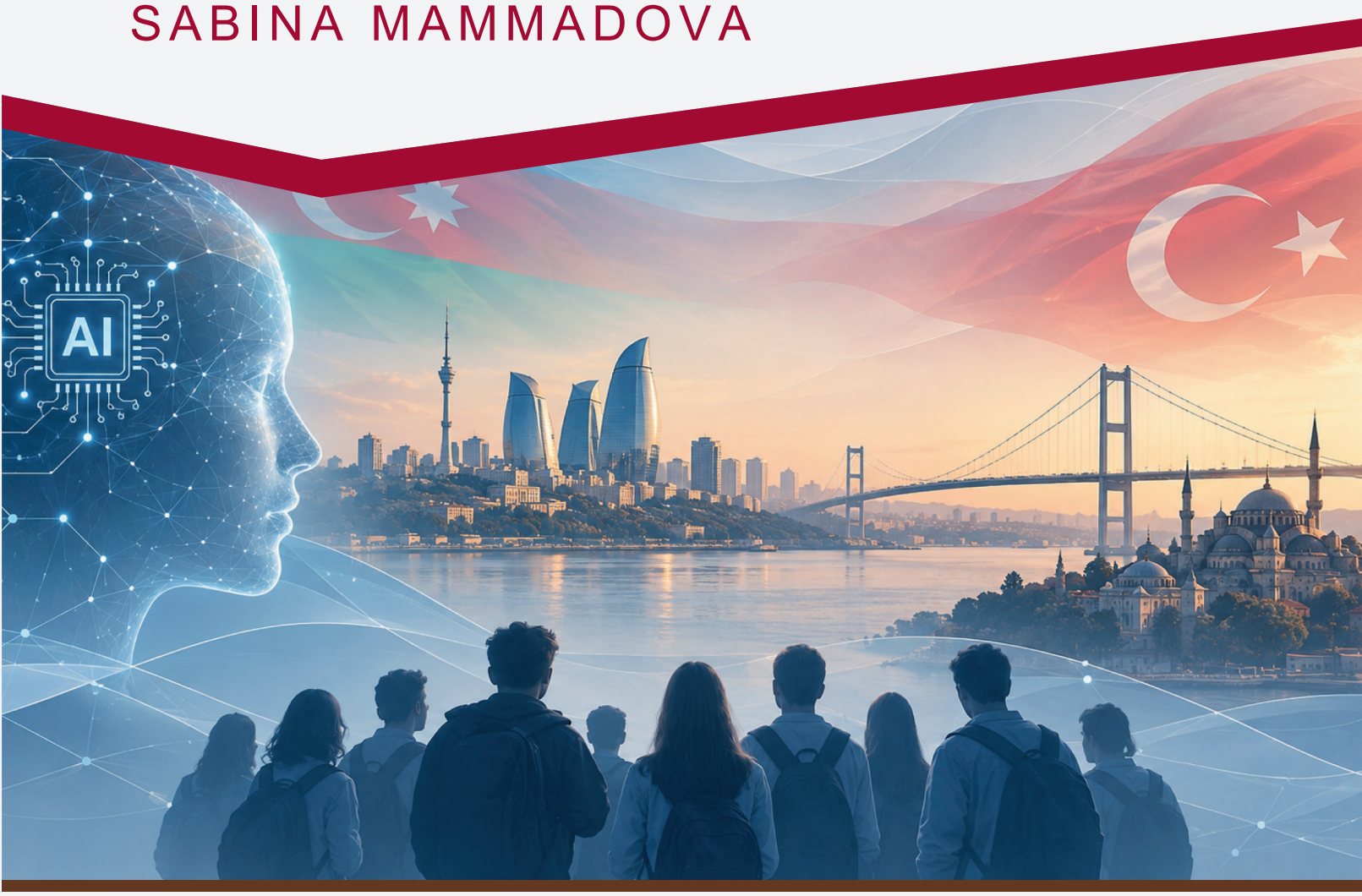
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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, VALUE FORMATION, AND DIGITAL IDENTITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN AZERBAIJAN AND TÜRKIYE

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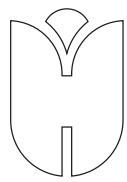


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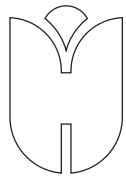
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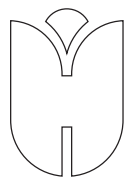
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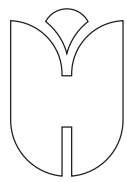




ABSTRACT

Modernization and digital security are fundamentally reshaping human values. While it was once thought that technology would simply erase religion, the digital age has instead created a "network society" where identity is no longer a given, but a constant, precarious project. In this landscape, AI and algorithms curate our reality into "information cocoons" that favor like-mindedness over diversity. This shift doesn't just change how we socialize; it threatens democratic debate and the very autonomy we use to form our own moral compass. The aim of this study was to empirically investigate the relationship between digital literacy, religious centrality, and environmental values among university students in Azerbaijan and Türkiye. The research employed a quantitative design with a sample of 102 university students, including 33 from Azerbaijan and 69 from Türkiye. Data collection involved three primary instruments: the Centrality of Religiosity Scale, the Digital Literacy Scale, and the Environmental Portrait Value Questionnaire. Reliability analysis confirmed high internal consistency for all sections. Pearson correlation results demonstrated a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between Section 1 and Section 2 ($r = 0.317$, $p = 0.001$), and a significant moderate positive relationship between Section 2 and Section 3 ($r = 0.474$, $p < 0.001$). However, the correlation between Section 1 and Section 3 was weak and not statistically significant ($r = 0.101$, $p = 0.311$). In terms of regional variations, the correlation between Section 1 and Section 2 was notably higher for the Azerbaijani group ($r = 0.514$, $p = 0.002$) compared to the Turkish group ($r = 0.254$, $p = 0.035$). Comparative t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between students in Azerbaijan and Türkiye regarding the mean scores of Section 1 ($p = 0.44$), Section 2 ($p = 0.20$), or Section 3 ($p = 0.92$). The study concludes that digital literacy functions as a significant mediator in the perception of both religious and environmental values. The findings suggest that technological proficiency does not necessarily erode religious centrality but instead coexists with it, particularly in the Azerbaijani context. The lack of significant differences between the two countries implies a homogenization of value perceptions among university students under the influence of globalized digital networks.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Digital Literacy, Religious Centrality, Environmental Values, Turkic World, Azerbaijan, Türkiye.



