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## Ontological Investigation of the Role of Internet in Religious Education

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### Abstract

The aim of the present study is to investigate the role of Internet in the religious education. For this purpose religious education is considered as the process in which belief, commitment, and worship-related, social and moral behaviors of the learner are formed and developed in an explanatory, critical, and passionate procedure and through using the criteria of evaluating accuracy or inaccuracy of beliefs, commitments, and actions. The applied research methods are hermeneutic phenomenology with qualitative content analysis. Based on the findings of the study the ontological characteristics of virtual experience in relation to face to face experience are: Distantiation of virtual experience; Collapse of place and time borders in virtual experience; Development of virtual relationship; and Expansion of availability to Technological Information. Then the bottlenecks or horizons of the mentioned ontological characteristics in the development of the mentioned characteristics for religious education is analyzed. Internet, for example, has eliminated the limitations caused by place and time as well as the hierarchical authority of teacher in information transfer in the process of religious education; it has provided a more expanded and more liberated context for the exchange of religious ideas and beliefs through disseminating virtual relationships. On the other hand and since in the virtual education there is no complete bodily presence and sensational experience, the development of such aspects like internal motivation, belief, internal experience, internal commitment and action faces some shortcomings. Finally some practical implications for applying internet in religious education are offered.

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### 1. Introduction

With reference to the significance of education and the events and alteration it brings to human life, and also due to the increasing expansion of technology particularly internet in the education, it is necessary to investigate role and consequences of technology in the domain of education from different views including philosophical view. Relevant to this issue, some of the researchers and thinkers have investigated technology, Information Technology as well as virtual education from a philosophical point of view (for example: Heidegger, 1977; Dreyfus, 2009; Borgman, 1999; Prosser and Ward, 2000).

On the other side, religious education as a kind of education especially has a substantial place in the educational systems and also for some people of Islamic countries (Shamsvari; Saeid; and Halstead, 1993). Therefore, from the

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past times this topic has been probed and some of the researchers and thinkers have studied the characteristics and components of such education.

In recent years, the role and place of technology, particularly internet, in the religion and religious education has also been the concern for studies with different views and approaches (for example: Hoover and Clark, 2002; Budden Baum, 1996; Baunt, 2000; Dart and Allen, 1993; Hess, 1998; O'Leary, 1996; Saleem, 2009; Ali Al-shehri, 2004). According to the mentioned background, in the present study and in agreement with the previous works, the role and place of internet, particularly as virtual education, is investigated in the religious education by adapting a philosophical approach. The present study is ontological and hence after an ontological comparison between virtual and face to face experience, it analyzes and investigates the role of internet, particularly as virtual education, in religious education.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

There are various, and sometimes conflicting views about the concepts of religion, education, and religious education. For example, indicating to the complexity of the concepts of religion and religiousness and difference challenges for them ranging from beliefs and commitments to its social displays, Broadbent and Brown (2002, p. xii) think that religious education encompasses the same complexities and challenges. Broadbent (2002) believes that teaching religion has three meanings concerning the two above mentioned components (p. 23): first, the learners get familiar with the special approach that religion applies; second, the learners take a role in the process of giving meaning [to life]; and third, they gain knowledge about religion. Hand (2006), drawing on the thoughts from philosophers and researchers like Hirst, Marples, Attfield, and Gardner, divides religious education into confessional and non-confessional (p. 1): in the confessional religious education, it is attempted to grow both students' religious understanding and belief so that finally their religious faith will be reinforced. But, in the non-confessional religious education, only students' understanding is developed without any attempt to reinforce their religious belief and commitment. It seems that these two approaches have some similarities and differences with each other in illuminating the nature of religious education and its components. Both of them consider the religious understanding to be the basic component of religious education; not only there is no such belief or requirement in non-confessional approach but it is not desirable at all, because it may lead to deviation from the process of religious education to dictation of beliefs and religious values.

