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RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AS PUBLIC TESTIMONY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DEMOS SHAKARIAN ARCHIVAL TEXTS AND KAZAKHSTAN-BASED YOUTUBE NARRATIVES

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Abstract. This article examines the testimonies of religious conversion based on two different media. The first is archival texts stored in the space of Demos Shakarian meetings and Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International, as part of the charismatic Christian movement of the XX century. The second is identity cards published in Kazakhstan on YouTube. It is not taken that these data fully describe the religious practice itself. Rather, the article focuses on how a person publicly interprets the change he has experienced, in what words he conveys it, and what meanings he relies on. What is different about this study is that it analyzes the two corps as two separate environments that made it possible to testify, rather than simply comparing them by country or period. The author considers religious turning stories not only as a personal biography but also as a type of narrative aimed at a specific audience. This study shows what topics are most common in testimonies, what events are associated with the internal transformation of a person, and how religious language is built in each environment. The results of the study suggest that religious testimony always reflects not only personal experience but also the social, religious, and media space that created the conditions for the expression of this experience.

Keywords: religious conversion; religious testimony; conversion narrative; charismatic Christianity; Demos Shakarian; Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International; archival texts; Kazakhstan; YouTube testimonials; media space.

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ДИНИ КОНВЕРСИЯ ҚОҒАМДЫҚ КУӘЛІК РЕТІНДЕ: ШАКАРЯННЫҢ МҰРАҒАТТЫҚ МӘТІНДЕРІ МЕН YOUTUBE-ТЕГІ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ ӘНГІМЕЛЕРДІҢ ДЕМОСТРАЦИЯЛАРЫН САЛЫСТЫРМАЛЫ ТҮРДЕ ЗЕРТТЕУ

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РЕЛИГИОЗНАЯ КОНВЕРСИЯ КАК ПУБЛИЧНОЕ СВИДЕТЕЛЬСТВО: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ АРХИВНЫХ ТЕКСТОВ ДЕМОСА ШАКАРЯНА И СНЯТЫХ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ РАССКАЗОВ НА YOUTUBE

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Андатпа. Мақалада діни бетбұрыс туралы айтылған куәліктер екі түрлі орта негізінде қарастырылады. Бірі – XX ғасырдағы харизматикалық христиандық қозғалыс аясында, Demos Shakarian кездесулері мен Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International кеңістігінде сақталған архивтік мәтіндер. Екіншісі-Қазақстанда YouTube арқылы жарияланған жеке куәліктер. Бұл деректер діни тәжірибенің өзін толық сипаттайды деп алынбайды. Керісінше, мақала адамның өз басынан өткен өзгерісті көпшілік алдында қалай түсіндіретініне, қандай сөздермен жеткізетініне және қандай мағыналарға сүйенетініне назар аударады.

Жұмыстың өзгешелігі – екі корпусы жай ғана елдер немесе кезеңдер бойынша салыстырмай, куәлік айтуға мүмкіндік берген екі бөлек орта ретінде талдауында. Автор діни бетбұрыс әңгімелерін жеке өмірбаян ғана емес, белгілі бір аудиторияға бағытталған баяндау түрі ретінде қарастырады. Осы арқылы мақала куәліктерде қандай тақырыптар жиі кездесетінін, адамның ішкі өзгерісі қандай оқиғалармен байланыстырылатынын және діни тілдің әр ортада қалай құрастырылатынын көрсетеді. Зерттеу нәтижесі діни куәлік әрқашан жеке тәжірибені ғана емес, сол тәжірибені айтуға жағдай жасаған әлеуметтік, діни және медиа кеңістікті де танытатынын аңғартады.

Түйін сөздер: діни конверсия; діни куәлік; конверсия нарративі; харизматикалық христиандық; Demos Shakarian; Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International; архивтік мәтіндер; Қазақстан; YouTube куәліктері; медиа кеңістік.

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются свидетельства о религиозных поворотных моментах на основе двух различных источников. Один из них архивные тексты, хранящиеся в собраниях Демоса Шакариана и в Международном сообществе бизнесменов Полного Евангелия, являющиеся частью харизматического христианского движения XX века. Второе – это удостоверения личности, опубликованные в Казахстане на YouTube. Не предполагается, что эти данные полностью описывают саму религиозную практику. Скорее, в статье основное внимание уделяется тому, как человек публично интерпретирует произошедшие с ним изменения, какими словами он передает это и на какие значения он опирается.

