for specific individuals, are increasing (*Fylypovych, 2022: 292*).

Every culture and religious tradition has its own concepts of consciousness, which reflect the peculiarities of perception of human nature, place in the world, and relationship with higher powers or God. "The national character of Ukrainians was formed over the centuries. Eternal truth-seeking, hospitality and generosity, kindness and benevolence, songfulness and musicality, hard work and talent, tenderness and deep lyricism, freedom-loving and spiritual richness are just some typical qualities of the

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Ukrainian national character known in the civilized world" (*Shcherban, 2002: 94*).

At the same time, Ukrainians have such a psychological trait as introversion (lat. *intro – inside and versio – to turn, rotate*) – a person's focus on his inner world. Peacefulness, reluctance to aggression and violence, high appreciation of one's inner freedom are associated with such an attitude. The dominant feature of the Ukrainian national character is emotionality as increased sensitivity, vulnerability, tendency to take offense.

Anthropological code is a historically formed socio-cultural and moral-psychological state of a subject - ethnic group, nation, people, citizens, authorities, which embodies in its memory, in the subconscious, in life activities the results of a long-term and established influence of historical, natural-geographical, ethnic, sociocultural, spiritual, economic conditions for the development of human communities. Thanks to its transitory nature, the Ukrainian people survived, preserved the heritage of their ancestors, their individuality, identity, mentality, their cultural and spiritual values (*Anthropological code of Ukrainian culture and civilization, 2020: 523-524*).

Russia's external aggression towards Ukraine, in particular the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the conflict in the east of the country, had a significant impact on society and the issue of religious self-identification in Ukraine. These events caused the growth of patriotic sentiments among the Ukrainian population, as well as caused an in-depth discussion and rethinking of national and religious identity.

In scientific opinion, the concept of religious identity is interpreted quite broadly, because religious identity is inseparable from cultural, ethnic and national identity. The core of civilization is culture, and its spiritual segment has largely inherited religious values.

Religious identity encompasses the awareness of belonging to a religious community, which is realized bilaterally, it is the readiness to accept the establishment, values of this community and, as a desire, to feel part of it, that is, to be a participant in its history, cultural-historical and spiritual values (*Civilizational identity of Ukrainians, 2022: 82*).

In the context of the peculiarities in the religious identity realization, the analysis of the religious dimension of the "Ukrainian world" concept deserves attention. The ideologeme of "Russian world" imposed by the Russian chauvinist-imperial policy prompts humanitarians to more carefully analyze both the scope and meaning of the concept "Ukrainian world" and the understanding of this concept by religious subjects functionally present today in modern Ukraine. As noted by L.Filipovych and O.Horkusha, the "Ukrainian world" in religious dimensions is determined by the Ukrainian worldview and formulated in the Ukrainian language, culture, historiography, modern event reality, therefore various churches and religious institutions existing in modern Ukraine should define themselves in the co-ordinates of the "Ukrainian world". However, some churches and religious institutions relate themselves more quickly to other cultural-household, historical-social loci. Accordingly, such self-determination in other coordinates leads to the fact that these church institutions evaluate modern events and the state of Ukraine itself through the optics of other worldview dimensions and behave as representatives (agents of influence within Ukraine) of other locations (*Fylypovych; Horkusha, 2020*).

One of the important aspects in this context is the role of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Before the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Moscow Patriarchate in 2018, the issue of religious self-identification in Ukraine was also linked to the issue of canonical affiliation of church associations. This process was of great importance for Ukrainian society as a symbol of national autonomy and independence.

In addition, the war caused religious transformations among the population, as some believers moved to other regions of the country or sought support from different denominations depending on their attitude to the conflict.

Based on the results of sociological surveys, the conclusion is formed that there is a clear inverse relationship between religious identity and traumatization. Here we can say that self-identification with believers and a correspondingly formed religious worldview protects such citizens from trauma. Perhaps the perception of the causes of today's events as dependent on external forces, the readiness to perceive them as inevitable, and the fact that everything depends on God and the last word will be His, in a certain way relieves the anxiety that can be observed in other citizens. Accordingly, religious identity has an inverse relationship with traumatization, suggesting a protective role of religion against psychological trauma caused by war (*Vinkov, 2023b: 31*).