But Esmaeel Ali and Javad Reza (2006), drawing on a confessional approach to religious education, try to explain the educational characteristics of "faithful" individual from Islamic viewpoint (pp. 26-27): as they believe, educating "faithful" individual is educating the belief, social, and moral dimensions of the his personality. In the belief dimension, "faithful" is someone who accepts and believes in absence, pray, and to devote for God, accepts what has been offered to Mohammed (Peace be upon him) and the prophets before him, and believes in resurrection, relies on God, and does Jihad (Islamic campaign against nonbelievers) (Sura.2, Vv.3-4; Sura.9; v51; Sura.40, v44; Sura.8, v74). In the social and moral dimension, faithful individual is someone who prevents waiver and to follow social obligations like alms, chastity, being trustee, and true promise (Sura.23, v5, 8&9).

It seems that in talking about the religious education, more than illuminating the concepts of religion and faithfulness, clarifying the meaning of education is also needed. Regarding the same point, Bagheri (2008, pp. 62-80) discriminating between quasi-education and education, believes that the former has three components of habit, reinforcement, and imposition; he considers the latter as having four main characteristics of explanation, presentation of criteria, internal and critical motivation. Explanation means that in the process of education or the process of desirable and universal changes, the individual would be aware of the changes that are supposed to happen in him, and the criterion and the rule are ones which the learner are provided with in order to be able to evaluate the accuracy and inaccuracy of his thoughts and beliefs in the process of education. On the other hand, Bagheri believes that the main components or characteristics of faithfulness include belief, internal experience, internal commitment and action. He mentions believing in the existence of unique God in his explanation about belief in resurrection and prophecy and refers to worship-related, social, and moral actions in his explanation about action.

Based on the presented background, in the present study religious education is considered as the process in which belief, commitment, and worship-related, social and moral actions of the learner are formed and developed in an

explanatory, critical, and passionate procedure and through using the criteria of evaluating accuracy or inaccuracy of beliefs, commitments, and actions.

By adapting such definition, the present study aims at analyzing and investigating the role of internet in religious education after ontological comparison of virtual and personal experiences. It should be mentioned that ontology of virtual experience is a territory as wide as ontology of such experience, and what defines the borders for this study are ontological discussions related to components of religious education which were mentioned previously.

### 3. Methodology

The present study has a philosophical nature with regard to its purpose and since the research methods are very diverse in the domain of philosophy and philosophy of education (Given, 2008; Heyting, 2005), a method (or methods) should be chosen which is able to meet the specific purpose of the study. Accordingly, the present study applies a phenomenological approach and qualitative content analysis as follows:

First, the method of “hermeneutical phenomenology” or “interpretive phenomenology” from the qualitative research methods (Given, 2008) are used. This method was first applied by Heidegger (1996) for describing and investigating human’s being and existence. He integrated Husserl’s phenomenology with the ideas of Dilthey regarding understanding which altered both phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Heidegger, following Dilthey’s ideas (Friedman, 1971), calls hermeneutics as phenomenology of being and expands it beyond an approach in human sciences, and to the human’s whole lifespan. Based on such a ground, interpretive phenomenology is against Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology; transcendental phenomenology looks for reducing any phenomenon to its essence and leaving pre-assumptions and pre-perceptions about them (Sokolowski, 2000), while in interpretive phenomenology, the pre-assumption and pre-perceptions of the researcher is the starting point and the ground and horizon of the research (Given, 2008). That is the reason why in this approach the phenomena are investigated in hermeneutic circle. Such circle, on the one side, includes the researcher’s experiences in using Information Technology and, on the other side, includes available studies on ontology of internet and the relationship with religious education. In other words, qualitative analyzing the content of available studies on this topic, along with probing the researcher’s experiences in using internet in the field of education, provides the possibility of ontological investigation of internet and its role in the field of religious education.

So in the present study, internet is regarded as a phenomenon which can be investigated from ontological point of view and to propose the role and place of internet in the process of religious education and as well as its necessities.