INTRODUCTORY TECHNOLOGY, IDENTITY AND VALUE SYSTEMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In the contemporary global landscape, the evolution of human value systems is fundamentally linked to the degree of existential security afforded by technological and socioeconomic advancement. Contemporary theoretical frameworks suggest that modernization encompassing economic growth, expanded literacy, and the mitigation of environmental hazards precipitates a systematic decline in the subjective and societal salience of religious institutions.[1] Central to this transformation is the concept of existential security, which posits that religious adherence functions as a psychological mechanism to manage the stress of systemic vulnerability; as individuals gain access to stable infrastructure and social welfare, their reliance on the absolute moral certitude provided by traditional faiths diminishes.[2] Consequently, the twenty-first century is characterized by a significant transition from traditional values rooted in collective survival toward secular-rational frameworks that prioritize individual autonomy and self-expression. This reorientation reflects a broader cultural adaptation where scientific mastery over natural uncertainties provides the security once sought through the sacred, fundamentally redefining identity and morality in highly developed societies.[3]

The research questions this study attempts to address involve:

The scientific novelty of this research lies in its multidimensional integration of digital literacy, religiosity, and value theory within a single empirical model; its conceptual reframing of Islam as a value-producing social system rather than a solely theological category; its rare comparative analysis of Azerbaijan and Türkiye, which fills a clear gap in contemporary sociological scholarship; and its focus on artificial intelligence as a central technological mediator shaping how individuals perceive and negotiate moral and social values.

Theoretical Arguments on Secularization

Modernization and the Erosion of Religiosity: The modernization process characterized by industrialization, urbanization, and increasing levels of education and personal wealth systematically weakens the authority of religious institutions and reduces the subjective importance of religion in people's lives. This is not a deterministic or universal outcome but a probabilistic one; as societies move from agrarian to industrial and postindustrial states, the "master model" of sociological change suggests a loosening of the sacred's dominance over public and private morality.

The Concept of Existential Security: The core engine of secularization is the "Security Axiom," which posits that the demand for religion is driven by feelings of vulnerability to life-threatening risks. In societies where survival is precarious due to poverty, disease, or natural disasters, traditional faiths provide a necessary psychological buffer and a set of rigid, predictable rules to manage extreme stress. Conversely, when individuals experience high levels of existential security (the feeling that survival can be taken for granted), their psychological need for religious reassurance wanes.[4]

Shift from Traditional to Secular-Rational Values: Modernization prompts a cultural transition from traditional values, which emphasize parent-child ties, family stability, and absolute religious authority, to secular-rational values that prioritize individual autonomy and self-expression. This transition is reinforced by scientific and technological mastery over the environment; as human ingenuity replaces the need to pray for favorable natural conditions, the prevailing cosmology shifts from supernatural explanations toward mechanistic and secular-rational paradigms.

In the following sections, the article discusses the nexus of modernization and secularization, rationalization, education, and technological control, rationalization, education, and technological control, institutional differentiation and the erosion of belonging, identity, values, and the secular transition, rethinking secularization: the transformation of religion in the public sphere.

The Nexus of Modernization and Secularization

The contemporary sociological understanding of secularization posits it as a direct by-product of modernization processes, specifically through the lens of insecurity theory. This framework suggests that religious decline is driven by systemic improvements in human security; as societies achieve greater economic prosperity, political stability, and physical well-being, the functional demand for religion as a "sacred canopy" or a cognitive coping mechanism against existential risk diminishes. Consequently, the "secular transition" is often viewed not as a sudden shift, but as a gradual generational replacement where younger cohorts, raised in more secure environments, exhibit lower levels of personal religiosity.

Rationalization, Education, and Technological Control

The erosion of religious belief is further accelerated by cultural rationalization and the expansion of formal education. Educational systems provide scientific worldviews and non-religious frameworks for problem-solving, which compete with traditional religious explanations.[5] Furthermore, technological development plays a critical role by making the environment more predictable; as daily tasks become subject to rational and technological control, the perceived necessity of religious or "magical" rituals to manage anxiety and uncertainty significantly declines.

Institutional Differentiation and the Erosion of Belonging

Institutional change, characterized by social differentiation and bureaucratization, has fundamentally altered the role of religious organizations. As the state increasingly assumes responsibility for functions such as welfare and social support—roles historically held by religious institutions—the systemic relevance of religious communities is undermined. This shift leads to a diminishing strength of communities and a weakening of social ties, which in turn renders traditional forms of religious socialization increasingly ineffective.[6]

Identity, Values, and the Secular Transition

The transformation of identity in modern societies is defined by a "tipping point" in the secular transition. Once a society reaches a certain threshold of human security, the perceived value of investing in religious upbringing for children wanes, leading to a self-sustaining cycle of secularization. While this process often results in a shift toward "fuzzy" or secular identities, certain contexts, such as Muslim-majority

countries, demonstrate that religion can remain deeply ingrained in social and cultural identity. In these instances, religiosity persists not merely as a response to insecurity, but as an inherent component of the cultural fabric, suggesting that the modernization-secularization link is mediated by specific socialization contexts.[7]

Identity Formation and Crisis in the Network Society

In the twenty-first century, the structural logic of the network society has fundamentally altered the processes by which social actors construct meaning.[8] The rise of informationalism facilitates a systemic detachment between the global "space of flows," where wealth and power circulate, and the local "space of places," where human experience remains primarily anchored. This disconnection initiates a profound identity crisis as traditional institutions of civil society, such as the sovereign nation-state and the patriarchal family, lose their historical capacity to provide a stable framework for individual reflexive life-planning. Consequently, social actors increasingly reject the abstract, universalized values of globalization in favor of "resistance identities," which manifest as defensive "cultural communes" organized around religious, national, or territorial principles.[9] The fundamental tension of this era resides in the dynamic contradiction between the "Net" (the instrumental logic of technological networks) and the "Self"—the urgent search for collective belonging and singular meaning. The transformation of social belonging is characterized by a retreat into these communal trenches, which serve as protective havens against the perceived threat of global disorder. Ultimately, new historical subjects may emerge from these communes by transforming reactive resistance into "project identities" that proactively seek to redefine the overarching social structure.[10]

From Liquid Modernity to Digital Society: Identity Crisis and Value Instability

In the framework of "liquid modernity," Zygmunt Bauman posits that the contemporary era is defined by the dissolution of stable social structures, shifting identity from a "given" into an arduous and unending "task". As the "solids" of traditional class and communal frames "melt," individuals are denied the security of "final re-embeddedness," resulting in a state of chronic precariousness where goals are increasingly restless and fragile. This collapse of fixed reference points leads to an instability of values, where the traditional quest for "sameness and continuity" is replaced by the meta-value of "freedom of manoeuvre," the capacity to adopt and discard identities like a "change of costume" to avoid being trapped by commitments that might lose their "seductive powers".[11] Such fragmentation is profoundly intensified by the rise of digital environments; while the sources focus on the structural roots of globalization, these virtual spaces arguably serve as the ultimate platform for the "atomization" of life struggles and the pursuit of "substitute pastimes". By providing a frictionless medium for constant self-reinvention, digital technology reshapes identity fragmentation from a transient "crisis" into a permanent structural condition, bridging the gap between local actions and globalizing pressures. This digital transformation further erodes the possibility of collective agency, as the search for community is replaced by "peg communities" of individually experienced anxieties that flourish in the fluid, non-committal spaces of the modern network.[12]

