The impacts of Metaverse on Religious concepts: An Academic Analysis

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Abstract

The rapidly evolving Metaverse, a virtual world built on VR and AR technologies, presents a unique challenge to impact religious concepts. As users interact with the Metaverse through personalized Avatar, a critical circumstance emerges, traditional religious concepts coexisting with this new digital landscape are a challenge for beliefs, worship, and financial matters. Focusing on the Hanafi school of Islamic law, this article explores the legal and religious implications of practicing faith within the Metaverse. By examining the potential tension between established religious beliefs and the modern Metaverse, the article proposes solutions and limitations to ensure this virtual world integrates harmoniously with religious values in individual and social life.
Keywords: Metaverse, Avatar, Religious Concepts, Ancient Imaginative system, Mukkalif (obligated), Ahleya (eligibility).

Introduction

The relentless march of science and technology has generated a pattern of invention that has profoundly changed the human experience. Inventions, once the stuff of science fiction, have become commonplace, seamlessly integrating into the fabric of our daily lives. Among these groundbreaking advancements stands the internet, a vast digital frontier that continues to rewrite the rules of communication and interaction. Now, nestled within this ever-evolving realm, a new concept emerges, poised to challenge our perception of reality – the Metaverse.

The Metaverse transcends the confines of a mere website or online platform. It's a nascent virtual world, a universe existing beyond the one we inhabit "meta" meaning "beyond" and "verse" signifying "universe" it means beyond the world[1]. Constructed with the magic of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), it allows users to transcend the limitations of the physical realm. Donning personalized avatars, digital representations of themselves, users navigate this immersive space and engage in a multitude of activities, blurring the lines between the physical and the virtual. Geographical boundaries dissolve, and experiences previously confined to the realm of imagination become tangible realities.

But the Metaverse's potential influence extends far beyond entertainment and leisure. It has the potential to profoundly impact every aspect of human life, both at the individual and societal level. Imagine attending a religious ceremony in a virtual cathedral with your avatar or participating in a global educational seminar from your living room. The possibilities border on the fantastical. However, alongside this boundless potential lies a significant challenge: the potential impact on the very core of our belief systems.

Religious concepts, traditionally anchored in the physical world, could be reinterpreted through the lens of the Metaverse. Beliefs, worship practices, and even social interactions related to faith might undergo a significant transformation. Can attending a virtual church service hold the same spiritual significance as one in a physical place of worship? Is performing prayers or fulfilling religious obligations like Hajj (pilgrimage) in a virtual space a valid practice within established religious frameworks? These are just some of the fascinating questions the Metaverse compels us to grapple with.

The onus of navigating this uncharted territory falls heavily on religious scholars, particularly those versed in specific legal systems like Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh). Determining whether the Metaverse is a fully realized reality or a concept still in its formative stages (Fiqh Taqderi) becomes crucial. Just as historical inventions have been evaluated through the lens of Sharia rulings, the Metaverse too requires a similar scholarly examination. This will ensure that religious values are not compromised in the face of rapid technological advancement.

The emergence of the Metaverse also compels us to revisit the history of the "imaginative system." From the philosophical contemplations of the Sophists in ancient Greece to the Romantic movement in literature, the power of imagination has captivated humanity throughout history. This very system, once used to envision utopian worlds, provided the foundation for the Metaverse's development. Interestingly, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a renowned Muslim reformer, even used the term "power of imagination" to critique the concept of miracles.

However, the power of imagination, while a potent tool, can also be a double-

edged sword. The rise of idolatry, for instance, can be traced back to a reliance on imaginative interpretations of the divine. Herein lies the central challenge: how can we harness the power of the Metaverse for positive ends while mitigating potential pitfalls related to religious beliefs and practices?

This exploration of the Metaverse is not just an intellectual exercise. It's a call for a multi-pronged approach. A scientific and research-driven evaluation of this groundbreaking technology is essential. We need to understand its potential impact on not only religious concepts but also on social structures, psychological well-being, and even the very definition of reality itself.

Furthermore, open dialogue between religious scholars, technologists, and ethicists is crucial. By fostering a collaborative environment, we can ensure that technological advancement adheres to established moral and religious frameworks. This necessitates a delicate balancing act – embracing innovation while safeguarding the core tenets of our faiths.

