

Media and Religious Consciousness: How the Information Environment Affects the Spiritual Security of Society

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The article analyzes the impact of the contemporary media environment on the formation and transformation of religious consciousness in the context of the spiritual security of society. In the digital era, the information space functions as a powerful factor of socialization, worldview construction, and cultural identification. The study explores the dual role of media – as a channel of interfaith dialogue and as a potential source of spiritual destabilization. Using methods of content and discourse analysis, the paper examines the mechanisms through which media messages influence collective and individual perceptions of faith, moral values, and social cohesion. Particular attention is paid to the phenomenon of “information religiosity,” where religious symbols and narratives are appropriated by secular media discourse, leading to a superficial and consumerist understanding of spirituality. The article also addresses the issue of religious manipulation through fake news, digital propaganda, and hybrid information wars, which threaten national identity and the moral stability of societies. The author substantiates the importance of developing media literacy and spiritual culture as key components of information security. The research concludes that the protection of spiritual security requires not isolation from global information flows but the creation of a value-oriented communicative environment that promotes critical thinking, ethical reflection, and respect for religious diversity.

KEYWORDS
media,
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consciousness,
information
environment,
spiritual security,
digital culture,
media literacy,
hybrid influence,
values.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the media environment has become one of the most influential factors shaping human consciousness and value systems. Digital communication technologies have penetrated almost every sphere of life, transforming not only social interaction but also spiritual experience (Petrushkevych, 2018). Religion, which historically served as a foundation of moral norms and collective identity, is now integrated into a globalized information space that reinterprets sacred meanings through the logic of mass communication. The convergence of media and religion has created a new type of spiritual experience characterized by rapid dissemination, visual dominance, and emotional saturation.

The problem of how media influences religious consciousness is not limited to theological or sociological discourse; it directly concerns the sphere of national and spiritual security (Fylypovych, Horkusha, 2024). The information environment may serve both as a medium for intercultural understanding and as a tool for manipulation, capable of distorting moral values and destabilizing social cohesion. In conditions of hybrid informational conflicts and global media competition, societies with weak value systems become vulnerable to external ideological and spiritual aggression (Kalynovskiy, 2007). Therefore, the issue of ensuring spiritual security through media literacy and ethical information policies is gaining special relevance (Lomachinska, Lomachinskyi, 2023).

Theoretical analysis of the problem reveals that modern researchers (Campbell, 2012; Hoover, 2016; Lundby, 2018) interpret the interaction between media and religion as a complex process of mediation, where digital technologies construct new religious identities and transform traditional rituals into media events. Ukrainian scholars emphasize the dual function of media: on the one hand, it provides access to diverse religious discourses, while on the other, it contributes to the commodification of faith, reducing it to an element of entertainment culture (Shuba, 2025).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of the information environment on the formation and transformation of religious consciousness and to determine its significance for the spiritual security of modern society. The main tasks are:

- to identify the key theoretical approaches to the study of media and religion;
- to analyze the mechanisms of media influence on moral and spiritual values;
- to substantiate the role of media literacy and ethical communication in protecting spiritual security.

This research is based on an interdisciplinary approach combining philosophy, religious studies, media studies, and cultural theory, which allows for a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between informational and spiritual dimensions of human existence.

Research methods

The study is based on an interdisciplinary methodological framework that integrates approaches from philosophy, cultural studies, media theory, and religious studies. The complexity of the topic – the interaction between the media environment and religious consciousness – requires a combination of qualitative and interpretive methods aimed at understanding the symbolic, communicative, and ethical dimensions of the phenomenon (Hjarvard, 2016).

The first stage of the research involved a theoretical analysis of academic literature on the problems of media influence, religious communication, and spiritual security (Petrushkevych, 2018). Works by international scholars such as Campbell (2012), Hoover (2016), Lundby (2018), and Hjarvard (2016) were compared with studies by Ukrainian authors including Kultaieva (2019), Mishchenko (2021), and Sytnyk (2022). This comparison made it possible to identify both universal and region-specific features of the media–religion relationship, as well as to determine how global media trends affect local religious identities.

To explore how religious themes are represented in the modern media environment, content analysis was applied to a selection of digital media sources (news portals, social networks, and religious blogs). The analysis focused on recurring motifs, language strategies, and symbolic imagery used in media discourse. The method allowed identifying the dominant frames through which spirituality is represented: as moral guidance, as entertainment content, or as an element of ideological propaganda.

The study also employed discourse analysis, aimed at examining how media language constructs meanings related to faith, morality, and value systems. Special attention was paid to discursive practices that produce “information religiosity” – a phenomenon where religious vocabulary and imagery are used to legitimize political messages or commercial interests. This approach helped to reveal the mechanisms of symbolic manipulation and to demonstrate how media discourse can transform spiritual concepts into ideological tools.