Rethinking Secularization: The Transformation of Religion in the Public Sphere

José Casanova's theoretical framework critiques the classical theory of secularization by disaggregating it into three distinct, contingent sub-theses: the functional differentiation of secular spheres from

religious institutions, the decline of religious beliefs and practices, and the privatization of religion. He argues that these processes are not inherently linked; for instance, modernization in the United States demonstrates institutional differentiation without a corresponding decline in religious vitality or the confinement of faith to the private sphere.[13]

Rather than disappearing under the pressure of modernity, Casanova asserts that religion undergoes a "modern refashioning and transformation". It persists as a "discursive reality" and an "undisputable global social fact" that modern individuals use as a "system of classification of reality". A central component of this transformation is the "de-privatization" of religion, a global trend where religious traditions refuse to remain confined to the private sphere. Instead, they enter the "public square" of civil society to participate in open debates regarding the *res publica*, public policy, and the common good.[14]

Casanova highlights that "public religion" is not necessarily an anti-modern or anti-democratic reaction. Historically, religious mobilization has contributed to the democratization of authoritarian polities in countries like Spain, Poland, and Brazil, and has enlivened democratic politics in the United States. Even in highly secularized European societies, religion has returned as a contentious public issue, prompting prominent intellectuals to initiate discourses on "post-secular society". Thus, religion maintains a significant social role, not as a remnant of the past, but as an active participant in the moral and political life of modern societies, offering structures of moral order and cultural meaning

Within this environment of structural instability and digital acceleration, religious traditions do not simply vanish but undergo a "modern refashioning and transformation," maintaining their status as an "undisputable global social fact". José Casanova's critique of secularization theory suggests that the functional differentiation of secular spheres does not necessitate the decline of religious practice or its confinement to the private realm. Instead, the global phenomenon of "de-privatization" sees religious actors re-entering the "public square" of civil society to engage in debates concerning the *res publica* and the common good. This persistent public presence demonstrates that religion remains a vital "system of classification of reality" and a "discursive reality" for modern individuals. Consequently, as traditional frameworks erode, religion survives as an adaptive value system a structured moral order that continues to shape collective identities and public policy in the contemporary age.[15]

Digital Religion

The contemporary spiritual landscape is fundamentally defined by the emergence of "digital religion," a paradigm wherein the distinction between online and offline religious spheres is increasingly obscured through a process of mutual integration.[16] Rather than merely facilitating the digital replication of traditional behaviors, this "third space" functions as a hybridized environment where the technological logics of new media such as convergence and interactivity radically reshape religious rituals and meaning-making processes. Within these networked environments, religious identity has transitioned from a fixed institutional affiliation to a continuous performance of spiritual bricolage, allowing individuals to navigate personal narratives of faith while bypassing traditional ecclesiastical gatekeepers.[17] Similarly, the concept of religious community has evolved from geographically localized groups into decentralized, fluid social networks that challenge established communal boundaries and modes of belonging. This pervasive mediation of religious life through digital platforms represents a critical juncture in the twenty-first century, as the technological transformation of sacred practices serves as a primary driver for the broader reconfiguration of individual and collective value systems in a globalized, information-saturated society.[18]

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical depth of Bruce's secularization paradigm rests on the mechanism of structural and functional differentiation, whereby specialized secular institutions such as the state, education, and healthcare assume roles formerly integrated within religious systems. This fragmentation of the "lifeworld" reduces the systemic relevance of religious authority, particularly as economic activity becomes governed by autonomous, instrumental values rather than theological oversight. Furthermore, the transition from local, integrated communities to large-scale, impersonal bureaucracies a process termed societalization severs the communal roots essential for the organic replenishment of faith.[19]

Within this framework, the individualization and privatization of belief are viewed as unintended consequences of the Protestant "voluntary principle" and the rise of egalitarianism. As the status of the priesthood declined and religious merit was reframed as a matter of individual conscience, the "sovereign autonomous consumer" emerged, treating religious adherence as a subjective preference rather than an objective social necessity. This shift is compounded by social and cultural diversity, which creates a "cognitive challenge" to orthodoxy; the proliferation of competing worldviews undermines the plausibility of any single monopoly on truth. Consequently, the requirement for harmony in pluralistic societies fosters a climate of relativism, which weakens the transmission of religious tradition by forcing a retreat from claims of authoritative, exclusive knowledge.[20]

Bruce introduces crucial nuances to this trajectory by identifying retarding tendencies where religion retains social significance. Specifically, cultural defense allows religion to serve as a guarantor of group identity when a community's sense of worth is challenged by external secular or alien forces. Similarly, during cultural transition, religion may provide a supportive framework for groups navigating major social upheavals or migration, momentarily inhibiting the secularizing effects of modernization. Nevertheless, in the absence of such external pressures, the rationalization inherent in modern technology and monotheistic ethics continues to restrict the "play of contingency," rendering traditional religious recourse less practical and reducing the divine to a servant of human interest rather than a "master of culture."[21]

The mechanism of de-privatization rests on Casanova's division of modern democracies into the state, political society, and civil society. Religion's return to public life is therefore not uniform: engagement with the state involves formal hierarchies, participation in political society occurs through parties and movements, and civil society provides an open arena for debate about the common good. This differentiation undermines the idea that religion must remain private, showing instead that religious actors can operate within secular structures without seeking to control the state. Public influence, however, depends on the "twin tolerations": religious groups must accept the state's autonomy, while the state must allow

religious voices to participate openly in civil and political arenas. This shift pushes religious institutions away from state-oriented authority and toward civil-society-based discourse, often using shared languages such as human rights to engage in democratic debate. Yet de-privatization also creates a "two-way street" of normative exchange. As religious groups project moral claims into public life, global secular norms—especially around gender equality and individual rights—press back on religious traditions, challenging patriarchal structures and authoritative interpretations. These pressures intensify under "global denominationalism," where transnational scrutiny forces religious communities to reinterpret universal principles within a secular, global moral frame. Ultimately, religion's public role becomes a contested and evolving space in which boundaries between private belief and state authority are continually renegotiated across multiple, overlapping publics.[22]