Отличие этой работы в том, что она анализирует два корпуса как две отдельные среды, которые позволили свидетельствовать, а не просто сравнивает их по странам или периодам. Автор рассматривает истории о религиозных поворотах не только как личную биографию, но и как тип повествования, ориентированный на определенную аудиторию. Благодаря этому в статье показано, какие темы наиболее часто встречаются в свидетельствах, какие события связаны с внутренним преобразованием человека и как строится религиозный язык в каждой среде. Результат исследования подтверждает, что религиозное свидетельство всегда отражает не только личный опыт, но и социальное, религиозное и медийное пространство, создавшее условия для выражения этого опыта.

Ключевые слова: религиозная конверсия; религиозное свидетельство; повествование о конверсии; харизматическое христианство; Демос Шакарян; Международное сообщество бизнесменов полного Евангелия; архивные тексты; Казахстан; свидетельства YouTube; медиaprостранство.

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Introduction

When we talk about religious conversion, the inner transformation of a person usually comes to mind. Faith shifts, outlook on life changes, and a person begins to understand himself differently than before. But this change is not just trapped inside the person. At a certain point, it becomes a story to be told. A person interprets what he has experienced, adjusts, puts forward some points, and shortens others. At that time, conversion is not only a personal experience, but is expressed in the form of public testimony.

A testimony is not just telling what happened. He brings experience into a certain form. Former life, crisis, search, Meeting, change, new life – such a line is found in many religious testimonies. Of course, not all testimonials will be the same. One person relies more on emotions, another speaks in religious language, and another tries to tell a real story. But still, when the testimony is pronounced, the experience falls into a certain semantic order.

The interpretation of conversion as a purely individual solution is narrow. Lofland and Stark showed that in this process, rapprochement with a religious group, social connection and entry into a new environment are important (Lofland & Stark, 1965). This view did not limit conversion to a change of faith within the person, but made it possible to understand it through social relationships. Richardson later made one amendment to such interpretations: it is not enough to present a person only as an object of external influence; his search and choice should also be in the spotlight (Richardson, 1985).

Rambo considers conversion as a complex process consisting of several stages. His model has stages such as context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences (Rambo, 1993). This scheme was not taken as a direct measure for our study. But when reading the texts of testimonies, a similar movement is observed. A person first tells about his former state, then explains the situation that led to the change, and then tells how he came to a new religious life.

Studies that explain conversion as a long religious path also come close to this place. Gooren proposes to consider a person's religious life not through a single turning point, but as a religious career that changes over time (Gooren, 2010). This thought helps to understand the texts of testimonies. Because testimony often does not consist of just one event. In it, a person's past life, search, approach to the religious environment, new experiences and subsequent transformation coexist.

Research on Narrative allows us to see conversion from the other side. Stromberg shows that a person understands religious change through a new language and reconstructs himself within that language (Stromberg, 1993). Here language is not just a means of description. He is involved in re-reading a person's past, giving meaning to his new life. Snow and Machalek also write that when convert identity is formed, a person reassesses his previous life through a new interpretation system (Snow & Machalek, 1984).

In evangelical and Charismatic circles, this is even evident. Harding analyzes that religious language does not just change a person's mind, but introduces him into a new religious reality (Harding, 2000). Therefore, it is not enough to read testimony as a simple biography. It shows the listener one religious world. Sometimes the same world is called. Sometimes a person retells his life with the language of the same world.

Conversion is not pronounced everywhere. Its form may vary depending on the historical period, environment, community, and audience. Hefner points out that the practice of converting to Christianity needs to be considered in different historical and cultural contexts (Hefner, 1993). Buckser and Glazier interpret conversion as a complex phenomenon where social connections, cultural boundaries, and personal biography meet (Buckser & Glazier, 2003). Such works remind us of one thing: the testimony is never pronounced in an empty space.

Research on the post-socialist space further complicates this issue. Pelkmans considers religious change in connection with historical discontinuity, uncertainty, and new religious movements in former socialist societies (Pelkmans, 2009). His research on religious boundaries shows that the practice of conversion is difficult to explain

in isolation from the local context (Pelkmans, 2010). This article does not aim to provide a complete picture of post-socialist religious change. But it would also be wrong to look at the texts on the YouTube public testimony corpus completely separate from their media and social environment.