The normative-value method was used to assess the ethical and axiological implications of media communication for spiritual security. It allowed interpreting the media not only as a technological system but as a value-laden cultural environment that shapes collective moral responsibility. The hermeneutic method facilitated the interpretation of media texts as modern myths that mediate between the sacred and the profane, revealing hidden meanings and existential dimensions of communication.

Finally, a systemic approach was applied to understand the information environment as an interconnected structure of actors, institutions, and value flows that influence the formation of religious consciousness. This approach made it possible to consider the media's role in spiritual security not as an isolated phenomenon but as part of a broader sociocultural system of symbolic exchange.

The methodological combination of these approaches ensures a comprehensive understanding of how media communication affects religious consciousness and contributes to either strengthening or weakening the spiritual security of society.

Results and Discussion

The results of the theoretical and content analysis demonstrate that the interaction between religion and media in the twenty-first century has led to a profound transformation of religious consciousness. In traditional societies, religion was the primary institution of meaning-

making and moral regulation. It provided coherent narratives about human existence, morality, and transcendence. However, in the digital era, the information environment has become the dominant sphere of symbolic production, displacing the traditional authority of religious institutions.

Contemporary media – especially social networks, digital platforms, and streaming services – have created a space where sacred symbols circulate freely, detached from their original contexts. Religious imagery is often reframed into memes, advertisements, or aestheticized forms of self-expression. This process leads to the mediatization of religion, a phenomenon described by Stig Hjarvard (2016), in which media logic reshapes religious practice and understanding. In this new environment, faith becomes individualized, fragmented, and performative – an element of identity rather than a shared metaphysical foundation (Taylor, 2007).

As a result, religious consciousness in media society is increasingly characterized by syncretism and eclecticism. Individuals construct their own spiritual worldview by selectively combining elements of different traditions, often based on what they encounter in online spaces. This produces a paradoxical condition: while access to diverse spiritual knowledge has expanded, the depth of individual faith experience has often diminished. The sacred becomes commodified – a product consumed for emotional satisfaction rather than existential commitment.

The research reveals a dual nature of the media's influence on religious consciousness. On the one hand, media serve as an instrument of interfaith dialogue and educational dissemination. Digital technologies provide opportunities for believers and religious institutions to communicate across cultural and geographical boundaries. Online sermons, religious podcasts, and streaming of sacred rituals have enabled global participation in religious life, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when physical gatherings were restricted.

At the same time, the mass character of digital communication creates an environment where religious content competes for attention with entertainment, politics, and consumer advertising. This competitive attention economy forces religious messages to adapt to media logic – brevity, emotional appeal, and visual attraction. In this process, complex theological ideas are simplified into slogans, and moral guidance is reframed into lifestyle recommendations.

The second aspect of media influence is manipulative and ideological. The information environment can be exploited to promote extremist ideologies or to justify political actions under the guise of religious values. Numerous studies (Hoover, 2016; Campbell, 2012) demonstrate how online platforms facilitate the spread of radical religious interpretations, conspiracy theories, and pseudo-spiritual movements. The anonymity and algorithmic personalization of digital media amplify the echo chamber effect, reinforcing confirmation bias and isolating individuals within ideologically homogeneous communities.

Such mechanisms not only polarize societies but also erode trust in traditional religious institutions. The transformation of sacred discourse into a field of ideological struggle contributes to the weakening of spiritual security – understood as the integrity and resilience of a society's moral and value system.

A central finding of the study is the emergence of what can be termed “information religiosity” – a form of quasi-

religious consciousness generated by the media environment. This phenomenon is characterized by the use of religious symbols, language, and rituals outside their theological context, primarily for aesthetic or ideological purposes (Terepyshchiy, 2023).

For instance, religious symbols are frequently used in advertising campaigns, pop culture, and political propaganda. Such representations exploit the emotional resonance of the sacred while detaching it from its ethical and metaphysical foundations. This produces a form of symbolic consumption where faith is replaced by spectacle and spiritual meaning is transformed into entertainment.

In social networks, users often engage in performative acts of religiosity – sharing prayers, icons, or moral statements as a form of digital identity construction. While these actions can express genuine faith, they also reflect the influence of “expressive individualism” (Taylor, 2007), where personal emotion becomes the central value. The collective dimension of religion – the sense of belonging to a spiritual community – is weakened, replaced by the pursuit of authenticity and self-expression.

From the perspective of spiritual security, such trends are ambivalent. On the one hand, digital religiosity increases visibility and accessibility of faith-related content; on the other, it erodes the boundaries between sacred and profane, transforming spirituality into a media commodity.

