

Editorial

The Current Rise of Artificial Intelligence and Religious Studies: Some Reflections Based on ChatGPT

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Abstract

In recent months, there has been a remarkable surge in artificial intelligence (AI) development, with ChatGPT emerging as a notable application. ChatGPT, an OpenAI chatbot, achieved an impressive milestone of 100 million monthly active users within two months of its launch in January, making it the fastest-growing consumer application to date. Experts predict that AI will significantly impact 50 percent of businesses in the next five years. ChatGPT has already showcased its versatility in the medical field, aiding in tasks like medical exam preparation and serving as an in-office scribe. As its potential in healthcare continues to expand, ChatGPT holds promising prospects for the future. Additionally, research on AI and religion is gaining traction, exploring topics such as ethical implications, integration into religious practices, analysis of religious texts, interfaith dialogue facilitation, and the theological impact of AI on creation. The increasing number of scholarly publications on the subject indicates a growing interest in exploring the complex relationship between artificial intelligence and religion.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; ChatGPT; Religion; Religious Studies; Scopus

In recent months, we have witnessed a rapid development in artificial intelligence that has captured the attention of many. One noteworthy application is ChatGPT. It has garnered significant interest from various parties. The OpenAI chatbot, ChatGPT, achieved an impressive milestone of 100 million monthly active users in just two months since its launch in January. This rapid growth establishes ChatGPT as the fastest-growing consumer application ever. Furthermore, the study forecasts that AI will have a significant impact on at least 50 percent of businesses within the next five years. ChatGPT has already demonstrated its versatility in the medical field, aiding in tasks such as passing medical exams and serving as in-office scribes. As its potential for healthcare applications continues to grow, ChatGPT holds promising prospects for the future of healthcare and other fields.

In this editorial, we explore how ChatGPT responds to "religious challenges" and compare it to the perspectives of experts as documented in various high-quality peer-reviewed academic works. To begin, the editor presents a prompt to ChatGPT, which is as follows: "Please provide me with five popular topics of research on artificial intelligence and religion". And here are ChatGPT response:

Certainly! Here are five popular topics of research on artificial intelligence (AI) and religion:

Ethical and Theological Implications: This topic explores the ethical and theological dimensions of AI, including questions about the nature of consciousness, personhood, and the moral agency of AI systems. Scholars delve into how religious traditions and beliefs can inform our understanding of the ethical implications of AI technologies.

AI and Religious Practices: This topic investigates the integration of AI technologies in religious practices. It explores how AI is being used in the context of religious rituals, ceremonies, and spiritual guidance. Researchers examine the impact of AI on religious experiences, the role of AI in religious education, and the potential benefits and challenges of AI in supporting religious practices.

AI and Religious Texts: This area of research focuses on the application of AI techniques to analyze and interpret religious texts. Scholars use natural language processing, machine learning, and other AI methods to explore religious scriptures, uncover patterns and themes, and gain new insights into the interpretation and understanding of religious texts.

AI and Interfaith Dialogue: This topic explores how AI can facilitate interfaith dialogue and understanding. It examines how AI technologies can be used to bridge cultural and religious divides, promote empathy and understanding among diverse religious communities, and foster peaceful coexistence.