### 4. Ontology of world experience in internet

Internet can be the subject for philosophical inquiry from various viewpoints such as epistemology, ontology and morality. In the ontological investigation of world experience through internet or virtual experience, the nature and characteristics of this experience is probed through the connection it has with being. In such ontological investigation, the first step is clarifying the concepts of information and technological information and then to illuminate the definition and characteristics of virtual experience in relation to natural experience.

#### 4.1. *Ontology of virtual education*

Since the virtual experience is the experience made possible by the information which is provided by Information Technology, first it is necessary to elucidate the meaning of information from the ontological point of view. The noun “information” is stemmed from “to inform”. As Borgman (1999) also indicates, the verb “to inform” is taken from the Latin word “informare” which was first used by Cicero to mean “shaping the material for its education and its improvement” (p. 9). This is the reason why in some of the dictionaries (for example, Oxford Dictionary) “to inform” is defined as “to educate” or “to impart knowledge”.

Borgman divides information into three categories of natural, cultural, and technological: natural information is the report about reality which refers to the information that human being understands naturally and without the intervention of any artificial issue. For example, if we hear a piece of music in where it is performed, we have a

report from it. Cultural information is a recipe for intervening with reality. It means that through applying this information human being can interfere in reality. For example, the music octaves are the instruction for performing the music which can be named cultural information. The cultural signs can be meaningful even when they are separated from their original situation and placed in another situation. So, it could be claimed that the cultural information in maps, diagrams, and symbols reveal the reality more widely and clearly than natural information, thus they could be applied in renovation and enrichment of reality. Technological information is recording the reality and can be considered as the adversary of reality; this type of information records reality by using technology and could offer the recorded reality in other places and times. For example, when the “recorded” piece of music on compact disk is playing, it is not a “report” of reality or a “recipe” for performance, but it is the piece of music itself.

Now, after explaining the meaning of technological information, in order to illuminate the ontological status of virtual experience, first it is necessary to elaborate on what is named as virtual experience in the historical background. As Purser (1999) also indicates, there has been a mutual relationship between human’s personal and social life and the transformation of communication medium among humans throughout the history. He mentions the dominant medium of communication in different times as: oral language for ancient times, chirography for middle ages, publication for renaissance, photography and then television and cinema for industrial era. He believes that we are now on the threshold of a deep cultural transformation which is passing from traditional media to the present interactional and digital media or the process of virtualization.

Some other thinkers have also tried to propose ontological explanations for the role of technology and media in transforming human life. For example, Harvey (1989) divides the history into three part based on the human’s conception about time and space: ancient, modern, and post-modern.

In ancient times the experiencing the world and interacting with it had been through direct presence and without the intervention of the technology. In those times, human being was present in the world and experienced place and time in connection with each other and by using natural abilities. Human being was in “time and place” and without separating himself from time and place on the one hand and phenomena on the other hand, he immersed in the world like a part of phenomena (Zarghami Hamrah, 2011). In the ancient times, “being in the world” was even the inspiration for different myths. For instance, Borgman (1999) recounts Anteus’ fate who takes power through connecting with the earth and has been invincible as far as he was connected to it, but he was defeated when Hercules lifts him and he was disconnected with reality, so he was disabled and died.

As Harvey believes (1989) by the beginning of philosophical and scientific renaissance and also the invention of mechanic clock and drawing the earth on wide maps, the traditional image of time and place was challenged and the process of “time-space compression” started. From the nineteenth century until about four decades ago and despite the changes like developing modernity and inclination toward world convergence, the capitalist economical system and expansion of relationships accelerate. From the view of Harvey, time-space compression has increased twofold from almost four decades ago according to the technical changes, particularly in the field of Information Technology. Giddens (1991) also holds that in the modern era, some instruments and mechanisms were devised and developed which altered the traditional relation between time and space. He calls these instruments and mechanisms as “abstract systems” and divides them into “symbolic signs” and “professional systems” (p. 18). He considers technical knowledge, particularly Information Technology as a marked example of professional systems which further provide the possibility of “action of distance”.