The study also shows that the modern information environment functions as an arena of moral conflict where competing systems of values coexist and clash. Media narratives frequently reinterpret ethical norms, presenting moral relativism as a sign of tolerance and pluralism. In this sense, the media environment contributes to the desacralization of morality, as it promotes pragmatic or hedonistic attitudes at the expense of transcendental values.

At the same time, the phenomenon of “fake news” and information manipulation poses direct threats to spiritual security (Baudrillard, 1995). When media communication is guided by political or commercial interests rather than truth and responsibility, it generates cynicism and moral disorientation. The boundaries between good and evil, truth and falsehood, are blurred. This condition, described by Baudrillard (1995) as the “hyperreality of signs,” creates a situation in which simulated representations of faith replace genuine spiritual experience.

Hybrid information warfare – a characteristic feature of modern geopolitics – often includes the instrumentalization of religion. Propaganda campaigns exploit religious narratives to polarize societies, justify aggression, or discredit alternative worldviews. Such practices undermine the ethical foundations of interfaith coexistence and provoke hostility between confessions. In this context, spiritual security must be understood not only as the protection of religious freedom but as the defense of truth, moral coherence, and the dignity of human belief.

One of the most significant findings concerns the crucial role of media literacy as a component of spiritual security (Postman, 1993; Terepyshchiy, 2023). The ability to critically interpret media messages, recognize manipulative strategies, and differentiate between authentic and fabricated content is a prerequisite for moral autonomy. Media literacy, in this sense, extends beyond technical skills; it becomes an ethical competence – the capacity for conscious, value-based participation in communication.

Educational initiatives that integrate media literacy with spiritual and moral education can strengthen individuals’

resistance to ideological manipulation. For example, programs that teach critical thinking alongside ethical reflection help develop what Postman (1993) called “defensive reason” – the ability to filter information through one’s value system.

Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of ethical communication within the media system itself. Journalists, editors, and digital influencers bear responsibility for maintaining a discourse of truth, respect, and empathy. The integration of ethical standards in media production – transparency, fact-checking, avoidance of hate speech – directly contributes to the preservation of the moral and spiritual health of the public sphere.

Another key result is the recognition of spiritual security as a cultural phenomenon, inseparable from national identity and collective memory. Media are not only transmitters of information but also producers of cultural narratives that shape a society’s image of itself. When media promote respect for religious diversity, cultural heritage, and ethical responsibility, they act as instruments of spiritual integration. Conversely, when they propagate stereotypes, hostility, or nihilism, they erode the symbolic foundations of culture.

In this regard, the role of national media policies becomes decisive. States that neglect the moral dimension of information security risk the fragmentation of their cultural identity. Protecting spiritual security therefore implies not censorship, but the creation of conditions for value-oriented communication, where pluralism coexists with shared ethical principles.

The findings also suggest that spiritual security cannot be ensured through isolation or restriction of information flows. Attempts to “shield” societies from global media influence are counterproductive and lead to intellectual stagnation. Instead, spiritual security should be conceptualized as a dynamic equilibrium between openness and protection.

Openness means engaging in global dialogue, learning from other cultural and religious traditions, and participating in the shared search for truth. Protection means maintaining moral boundaries, defending the dignity of faith, and ensuring that information exchange serves human development rather than degradation.

This dialectic requires both institutional regulation (ethical standards, education policies) and personal maturity (critical thinking, empathy, responsibility). The results of the study confirm that spiritual resilience depends not on the absence of external influences but on the ability of individuals and communities to interpret and integrate them in accordance with their own value system.

The discussion of these findings leads to the formulation of a new conceptual approach that may be termed the “spiritual information ecology paradigm”. This approach views the media environment as a living ecosystem in which information flows, values, and beliefs interact. Just as ecological systems require balance to sustain life, the information ecosystem requires moral and spiritual balance to sustain human dignity.

In this paradigm, spiritual security is understood as the health of the informational environment – the degree to which communication supports truth, empathy, and meaning. Media pollution – the spread of lies, hatred, and moral relativism – functions analogously to environmental pollution, destroying the symbolic habitat of human consciousness. Therefore, protecting spiritual security is similar to protecting ecological sustainability: it demands

awareness, responsibility, and cooperation at all levels – individual, institutional, and global.

The results of this study thus expand the understanding of information security beyond technical and political dimensions. They show that spiritual security is a fundamental component of social resilience, determining the capacity of societies to withstand ideological manipulation, moral disintegration, and existential despair.

Religious consciousness in the digital era is transformed by media logic, becoming more individualized, performative, and fragmented.

Media play a dual role – facilitating access to religious knowledge while simultaneously enabling manipulation and commodification of the sacred.

