



Youth Spirituality In The Information Society: The Phenomenon Of Social Networks

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a philosophical and theoretical analysis of the impact of social networks and virtual space on the spiritual consciousness of youth in the context of the information society. Social networks are interpreted not merely as communication tools but as a technological phenomenon that shapes and regulates spiritual and moral processes. Drawing on M. Castells' concept of the information society, M. McLuhan's idea that "the medium is the message," Z. Bauman's theory of liquid modernity, G. Gerbner's cultivation theory, and the works of S. Turkle, G. Kellner, and D. Lyon, the study examines how visual and textual information flows influence youth identity, moral choice, and spiritual stability. The article substantiates the role of algorithmic governance, symbolic domination, and emotional manipulation as factors that weaken the spiritual immunity of young people. The findings highlight the necessity of developing critical thinking and conscious filtering of information flows in the digital environment.

KEYWORDS: Information society, youth spirituality, social networks, virtual space, spiritual consciousness, digital culture, algorithmic governance, symbolic domination, liquid modernity, media influence, critical thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Social networks and the virtual space have today become a direct and influential tool in shaping the spiritual consciousness of young people, with various messages being instilled in their minds, images and video materials often serve to change moral and ethical views without being noticed. M. Castells, in his concept of the "Information Age," notes: "modern communication networks place individuals' views at the center of social currents and connect them to the global flow of information" [1.22.]. This idea indicates that the visual and textual materials entering young people's consciousness are now being shaped not only by individual experience but also as an integral part of global spiritual processes. Thus, from the perspective of spiritual technologies, the vulnerabilities emerging in the consciousness of young people are closely linked to the weakening of their independent processing of information.

Social networks and virtual space are not only a source of information in the formation of young people's consciousness but also function as a mechanism for managing spiritual and moral processes. S. Turkle, who studied the nature of virtual communication, says: "People create new 'selves' in digital space, and this simulative experience directly influences their real-life values and emotions." [2.152.] This idea implies that the various messages, images, and video materials being instilled in the minds of young people permeate their personal identity, effectively turning them into subjects controlled by certain spiritual technologies. The main risk

in this process is that the individual is not independent in their self-perception, but rather is under the influence of algorithmic filtering and media streams.

Also, according to G. Gerbner's "cultivation theory," the constantly repeated images and messages in the mass media form a specific "normative model" of social reality itself[3.178.]. The constant portrayal of violence, consumerism, or radical ideas in the virtual space can be perceived by young people as natural reality. The spiritual consequences of this process, first and foremost, are the deformation of their value system and the replacement of humanistic standards with artificial codes. Thus, Gerbner's theory serves as a methodological basis for explaining the images being instilled in the minds of young people by social networks and visual information streams today.

Z. Bauman, in his concept of "liquid modernity," explains the unstable nature of the modern flow of information: "In the virtual space, all symbols and messages quickly become obsolete; rather than shaping personal viewpoints, they constantly demand new ones," he notes [4.95.]. The images and video materials being instilled in the minds of young people create such a "liquid" spiritual environment that stable moral values are replaced by quick emotional reactions and short-term, impactful images. As a result, young people's minds develop not long-term spiritual stability but rather a quick-consumption mindset. Based on Bauman's views, it can be concluded that virtual space technologies artificially fragment spiritual processes and subject them to rapid currents.

Also, G. Kellner notes in "Media Culture Theory" that "modern information flows control moral choices through artificial stimuli, in this process, social stereotypes intensify in the minds of young people, and independent thinking is relegated to a secondary position" [5.112.]. From such perspectives, it appears that the materials being instilled through social networks not only manipulate spiritual processes but also limit the possibilities for moral choice. As a result, it is not the independent thinking of young people that prevails, but rather views shaped by algorithmically suggested, visual, and textual messages. This undermines the freedom of spiritual processes.

The impact of messages, images, and video materials circulating on social networks and in virtual spaces on the minds of young people is actually intrinsically linked to the technological mechanisms that govern spiritual processes. The speed of information flows, the symbolic power of images, and the emotional impact of video content directly penetrate the mind, process it, and form new spiritual codes. M. McLuhan explains this phenomenon through the idea that "the medium is the message," emphasizing that "the technological medium is not merely a carrier of messages, but a force that shapes the content itself" [6.7.]. This idea is relevant for analyzing the impact of various contents being instilled in young people's minds, because they do not reshape consciousness through the message itself, but through the very technology that delivers it.

Z. Bauman, analyzing the impact of visual and textual materials on social networks through the concept of "liquid modernity," "The instantaneous information emerging in the virtual space erodes personal stability and forces a person to constantly adapt to new stimuli," he notes [7.118]. The dangerous aspect of the images and messages being instilled in the minds of young people is also that they do not strengthen personal identity but rather loosen it, resulting in moral choice becoming unstable. From this perspective, Bauman's concept helps to deeply understand the spiritual consequences of virtual space.



D. Lyon, in his theory of the “surveillance society,” focuses on a secondary yet very important aspect of social networks and virtual space. In his view, “information exchange on social networks serves not only as a means of communication but also as a new form of surveillance and control”[8.54.]. The video materials and images being instilled in the minds of young people, as part of this control process, keep their behavior, tastes, and views under algorithmic control. This deprives spiritual processes of their natural freedom, turning them into an artificially controlled environment.

Virtual space and social networks today serve as a distinctive “symbolic technology” in shaping the spiritual consciousness of young people. The complexity of this process lies in the fact that messages, images, and video materials are not mere communicative tools but have become a powerful discursive arena shaping spiritual decisions. M. McLuhan advances his famous thesis that “the medium is the message,” emphasizing that technological media fundamentally alter human spiritual perception regardless of their content [9.7.]. This idea shows that any visual or textual content circulating on social networks is not only its content but also its form that is a force dominating consciousness and spirituality. In this sense, video clips, short images, or “memes” being instilled in young people's minds become manipulative tools that subconsciously shape moral choices.

Thus, the theories of McLuhan, Bourdieu, and Lipovetsky differently interpret the impact of the messages, images, and video materials being embedded in social networks and virtual space: McLuhan regards it as the power of a technological medium to reshape spiritual consciousness, Bourdieu as a hidden form of symbolic domination, and Lipovetsky as the central mechanism of emotional and psychological manipulation. Their common point is that social networks are not just simple communication tools, but rather a technological field that reproduces and manages spiritual processes. This necessitates strengthening young people's spiritual immunity, developing critical thinking, and consciously filtering information streams.

References

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