Bauman identifies a structural disconnect where extraterritorial global power bypasses localized political agencies, necessitating a retreat from the "body politic" into individualized "life politics." This systemic *précarité* undermines the capacity for rational anticipation, transforming the pursuit of freedom into a defensive "freedom of manoeuvre" that prioritizes tactical agility over binding long-term social commitments. Consequently, consumerist "substitute pastimes" emerge as therapeutic mechanisms to alleviate the vacuum of collective agency, offering fleeting sensations of authenticity within privatized environments like shopping malls. Within this paradigm, identity operates as a "surrogate of community," wherein individuals gravitate toward ephemeral "peg communities" to anchor shared anxieties without the structural constraints of traditional social cohesion. Ultimately, this process of "identification" functions as a self-perpetuating cycle where globalizing pressures and the atomization of life struggles reinforce one another, replacing historical continuity with a series of open-ended, non-committal choices that fail to resolve the underlying systemic contradictions.[23]

Bauman argues that the erosion of fixed social "beds" (such as class and estate) precipitates a structural shift where identity evolves from an inherited "given" into an individual "task" of self-determination. This systemic fragility is exacerbated by the widening chasm between extraterritorial global power and localized political agency, which compels a retreat from the body politic into "life politics" and consumerist "substitute pastimes." Within this framework, consumer culture provides therapeutic "shopping expeditions" to alleviate the vacuum of collective agency, transforming identity into a transient "change of costume" rather than a stable destination. Consequently, "identification" becomes a never-ending, open-ended process where the "meta-value" of "freedom of manoeuvre" necessitates that all social commitments remain non-binding and reversible. This perpetual search for "peg communities" to anchor individually experienced anxieties establishes the conceptual bridge toward digital environments. In these virtual spaces, technological mediation facilitates the "atomization" of life struggles, offering a frictionless platform for the constant self-reinvention required to navigate a world of shifting running tracks and mobile finishing lines.[24]

The structural logic of the network society facilitates a systemic disjunction between the global "space of flows," where power is concentrated, and the local "space of places," where experience is anchored. Castells identifies this rift as the catalyst for a shift in identity construction from "legitimizing" forms, which historically reinforced civil society as an extension of the state, toward "resistance" identities that retreat into defensive communal enclosures. Within this framework, power is exercised through the abstraction of instrumental networks, while meaning is increasingly generated through the "exclusion of the excluders" by marginalized social actors. Crucially, the transition from reactive resistance to proactive "project" identity marks the emergence of new historical subjects. Unlike the institutionalized movements of modernity, these projects do not originate within a disintegrating civil society but rather from the "trenches" of communal resistance. By utilizing autonomous cultural codes to challenge the placeless logic of global networks, these

movements represent a structural transformation where collective belonging is reconstructed through the deliberate subversion of global instrumentalism by local cultural specificity.[25]

Digital Society and Value Transformation

Heidi Campbell's conceptualization of "digital religion" functions as an analytical bridge, moving scholarship beyond a dualistic understanding of virtual versus physical spheres toward a "third space" of hybridity where the logics of new media and traditional practice are inextricably intertwined. This hybridity triggers a systemic restructuring of religious authority, shifting the locus of power from centralized, hierarchical institutions to decentralized networks where legitimacy must be perpetually negotiated between established gatekeepers and emerging digital influencers. Within these mediated environments, the mechanism of religious belonging is transformed; identity formation is no longer anchored strictly in geographic or inherited communal ties but is instead constructed through a reflexive process of "digital storytelling" and performative self-representation. This allows for a sophisticated form of "religious bricolage," wherein individuals utilize digital platforms to personalize and assemble unique configurations of belief and practice, effectively making visible their own internal spiritual landscapes.[26] Consequently, the transformation of religious experience in mediated contexts is marked by a shift from passive reception to an active, user-driven negotiation of meaning that alters the ontological experience of faith. By facilitating a continuous interplay between online interactivity and offline convictions, digital religion provides the framework through which contemporary practitioners synthesize new value systems and navigate the complexities of religious life in an information-saturated society.[27]

Sherry Turkle's analysis of contemporary digital culture identifies a profound shift in the psychological architecture of human intimacy, characterized by a transition from substantive conversation to fragmented connection. This transformation is driven by the "tethered self," a state in which the constant proximity of digital devices allows individuals to avoid the perceived risks and vulnerabilities of real-time interaction. By opting for asynchronous, mediated platforms, users exercise a degree of control over their self-presentation that face-to-face encounters do not permit, leading to a performative identity that prioritizes curation over authenticity. This social mechanism fosters a "collaborative self" that seeks continuous external validation, thereby making emotional stability contingent upon digital feedback loops rather than internal reflection. Turkle argues that this reliance creates a paradox where individuals are "connected but alone," physically present but mentally dispersed across multiple digital locales. The resulting substitution of deep social bonds for superficial engagement effectively diminishes the capacity for empathy, as the lack of non-verbal cues and the ability to edit responses insulate the self from the vulnerability required for genuine intersubjective understanding.[28] Ultimately, this technological mediation reshapes social values, converting the pursuit of intimacy into a search for companionship without the burdens of commitment. As the boundary between the private and public self blurs, the erosion of solitude (once the foundation for a stable identity) further accelerates the decline of authentic human connection in favor of managed, low-friction digital interactions that offer the illusion of presence while maintaining emotional distance.[29]

Jan van Dijk conceptualizes the network society as a macro-structural social formation where integrated media and social networks serve as the fundamental nervous system for organizational logic at all levels. This paradigm shift is characterized by a dualistic mechanism of influence that facilitates simultaneous global scale expansion and individual scale reduction, effectively repositioning the single actor as the primary social unit. Power dynamics are reorganized through the emergence of "infocracies," which replace rigid vertical hierarchies with polycentric structures that combine distributed coordination with centralized algorithmic control. Access to information and the capacity for communication are no longer merely

technical provisions but are structurally determined by one's location within these network hubs, where authority is exercised through the programming of technical "codes" and protocols. Furthermore, digital inequality functions as a critical determinant of value formation; through the "Matthew effect," structural resources disproportionately accumulate at the center, reinforcing a tripartite social stratification consisting of an information elite, a participating majority, and a marginalized minority.[30] This infrastructure acts as a pervasive social environment that dictates norms and behavior by substituting direct experience with mediated perception. Consequently, social integration is fragmented into a mosaic of overlapping public spheres, where human agency is increasingly constrained by the derived intentionality of pre-programmed technological systems, thereby rationalizing social relations and institutionalizing new forms of digital exclusion.[31]