Ultimately, the Metaverse presents both opportunities and challenges. As we stand at the precipice of this transformative new world, it's imperative that we approach it with a sense of cautious optimism. By fostering collaboration, critical thinking, and a commitment to upholding our values, we can ensure that the Metaverse becomes a force for positive change, enriching our lives while remaining grounded in the principles that guide us.

Research Questions:

How relevant are ancient imaginative concepts and modern Metaverse?

How does Metaverse affect religious concepts?

What is the impact of Metaverse on individual and collective life in contemporary times and their solution in the light of Sharia?#

Ancient Imaginative Concepts:

Everything in the mortal world begins with a thought. Thought is the initial step toward the existence of anything; action is impossible without it. When something is frequently thought about, it is stored in the unconscious, and the unconscious begins to act on that concept, whether it is good or bad. Thoughts begin to enter the unconscious as early as childhood. The surrounding environment has a significant role in this process. Parents, teachers, friends, and the media all play a significant part in this matter. The mind requires programming, which can take the form of either good or negative beliefs. This programming influences thoughts about life. Man can reach the highest points in the sky and the deepest depths of the earth with a certain style of thinking.It is an unseen thread that enslaves the intellect and awareness, and the human body submits to this intellect and consciousness, preferring mental enslavement. When a person trains an elephant's infant, he first attaches it to a chain. The elephant cub pulls the chain but quickly understands that it cannot be removed. As the elephant grows, they reduce the chain and eventually bind it with a rope. But all he can think about is how he's linked to a heavy chain that he can't escape. Actually, he can physically break it, but emotionally, he is imprisoned. His ability to imagine prevents him from fleeing.

A person's current life reflects his previous thoughts. Reality emerges from the mind. By putting this hypothetical energy into action, new scientific and technological breakthroughs emerge, as if the significance of imagined power could not be disputed.

Definition of Imagination:

In Arabic the words (الخَيَال) and (التّخيّل) are being used. According to these words the definition of imagination will be;

الخَيَال : أصله الصّورة المجرّدة المتصوّرة كالصّورة المتصوّرة في المنام ، وفي المرآة وفي القلب بعيد غيبوبة المرئيّ ، ثم تستعمل في صورة كلّ أمر متصوّر ، وفي كلّ شخص دقيق يجري مجرى الخيال ، والتّخييل : تصوير خيال الشيء في النّفس ، والتّخيّل : تصوّر ذلك ، وخلت بمعنى ظننت ، يقال اعتبارا بتصوّر خيال المظنون. 2

It means the form of the abstract. Such as the form that appears in a dream or vision or in the absence of someone, it is conceived in the heart. Then it applies to everything that is conceived, and every thin person who has an idea and imagination. The meaning of imagination is to establish a thought of something in oneself, and the meaning of imagination is to establish such a concept on its own.

In Merriam Webster Dictionary it is defined as.

The act or power of forming a mental image of something does not present to the senses or never wholly perceived.[3]

Creativity springs from imagination, which connects the abstract and the concrete. It starts as shapeless visions, like those in dreams or when thinking deeply about someone absent. These abstract notions then transform into a way to grasp any concept or detailed idea that exists solely within the mind. The Arabic text even associates imagination with the heart, highlighting its connection to both emotions and the source of our thoughts.

The reach of imagination extends far and wide. It encompasses every conceived idea, every intricate detail a person brings to life through their mind's eye. The passage offers two related terms: "Al-Khayāl" which embodies the very faculty of imagination itself, and "Takhyīl." These can be understood as the act of solidifying a thought or concept within oneself, the process of giving form to an abstract idea. Ultimately, imagination is the power to create mental images, to envision what isn't physically present or fully grasped yet. This ability allows us to explore possibilities beyond the limitations of our immediate surroundings.

The History of Imaginative Concepts:

The history of imaginative ideas is as old as the creation of humanity. When Allah Almighty expressed to the angels the intention of creating Adam (peace be upon him), the angels were surprised at this creation.

قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ 4

They said, will you create there one who will separate disorder on the earth and cause bloodshed.[5]

Many of the reasons for this condition of angels have been described by commentators. One of the reasons is stated by Imam Fakhr-ud-Din Razi :

فثبت أنّهم قالوه عن الاستنباط والظن والقدح في الغير على سبيل الظن 6

''Therefore, it is proved that they said it from their own imagination, and accused others without any evidence.''