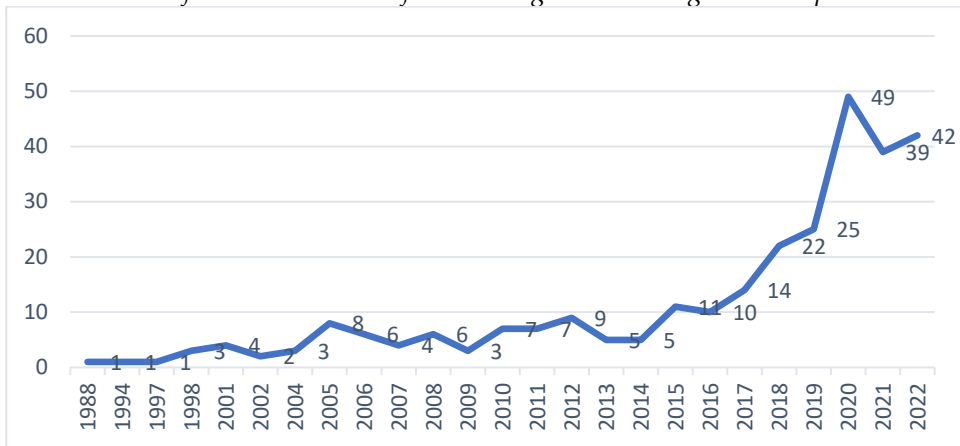
AI and Theology of Creation: This area of research examines the theological implications of AI in relation to the concept of creation. It explores how AI challenges traditional notions of human uniqueness, creation, and divine purpose. Scholars delve into philosophical and theological questions about the role of AI in creation and its implications for religious worldviews.

These topics represent some of the exciting and emerging areas of research at the intersection of artificial intelligence and religion. Researchers are actively exploring these areas to deepen our understanding of the complex relationship between technology and spirituality.

A search using the TITLE-ABS-KEY (artificial AND intelligence AND religion) in Scopus revealed the presence of 287 documents from 1988 to 2022. Figure 1 illustrates the research development on artificial intelligence and religion in the Scopus database. The available data shows a significant upward trend in recent years. This indicates the heightened interest among scholars in religious studies regarding the importance of artificial intelligence for the advancement of religious communities in the present and future.

Figure 1

Search results of documents on artificial intelligence and religion in Scopus

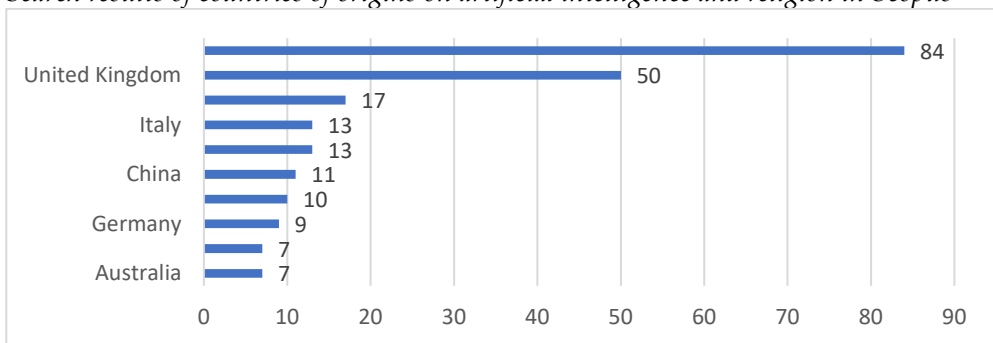


Source: Scopus, 2023.

Based on the origin of research, as shown in Figure 2, it is evident that advanced countries like the United States and the United Kingdom dominate research on artificial intelligence and religion. This is a positive indication for the development of such studies in other countries, particularly those with a strong religious character.

Figure 2

Search results of countries of origins on artificial intelligence and religion in Scopus



Source: Scopus, 2023.

The development of artificial intelligence and its relationship with religion can be considered parallel to the development of science and

technology with religion. Continuous discussions and even academic debates are normal when it comes to artificial intelligence. That is why it is necessary to expand the academic space to build a dynamic relationship between artificial intelligence and religion.

This Issue

This issue features ten articles with some authors from abroad: Ghana, Hungary, Sudan, and United Kingdom. The first article views religious responses to the Covid-19 pandemic have raised critical questions with profound socio-legal implications. This article delves into the historical dynamics among science, politics, and religion, particularly in the context of global pandemics. It examines the ethical and human rights considerations that arise during health crises and explores the role of media in addressing these issues. Additionally, the article focuses on the pastoral responsibility assumed by religious leaders during times of crisis, considering its significance in a materialistic and secular modern era. The analysis is grounded in the specific context of England, building upon the author's prior research on the British Muslim community's response to the Covid-19 pandemic while expanding to encompass broader socio-legal themes within religious responses in England.

