A new decade for social changes
The manifestation of the religiosity of older people through social media during the pandemic period

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Abstract. The analysis of the manifestation of the religiosity of the elderly during the pandemic through social networks represents the object of this paper. In order to achieve the purpose of the research carried out involved the use of qualitative research methods the semi-structured interview and the case study, with the objective of having an overall view on this subject, having as a basis the revision of the works in international databases so as to obtain as much truthful information as possible for the scientific approach. In carrying out the qualitative research, 150 elderly people from Romania participated and the case study was carried out in Constanta because the Orthodox Church had an intense activity during the online pandemic. Different understandings of religion, church, and community were analyzed during a pandemic period and support the value of an approach that places debates born in the context of historical precedent, personal experience, and theoretical approaches to networks, communities, religion, and social media.

Keywords. Elderly, pandemic, religion, social media,

1. Introduction
Transcencultural empirical research tells us, whether we look at the size of religious practice, institutional affiliation or subjective appreciation, that Romania is one of the most religious countries in Europe. After decades of communism and ideological atheism, Romania’s population turns out to be strongly oriented toward religion. Like other States in the South-East European area, Romania has a religious revival after the fall of communism, which contrasts sharply with the situation in other European States, which are facing the marginalization of the church institution and the religious phenomenon. As in other post-communist societies, religion in Romania becomes an important factor in shaping the public sphere of life [1].

2. General informations
An important problem facing modern society today is the aging of the world’s population, attributed to the decrease in birth rates and high mortality among adults, and Romania is part of this overall picture, facing worrying demographic changes that have medium and long-term implications on demographic, social, and economic levels. Active aging aims to eliminate age-based discrimination and to raise awareness of the diversity of needs of older people, and is a constant process to optimize opportunities to remain in good health,
participation and security in order to enhance quality of life throughout aging, enabling older people to maintain good psychic, social and mental potential throughout their lives and to engage in society according to their needs, desires and capacities [2].

The COVID 19 pandemic, which began in early 2020, has particularly affected people over the age of 65. Several studies have shown that the older generation is most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because it is the most vulnerable group both in terms of high risk of infection and death, and the degree of social exclusion due to social distance and self-isolation [3], discrimination and racist attitudes related to age [4].

Older people are often vulnerable: some are vulnerable from many points of view, such as fragility or disability, belonging to an ethnic or religious minority. In addition, vulnerable elderly people may be at risk of abuse, such as neglect or physical or psychological violence. The high price paid by vulnerable elderly people during the pandemic underlines the importance of protecting their autonomy, health and living conditions.

Technological developments can increase the vulnerability of older people, for example if they are less familiar with digital tools or feel less comfortable using them, or if they have limited access to digital technologies.

The post-modern society is dependent on digital technology that has actually changed the world. Life is becoming more and more digitized with the “monopoly of the Internet.” Thus, human relationships enter a new stage of multidimensional communication, and social interactions unfold in a virtual world that overlaps with the real one and conceals it.

In recent years around the world, the number of people using at least one of the channels of online communication, social interaction and the propagation or search of easily accessible information (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Youtube, TikTok) has increased. Everything is interesting because there is the possibility of uncensored expression, socialization and the creation of new friends [5].

However, an increased number of elderly people in Romania want to benefit from the advantages of social networks such as fast communication, viewing various films, even religious services.

The use of telephone and internet communication through video conferencing can make older people feel integrated and reduce the boredom and loneliness that comes with social isolation and make them feel emotionally connected if in these difficult times.

In order to survive unprecedented conditions, the elderly developed coping mechanisms adaptive to the crisis situations generated [6], one of which was religious coping.