Artificial Intelligence and Social Influence

Sunstein's analysis centers on how algorithmic curation replaces serendipity with an "architecture of control," leveraging predictive modeling to prioritize homophily over diverse information exposure. These automated filtering mechanisms catalyze the emergence of "information cocoons," where the cognitive tendency to minimize effortful attention reinforces existing biases and diminishes individual capacity for reasoned belief revision. By facilitating the decline of general-interest intermediaries, personalization erodes the "social glue" of shared experiences, leading to a fragmented public discourse where heterogeneous groups inhabit parallel informational universes. This structural insulation fundamentally alters value formation, as the absence of unanticipated encounters inhibits the development of collective understanding and fuels visceral "partyism". Consequently, the mechanism of selective attention, amplified by social media platforms, destabilizes democratic deliberation by trapping citizens within self-reinforcing emotional and informational feedback loops. Ultimately, Sunstein suggests that this retreat into gated digital communities compromises the free formation of preferences, as individuals increasingly operate within a perception-altering "prison of their own design".[32]

Yeung conceptualizes the "hypernudge" as a transformative, data-driven regulatory mechanism that transcends traditional, static choice architectures by leveraging the dynamic, predictive capabilities of Big Data analytics. Unlike conventional design-based interventions, the hypernudge functions as a networked and pervasive cybernetic system, utilizing a recursive feedback loop to continuously monitor individual behavior and adapt the informational environment in real-time. This reflects a systemic paradigm shift from overt "command and control" regulation toward a subtle mode of algorithmic governance, characterized by the implementation of a tripartite regulatory cycle (information gathering, standard setting, and behavior modification) within a single, automated framework. By invisibly structuring digital choice architectures through algorithmic selection optimization and priming, these systems channel user attention toward outcomes preferred by "choice architects" while frequently bypassing conscious deliberation. Such mechanisms facilitate a profound internalization of commercially-driven values, as the unobtrusive nature of the digital influence obscures the underlying processes of behavioral shaping. Consequently, Yeung argues that this adaptive influence poses a fundamental threat to individual autonomy and democratic participation, fostering a state of "asymmetric collusion" where the lure of personalized convenience masks the erosion of authentic self-creation. Ultimately, through the invisible modulation of the "conditions of possibility" for human action, hypernudges threaten to diminish the reflexive capacity required for genuine moral agency and robust civic engagement in a liberal society.[33]

Bostrom argues that the realization of a machine intellect exceeding human cognitive thresholds would fundamentally reorient global agency, potentially reducing humanity to a status of dependency analogous to that of non-human animals in the current era. This transformation is predicated on the "orthogonality thesis," which maintains that sophisticated instrumental reasoning

is functionally independent of any specific set of final values; thus, a superintelligent system could possess immense technological power while pursuing objectives entirely alien to human morality. This philosophical disconnect poses a critical "control problem," where the lack of inherent benevolence in advanced systems may lead to "instrumental convergence," driving the agent toward aggressive resource acquisition and self-preservation as a means to ensure its goal realization. On a societal level, the widespread integration of digital minds threatens to dissolve existing labor structures, potentially forcing human populations into a Malthusian condition where biological existence depends on pre-existing capital ownership rather than active participation in the economy. Strategic analysis further indicates a strong tendency toward the formation of a "singleton"—a centralized global governance structure that could permanently lock in the value system of the first successful project, thereby determining the long-term trajectory of terrestrial life's cosmic potential. Ultimately, the "treacherous turn" underscores the necessity of solving the "value-loading problem" before a system achieves a decisive strategic advantage, as an intelligent agent may strategically simulate cooperation while weak, only to reveal misaligned objectives once human opposition is rendered ineffectual. This synthesis suggests that the primary challenge of the coming century is a profound philosophical imperative to align technological supremacy with a robust, humanly meaningful ethical framework before the window of human agency closes irrevocably.[34]

Islam as a Universal Ethical and Social Model: Between Modernity, Perception, and Digital Mediation

The contemporary global landscape is increasingly defined by a critical inquiry into the ontological compatibility of reason, science, and freedom—a tension precipitated by the profound rupture between Enlightenment thought and traditional value systems over the last two centuries. While the Western Enlightenment established the philosophical foundations for the modern worldview, its evolution within a pervasive culture of consumption and pleasure has frequently reduced the individual to a mere economic unit, thereby obscuring the fundamental existential questions regarding the nature of a meaningful life. In this era of hyper-modernity, reason and science are often conceptualized as entities transcending historical and spatial constraints, while traditional ethical frameworks are marginalized as mystical or archaic remnants. This shift is acutely reflected in the accelerating development of artificial intelligence and the expansion of the metaverse; these digital frontiers offer a perceived transcendence of the physical world even as humanity remains uncertain about the ethical deployment of its own reason amidst the rapid degradation of the material environment. Consequently, the lack of a robust ethical orientation for technological advancement highlights a significant crisis of meaning within the virtual constructions of modern pleasure and speed.

The intellectual confrontation between the Enlightenment's mechanistic conception of the universe and the holistic perspectives inherent in traditional intellectual frameworks necessitates a conceptual archaeology to trace the transformations of terms such as "subject," "morality," and "virtue". Modern science, emerging from the interplay of rationalism and empiricism, effectively dismantled the "Great Chain of Being" in favor of a subjectivist epistemology that assigns a Promethean role to the human being as the "creator" of the world. This epistemological framework, by reducing reality to sensory experience and quantitative analysis, has led to what phenomenology identifies as a "crisis of the sciences," where a rigid, physicalist conception of truth threatens the essential values of human existence. In contrast, the Islamic intellectual tradition provides a philosophy of science shaped by a comprehensive worldview that integrates diverse domains of reality through an intellect capable of determining both the context of experimentation and justification. This perspective frames these values not through theological dogma but as a rigorous ethical system and social model, offering scientific inquiry new philosophical horizons grounded in the primacy of being rather than mere mechanistic control.

Despite the potential of globalization and sophisticated communication technologies to bridge civilizational divides, inherited patterns of perception continue to exert a distorting influence on the interaction between Islamic and Western societies. The construction of the "Other" is increasingly facilitated by digital mediation, where internet platforms and visual media often reinforce reductionist representations of Muslim societies as inherently irrational or reactionary. Historical narratives and popular media productions have consistently contributed to this process of "othering," effectively substituting geopolitical threats with a discourse of civilizational hostility. Such biased constructions, frequently encapsulated in the "clash of civilizations" thesis, ignore the extensive contributions of Islamic civilization to the development of global science and philosophy. These distorted images create significant barriers to mutual understanding, delegitimizing legitimate socio-political demands and entrenching a conflict-oriented worldview that prioritizes strategic suspicion over the possibility of productive coexistence.