The FGBMFI archival corpus was formed in other environments. The testimonies here are mentioned within a certain charismatic movement. Coleman analyzes the global spread of charismatic Christianity, the transformation of religious language into a social form, and the issue of prosperity-oriented discourse (Coleman, 2000). This is important for understanding symbols in FGBMFI texts, such as business identity, Spirit baptism, and speaking in tongues. Such elements may not be just a random choice of an individual. They also reflect the characteristic language of the medium in which the testimony is spoken.

This literature reveals conversion from different angles. One area focuses on social connections. The second direction reflects the phased nature of the process. Narrative research focuses on a person reconstructing their life with a new religious language. Anthropological works bring to the fore the role of context. But in the midst of all this, one question has not yet been fully revealed: how is the conversion story built within different testimony settings?

This article is looking for an answer to the same question nearby. The goal is to compare how religious conversion testimonies are organized within two different testimony settings. It does not provide for measuring the inner spiritual experience of a person. The psychological cause of the conversion can also not be fully recovered. The data at hand allows something else: a comparison of what event Network, what religious emphasis, what institutional features are manifested in the texts of public testimony.

The main question of the study is posed as follows: through what narrative, theological and institutional elements are religious conversion testimonials created in the FGBMFI archival corpus and YouTube public testimony corpus?

This question is divided into three specific areas. The first is in what event sequence is the conversion narrative given in the two corpus? The second is the charismatic experience, in which corpus are institutional markers such as business identity, Spirit baptism, and speaking in tongues, more pronounced? Third — How can the observed differences be interpreted not as a national difference, but as a difference in the setting of testimony?

Here, it is worth clarifying something from the very beginning. It is not correct to call testimonies published on YouTube a digital conversion. This article does not attempt to prove that the conversion took place in the online space. YouTube public testimony corpus only allows you to see how the conversion story is told in today's media environment. The FGBMFI archival corpus also does not represent all conversions in a given society. It is considered a set of testimonies that are spoken of in a charismatic-institutional environment and then archived.

These two are compared using the corpus 14 category coding framework. This framework is not a new universal conversion model. It is not offered instead of Rambo, Lofland-Stark or other classic models. His task is simple: to systematically compare how narrative structure, theological emphasis, emotional tone and institutional markers look in the texts of public testimony. If we read testimony as a public narrative created in a specific environment, rather than a literal copy of personal experience, such a comparison can be one small but useful step within conversion studies.

Methods

This study looks at how religious conversion testimonies are constructed in two different environments. We are not comparing religious change in the two countries. Such a comparison would not be too broad and accurate. The object of the study here is the medium of testimony pronunciation: on one side are charismatic testimonials, pronounced as part of the FGBMFI movement and later archived, on the other side are the texts of the current public testimony, openly published on YouTube.

The research Corps consisted of 172 texts. 76 testimonies from FGBMFI archival materials were included in the first Corps. These texts were mentioned in meetings in the 1960s and 1980s as part of the Demos Shakarian and Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International Movement. They were originally given as oral testimony, and later preserved in the archive in the form of text. This study used materials published openly on the Oral Roberts University website.

The second body included 96 testimonies published on YouTube. These materials were collected from the open YouTube space in Kazakhstan, but they were not taken as a “complete reflection of conversion in Kazakhstan”. They have been seen as testimonial texts addressed and spoken to the public in today’s online environment. The main condition for selection is a relatively complete presentation of the testimony. That is, it was necessary for a person to state his previous life, the situation that prompted the change, the conversion process and the subsequent change in a certain order. Selected videos were captured in full text. Since the sources are open, no personal or confidential information has been collected.

Thus, the comparison was not made between two national contexts, but between two testimony settings. The first is a testimony formed in the archival and institutional environment. The second is the current public testimony spread through YouTube. This difference was then constantly taken into account in the interpretation of the results.

The texts were encoded in 14 categories: Pre-Conversion Life, Conversion Trigger, Conversion Process, Post-Conversion Change, Supernatural Experience, Message Style, Emotional Tone, Core Theological Theme, Call to Action, Invitation Source, Role of Business, Baptism in the Holy Spirit / Speaking in Tongues, Role of Music / Worship, Setting of conversion.