This delves into a unique view of imagination, suggesting it might be as inherent to humanity as our very existence. The Quranic verse describes the angels' apprehension about creating humans. Islamic scholar Imam Razi interprets this as stemming from the angels' own imagination, essentially suspecting humans of negativity without proof. This implies that imagination, even with its capacity for negativity, might be a cornerstone of the human condition. In essence, the creation of humans could be seen as the dawn of imagination, both in its positive and negative forms.

In fact, idolatry was started by using the power of imagination. Hazrat Shah Waliullah (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

> "*After the death of Adam (peace be upon him), when Sheth (peace be upon him) became a prophet according to his will and became a prophet by the revelation of Allah, according to some historians, the foundation of imagery was established at the same time and for some it started after the death of Hazrat Idris (peace be upon him). Satan came to the people in human form and said, "I have seen the bright and blessed form of Hazrat Idris (peace be upon him) and I have also reached perfection in the painting, if there is a sign, I will make a picture of the Holy Prophet so that this picture should be kept safely in his isolation room and a mirror with the same dimension should be placed on it and preached among the people. It should be said that they came to this place to visit him, so people used to come there and bring nazar and niaz and see the shape of this picture, they used to express their interest and passion. "*[7]

It is as if the first pictures of holy beings were made in the imagination due to the power of imagination and then gradually these pictures became the cause of regular idolatry. They were given the status of creator and owner by imagining everything.

In Greece, at the beginning of the 5th century BC, a group of philosophers arose under the name of The Sophists. They offered many new things. They were regular professional philosophers and charged the price for teaching their ideas. David Cannon wrote in his book Sophistic Method and Practice:

> *''They offer their instruction for fees. Their motive is to make money, and they target wealthy and naive Athenian youths. In short, sophists are unethical as well as incompetent.''*[8]

The Sophists were the first to deny the facts and realities of things and laid the foundation for idealism. Sa'dud din Taftazani wrote this in his famous book Sharh al Aqa'd Nasfia;

<div dir="rtl">

حقائق الأشياء ثابتة، والعلم بها متحقق، خلافا للسفسطائية [9]

</div>

''The realities of things are proven, and the facts of the knowledge are established, as opposed to the Sophists.''
He explained regarding this;

<div dir="rtl">

فإنَّ منهم مَنْ ينكر حقائق الأشياء، ويزعم أنها أوهام وخيالات باطلة[10]

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''Some of them deny the realities of things and think that these are all

illusory things and false thoughts.''

The above discussion proves that imaginative ideas or idealism were initiated by the Sophists and took the mind away from the realities of the things.

Introduction to the Metaverse:

The concept of the Metaverse refers to a virtual universe or interconnected network of digital spaces that are accessed through various devices, enabling users to interact with each other and their surroundings in real or simulated time. It is a collective virtual shared space that combines elements of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), blockchain, artificial intelligence (AI), and other emerging technologies.[11]

The Metaverse is the post-reality universe, a perpetual and persistent multiuser environment merging physical reality with digital virtuality. It is based on the convergence of technologies that enable multisensory interactions with virtual environments, digital objects, and people such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Hence, the Metaverse is an interconnected web of social, networked immersive environments in persistent multiuser platforms. It enables seamless embodied user communication in real-time and dynamic interactions with digital artifacts. Its first iteration was a web of virtual worlds where avatars were able to teleport among them. The contemporary iteration of the Metaverse features social, immersive VR platforms compatible with massive multiplayer online video games, open game worlds and AR collaborative spaces.[12]

The term "metaverse" was first put forward by Neil Stephenson in his science fiction novel named "Snow Crash" in 1992. In this novel, the metaverse is known as a computer-generated universe parallel to the real world, where the users can enter as avatars by putting on goggles and earphones and connecting to the terminal.[13]

So, the Metaverse is a vast, interconnected network of virtual spaces accessed through devices, allowing users to interact in real or simulated time. It combines elements like virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI), essentially creating a persistent virtual world where physical and digital realities merge. This concept isn't entirely new; the term itself was coined by science fiction author Neal Stephenson in his 1992 novel "Snow Crash," where it was depicted as a virtual world accessed through special equipment. Today's Metaverse utilizes technologies like VR and AR to enable real-time communication and interaction with digital environments and objects.