Socio-human sciences (psychology, pedagogy, anthropology, ethnology, history, sociology) are increasingly concerned with religion and religiosity. To be or not to be religious are but two existential situations assumed by the individual. Thus, the interest in man’s religiosity, in his knowledge of his spiritual universe, can only contribute to the general connoviousness of man, as Mircea Eliade said [7]: religiosity extends over a very broad field: From the pole, the category of the non-religious, the (relative) arylios to the category of the (relative) religious. It has a dynamic character in that it takes place throughout the life of the individual, being part of the general process of identity formation and socialization [8]. Religiosity is subject to a reflective process, processing traditional transmitted religious elements, inherited from one generation to another, but at the same time a constructive process, undergoing transformations and disvotions through learning, combining, exploring. Whether it is socialization in the family or in the school, in the group and in the community, at the intersection with the belonging environments, the individual forms his psycho-social personality, which can also be religious. Thus, the individual interacts with the religious
throughout his life, and the experience of the religious can have dominant aspects. Religiosity is a complex phenomenon, hardly measurable and quantifiable. In the definition of religiosity, an extended perspective is increasingly used. This refers to a complementary approach of methods and models: Theoretical or empirical, from a multidimensional perspective. In addressing the issue of religiosity, it is important to refer to the current social context. The religious landscape of the present day also has its mark on religiosity. The religious load of profane elements (consumption, media, music), the non-obligation to belong to a church as an institution, the crisis of meaning, the crisis of values, the crisis of orientation develops a new type of religiosity, or weakens the classic, consecrated one. Religion is present as before, but it seeks new ways, new forms of manifestation.

3. Methodological design of research

The purpose of the study is to analyze the manifestation of the religiosity of older people during the pandemic through social networks. In order to achieve the purpose of the research carried out involved the use of qualitative research methods the semi-structured interview and the case study, with the objective of having an overall view on this subject, having as a basis the revision of the works in international databases so as to obtain as much truthful information as possible for the scientific approach.

The interview is a qualitative research method through which we try to obtain as consistent information as possible from each interviewee. Thus, the interview is an indirect method, in which we do not have access to the phenomenon studied and we try to obtain the necessary data by asking people who have certain knowledge about the phenomenon we are interested in called interviewees. The purpose of the interview technique is to provide additional and complementary data on the topic being studied, which will then be combined with data obtained through other investigative techniques in order to formulate conclusions about the investigated universe.

A case study is an intensive analysis of a single case. Thus, this design focuses on the complexity and particular nature of the selected case. The treatment of the subject in the case study should be as thorough as possible. In this regard, the researcher focuses on the unique aspects of the subject, which creates a fundamental distinction from the above projections in the sense that they focused on generalizing the results.

Case study is the most appropriate method when we want a full and in-depth investigation of a subject, but also of the context in which it is carried out.

As regards the determination of the size and structure of the population investigated for qualitative research, The size of the investigated population was 150 elderly people from all over Romania, who are both beneficiaries of social services or not. The interviews were conducted face to face between January and June 2022.

The case study is carried out in Constanța County because the Orthodox Church had an intense activity during the online pandemic.

4. Analysis of results

On number of 150 seniors aged 61 to 99 responded to the interview, of the 150 participants in the interview, 62% are women and almost 38% men, and in terms of the marital status of the elderly, 66% are widows, 20% are married, 12% are divorced and the rest have never been married. The county where most of the older people who participate in the interview live is Argeș, followed by Constanța, Timis, Mureș, Alba, Covasna, Salaj, Buzau, Tulcea, Bacau, Suceava, Vrancea, Hunedoara, Dâmbovița, Cluj, Botosani and Ilfov in urban areas 55%
and 45% in rural areas. The level of education of seniors is balanced: 13.3% have higher education, 20% have primary education, 32% have general education and 34% have secondary education. As regards the professions of seniors, there is a very diverse range of people who are represented, but most of them said they are retired. When asked whether they benefit from social services, 77% of respondents said they are beneficiaries of social services.

The answers to the question of how you are feeling at the moment are very varied, with respondents expressing various feelings: “Beheaded, thoughtful” (male), “balanced” (male), “sad, angry,” abandoned by my daughter” (male), “weak and powerless” (female), “somewhat more optimistic, confident” (male), “sometimes cheerful, sometimes sad” (male) and a wide range of states and feelings: “i feel at peace with myself and the world” (female), “i feel very good, we play remi, i walk” (female), “I feel safe” (woman), “I am angry with everyone around me” (woman), “I am afraid of war and hunger” (man), “scared of price increases” (woman), “I am calm” (woman), “I have days when I am calm and other days when I worry about my son in Canada” (woman).