These 14 categories are not presented as a new theoretical model. They were taken as the coding framework, which was used in this study for sequential comparison of texts. When compiling the categories, the general logic of works explaining conversion as a process, context, and narrative self-transformation was taken into account. The process of social connection and decision-making in the Lofland-Stark model, context and period change in Rambo’s work, and the problem of self-transformation through language in Stromberg’s study gave a general direction here. But the study did not aim to completely repeat these models.

Part of the categories helped to maintain the event line of the testimony: the past life, the situation that caused the change, the process of change, and the afterlife. The rest of the categories made it possible to see the style of pronunciation, emotional tone, religious content, audience-oriented appeal and charismatic features of the text. Some categories do not necessarily fit the two bodies equally. For example, elements such as business or speaking in tongues may appear more clearly in the FGBMFI archive case. This is not a disadvantage, but rather a sign that will help you see the difference between the two testimony settings.

Before coding began, the two encoders were given a common instruction. First, pilot coding was performed. During this period, the definitions of some categories were revised, the ambiguities were reduced, and the coding rules were unified. This was necessary because testimony texts are not issued in the same format. In one text, the story is clearly told; in another, emotion or religious appeal prevails.

Each category was evaluated using the Likert scale from 1 to 7 (Boone et al., 2012). A score of 1 means that a particular element is very weak or close to zero in the text. A score of 7 indicates that the same element is clear, strong and occupies an important place in the main structure of the text. The average value of 14 categories was also calculated for each testimony. This indicator was used only to see the overall content saturation of the testimony. It cannot be understood as an indicator that measures the depth or authenticity of a person’s inner religious change.

To test the reliability of the encoding, a random sample of 30 testimonies was evaluated by two independent encoders. Since the data was in the form of an ordinal scale, weighted Cohen’s Kappa was used to measure the level of agreement. The Kappa values were between 0.20 and 0.73 (Cohen, 1968). In structural categories, compliance turned out to be higher. In the emotional and interpretive categories, the indicator was lower. This limitation should be made clear. Such categories are more dependent on the interpretation of the text. Therefore, the quantitative results of this study should be read as an exploratory comparison, not a strict criterion.

Quantitative analysis consisted of several stages. At first, the mean and standard deviation were calculated for two corps in each category. The distribution was then tested by the Shapiro-Wilk test (Demir, 2022). Since the indicators did not meet the normal distribution requirement, nonparametric methods were used. The difference between the two corpus was assessed by the Mann-Whitney U test (Mann&Whitney, 1947). The Effect size was given by rank-biserial correlation. To see the relationship between categories, the correlation matrix was calculated.

Two things were considered when interpreting the results. The first is the time difference. The FGBMFI archive Corps was formed in the charismatic environment of the 1960s and 1980s, and the YouTube Corps was published in the current media environment. The second is the format in which the testimony is pronounced. Archival text and public testimony on YouTube are not intended for the same audience and are not mentioned in the same context.

Therefore, it is wrong to interpret the differences found only as national differences. They can also be formed through genre, audience, media environment, and the tradition of testifying.

Results

The results were given in a few steps. First, we looked at the reliability of coding. Later, the characteristic indicators for the two corpuses were compared. This was followed by the normality test, the Mann–Whitney U test, and the correlation matrix between categories.

Coding reliability was not the same in all categories. In structural categories, the consistency between coders turned out to be higher. Especially the Conversion Process, Conversion Trigger, Pre-Conversion Life, and Role of Business categories were encoded relatively regularly. This is understandable because such elements are often clearly visible in the text.

In the emotional and interpretive categories, consistency was low. The categories Emotional Tone, Message Style and role of Music/Worship have become more difficult to evaluate. Here, the coder explains the tone, style, and semantic background of the text. Therefore, there is no need to hide low kappa values. The results of this study should be read as an exploratory comparison.