War, like any other event that threatens the existence and preservation of identity, prompts the person who is the bearer of this identity to rethink the fragility of life, reevaluate existing social ties and turn to the resources of the community to which he belongs. If such resources can be found, the chances of preserving the identity increase. However, if this is not possible or the proposed development models do not meet the existing needs, a person looks for other social groups capable of satisfying these needs.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine caused millions of believers to go abroad. Many of them started looking for a church in their new place of residence, and some even took the initiative to create such churches where they settled. During the year, dozens of new Ukrainian churches appeared in Europe, and those that already existed, for example in Poland, grew by several times.

According to Opendatabot, a service for monitoring registration data of Ukrainian companies and citizens, since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, 2.4 million Ukrainians have gone abroad and have not returned. According to E. Libanova from the M.V. Ptucha Institute of Demography and Social Research at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, demographic losses due to a full-scale war range from 500-600 thousand to 5-6 million people. The indicated figures only reflect the range of possible losses (*Libanova, 2023*).

It should also be noted that estimating demographic losses in a war zone can be difficult due to the unavailability of accurate data, especially in conditions of chaos and conflict. At the same time, it is necessary to realize that the state is losing not only the reproductive fund, but also the qualified labor force.

When talking about demographic losses, attention is often paid not only to the total number of people who died or were forced to leave their homes, but also to the quality of these losses. In the context of an able-bodied workforce, demographic losses can have serious consequences for a country's economy and society. The death of qualified

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workers, experts and other specialists can lead to a decrease in the productivity of the economy, a delay in the development of science, technology and innovation.

Regardless of how many Ukrainians will return home, the state faces another serious problem - psychological rehabilitation not only for the military and civilians who remained in Ukraine, but also for those who returned. These issues need to be resolved now. Attracting investments, fighting corruption and improving the quality of life of the population are key aspects for the stable development of the country. This requires complex measures on the part of the government, public organizations and civil society.

At the same time, the role of religious organizations cannot be underestimated, they should become an important aspect of the psychological rehabilitation of the population in the post-war future. Religious leaders can provide psychological support to their followers through religious counseling, prayer, and spiritual guidance, and participating in spiritual meetings will allow believers to feel supported and compassionate, gain inner peace and focus, and strengthen their spirituality and faith. However, it is also important to take into account the diversity of faiths and beliefs in society and ensure equal access to psychological support for all population groups.

It is important to consider that religious support should be available and open to everyone, regardless of religious beliefs, and should complement existing psychological rehabilitation programs, not replace them.

Analyzing the migrations of Ukrainians of previous waves, M. Kozlovets noted that Ukrainian emigrants, settling in foreign territories, even in cases of their compact settlement and preservation of informational ties with the ethnic homeland, unfortunately gradually lose, at least partially, their former ethnicity and acquire new ethnic features. This happens because there is their attachment, through sociocultural and partly physical adaptation, to a new, more or less clearly defined, natural and social environment, that is, to a new ethnic niche. This adaptation and attachment is fixed at the mental level. This is how the new ethnic essence of the emigrant community is formed, of course, in the migrants of the second, third and subsequent generations (*Kozlovets, 2009: 217*).

The creation of new Ukrainian churches in Europe and the growth of existing ones testifies to the strength of the community and the initiative of believers who want to preserve their faith and cultural and religious traditions. These new churches can become not only a place of spiritual support, but also a center for social and cultural events for the Ukrainian diaspora and local communities.

However, it is important to understand that participation in religious rites or visiting churches can have different motives for different people. Some may wish to find spiritual support and community, while others may have political motives or ties to certain church structures. Such a situation can lead to the strengthening of (pro) Russian church structures abroad, especially in countries where there is a significant Ukrainian diaspora.

It will be important to support and promote the development of these new churches and communities. This may include providing resources, training and support from larger faith-based organizations, as well as working with local authorities and communities to create the conditions

for the successful integration and development of these new communities.

In this regard, using the possibilities of the religious segment of the Internet will promote communication and cooperation and will allow highlighting various aspects of religious life in Ukraine and beyond.