Purser (1999) also explains the basic differences between world experience by human being in the renaissance era and prior to that through a concept of perspectival view. As he believes world experience by human from ancient times to middle ages has been a pre-perspectival so that “... in the pre-perspectival awareness, the mind could not distance itself from the phenomena in order to have a perspective, but the mind immersed in the phenomena unconsciously...” (p. 6).

Ontological description of transformations that emerged by the appearance and development of internet in human life, is a ground for an ontological comparison between virtual experience and personal experience and investigating the role of internet, particularly in the form of virtual education, in the religious education which follows it.

#### *4.2. Ontology of virtual experience in comparison to personal experience and its role in the religious education*

Now, based on what mentioned above, we can name the ontological characteristics of virtual experience in relation to personal experience and probe the role of each in religious education:

#### 4.2.1. *Distantiation of virtual experience and its role in religious education*

One of the transformations happened in virtual experience is relative independence from place and time in the virtual experience. Internet provides the opportunity for the human beings to experience a reality in another time and place regardless of the place and time they are present in. Such freedom is relative and provisional; it is relative since in the process of virtual experience, human body is still present in the natural place and time; it is provisional since virtual experience is part of natural experience, and after passing of time it would return to its natural experience. It is so that Baralou and Shepherd (2005) consider distantiation to be the most important characteristics of virtual experience and believe that distance develops between physical presence and reality in the virtual space. It seems that distantiation changes the role of body and bodily presence in the world experience and hence it is necessary to investigate the role of such change in religious education. In this way, first it is necessary to probe the role of body and bodily presence in the world experience as well as educational process.

Drawing on a phenomenological approach, Merleau-Ponty (1962) emphasizes the importance of perception and holds that what happens in human's encounter with impermanent and real world, is his perception. He underscores the role of body in perception and considers perception as bodily experience which occurs in the universe and pre-reflective level. It is worth mentioning that attending to the role of body in perception does not necessarily imply a materialistic view and limiting human being to his biological aspects, but it is introducing the basis and display of human interaction with the world. For example, Marcel who highlights the concepts like "being", "love", and etc. and has virtual views, states: "I am the body" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1964, p. xii). In such view the human body is the display of his existence and is a general concept that includes sensational, intellectual, and even virtual dimensions of human being. Human's being in the world, is a corporeal and sentimental being and the body, in and by which even the process of reflection and acquiring knowledge become possible.

It seems that such rationalization for the role of body in real world experience is also present in religious views. Talking about bodily enjoyments and privations as world and hereafter rewards and torment<sup>b</sup>, imaging the feeling and passion of the faithful individual when he meets God's visage, the existence of deep and close relationship between feelings and religion (Corrigan, 2004); emergence of verbal and philosophical discussions regarding bodily resurrection<sup>c</sup>, and the value of journey and presence in specific places such as Holy Mecca for the muslims, point to the focus of religious views on body and its role, particularly in sensational and sentimental experience of the world by the human being.

With regard to this issue some of the thinkers underline the role of bodily presence in the process of education. For example, associating being and place, Cantella (2007) considers the place in which the individual is present as the basic element in providing multifaceted and deep connection with the universe as well as self-conceptual perception, and believes that the manner of understanding the surrounding universe and cooperating in it is dependent on the place. Therefore, he necessitates bodily presence in the place for multifaceted and deep experience of "self and universe" and concludes that bodily presence of the learner in the educational place like school would further enrich his experience and perception of self and universe.