Table 1

Interrater reliability (Weighted Cohen's Kappa) for 14 categories

Nº	Category	Weighted Cohen's Kappa
1	Pre-Conversion Life	0.657
2	Conversion Trigger	0.680
3	Conversion Process	0.729
4	Post-Conversion Change	0.595
5	Supernatural Experience	0.640
6	Message Style	0.238
7	Emotional Tone	0.205
8	Core-theological Theme	0.379
9	Call to Action	0.362
10	Invitation Source	0.426
11	Role of Business	0.729
12	Baptism in the Holy Spirit/ Speaking in tongues	0.325
13	Role of Music/ Worship	0.226
14	Setting of Conversion	0.566

Descriptive statistics showed that there is a difference between the two corpus in several directions. In the YouTube public testimony corpus, Pre-Conversion Life, Conversion Trigger, Conversion Process, and Post-Conversion Change were seen as higher. In other words, in these texts, conversion is often told as a complete story: the previous life, the situation that caused the changes, the process of change, and subsequent changes are combined into a single network.

In the FGBMFI archival corpus, categories such as Message Style, Core-theological Theme, Role of Business, and Baptism in the Holy Spirit / Speaking in Tongues were higher. This difference may be related to the nature of the corpus itself. The FGBMFI materials are voiced in Charismatic circles and are close to a certain religious-auditory posture. But here it is better not to draw hasty conclusions. We read this difference as a difference in testimony setting, not a national difference.

Some categories were close to each other in the two corpus. There was no big difference in Supernatural Experience, Emotional Tone, and Setting of Conversion. This indicates that although the two environments are different, some common narrative elements remain in the conversion testimonies.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for 14 categories (US, n=76; KZ, n=96)

№	Category	Mean		SD	
		Kazakhstan-based YouTube corpus	FGBMFI archival corpus	Kazakhstan-based YouTube corpus	FGBMFI archival corpus
1	Pre-Conversion Life	4.71	3.54	1.75	1.84
2	Conversion Trigger	4.81	3.83	1.50	1.54
3	Conversion Process	5.35	4.41	1.23	1.65
4	Post-Conversion Change	5.96	5.36	0.97	1.09
5	Supernatural Experience	4.97	4.92	1.94	1.91
6	Message Style	3.85	4.70	1.02	0.63
7	Emotional Tone	5.36	5.30	0.78	0.78
8	Core-theological Theme	4.69	5.07	1.16	1.26
9	Call to Action	2.88	3.34	1.36	1.86
10	Invitation Source	2.40	2.13	1.10	1.58
11	Role of Business	1.80	2.58	1.00	1.80
12	Baptism in the Holy Spirit/ Speaking in tongues	1.77	3.33	0.99	2.48
13	Role of Music/ Worship	1.99	1.55	0.93	1.34
14	Setting of Conversion	3.21	3.08	1.15	1.29

In the next step, the distribution property of each category was checked. The Shapiro-Wilk test results showed that the normal distribution condition was not met. Therefore, a nonparametric method was used to check the difference between groups.

Table 3*Results of the Shapiro-Wilk Normality test for 14 categories*

№	Category	Shapiro-Wilk W		Shapiro-Wilk p	
		Kazakhstan-based YouTube corpus	FGBMFI archival corpus	Kazakhstan-based YouTube corpus	FGBMFI archival corpus
1	Pre-Conversion Life	0.92	0.90	<.001	<.001
2	Conversion Trigger	0.91	0.94	<.001	0.001
3	Conversion Process	0.85	0.92	<.001	<.001
4	Post-Conversion Change	0.81	0.90	<.001	<.001
5	Supernatural Experience	0.86	0.87	<.001	<.001
6	Message Style	0.89	0.79	<.001	<.001
7	Emotional Tone	0.84	0.85	<.001	<.001
8	Core-theological Theme	0.92	0.93	<.001	<.001
9	Call to Action	0.92	0.87	<.001	<.001
10	Invitation Source	0.89	0.74	<.001	<.001
11	Role of Business	0.73	0.81	<.001	<.001
12	Baptism in the Holy Spirit/ Speaking in tongues	0.68	0.76	<.001	<.001
13	Role of Music/ Worship	0.80	0.47	<.001	<.001
14	Setting of Conversion	0.91	0.92	<.001	<.001

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test showed that there is a statistical difference between the two corpus in 9 out of 14 categories. The most obvious difference was observed in the first four structural categories: Pre-Conversion Life, Conversion Trigger, Conversion Process, and Post-Conversion Change. This shows that in the YouTube public testimony corpus, the conversion event is built more as a full narrative sequence.