The life of the elderly is seen as: “Acceptable” (woman), “I have an active life and I like it” (man), “here in the home is good, I have a quiet life” (female, beneficiary), “I have a sad life, no one is looking for me” (woman), “I am satisfied with my life” (woman), “a little disordered” (woman), “At peace with the present situation” (woman), “life is hard, I feel powerless” (woman), “I really feel that I am living, thank God, everything is fine” (woman). And among the shortcomings are: “I lack health” (woman), “accompaniment and communication with other people” (woman), “I want to go home and live with my daughter” (woman), “the deceased child” (man), “I miss a lot, from food to children left the country” (woman), “I lack activities” (woman), “I miss going out” (woman), “I miss my youth, the rest is fine” (woman), “the security of tomorrow” (man).

Before the outbreak, the vast majority of older people went to day care centers for the elderly, religious activities, travel, and many other activities. Among the daily activities carried out by the older people participating in the interview are: “I wake up, I pray, I take my medicine, I make the fire (when it is cold outside), I listen to the news on the radio, the caretaker comes and brings me water, she does my shopping, she helps me shake and sweep, I wash clothes (once a week), in the meantime, we socialize for about an hour, he informs me of some things that i do not hear well, he has patience with me, i repeat in the afternoon the medical treatment from the doctor (the caregiver puts them in different boxes), i eat, sometimes socialize with the neighbors, i do my evening prayer, i read newspapers, go to bed, eat in the morning, then cook for lunch, clean up, watch a movie, go to my neighbor, make the market, eat, listen to popular music and religious service, go out often and smoke on the balcony. i do the exercises i can do, i go to church, i talk to my colleagues in the center and the employees.”

The frequency with which elderly people go out into the community and participate in Community activities varies depending on their health, most often they go shopping and church, and monthly to the doctor after prescriptions or when needed, and in the theater, opera or city hall very rarely: “church weekly, family doctor once a year, city hall once a year, in the park weekly. Theater and opera almost no shopping at 2-3 days’ (woman), “at church less often, at the doctor at 3 months, at the mayor’s office once a year, in the park several times a week, opera not at all, theater not at all, shopping every time needed” (man), “church once a month, family doctor once a month, i have not been to the city hall for many years, the caretaker goes and pays my taxes, i have not been shopping for more than 7 years, so the caretaker takes care of it, before i paid someone and helped me” (woman), “i didn’t go to church during the pandemic and the rest i didn’t need, i can’t go shopping because it’s harder to walk but i’m helped” (woman) “the
priest comes monthly or when we need, weekly the doctor, daily the nurse, i can't go outside the center.

Free time is spent by the elderly watching various programs on TV, spending time on social networks, outdoor walks, gardening “activities in the garden, going out on the street on the bench in front of the house, socializing with neighbors, watching TV” (woman), “watching jobs on Facebook, I make bead necklaces, go to the gym, go to the club hall, walk” (woman), “I watch TV, go out with my neighbor, visit some second hands” (woman), “I watch TV, watch YouTube at jobs, walk, socialize on Facebook” (woman), “I watch jobs on YouTube, go to the choir and the cemetery” (woman), “I go to the park, summer to the beach and socialize with people a lot” (woman).

Analyzing the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic on the elderly in our country the main problems they faced during this period we note the contact of the virus, I was sick of COVID” (Alba, woman), restrictions imposed by the authorities, wearing the protective mask, restricting the exit from the house, stress due to the idea of mandatory vaccination “those statements when they were, i had nowhere to get them, then with the doctor, he didn’t want to receive me” (woman), lack of personal freedoms, lack of personal ties “we were totally isolated from our loved ones” (woman).

The coronavirus pandemic has brought changes in the lives of older people such as “I became more careful” (woman), “I became more withdrawn and reduced social contacts” (woman), “I was very stressed and annoyed” (man), “i didn’t go to the clinic for a while and i didn’t get visits for a while” (woman), “i couldn’t go to the places i used to go to before” (man).

The feelings experienced by the elderly during the pandemic were varied and contradictory: Fear, fear, anxiety, anxiety, sadness, longing, anger, wonder: “initially i was scared, then i convinced myself” (man), “i was afraid for the family” (woman), the activities they performed to feel better were: “i watched religious services on the internet and prayed, read and complete integrals, wrote poems” (man), “i’ve talked to everyone around me” (woman), “i’ve had a few sessions with a psychologist to get through the moment” (woman), “i went outside, i’ve worked with the employees of the center” (man), “i’ve spent more time with my family” (woman), “i’ve watched religious services and internet entertainment shows” (woman), “i talked more on the phone with the family, i asked for help from the staff at the dorm” (woman), “I prayed” (woman), “i bought a tablet and a high-performance phone with which i can see the jobs and see my children and grandchildren” (woman). As a result, the technology was used by the elderly to view jobs, shows, tutorials, and also helped maintain relationships with those close to them, “I talked on tablet video and phone with family and friends” (woman), “I talk on What-App with my children” (woman).