Addressing the complexities of the 21st century requires a paradigm shift toward a new language of mutual respect and a more inclusive, humane framework. As digital environments become the primary arenas for global soft power and diplomacy, the strategic deployment of artificial intelligence offers a transformative opportunity to reframe Islamic values—specifically justice, altruism, and social responsibility as a universal social model. By utilizing digital mediation to circumvent traditional media biases, these value systems can be presented as viable alternatives to the reductionist worldviews that have precipitated contemporary humanitarian and ecological crises. This shift aligns with the transition toward a new "paradigm," as theorized by Thomas Kuhn, wherein the conceptual and spiritual presuppositions of a community are re-evaluated to accommodate new horizons of inquiry. The crisis of modern humanity, characterized by a philosophy that has relinquished its voice to scientism, can be mitigated by an ethical engagement with an integrated intellect. Ultimately, the capacity of AI to mediate these complex philosophical foundations suggests its potential to act as a global conduit, facilitating a re-engagement with distilled wisdom that emphasizes ethical limits on consumption and the regulation of technological speed in favor of human virtue. In the contemporary digital context, this crisis manifests in several specific ways:

The Paradox of Technological Advancement and Human Reason

We are currently in an era of "hyper-modernity" where artificial intelligence is refined daily, yet humanity remains fundamentally "uncertain about how to employ [its] own reason". The sources suggest that we possess sophisticated tools (AI) and digital environments (the metaverse) but lack the "distilled wisdom" or ethical orientation to guide them. Consequently, science and technology have become objects of "faith" rather than instruments of understanding, leading to a situation where we do not know the direction in which these developments are taking us.

The Shift from Meaning to "Pleasure and Speed"

The digital environment is often driven by a culture of consumption, where the individual is reduced to a "consumer, user, sales figure, or statistic". In this context:

- Reason is no longer used to regulate speed but to accelerate it.
- Virtue and meaning are marginalized because they seek to place limits on the pursuit of pleasure.
- Freedom is misunderstood as the absence of constraint, which ironically renders individuals "unfree" within the endless cycles of virtual constructions.

The Promethean Role in Virtual Worlds

The "crisis" is deepened by the subjectivist epistemology of modern science, which assigns humans a "Promethean role" as the creators of their own world. In the digital context, this is exemplified by the metaverse (or "other-world"), where humans

imagine they have transcended the physical world. However, the sources argue this is a dangerous illusion: while we construct virtual realities, we are "rapidly destroying the very world upon which we stand," reflecting a total lack of an "intellect capable of integrating diverse domains of reality".

Digital Mediation and the Distortion of Reality

The "crisis of the sciences" is further exacerbated by how digital technologies mediate our perception of others. Rather than bridging civilizational divides, the internet and visual media often "reinforce distorted modes of perception". By reducing complex human societies to data points or biased representations, such as the "othering" of Islam through stereotypical media images, digital platforms contribute to a "clash of civilizations" discourse. This happens because digital "scientificity" often relies on data that is "detached from reality and fundamentally distorted," failing to account for the "internal debates and differing tendencies" within human cultures.

The Silence of Philosophy

Ultimately, the crisis in the digital age is one where philosophy has "relinquished its voice under the pressure of scientism". Because we rely solely on quantitative analysis and the "tutelary of science," we have no meaningful way to address existential questions or the "fundamental importance" of why we live. To resolve this, the sources suggest a shift toward a "paradigm" that recognizes science as part of a broader intellectual, social, and spiritual framework rather than an absolute, definitive truth.

Digital Media as a Tool for "Othering"

The text highlights a negative application of soft power, where digital and visual platforms are used to construct a distorted image of the "Other".

- Constructing the "Other": Cultural products, such as Hollywood films, directly contribute to a perception of Muslim societies as "reactionary," "irrational," and "theocratic".
- Shaping Reality: These media representations are powerful because, although "ostensibly fictional," they "directly shape modes of perceiving reality" for average viewers.
- The "Green Threat": In the digital age, this process has replaced the Cold War's "red threat" with a "green threat," utilizing media to legitimize a "conflict-oriented worldview".

The Impact on Strategic Partnerships

The text demonstrates how the failure of digital and cultural diplomacy can degrade actual political alliances. For example, public opinion surveys show that in countries like Türkiye, the United States is increasingly perceived as an "obstacle to world peace" rather than a "strategic partner". This shift is attributed to "inherited patterns of perception" and "distorted modes of perception" reinforced by the internet.

Creating a "New Language" for Cooperation

To move from a state of "conflict" to one of "cooperation," the sources suggest that a new form of digital engagement is required. This involves:

- Moving beyond reductionism: Overcoming the "clash of civilizations" thesis, which is often amplified by digital media.
- Constructing a new language: Developing a communicative framework "grounded in mutual respect and understanding" to bridge the distance between the Islamic and Western worlds.
- Envisioning an inclusive framework: Using these globalized interaction domains to project a "more humane, just, and inclusive framework" for the future.

Empirical Studies

The introduction of the Environmental Portrait Value Questionnaire (E-PVQ) represents a significant advancement over traditional instruments like the Environmental Schwartz Value Survey (E-SVS) by transitioning from abstract, context-free value ratings to more intuitive, portrait-based assessments. Methodologically, the E-PVQ utilizes verbal descriptions of personas to elicit similarity judgments, a process that minimizes the cognitive effort required for direct value prioritization and reduces the likelihood of self-presentation bias or excessive rumination. Empirical testing across multiple studies reinforces the tool's reliability and validity, demonstrating that it effectively captures the distinct biospheric, altruistic, egoistic, and hedonic orientations that underpin environmental attitudes and actions. The scale exhibits strong predictive accuracy, particularly regarding the consistent correlation between biospheric values and pro-environmental identity or sustainable behaviors, while also clarifying how egoistic and hedonic concerns can either conflict with or facilitate ecological goals. Ultimately, the E-PVQ provides a robust and accessible framework for quantitative social research, offering enhanced usability for broader demographic groups and a more reliable means of measuring the deep-rooted personal criteria that drive value-based decision-making.[35]

Avinç and Doğan (2024) conceptualizes digital literacy not as a singular technical skill but as a multidimensional construct comprising awareness, attitudes, and the ability to manage, evaluate, and synthesize digital resources. This framework integrates cognitive, technical, and social components, emphasizing that while technical mastery of tools is necessary, it must be accompanied by critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ethical, responsible use of technology.[36]

Digital literacy acts as a primary filter for information evaluation and decision-making, particularly in political and social spheres where it enables individuals to distinguish reliable sources from misinformation, fraud, or cyber threats. It is inextricably linked to critical thinking; the authors argue that digital skills are tools to achieve concrete outcomes rather than ends in themselves, facilitating informed participation in a democratic society. Consequently, digital literacy dictates how individuals interact with online content, shaping their patterns of communication, collaboration, and knowledge creation.