The difference in Message Style sided with the FGBMFI archival corpus. In these Corpus texts, a ready-made rhetorical form, a religious speech pattern, or a narrative style typical of a charismatic environment may be more pronounced. The difference in the categories Role of Business and Baptism in the Holy Spirit / Speaking in Tongues also appears to be related to the historical and religious environment of this corpus.

Invitation Source and role of Music/Worship came out higher in the YouTube public testimony corpus. This may mean that modern public testimony texts mention more of the practice of invocation, worship, music, or worship that brought a person to the congregation. But even here, the result should be read carefully. Testimony on YouTube often includes not only a personal story, but also a religious message aimed at the audience.

The difference in Core-theological Theme, Call to Action, Supernatural Experience, Emotional Tone, and Setting of Conversion did not come out at an obvious level or was weak. These categories are found in both corpus, but are not strongly shifted to one side.

Table 4*Mann-Whitney U test (with rank biserial correlation)*

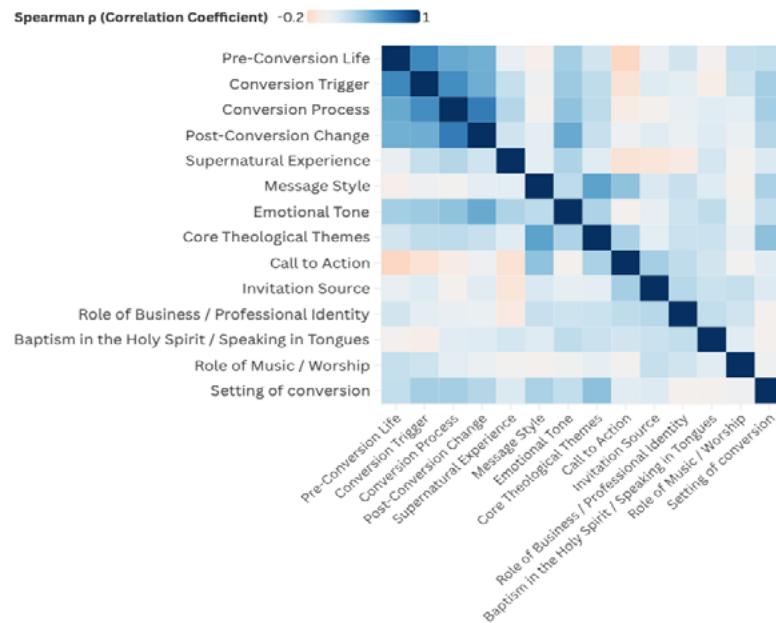
№	Category	U	p	r (Rank biserial correlation)
1	Pre-Conversion Life	2368.00	<.001	0.35
2	Conversion Trigger	2325.50	<.001	0.36
3	Conversion Process	2446.50	<.001	0.33
4	Post-Conversion Change	2444.00	<.001	0.33
5	Supernatural Experience	3569.50	0.806	0.02
6	Message Style	1904.50	<.001	-0.48
7	Emotional Tone	3484.00	0.585	0.04
8	Core-theological Theme	3039.00	0.053	-0.17
9	Call to Action	3205.50	0.165	-0.12
10	Invitation Source	2844.00	0.010	0.22
11	Role of Business	2929.50	0.019	-0.20
12	Baptism in the Holy Spirit/ Speaking in tongues	2796.00	0.005	-0.23
13	Role of Music/ Worship	2112.50	<.001	0.42
14	Setting of Conversion	3380.50	0.395	0.07

Note. $H_a \mu_{\text{FGBMFI archival corpus}} \neq \mu_{\text{Kazakhstan-based YouTube corpus}}$

In the final stage, the relationship between categories was reviewed by Spearman correlation. The strongest relationship was observed between the first four structural categories. Pre-Conversion Life, Conversion Trigger, Conversion Process, and Post-Conversion Change often go together. When a testimony is created as a complete event, these parts do not stand apart from each other.

In the rest of the categories, communication was at a weak or moderate level. Message Style communicates with some categories, but does not hold the entire structure in the same way. Emotional Tone also goes hand in hand with structural categories to a certain extent, but it remains as a separate dimension. The relationship between Call to Action and Invitation Source looks logical, as both reflect the audience-oriented side of the testimony.