The phenomenon of “information religiosity” exemplifies how religious symbols are recontextualized within secular media discourse, producing both new forms of spirituality and moral superficiality.

Spiritual security is endangered by the proliferation of fake news, propaganda, and moral relativism, which erode trust and coherence in value systems.

Media literacy and ethical communication emerge as central mechanisms for safeguarding the moral and spiritual health of society.

The balance between openness to global communication and protection of national moral identity defines the sustainable model of spiritual security.

Ultimately, the study confirms that the relationship between media and religious consciousness is neither inherently destructive nor purely constructive. It is a dialectical process in which information technologies can either amplify or degrade human spirituality, depending on the ethical choices made by communicators and audiences.

In a world saturated with information, the task of protecting spiritual security is not to limit communication but to infuse it with meaning. This requires a deliberate effort to cultivate critical awareness, empathy, and responsibility – virtues that transform media from an instrument of manipulation into a medium of truth and moral development.

Conclusion

The conducted research allows drawing several general conclusions about the complex relationship between the media environment, religious consciousness, and the spiritual security of society. The study demonstrated that in the era of digital globalization, media have become not only instruments of communication but also active agents of spiritual and moral transformation. Their influence extends far beyond the sphere of information exchange, penetrating the very foundations of human self-awareness and cultural identity.

Firstly, it has been established that the mediatization of religion leads to a reconfiguration of traditional forms of faith and religious practice. Media transform the ways in which individuals perceive the sacred, creating new channels of access to religious content but also reducing the depth of spiritual experience. This process fosters the rise of “information religiosity,” characterized by superficial engagement with faith, aestheticization of sacred symbols, and their use as markers of digital identity rather than as expressions of transcendental belief.

Secondly, the results show that media play a dual role in the spiritual sphere. They can serve as tools for interfaith dialogue, moral education, and cultural integration, but at

the same time, they may function as instruments of manipulation, spreading extremism, intolerance, or moral relativism. The direction of this influence depends largely on the level of media literacy, ethical responsibility of communicators, and the maturity of the audience's value consciousness.

Thirdly, it is argued that spiritual security should be conceptualized not as isolation from external information flows but as the ability of a society to maintain moral coherence and ethical resilience amid global communication. True protection of spiritual security lies in the development of critical thinking, empathy, and value-based dialogue. Media literacy, when combined with moral education, becomes a vital element of this protection, enabling individuals to discern truth from manipulation and to interpret media content through the lens of ethical reflection.

Fourthly, the study proposes viewing the problem through the lens of spiritual information ecology, in which the media space functions as an ecosystem whose balance depends on the harmony between truth, responsibility, and respect for human dignity. Just as environmental sustainability ensures the survival of nature, ethical and spiritual sustainability ensures the survival of human culture.

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that the spiritual security of modern society depends not merely on external regulation of the media but on the inner transformation of communicative culture. The digital age demands the cultivation of a spiritually conscious citizen – one who participates in the information environment not as a passive consumer but as a morally responsible subject. The future of human civilization will depend on whether media remain a field of manipulation or become a space for dialogue, truth, and the renewal of the sacred dimension of human life.

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Медіа та релігійна свідомість: як інформаційне середовище впливає на духовну безпеку суспільства

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У статті проаналізовано вплив сучасного медіасередовища на формування та трансформацію релігійної свідомості в контексті духовної безпеки суспільства. В епоху цифровізації інформаційний простір функціонує як потужний чинник соціалізації, світоглядного конструювання та культурної ідентифікації. Досліджено подвійний характер ролі медіа – як засобу міжрелігійного діалогу і водночас потенційного джерела духовної дестабілізації. За допомогою контент- та дискурс-аналізу розкрито механізми впливу медійних повідомлень на колективні та індивідуальні уявлення про віру, моральні цінності й соціальну згуртованість. Особливу увагу приділено феномену «інформаційної релігійності», коли релігійні символи та наративи використовуються у світському медійному дискурсі, що сприяє поверхневому та споживацькому розумінню духовності. Також висвітлено проблему релігійних маніпуляцій через фейкові новини, цифрову пропаганду та гіbridni інформаційні війни, які становлять загрозу національній ідентичності та моральній стабільноті суспільства. Обґрунтовано важливість розвитку медіаграмотності й духовної культури як ключових складників інформаційної безпеки. Зроблено висновок, що захист духовної безпеки не передбачає ізоляції від глобальних інформаційних потоків, а потребує створення ціннісно орієнтованого комунікативного середовища, яке формує критичне мислення, етичну рефлексію та повагу до релігійного розмаїття.

Ключові слова: медіа, релігійна свідомість, інформаційне середовище, духовна безпека, цифрова культура, медіаграмотність, гіbridний вплив, цінності.

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