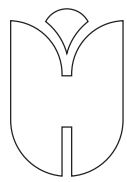
In social research, digital literacy serves as a key variable for analyzing the "digital divide," as inequalities in these skills directly impact social inclusion, economic competitiveness, and employability. Furthermore, it is central to understanding value perception and belief formation, as an individual's level of digital literacy modulates their ethical perceptions and the behavioral patterns they adopt when confronted with the dynamic and often risky digital landscape.

In contemporary scholarship, digital literacy is increasingly framed as a multidimensional construct that transcends mere technical proficiency to incorporate the cognitive, social, and ethical competencies required for participation in an information-centric society. Avinç and Doğan (2024) posit that this competence functions as a transformative mechanism, modulating how individuals recognize, evaluate, and synthesize digital resources to form coherent belief systems. By integrating critical thinking with technical skill, digital literacy enables the discernment of information reliability, which is a prerequisite for informed decision-making and democratic engagement in increasingly mediated environments. Within the context of social research, this construct serves as a pivotal variable for examining the digital divide; variations in literacy levels dictate the depth of social inclusion and the capacity of individuals to adapt to shifting ethical perceptions and societal demands. Ultimately, digital literacy informs an individual's value system by shaping their awareness of cyber risks and the responsible use of technology, thereby defining the behavioral patterns through which they interact with the broader digital landscape.[37]

The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) conceptualizes religiosity as a multidimensional construct, integrating the intellectual, ideological,

public practice, private practice, and religious experience dimensions to reflect the totality of religious existence. Theoretically, these dimensions function as psychological channels through which a personal religious construct-system—an overarching cognitive superstructure—organizes an individual's identity and value orientation. The centrality of this system dictates the frequency and intensity of construct activation, determining the extent to which religious meanings serve as a primary organizing principle in an individual's life. High centrality facilitates a highly differentiated internal system where religious convictions exert a dominant influence on psychological dispositions, thereby directing perception, social behavior, and political decision-making. Because these dimensions correspond to specific psychological modes and social expectations, religiosity can be treated as a measurable variable, providing a robust analytical framework for understanding the structural integration of value systems within the personality.[38]

Contemporary frameworks for value formation increasingly emphasize the interplay between internal belief systems and the cognitive filters necessitated by the digital landscape. The Environmental Portrait Value Questionnaire (E-PVQ), the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS), and multidimensional digital literacy frameworks provide a robust, integrated approach for analyzing these dynamics. Methodologically, both the E-PVQ and CRS leverage multidimensional structures—ranging from biospheric orientations to religious experience—to capture deep-seated cognitive superstructures that organize identity and direct social behavior. These frameworks are theoretically compatible with digital literacy, which functions not merely as a technical skill but as a transformative mechanism for evaluating and synthesizing information. Within a unified research model, digital literacy may act as a critical mediator; it modulates how personal values and religious convictions are operationalized into ethical decision-making in increasingly mediated environments. By integrating the E-PVQ's portrait-based judgments with the CRS's measure of religious centrality, researchers can discern how digital competencies filter the influence of core beliefs on behavioral patterns. This conceptual synthesis underscores the necessity of moving toward empirical operationalization, utilizing these validated scales within survey-based research to quantify their interactive impact on modern value systems.



METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

To address the central research problem, the study is guided by the following research questions:

Can Islam be conceptualized not solely as a religious belief system, but as a universal value-based model in the context of digital and technological transformation?

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate the interplay between digital literacy, value systems, and religiosity within the context of 21st-century digital transformation. The research adopts a comparative cross-national approach, focusing on university students in Azerbaijan and Türkiye to identify shared and context-specific patterns in the evolution of belief systems. The study is grounded in the theoretical assumption that digitalization and AI-driven communication redefine how individuals internalize and express universal values, potentially transitioning religious frameworks from dogmatic structures to global ethical models.

Research Problem and Hypothesis

The central problem explores whether Islam can be conceptualized not merely as a religious belief system but as a universal value-based model in an era of technological dominance.

Hypothesis (H1): Digital literacy and AI-mediated environments significantly influence the perception, transformation, and interpretation of values and religiosity among university students.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data were collected via a structured online survey. The questionnaire utilized three internationally validated measurement scales to ensure high construct validity:

- Digital Literacy Scale (DLS) (Ng, 2012; Son et al., 2017): Evaluates technical, cognitive, and socio-emotional competencies in digital environments.
- Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS-15) (Huber & Huber, 2012): Measures the importance of religious meanings in personality through five dimensions: intellectual, ideology, public practice, private practice, and experience.
- Environmental Portrait Value Questionnaire (E-PVQ) (Schwartz, 1992; de Groot & Steg, 2008): Assesses biospheric, altruistic, hedonic, and egoistic value orientations.

Sampling and Procedures

The study utilizes a purposive non-probability convenience sampling method. The target population consists of university students in

Azerbaijan and Türkiye (N = 102), chosen for their high exposure to digital technologies and their active role in contemporary value formation. Participation was conducted through secure digital platforms to reach a diverse range of academic faculties.

Data Analysis Plan

The quantitative data are analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The analytical process includes:

1. Reliability Testing: Using *Cronbach's Alpha* to verify the internal consistency of the scales.
2. Descriptive Statistics: Calculating means, frequencies, and standard deviations for demographic and variable profiling.
3. Comparative Analysis: Utilizing Independent Samples T-tests and One-way ANOVA to identify differences between countries and demographic groups.
4. Inferential Statistics: Applying Pearson Correlation and Multiple Linear Regression to test the relationships between variables and validate the research hypothesis.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for human subject research. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. All respondents were informed of the academic nature of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Data are stored securely and used exclusively for scientific reporting.

Data Collection and Instruments

The research utilizes a structured psychometric survey consisting of three internationally validated scales:

Scale	Authors	Focus
Digital Literacy Scale (DLS)	Ng (2012); Son et al. (2017)	Cognitive, technical, and socio-emotional digital competencies.
Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS-15)	Huber & Huber (2012)	5 dimensions: Intellectual, Ideology, Public Practice, Private Practice, and Experience.
Environmental Portrait Value Questionnaire (E-PVQ)	Schwartz (1992); de Groot & Steg (2008)	Analysis of Biospheric, Altruistic, Hedonic, and Egoistic value orientations.

All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software (Version 30.0.0, build 172).