The Correlation matrix makes one thing clear: 14 categories do not fully converge into a single common scale. They show different layers of the testimony. The first four categories hold narrative structure well. The rest reveal separate facets such as style, religious content, charismatic experience, and audience-oriented appeal.

Figure 1*Spearman ρ (Correlation Coefficient)*

In general, the results showed that the difference between the two corpus is manifested primarily in the structural organization of the testimony. In the YouTube public testimony corpus, the conversion is told more broadly as a full life story. In the FGBMFI archival corpus, style, charismatic experience, and religious-auditory cues are more pronounced. But these differences do not mean that the conversion experience itself is directly compared. They show how the story of religious change is built within two different testimony settings.

Discussion

The results of this study showed that the main difference between the two corps is not in the conversion itself, but in how that conversion is reported publicly. In YouTube public testimony corpus, testimony is often built in the form of a full life story. A person first describes his former life, then explains the situation that prompted the change, and then talks about the process of change and the result in a new life. Such a structure allows the listener to see the conversion not as a decision made at some point, but as a life change that has passed a certain path.

This result is close to Rambo's conversion model. Rambo explains conversion not only through the transfer of personal beliefs, but through several interrelated stages: context, crisis, quest, meeting, interaction, commitment, and consequences. Our study did not directly measure these periods. Therefore, it cannot be said that the testimonials on YouTube exactly repeat the Rambo model. But the narrative sequence observed in this corpus echoes the same logic: the testimony often begins with a person's previous condition and passes to a new religious life through the reasons that led to change.

Other features were more clearly visible in the FGBMFI archive case. Institutional markers such as charismatic experience, religious speech patterns, business identity, immersion in the Holy Spirit, and speaking in languages are more common in these texts. It doesn't look like a random difference. These testimonies are expressed within a certain charismatic movement, in front of a certain audience. The same environment may have influenced not only what a person says, but also how they say it. The Lofland and Stark model is important here. They explain conversion not only as an internal change of faith, but also through social connections, approaching a religious group, and communicating with a new community.

Business identity and community traits in the FGBMFI archive Corps are significant in this regard. They reflect not only the experience of the individual, but also the imprint of the social environment in which that testimony is

mentioned. That is, the religious change in the text is transmitted not only as a personal biography but through the language and expectations of a certain group. Therefore, it is wrong to interpret the difference between the two corps as a national difference. This study does not compare conversions in the two countries.

The main comparison was made in relation to two different testimonies environments. The first is testimonies that were mentioned within the Charismatic Movement and later went to the archive. The second is the testimonial texts that are made public in today's YouTube Space. Therefore, it would be too easy to read the result as "conversion in one society is different from that in another". The right thing is to say that each medium builds the story of religious change in a form that is understandable to him and that he needs. Stromberg's work on the narrative of conversion is useful at this point. He sees testimony as a person's re-understanding of his life through a new religious language. This thought is good for our results. The testimony does not simply repeat what happened to a person. He reconstructs that story, placing it in a certain religious meaning. In one environment, this process is seen as a complete life story. In other environments, charismatic experience and communal language come to the fore. This is where the problem of context comes from.

Works edited by Buckser and Glazier highlight the importance of considering conversion in different cultural and social contexts. Pelkmans notes that to explain religious change in the post-Soviet space, it is necessary to take into account the local historical situation, social pressure and public place of religious communities. This study does not aim to fully explain post-Soviet religious change. But it is also wrong to read testimonials on YouTube separately from the same media and social environment. They are not just an individual narrative, but a form of religious narrative aimed at the public. The completeness of the narrative sequence in the YouTube public testimony corpus may depend on this media environment. YouTube testimonials are often intended for an unfamiliar audience in advance. The viewer does not know the life of a person. Therefore, the testimony will have to explain his story from the very beginning: what was his previous life like, what influenced the change, and what changed after the new faith. Here, the testimony does not convey only internal experience. He creates a story that is understandable to the viewer. It is also understandable that institutional labels are stronger in the FGBMFI archive Corps.