Because the pandemic has isolated older people in homes, many older people have found peace and comfort in religious services.

Many churches were closed during the pandemic, but spiritual leaders around the world adapted and found a solution for believers: Live transmission of religious services. The number of religious institutions offering such services has increased over the past decade, but many believers doubt that these options can truly recreate the experience of attending services in places of worship. But as the coronavirus pandemic forced companies to find solutions for employees to work from home, so did religious gatherings move online.

The spread of the virus has affected people of all religions around the world. Beyond live broadcasting, places of worship around the world have used several strategies to adapt to the coronavirus crisis and keep the faith alive.
With the pandemic, church services began to be broadcast online, so several believers outside the episcopate began to follow them, so daily, the Archdiocese of Tomis transmitted online on social networks the Divine Liturgy, akatist, officiated by the Archbishop of Tomis, he also had an interactive weekly dialog program with the faithful through which he communicated and prayed with the faithful, especially the elderly.

Social support from a religious person in the religious community and the development of a relationship with God are also essential components of coping [9]. Religion can provide a resource that helps in seeking meaning and overcoming loneliness. Belief in the divine gives the individual a philosophy of life and a whole range of attitudes, values, and ideas that help him interpret and understand himself. At the same time, churches offer a social and community sense of integration, very well correlated with a sense of personal well-being. Typically, churches also provide older members with a wide range of social activities that tend to attract the older person to other people and reduce the possibility of social isolation and loneliness [10].

5. Discussions

Walking through the park, meeting friends, participating in activities in day centers and senior clubs, and attending religious services were the main concerns of older people before the pandemic, but during lockdown and quarantine became impossible to achieve. Loneliness and isolation have been shown to have had a significant impact on older people both emotionally and physically.

Romania is among the most religious countries in the EU, with over 80% of its population identifying as an Orthodox Christian [11]. While most major religions and other Christian denominations in Europe have rapidly announced measures in response to the pandemic. European Orthodox churches were among the slowest in responding, partly because of their extremely conservative doctrines.

Social involvement through religious activities can be another means of social support in stressful situations caused by the pandemic. The religious activity of the elderly is a mental resource that provides a framework for understanding common problems such as illness, death, and loss. This helps them become receptive to these problems [12]. It functions as an unofficial social support variable that helps older people integrate thoughts and overcome personal problems. Since religious activity is closely related to ego integrity and depression in the elderly, these factors should be considered together [13].

During periods of social isolation, there were some ways to help religious seniors use their faith to ease their anxiety during this COVID-19 pandemic, such as spending time praying, listening to religious services, or caring for neighbors, meeting their emotional/physical needs there is no better way to reduce anxiety and social isolation than by reaching out a helping hand to other people in need [14].

Older people use technology less, especially virtual technology, and are less motivated to learn new technology-related skills. The main reason for the poor use of technology among older people is not the lack of access to technology or connectivity, but rather the lower expectations that are attributed to older people in terms of using technology and taking risks due to lack of knowledge [15]. Technology is essential in long-term social distancing to meet psychological needs and access to services [16].
6. Conclusions

The quarantine revealed technological opportunities that had previously been unnoticed by religious communities. The response of churches to the challenges presented by the global pandemic COVID-19 invited a closer examination of the relationships between virtual and embodied religious communities in a time of social distancing. The speed and extent of church closures at the beginning of the pandemic highlighted the practical, emotional and spiritual responses to the relationship between church and people, which is increasingly dominated by online interactions. Such a seismic shift in social culture opens up the possibility and challenges of a new understanding of belonging and participation in a religious community.

Given its liturgical, pastoral and sacramental significance, Easter 2020 was an extremely busy moment for the relationship between Christian churches and believers, as well as between religious worship and social media. This paper analyzed different understandings of religion, church, and community during a pandemic period, and supports the value of an approach that places debates born in the context of historical precedent, personal experience, and theoretical approaches to networks, communities, and communities. Religion and social media and their impact on the manifestation of the religiosity of elderly people in Romania through social networks.

References