The second article assesses the growth and influence of Christianity as a missionary religion on Islamic da'wah in Indonesia, a country with a history of Muslim resistance to colonialism initiated by the Christian community. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, primarily relying on factual observations in the field of Christianization. The impact of Christianity on Islamic da'wah was analyzed through a review of documentation and reference studies. The findings revealed that Christians utilized various methods such as occupation, politics, Western influences, poverty, diseases, weakening of consciousness, self-preparation, Muslim complacency, financial support, teaching negligence, missionary preparation, and indoctrination. These methods often led to conflicts within communities as Christians sought to assert their denominations and congregations. The study underscores the

importance of fostering healthy and productive dialogue from a fresh perspective to address conflicts, foster harmony, and promote a fair, peaceful, and innovative civilization that embraces spirituality in religious understanding.

The third article argues that ensuring the quality of research and scientific publications is a crucial consideration in the management of higher education institutions. With this in mind, this qualitative study aims to explore the policies and strategies employed to enhance research and scientific publication quality in State Islamic Religious Colleges. Data for the study was gathered through library and field research. The findings reveal that each university has established regulations aligned with the Ministry of Higher Education's provisions, including the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) and External Quality Assurance System (SPME), to manage research quality. Notably, UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, UIN Samarinda, and IAIN Palangkaraya are actively improving the quality of research and scientific publications among their lecturers by allocating 30% of BOPTN funds and implementing the LITAPDIMAS system. However, challenges remain, particularly in fully realizing the outputs and benefits of these policies due to budget absorption issues that hinder the development of a research and publication culture. Addressing this challenge requires a long-term commitment and the engagement of all stakeholders, emphasizing the need to cultivate a research and publication culture from upstream to downstream aspects.

The fourth article examines the effects of Covid-19 e-learning and teaching on students' social lives, specifically their engagement in social activities post-pandemic. With the global closure of schools and the implementation of e-learning programs during the pandemic, the study focuses on second-cycle and tertiary institutions in Accra, Ghana, using multiple sampling techniques. Through extensive interviews with students, teachers/lecturers, and parents, supplemented by personal observations, the research reveals that students' social skills suffered

negative impacts during the pandemic, leading to various forms of social exclusion upon the reopening of schools. While Ghana's introduction of e-learning helped maintain educational contact hours, the study highlights the inability of students to fully recover their social skills and foster social conviviality. Based on these findings, the paper concludes that Ghana should invest in its Triple Heritage, integrating elements from Islam, Christianity, and indigenous worldviews, to reshape its educational curriculum and promote social conviviality among students. Additionally, the article emphasizes the need for further research to explore the expansion of Ghana's cultural heritage while safeguarding the inclusion of emerging minority cultures.

The fifth article discusses Yayasan Pendidikan Islam (Yapis) di Tanah Papua contribution to education. Papua region faces significant challenges in transportation and human resource development for indigenous Papuans. Yapis has emerged as a committed institution in improving the quality of human resources in the region, offering 198 educational institutions ranging from basic to higher education. This qualitative research, conducted as a case study, gathered information through interviews, observations, and documentation studies involving Yapis administrators, educational institution managers, students, and stakeholders. The analysis employed a data cross-check method to ensure information validity. The findings highlight Yapis's strategic planning, which encompasses policies for establishing and developing educational institutions, human resource planning, the provision of attractive facilities and infrastructure, the promotion of extracurricular activities, and the optimal welfare of Yapis personnel.