These materials originated within the religious culture of a particular movement. Business identity is associated with the social image of that movement. Immersion in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues are seen as essential features of charismatic practice (Hong, 2026). The frequent occurrence of such elements can arise not only from the experience of individuals but also from the tradition of testifying in the same environment. But don't say it too loudly. There is not enough evidence to say that the entire text is built on a ready-made template. However, recurring symptoms indicate the role of the institutional environment.

The limitation of the study is also clearly seen here. We did not directly study the actual conversion practice itself. How a person felt the same change at that moment, how he later realized it again, what internal doubts he went through – these data do not fully reveal it. Our material is a public testimony. Therefore, this study does not measure the psychological cause of the conversion, the spiritual depth or the inner state of the person. It only shows how the conversion story is organized within the text. It is wrong to see this limitation only as a weakness. He clarifies the boundaries of research. The testimony will always be a selected and organized conversation. A person says something, does not say something. Strengthens some moments, shortens some. Therefore, it is dangerous to perceive the testimony as a "pure experience". But it is important to study it as a public narrative. Because in religious communities, in the media space, and in archival materials, conversion is often expressed precisely through such a form of testimony.

In this sense, the 14-category framework was useful for research. It does not replace classic conversion models such as Rambo or Lofland-Stark. Rambo explains the periodic and contextual nature of the conversion. Lofland-Stark promotes the process of social connections and rapprochement with a religious group. Stromberg shows a person's reinterpretation of himself through narratives. Pelkmans reveals the role of the local historical and social context. Our framework does not offer a new universal model in place of these theories. It only helps to compare how such elements are reflected in public testimonial texts. This is where the main contribution of the study is made. He does not fully explain the conversion; he did not set such a goal. But it offers a specific way to compare conversion testimonies. If we consider a testimony not a literal copy of personal experience, but a public narrative created in a specific environment, then the coding framework, consisting of 14 categories, can be a useful tool. Especially when

compared to archival charismatic testimonials and testimonials posted on YouTube today, the difference is not only in the content, but also in how the story is built.

Conclusion

This article did not address religious conversion itself, but how a testimony of conversion is created. The main result of the study comes down to this: the difference between the two corpus manifests itself primarily at the level of testimony setting. That is, the question “Where is the conversion?” not in the question “what?” The question is what form the conversation about religious change takes in each medium.

In YouTube public testimony corpus, the conversion is often told as a full life story. A person sequentially talks about his past life, the situation that prompted the change, the process of change and the afterlife. This structure allows the listener to see human change as a narrative with a beginning, development, and outcome. Other emphasis was observed in the FGBMFI archival corpus. Here, the charismatic experience, business identity, Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues and characteristic features of the institutional environment were more clearly manifested.

It is wrong to read these differences as national differences. This study did not compare conversion rates in the two countries. The FGBMFI archival corpus shows testimonies that were spoken within a certain charismatic movement and then transferred to the archive. The YouTube public testimony corpus shows public testimonies in modern media environments. Therefore, the results should be understood as the difference between these two test settings.

The limits of research are also clear. This work does not fully restore the actual conversion experience. What was the inner spiritual state of a person, how he felt the change at that moment, how he later understood it – these questions cannot be fully answered by this fact. What we analyzed is public testimony. For the same reason, the article does not measure the psychological cause or spiritual depth of the conversion. It only shows how the testimony is arranged in the text.

The 14-category coding framework helped with this goal. It will not be presented as the new universal conversion model. His task is to compare how narrative structure, theological emphasis, emotional tone, and institutional markers look in the texts of public testimony. From this point of view, the framework does not go instead of Rambo, Lofland-Stark and other classic models. He spoke with the same theories, but his narrowness was used as an empirical tool.

The contribution of this study also lies in this simple place. If we consider conversion testimony not as a literal copy of personal experience, but as a public narrative created in a specific environment, then we can compare archival and modern media testimony. But such a comparison should be made with caution. If future research goes deeper into this area and looks at individual interviews, community context, and audience perception together, it will be possible to understand more clearly how conversion testimony is formed.

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Alpysbay M.A. – conducted the literature review, collected and analyzed the empirical data, and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript.

Utebayeva D.S. – supervised the research process, validated the analytical results, edited the manuscript, and handled correspondence with the journal.

Koishybayeva S.S. – participated in the interpretation of the research findings and contributed to editing the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no relevant conflicts of interest

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