As the results, it seems that particularly experiencing the feelings such as happiness, exhilaration, and love is possible in and with the body. Consequently, developing such feelings as one of the elements of religious education also requires bodily experience and learner's presence. On the other side, the body of the learner would not be engaged in a multifaceted way in the virtual experience in comparison to personal experience. And the sensational experience which is bodily and place-dependent experience would be reduced to visual experience and the other dimensions of sensational and bodily experience would be suppressed severely. This condition would be a bottleneck for developing learner's passion and deep feelings, as one of the aspects of religious education. In the same line and as an example, some of the researchers (in Hoover & Clark, 2002) consider the experience of doing religious rituals as sensational and sentimental experiences which is achieved in physical environment and through human's body. From the presented discussion, Fern Back (2002) concludes that although performing and experiencing these rituals would be possible through internet, but anyway we should be aware of the sensational and sentimental limitations of this type of experience in which the body is not fully engaged (p. 259).

<sup>b</sup> Verses like Sura.43, v.71; Sura.76, v.15; Sura9, v.72; and Sura55, v54& 72 refer to material causes in the hereafter and verses like Sura. 54, V.48; Sura.25, v34&13; and Sura.40, v.71 talk about bodily torments.

<sup>c</sup> For example refer to Mollasadra, *Alhikmata almotealia fi alafar alta' alia alrabe'a*, Qom, Mustafavi Publication, 1959, vol. 9.



The other point regarding the role of body in world experience relates to the relationship between body and commitment. The human being begins to experience the reality by his body and gradually perceives the feelings like enjoyment, pain, agony, tiredness, panic, guilt, and hope. The feeling of pain and mainly the feeling of tiredness indicate to body limitations and the human being would know about his limitations by understanding them and following that he would be committed to realities and would careful not to be harmed in the incidents (Zarghami Hamrah, 2011). Concerning the same point, Dreyfus believes that each bodily experience leads to commitment and states: "...bodily needs, either direct or indirect, create responsibility in us..." (Salinger, 2003, p. 85). Accordingly, he considers presence in the place and time of events and concern about them as human experience, the omission of which would lead to abolishment of commitment (Dreyfus, 2004). For example, referring to face to face relationship between the teacher and the learner, Dreyfus (2009) believes that such relationship leads to commitment specifically for the learner and would encourage him do his commitments and responsibilities. In this way, we can talk about another type of commitment which results from learner's encounter with the character and personality of the teacher. Personal encounter of learner with the religious and spiritual personality of teacher provides a ground for growing the sense of religious and spiritual commitment in the learner. According to the presented points, one other bottleneck by virtual experience is growing internal commitment as one of the aspects of religious education.

#### *4.2.2. Collapse of place and time borders in virtual experience*

Due to collapse of place and time borders, virtual experience does not face some of the limitations of personal and face to face education. For example, in the traditional experience of education, presence in the same place and time that teacher was present was a necessary condition for acquiring knowledge but as Saleem (2009, p. 75) indicates, in virtual experience the place and time limitations of education would disappear and hence, the process of democratization of knowledge would be further possible. The consequences of such changes in the religious education can be summarized as two points:

First, the ground for that type of religious education which is called quarantine religious education by Bagheri (2008), is provided by using the power of dominant system and the teacher based on habits, dictation, and imposition, but as the result of collapse of the forbidden and allowable and due to eliminating the far and close limitations, the power of above mentioned authorities in maintaining such borders would be eliminated. By diminishing the power of authorities in governmental and quarantine religious education, the context for free thinking, courage, and creativity about religion would be further possible. As Saleem (2009) believes, providing the ground for creativity, independence, and self-respect is the result of the collapse of the traditional role of religious teacher in the process of virtual education.

Another point to be mentioned is that, as some thinkers believe this change can even lead to the change of the concepts of religion, faithfulness, and religious education. For example, Castells (Lawrence, in Hoover and Clark, 2002, p. 239) holds that information revolution changes religion the same as other aspects of human's present life. From another view and drawing on pessimistic view, Ellul (*ibid*, pp. 267-268) also believes that Newtonian revolution opened a way for human to technical society in which the traditional values including religious values would be collapsed. He calls this procedure as technical invasion which is intensified at the present by the emergence of Information Technology. As he believes, in this process the religious values are transformed to a type of civil religion; a religion which respects technology. In this way, at the present time technology is responsible for the breakup of traditional organic, moral, and social culture. In agreement with this point, Mumford (*ibid*, p. 286) also believes that technology disintegrates the power of religion in the role of arbitrator for reality, and propagates the secular types of knowledge. So, in his interpretation, religious symbol epistemology loses its position. On the other side, Fernback (in Hoover and Clark, 2002) talks about transformation of the meaning of faithfulness and spiritual life by the entrance of internet to humans' life with an optimistic view. For example he describes traditional and novel spiritual experience of youth in his own words:

"I grew up going to church and believing what I was told. But as I got older, I felt like I couldn't go to church anymore because it just didn't make sense. . . . I still consider myself a fairly religious person and I pray every day. Instead of kneeling down in front of an altar, I sit down in front of a computer screen. Out there (on the Internet) is a sense of peace, of community, of working together, of sharing ideas. That, to me, is true spirituality" (p. 256).

In concluding the discussed viewpoints, despite of differences and even conflicts, it seems it can be said that transformation of the concepts of religion, faithfulness, and religious education is actualized by the expansion of Information Technology in educational environments.

With regard to what presented above, it seems that the collapse of place and time borders in virtual experience provides the chance for explaining and critical thinking about religion in a more liberated atmosphere. Also, this chance could be a ground for a revision of what is called as religion and religious education.

#### 4.2.3. *Development of virtual relationship*

Through the relative detachment from the place and time of education, virtual education provides the real and more pervasive field for interaction of religious opinions and thoughts. This possibility is specifically due to the fact that internet communications remove the geographical, cultural, ethnic, and religious borders and make possible the religious discussion between humans regardless of the mentioned borders. In this way, the possibility of encounter among beliefs and challenging them would be further provided, because in such communications, there is no limitation caused by similarities of beliefs which can be due to living in specific cultural situation or power of dominated system. Therefore, as Hoover explains (cited in Fernback, 2002), Para-church religiosity is granted to all religions to have open and extensive discussion about religion and religious beliefs. As an example, the experience of a youth called Jerry regarding the virtual discussions he had about the religion with people having different religions from his own also confirms this view:

“...I don't believe what they believe, but we think the same way. Linear, logical discussion is easy to find on any topic, but my creative side lives in patterns and symbols and echoes, like a poet, and pagans are the only ones I know who speak that language regularly. I find it a very useful discussion group for this, and useful also in keeping everyone from getting too narrow-minded about their own way of doing things.” (p. 265)

According to what discussed, it seems that if the communication, going beyond oneself, encountering with different thoughts, respecting them, and understanding the bonds between human beings are considered as part of the signs of human's spiritual life, then it could be said that by expanding virtual communications, internet has provide the context for reinforcement of those signs.

In this way, it appears that virtual experience is an opportunity for reinforcing religious, social, and moral commitment and behavior in an explanatory and even critical procedure.

#### 4.2.4. *Expansion of availability to Technological Information*

One of the horizons that internet opens in front of learners, is the availability of a large amount of information in different fields, including religion. For example, Lawrence (in Hoover and Clark, 2002) introduces some of the websites and specialized databases for Islamic knowledge by categorizing them and divides them into three categories of institutional, public, and private (pp. 242-250). So, on the one side, today the pervasive and fast availability of information has decreased the needs of learners for religious information and hence the individuals who have the information like clergy man or religious teacher, and on the other side, the time for gathering the information would be saved. More than this, internet has facilitated the process of reaching religious information in a way that learner would be fond of gaining information from websites and databases more than sitting in the classroom and studying written texts. The reason is that internet information are more attractive due to containing images and high variations, and the availability to them would be even more comfortable, low-cost and also different from the traditional procedure of gaining information by sitting in the classroom and the difficulties resulted from it (Zarghami Hamrah, 2011).