Impacts of the Metaverse on the Fundamental Beliefs:

The accuracy of faith depends on the accuracy of beliefs. Monotheism is the foundation of Islam; monotheism is the first duty that every Muslim is obliged to accept with all his heart and soul. Without it, no human being can enter the realm of Islam. It is the thing due to which there are wars between Muslims and disbelievers, and countless Muslims sacrificed their lives for it.

Monotheism is the basic duty that differentiates between Islam and disbelief. monotheism is the only thing that, if it is accepted and its requirements are fulfilled and death comes upon it, then Allah has promised paradise on it, and if it is not accepted, then Allah has promised hell on it. The importance of monotheism is proved by these Verses and Hadith.

وَاِلٰهُكُمْ اِلٰهٌ وَّاحِدٌ، لَآ اِلٰهَ اِلَّا هُوَالرَّحْمٰنُ الرَّحِيْمُ [14]

Your god is one God: There is no god but He, the All-Merciful, the Very Merciful[15].

فَاِلٰهُكُمْ اِلٰهٌ وَّاحِدٌ فَلَهٗ اَسْلِمُوْا [16]

So, your God is One God. Therefore, to Him alone you must submit.[17]

فَلَا تَدْعُ مَعَ اللهِ اِلٰهًا اٰخَرَ فَتَكُوْنَ مِنَ الْمُعَذَّبِيْنَ [18]

So do not invoke any other god along with Allah, otherwise you will be among those who are to be punished[19].

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ ﷺ: ''مَنْ مَاتَ وَهُوَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللهُ، دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ'' [20]

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said. He who died knowing (fully well) that there is no god but Allah entered Paradise.

Using modern technology, Christianity is propagating its religion. Churches were formed in the metaverse a long time ago and invited everyone to come to their church and listen to their teachings. When someone's Avatar enters the church, they baptize him and give him the teachings of the Bible.[21] Many churches are doing this, and among all of them, some are so famous. As,

Life. Church has launched services in the metaverse, allowing people to attend virtually and even participate in small group discussions.[22]

VR MMO Church is a virtual church community that exists entirely in the metaverse.[23]

Cornerstone Church (Sioux Falls, South Dakota):
They've established a virtual campus within the metaverse platform called "The Reach." This allows them to host services, small groups, and even virtual baptisms.[24]

In this regard, they are presenting their mission in this way.
''Our primary goal of hosting a service in the metaverse isn't to take people out of the physical world and bring them into the metaverse. We are creatively leveraging these new platforms to draw people toward Jesus…people who might never hear about Him via physical church experience.''[25]

Obviously, their mission in metaverse is to Invite the people in the church for listening the Bible's teaching. Their Jesus teachings and to impress them by their religion. Metaverse is open place, and everything is possible in this because it is free

from all boundaries and limitations.This technology is impacting almost all religions and bringing challenges to them.

Sreevas Sahasranamam a Professor at the University of Glasgow is describing this as;

> *"Imagine getting Geetopadesha straight from Lord Krishna. No, I am not talking about being on a Sci-Fi time machine to take me back in time to the Kurukshetra war. Rather, I am talking about being in my living room, donning the role of Arjuna, seeking answers to my internal battles through Geetopadesha from Lord Krishna's avatar on a Ray-Ban Meta glass."[26]*

Essentially, it ponders the possibility of technology enhancing religious experiences. Imagine having a virtual Lord Krishna answer your doubts and questions, just like Arjuna did, to help you navigate your own internal struggles.Considering the preceding discussion, Muslims must bear in mind the problematic conditions that exist in the metaverse.

The Metaverse and Worshipping:

The consumer's avatar participates in any activity in the metaverse. But with the help of modern tools, consumer may not only control his avatar but also be influenced by the avatar's actions.The law of Sharia is that its addressee is the *Mukallaf* (obligated individual), not any created fictional avatar. There is a direct relationship between the individual and their religious obligations. An avatar is not *Mukallaf* (obligated individual). It is an imaginative body that shaped by rays.

The concept regarding the *Mukallaf* (obligated individual) is mentioned below.