The sixth article examines the evolution and significance of the hijrah movement on social media. Initially, hijrah was understood as a process of transitioning from a state of misguidance (*jahiliyyah*) towards a more Sharia-compliant lifestyle. Over time, hijrah has come to represent the transformation of individuals from being less religious to more religious (*Islami*), manifesting in various aspects such as clothing choices,

work preferences, and social relationships. The ideological propagation of the meaning of hijrah has been extensively carried out through social media platforms, evident in the greater online search volume for "hijrah" compared to other religious topics. This article investigates the interpretations and articulations of hijrah by digital activists, employing a qualitative research approach that combines critical discourse analysis with a digital hermeneutic approach. The study reveals that influential preachers with substantial social media followings play a significant role in shaping the ideologization of hijrah. Social media followers serve as both capital and means for mainstreaming discourse and ideas. The article highlights that discussions on hijrah in the realm of social media encompass not only interpretations of religious texts but also involve religious commodification. Furthermore, the dominance of conservative groups is an integral aspect of the ideological flow surrounding hijrah on social media.

This seventh article presents a comparative study of the digital media usage in two distinct religious communities in Hungary: the 777 Community (a youth Catholic community) and the Hungarian Krishna-Conscious Believers community. The research begins with a descriptive phase, documenting how these two groups depict themselves as religious communities online. Subsequently, the study explores the intersection between online and offline practices and discourses within these religious communities, focusing on rituals, community dynamics, identity formation, authority, and public presence. The investigation also examines how these religious communities shape and adapt technological platforms in alignment with their values, patterns, and the construction of their identity in the public sphere. The analysis employs a uses and gratifications approach to understand the online activities of religious internet users, followed by the Religious Social Shaping of Technology method to explore how these practices relate to their broader religious and social identities. Ultimately, the study compares the

different value-based strategies and approaches employed by the two investigated religious communities.

The eighth article delves into the examination of Islamic thought and its correlation with changes in the state structure of Indonesia during the reform era, spanning from 1998 to the present. The transformative shift in the Indonesian state order, characterized by the constitutional amendment of 1945 and increased public participation, gave rise to progressive Islam, mainstream Islam, and political Islamist thought. This article aims to explore how these three variants of Islamic thought have evolved within the changing state order of Indonesia's reformation era. The theoretical framework employed encompasses a people-centric approach, acknowledging citizens as full participants in the state, along with a socio-historical and political economy perspective. The analysis relies on political philosophy, drawing insights from official publications and decisions made by various figures and organizations that are closely associated with the changes in the state order during Indonesia's reformation era. The findings of this study indicate that these three prominent variants of Islamic thought in Indonesia have played a significant role in shaping and guiding the progression towards a just and welfare-oriented state.

Gender equality issues continue to be a subject of ongoing discussion and garner significant attention. Throughout history, women have faced numerous inequalities, perpetuated by patriarchal cultural norms, despite the increasing awareness and advocacy for gender equality. Islam, however, offers potential for gender equality within its framework. The ninth article focuses on Riffat Hassan's perspectives on realizing gender equality in the Islamic context, employing a qualitative descriptive method and narrative analysis approach. Through the analysis of various sources related to Hassan and her ideas, it is revealed that she adopts two approaches in interpreting Quranic verses: the ideal-normative and socio-historical approaches. She highlights that patriarchal culture is rooted in the belief that men were created first and

women are derived from them, rendering women as ontologically secondary. Additionally, she emphasizes that women, not men, are often portrayed as the primary agents of human fall from heaven and that women are viewed as mere instruments created for men's benefit, lacking inherent significance.

Time and space are quantities determined by mass and speed, while atoms are the smallest indivisible units of matter. The advent of the quantum revolution introduced the concept of wave-particle duality, shedding light on the nature of micro-objects and their constituents. This has implications for comparing time and the afterlife, as explored through scientific analysis and the Qur'an as a source of truth. Utilizing the library research method and analyzing connections with the Qur'an, the tenth article reveals that the Qur'an explains the comparison of worldly time and the time of the Hereafter in verses such as Al-Hajj 47 and Al-Baqarah 80. It suggests that worldly time is faster than the time of the Hereafter, drawing a parallel with quantum physics where the assumption is made that the world resembles an atom while the Hereafter represents a larger dimension, resulting in a significant difference in the perception of time. The concept of atoms is also mentioned in Qur'anic verses like Al-Zalzalah 7-8, Yunus 61, and An-Nisa 40.

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