The development of virtual information, despite the horizons it has opened for any type of education, can cause some impasses for the religious education; some of the points regarding the same issue are as follows. The first point about the difference between information and knowledge is what some of the educational thinkers has pointed out. For example, Hirst (1974), through an analytic view, has tried to illustrate the difference between information and knowledge. As he believes, knowledge can be divided into different forms and these forms are not merely a collection of information and knowledge is basically the result of the complex methods of perceptual human experience. He refers to four characteristics in further explanation and regarding the distinctive characteristics of developed forms of knowledge: 1) any form of knowledge has specific central concepts for itself. For example, theology has hierarchy of central concepts such as God, guilt, force and free will. 2) Any form of knowledge, in terms of the relationship between its central concepts and other concepts, has a particular logical structure. For example, in theology the concepts of God, guilt, force, and free will could be related logically. 3) Due to specific concepts and logic, each form of knowledge has some predicates which are testable against experience, and 4) Each

form of knowledge, from the methodological point of view, provides specific techniques and skills for experimentally testing its predicates.

In this regard, Lyotard (1979) in criticizing the formation and development of knowledge/information equation in the Information Technology era believes that, by the development of Information Technology, knowledge is reduced to information or in other words informational stuff and even the education is practiced with the aim of translating subjects and phenomena in the language of information. The concept of knowledge is beyond information and informational predicates are only a part of our knowledge. He indicates that knowledge is the ability of appropriate functioning in various descriptive, prescriptive, and evaluative domains of human life and hence, beyond the real criterion, is linked to criteria like justice, felicity, and beauty. In this way, knowledge does not have the meaning of information but it means wisdom which is well-considered and proper encounter with issues and situations. Well-considered encounter with an informative predicate means evaluating its accuracy or inaccuracy; well-considered encounter with practical situation, more than evaluating its accuracy or inaccuracy, is following justice as well as virtue; and well-considered encounter with aesthetic situation requires enthusiasm, perception of beauty and artistic joy. This is the reason Bagheri (2008) considers knowledge to be in the same place with Hikmat (wisdom) in Islamic culture. Alragheb Alesfahani in *Almofradatt* believes Hikmat (wisdom) to be the knowledge of achieving God both in the grounds of thought and practice. On this basis Bagheri with reference to some verses from holy Quran (for example, Sura.16, V.78; Sura.5, V.30; Sura.78, Vv.10-17) introduces the process of Hikmat(wisdom) as including sensational encountering with universe, thinking about it, evaluating weak ideas, deeper revising, and conflict of best.

Therefore, it could be concluded that access to the religious information is not equivalent to acquiring religious knowledge. Religious knowledge could be considered as synonymous with religious wisdom which is revealed in both theoretical and practical religious wisdom. Theoretical religious wisdom is the same as well-considered and proper encounter with the universe and phenomena in a way that it talks about sensational encountering with universe, thinking about it, evaluating weak ideas, deeper revising, and conflict of best.

Based on what has been presented, it is necessary to differentiate among clergyman, faithful individual, and the individual who has religious information. As it was indicated the religious information can provide a ground for religiously theoretical wisdom but it is not equivalent to it. As Hand (2006) suggests, such wisdom in non-confessional refers to the religious understanding of the learners which although can provide the ground for belief, commitment, and action, more than teaching religious knowledge, it needs providing the necessary grounds for explanation, critique, belief, commitment, and following virtue and justice. In this way, using critical intellect, precision and deep thinking are some of the necessary grounds. But, abundance and prevalence of technological information could be an obstacle on the way of critical intellectualism, deep thinking and precision. In other words, widespread access to information and human's curiosity for getting informed about them could cause the individual to collect more and more information instead of critical intellectualism, deep thinking and precision.