ذهب جمهور الفقهاء إلى أن مناط التكليف في الإنسان هو البلوغ وليس التمييز، وأن الصبي المميز لا يجب عليه شيء من الواجبات ولا يعاقب بترك شيء منها، أو بفعل شيء من المحرمات في الآخرة؛ لقوله ﷺ: رفع القلم عن ثلاثة عن النائم حتى يستيقظ وعن الصبي حتى يحتلم وعن المجنون حتى يفيق [27]

The majority of Islamic jurists (fuqaha) hold the view that the basis of obligation (taklif) for a human being is puberty (bulugh), not discernment (tamyees). This means that a discerning child (sabi mummayyiz) is not obligated to perform any of the religious duties, nor is he punished for neglecting them or committing any of the forbidden acts (maharim) in the hereafter. This is based on the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

> "*The pen is lifted from three: from the sleeper until he wakes up, from the child until he reaches puberty, and from the insane person until he regains his sanity.*"

An avatar, or digital depiction of a human in the Metaverse, is not a Mukallaf (obligated individual). It is a fictitious creation incapable of fulfilling Sharia's requirements. However, an avatar's behaviors and experiences can have an impact on the individual's real-world behavior.As humans explore

the Metaverse, it is critical to distinguish between avatars and Mukallaf (obligated individual). While avatars themselves may not be subject to Sharia, their impact on a person's conduct must be carefully considered. Individuals can explore the Metaverse while adhering to Sharia's principles of morality, ethics, and personal responsibility, fulfilling their religious responsibilities and establishing a peaceful virtual environment.

Furthermore, eligibility (Ahleya) is a key notion in Sharia law that describes a person's ability to fulfill responsibilities and undertake acts of worship. An avatar, which is a computer image of a person in the Metaverse, lacks this necessary attribute. Avatars do not have the same cognitive powers, legal standing, or moral compass as humans, making them unsuitable to completely appreciate and follow Sharia's principles.

أهلية الإنسان للشيء صلاحيته لصدور ذلك الشيء وطلبه منه وهي في لسان الشرع عبارة عن صلاحيته لوجوب

الحقوق المشروعة له وعليه وهي الأمانة التي أخبر الله عز وجل بحمل الإنسان إياها بقوله: {وَحَمَلَهَا الْأِنْسَانُ} 28

The eligibility of a person for something is their competence to issue that thing and to demand it from him. In the terminology of Sharia, it refers to his competence for the obligation of legitimate rights for him and against him. It is the trust that Allah Almighty has informed man of carrying it by His saying: {وَحَمَلَهَا الْأِنْسَانُ}and man picked it up.

So, performing any worship in metaverse through avatar is not permissible and lawful. Due to the lack of eligibility in avatars, committing acts of worship through them is prohibited under Sharia law. Worship is a holy and intensely personal effort that demands an individual's deliberate intention, understanding, and commitment. Avatars without these attributes are unable to properly engage in acts of worship, rendering such deeds meaningless in terms of spiritual value and legality. It is imperative that people understand the restrictions of avatars and the significance of abiding by Sharia law while they explore the Metaverse. While avatars provide unique experiences, they cannot replace an individual's direct and genuine relationship to their religious duties. Individuals can navigate the Metaverse while keeping their spiritual integrity and carrying out their religious responsibilities in accordance with Sharia law by adhering to the concepts of eligibility, purpose, and personal responsibilities.

Conclusion:
1. The findings of this research provide strong evidence to support the notion that
2. The Metaverse is a vast network of interconnected virtual spaces accessed through devices like Virtual Reality headsets.
3. It allows users to interact with each other and their surroundings in real or simulated time, blurring the lines between physical and digital reality.
4. Metaverse is a practical form of an ancient imaginative system.

Imagination is a powerful tool that can be used for good or bad.

5. The history of imagination is filled with both positive and negative examples, such as the creation of idolatry.

6. The Metaverse raises concerns for the Islamic concept, where faith is based on beliefs.

7. The blurring of the barriers between reality and the virtual world has the potential to undermine fundamental concepts.

8. Avatars in the Metaverse are not considered "obligated individuals "*(Mukallaf)* under Sharia law. This means they cannot fulfill religious obligations or be held accountable for them.

9. An avatar's actions and experiences can still influence a person's real-world behavior. It's important to be mindful of this influence and ensure it aligns with Sharia principles.

10. Eligibility *(Ahleya)*, the ability to fulfill responsibilities, is another key concept in Sharia law. Avatars lack this eligibility and cannot truly understand or follow Sharia's requirements.

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