It is worth noting that with the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2014 (and especially after the full-scale invasion of 2022), many of our compatriots began to clearly position themselves in the virtual space as Ukrainians (through such identities as an avatar, like pages, posted content, etc.). At the same time, a "virtual" or "networked" identity can be even more real than positioning oneself in a non-digital world. During the war, Ukrainians began to react sharply, painfully or even aggressively to the virtual identity of those who defend the values of the aggressor country. Tracking identity markers over the Internet has become commonplace in recent years, however, this leads not only to destruction (writing offensive comments, removal from the list of friends, etc.), but also to the formation and consolidation of collective identity at the macro level (*Dyiak et al., 2024: 15*).

Digital means of spirituality, such as online groups, chats with pastors, sermons, and religious content on social networks, are becoming increasingly popular. Although "digital religion" does not necessarily attract many young people, it enriches the experience of those already involved in religious practices. This allows them to maintain and expand their spiritual path through digital platforms.

Let us consider some groups that reflect the diversity of religious and social initiatives in Ukraine and actively use digital platforms for communication, education and mobilization of their members and supporters.

Network of Open Orthodoxy on Facebook is "a non-hierarchical canonical community of Christians with an open civil position, who are engaged in education and enlightenment"[1]: a social community with an active civil position, aimed at the creation of an independent and cathedral Ukrainian Church. It promotes the principles of openness, love and holiness. The group has 2.8 thousand subscribers.

Orthodox Youth of Ukraine[2] is a group that unites young Orthodox in Ukraine with 1.2 thousand followers in Facebook.

Internet publication "A word about a word"[3]: an information resource that popularizes Orthodox values and has about 2,300 subscribers in Telegram.

Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church[4]: The church community with the largest audience in Facebook among the mentioned groups, has 72 thousand followers and actively interacts with its members through social networks.

Pope Benedict XVI created his X-account (Twitter) in 2012, which was an important step in using digital media to spread Christian ideas and values. This allowed the Church to attract attention to important topics and communicate with the world on a platform where speed and availability of information are of great importance.

The current pope, Francis, also actively uses social media. His @Pontifex[5] account (18.5 million followers) (on X) in nine languages and his Instagram (@Franciscus)[6] presence (9.3 million followers) allow him to send messages of peace, love, tolerance and social justice that are about the main themes of his papacy.

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[1] https://www.facebook.com/groups/mereza
[2] https://www.facebook.com/Ukrainemolod
[3] https://slovoproslovo.info/

[4] https://www.facebook.com/ugcc.ua/about?locale=uk_UA
[5] https://x.com/pontifex
[6] https://www.instagram.com/franciscus/?__coig_challenged=1

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It is known that the bishop of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, Vyacheslav Horpynchuk, actively uses social networks to explain the research of the Word of God in the context of his faith and presentation. This shows a modern approach to faith and education, where digital platforms are becoming an important tool for communication and learning. In particular, it has a Facebook page with more than nine hundred followers[7].

Here are some key aspects of the Lutheran Church's presence in the digital space:

- the church uses its official pages in social networks to inform its parishioners about services, events, educational activities and other important announcements, which helps to reach the audience quickly and efficiently;

- the Lutheran Church uses social media to share spiritual resources, educational materials, and spiritual reflection, which includes expounding the Word of God, theological discussions, and other forms of educational activity$

- the Church uses social networks, too, to cooperate with other church and religious communities, as well as to communicate with the public as a whole. This contributes to building mutual understanding and joint dialogue between different cultural and religious traditions. Social networks allow the Church to maintain activity in public life, in particular in the spheres of public assistance, charity and social support for the needy.

These initiatives not only contribute to the rapprochement of the Church with believers, but also allow it to keep up with the pace of the modern world, addressing new generations who actively use digital technologies.

In general, online faith-based communities can create a safe environment for migrants where they can find the understanding, support, and resources they need to successfully adapt and integrate in a new country. Their activities can be implemented in the following directions: cultural adaptation (through religious rites and traditions supported in these communities, migrants can keep in touch with their culture, which helps to reduce culture shock and adapt to a new environment); social connections (such communities can become a platform to meet other migrants who have similar religious beliefs and are in a similar situation, this creates a support network where advice, experiences and resources can be exchanged); informational support (Internet communities can provide important information about living abroad, including legal advice, educational opportunities, job vacancies and other resources needed to integrate into a new country); language support (Internet communities can provide an opportunity to learn the language of the host country through online courses or communication with native speakers, which facilitates the process of adaptation and integration); practical help (religious communities often organize charitable actions and projects aimed at supporting migrants by providing them with food, clothing, housing and other necessary assistance).