The other point concerning this issue is the relationship between technological information and commitment. As it was pointed out before, in Dreyfus beliefs (2004) a part of sense of responsibility and commitment is the result of human living in realities. The same idea is stated by Borgman in other expression and through dividing information into natural, cultural, and technological. In this regard, extravagance in the use of technological information may create an impasse for understanding reality and the commitment which results from it. It seems that the critique of Kier Kegaard on the media of his own time could also be classified in this category: as Kier Kegaard believes, newspapers had caused a situation in which "everyone knows everything, but no one is not committed to anything". In his beliefs, media were the obstacles for moral commitment and in the higher level for human's elevation to religious levels and the commitment needed for it.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was investigating the role of internet in religious education. to this aim, first the concepts of education and faithfulness were analyzed and then based on these concepts the process of religious education up to the process of formation and development of beliefs, commitment, and religious, social, and moral behavior in an explanatory, critical, and dynamic procedure with using criteria like virtue and justice are considered and the role of internet is investigated in each of the mentioned characteristics, analysis, impasses, and the horizons in front of religious education with applying internet as Information Technology.



At last and based on the findings of the present study some necessities and recommendations are proposed as follows:

### *5.1. The priority of asking about why to using internet over asking about the how to use it in the process of religious education*

Typically, the recommended revisions in using internet are based on accepting the ability of internet in improving the process of education, while in the field of education, particularly religious education, the more basic question is asking about why of using internet and its role in the religious education. Concerning the same point and since the content and process of religious education are taken from such process which were also named in this study, these characteristics determine the range of using internet in the process of religious education. In this regard, we can refer to horizons and impasses of internet in the religious process.

According to the findings of the study, internet, for example, has eliminated the limitations caused by place and time as well as the hierarchical authority of teacher in information transfer in the process of religious education; it has provided a more expanded and more liberated context for the exchange of religious ideas and beliefs through disseminating virtual relationships; it has allowed the formation of societies and religious groups beyond physical, national, and ethnical borders more than before; it has provided the ground for going beyond oneself and the sense of linking with others and understanding them more; and also it has put an end to the quarantine religious education. These horizons illustrate the why and necessity of using internet in the process of religious education.

On the other side, virtual experience and education can cause some failures in the process of religious education. For example, body and bodily presence in time and place of events and concerning about them are aspects of experience removing which may lead to the destruction of commitment (Dreyfus, 2002). In agreement with this, in virtual experience the body does not have complete presence and some of the aspects of bodily presence are eliminated. In this way, and since in virtual education bodily presence and sensational and sentimental experience are not complete, reinforcing characteristics such as belief, commitment, exhilaration and practice which need sensational and sentimental involvement of the learner may face losses in a way which may disrupt achieving higher levels of internal commitment and practice. Finally, despite the expansion of challenges like equating these information with theoretical and practical religious wisdom, fading the borders between exact and deep religious information on the one hand, and inexact and superficial on the other hand, and also vagueness and curiosity for gaining too much information and therefore lack of time for concentration and reaching the deepness, thus lowering commitment also face the religious education.

Based on asking about why to use internet in religious education other necessities can be also proposed as follows.

### *5.2. Multi-dimensional view of teacher for using internet*

The religious teacher should not have a merely technological view in using internet in the process of education, but he should, for example, investigate the relationship among internet and religion, education, and religious education. As the result, prior to and more than applying internet, the teacher should be provided with the grounds for considering internet and its consequences in religious education in the curriculum. In teacher training courses for religious teachers, the topics like “the philosophy of internet and its relationship with religious education” could be held as curriculum or research program. In such courses the teachers would be familiarized with the necessity of using internet in religious education besides attending to the failures and would be able to take steps for removing these failures. One of the approaches for removing the failures is presented in the next part.

### *5.3. Integrating virtual education with personal and face to face education*

Although, using internet has opened many horizons in for religious education, but it cannot be, by itself, a ground for religious education and reinforcing all of its elements like belief, commitment, exhilaration and practice which needs natural sensational and sentimental involvement of the learner. Therefore, although the technological possibilities in our country have actualized religious and virtual schools and universities, but the virtual religious education is not capable of meeting all of the goals of religious education. In other words, virtual religious education

is not whole of religious education and hence it cannot and should not replace personal and face to face education but it should enrich the educational experience of the learners besides that.

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