Media is not just a means of transmitting information, it is a whole environment in which cultural codes are produced, aestheticized and broadcast. The media culture of cyberspace forms a communicative environment that ensures the interaction of social groups with the help of symbolic exchange mechanisms, it is a culture of images, sounds and images that are broadcast through technical means, creating virtual values and meanings (*Lomachinska, Lomachynskyi, 2022*).

In the conditions of digitization, social media become a powerful tool for the culture of dialogue, rational discussion and logical argumentation. The participation of people who appreciate these values and strive to cultivate a high level of discourse is critical. This means that it is necessary to strive for high standards of morality and ethics in communication, to avoid simplifications and straightforward approaches that can distort the truth or leave out important aspects.

Conclusion

The religious factor plays an important role in the formation of the national self-awareness of Ukrainians, their identity. Along with the self-determination of a person in relation to traditions, culture, type of language and spiritual values, it is important for any nation to be aware of its own religious affiliation, associated with correlation with religious ideas, a system of values, norms, principles, prohibitions, models of behavioral acts, with traditions about family, society, power. These processes of self-awareness were catalyzed by the Russia-Ukraine war, especially in its full-scale version. This happened in connection with mass internal and external migrations of Ukrainians to the west of the country and abroad and their mass search for psychological balance and recovery from trauma. The development of a religious worldview through spiritual rehabilitation support and pastoral care of church institutions, as shown in the article, directly contributes to this.

Ukrainian citizens, immersed in the new canonical reality due to moving to another place of residence and often outside Ukraine itself, are looking for a mentally and linguistically close community, but in this case they may face the threat of erosion or complete loss of their religious identity. The reason for such erosion can be proselytizing manifestations on the part of the new denominations they visit, which use the factor of language, cultural identity, aesthetic appeal, logistical advantage, etc., convenient for specific individuals. And in a situation of moods of anxiety, despair, loneliness, and in the absence of constant pastoral support, the risks of leveling, or even the final loss of religiosity as such, increase.

A certain solution to this situation can be an increase in religious support from Ukrainian churches, both thanks to their physical expansion in Europe, and thanks to the expansion of the presence in social networks for informational, humanitarian, language support, as well as the promotion of social adaptation while preserving one's own religious and cultural identity.

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[7] https://www.facebook.com/vyacheslav.horpynchuk.1/

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Стаття присвячена аналізу особливостей релігійного чинника національної самоідентифікації в контексті цифрової трансформації. Актуальність та новизна дослідження полягає у актуалізації проблеми реального стану та потенційних можливостей збереження національно-релігійної ідентичності українськими мігрантами за допомогою засобів Інтернет в умовах повномасштабного російського вторгнення в Україну. Проаналізовано роль релігійного чинника в становленні національної самоідентифікації українського народу. Зазначено, що дослідження ідентичності також може включати аналіз використання мови, символів, релігійних обрядів та інших культурних виявів, які впливають на сприйняття себе та інших українцями. Визначено характерні риси українського національного характеру - миролюбність, несхильність до агресії та насильства, високе поцінування своєї внутрішньої свободи. Визначено роль релігійної ідентичності як засобу протидії психологічним травмам, викликаним війною. Проаналізовано виклики і небезпеки національній та релігійно-культурній ідентичності, з якими стикаються українські мігранти. Охарактеризовано інтернет-спільноти українських релігійних конфесій у соціальних мережах, їх напрями роботи та напрями конструктивної діяльності задля збереження українськими мігрантами національної і релігійно-культурної ідентичності.

Ключові слова: національна ідентичність, релігійна ідентичність, український національний характер, українська національна релігійність, українські мігранти, соціальні мережі, релігійно-культурні цінності.

СХІД Том 6 (2) 2024
Релігійно-філософський дискурс гуманітарної безпеки
в контексті трансформацій цифрової доби