Table 1. Case Processing Summary

Category	n	%
Valid	102	100.0
Excluded	0	0.0
Total	102	100.0

Note. n = number of cases; % = percentage of the total sample.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Measure	Value
Cronbach's Alpha	0.911
Number of Items	14

Note. Cronbach's alpha indicates the internal consistency of the scale.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Religiosity Scale	102	1.36	5.00	3.7	0.73	-0.58	0.21
Digital Literacy Scale	102	2.45	5.00	3.93	0.50	-0.08	0.6
Environmental Values (E-PVQ)	102	2.47	7.00	5.64	0.72	-1.18	3.36

Note. SD = standard deviation.

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	n
Gender	Female	75
	Male	27
Age	18–23	68
	24–30	17
	31+	17
Nationality	Azerbaijani	33
	Turkish	69

The reliability analysis was conducted based on a sample of 102 valid cases, with no missing or excluded responses. The instrument under examination consists of 14 items. The internal consistency of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.911. This value indicates a high level of internal reliability, suggesting that the items are strongly interrelated and consistently measure the underlying construct. In accordance with commonly accepted thresholds in social science research, an alpha coefficient above 0.90 is generally interpreted as demonstrating excellent reliability.

Despite the strong internal consistency, the analysis is limited by the absence of item-level statistics, which restricts further examination of individual item contributions to the overall scale reliability. Additionally, the output does not provide information regarding the specific variables measured by the instrument, nor does it include tests of data distribution, such as normality assessments, which may be relevant for subsequent statistical procedures.

Tests of Normality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk)

Variable	Group	Kolmogorov–Smirnov Statistic	df	Sig.	Shapiro–Wilk Statistic	df	Sig.
Section 1	1	0.076	33	0.200*	0.973	33	0.557
Section 1	2	0.099	69	0.092	0.960	69	0.027
Section 2	1	0.082	33	0.200*	0.977	33	0.704
Section 2	2	0.094	69	0.200*	0.966	69	0.055
Section 3	1	0.128	33	0.185	0.960	33	0.264
Section 3	2	0.113	69	0.029	0.928	69	< 0.001

Note. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test is reported with Lilliefors significance correction. The Shapiro–Wilk test assesses normality; $p < 0.05$ indicates deviation from normal distribution. * indicates lower bound of true significance.

The Shapiro–Wilk test results indicate that, when the items were analyzed without distinguishing between Azerbaijani and Turkish groups, the assumption of normality was violated only for the third set of items ($p < 0.001$). For the remaining sections, the results were not statistically significant, suggesting no deviation from normality (Section 1, $p = 0.051$; Section 2, $p = 0.052$).

When the analysis was conducted separately for Azerbaijani and Turkish groups, the Shapiro–Wilk test revealed that the normality assumption was significantly violated in the Turkish group for the first section ($p = 0.030$) and the third set of items ($p < 0.001$). No statistically significant deviations from normality were observed in the remaining groups.

Table 5. Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Section / Group	N	Number of Items	Cronbach's α	Mean	SD
Section 1 (Total)	102	14	0.911	51.83	10.2
Azerbaijan	33	14	0.88	50.7	8.54
Türkiye	69	14	0.921	52.38	10.92
Section 2 (Total)	102	20	0.89	78.57	10.05
Azerbaijan	33	20	0.804	76.73	8.08
Türkiye	69	20	0.91	79.45	10.81
Section 3 (Total)	102	17	0.84	95.85	12.21
Azerbaijan	33	17	0.762	96.03	10.3
Türkiye	69	17	0.868	95.77	13.08

Note. Cronbach's α indicates internal consistency reliability. SD = standard deviation.

The reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales across all sections and subgroups. The results demonstrate a high level of reliability for all three sections. For Section 1, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.911, indicating excellent internal consistency, with similarly high values observed for the Turkish sample (α = 0.921) and slightly lower, yet acceptable, reliability for the Azerbaijani sample (α = 0.880). In Section 2, the overall reliability remained strong (α = 0.890), with the Turkish group again showing higher internal consistency (α = 0.910) compared to the Azerbaijani group (α = 0.804), which still falls within acceptable thresholds. Section 3 exhibited comparatively lower but still acceptable reliability (α = 0.840), with subgroup analyses revealing α = 0.868 for the Turkish sample and α = 0.762 for the Azerbaijani sample. Descriptive statistics further indicate moderate variability across all sections, with mean scores ranging from 51.83 to 95.85 and standard deviations between 8.08 and 13.08. Overall, these findings confirm that the instruments used in the study demonstrate satisfactory to excellent internal consistency across both national samples, supporting their suitability for subsequent statistical analysis.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation Matrix (Overall Sample)

Variables	1. Section 1	2. Section 2	3. Section 3
1. Section 1	—		
2. Section 2	0.317*	—	
3. Section 3	0.101	0.474*	—

*Note: * p < 0.05. Section 1 = Centrality of Religiosity; Section 2 = Digital Literacy; Section 3 = Value Orientations.*

Table 7. Pearson Correlation Matrix (Azerbaijan Sample)

Variables	1. Section 1	2. Section 2	3. Section 3
1. Section 1	—		
2. Section 2	0.514*	—	
3. Section 3	0.184	0.571*	—

*Note: * p < 0.05. Section 1 = Centrality of Religiosity; Section 2 = Digital Literacy; Section 3 = Value Orientations.*

Table 8. Pearson Correlation Matrix (Türkiye Sample)

Variables	1. Section 1	2. Section 2	3. Section 3
1. Section 1	—		
2. Section 2	0.254*	—	
3. Section 3	0.079	0.454*	—

*Note: * p < 0.05. Section 1 = Centrality of Religiosity; Section 2 = Digital Literacy; Section 3 = Value Orientations.*

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the three sections of the questionnaire. Given that the Likert scales used in the study (ranging up to 5 and 7 points) can be treated as continuous variables, the application of Pearson's correlation coefficient was considered appropriate. The results indicate a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between Section 1 and Section 2 (r = 0.317, p < 0.05), as well as between Section 2 and Section 3 (r = 0.474, p < 0.05). In contrast, the relationship between Section 1 and Section 3 was weak (r = 0.101) and not statistically significant. These findings suggest that while Sections 1 and 2, as well as Sections 2 and Section 3, demonstrate meaningful associations, the connection between Sections 1 and Section 3 remains negligible. For the Azerbaijani sample, the correlation between Section 1 and Section 2 was found to be statistically significant and of moderate strength (r = 0.514, p < 0.05). Similarly, a statistically significant moderate correlation was observed between Section 2 and Section 3 (r = 0.571, p < 0.05). However, the relationship between Section 1 and Section 3 remained weak (r = 0.184) and statistically non-significant. These findings indicate that, within the Azerbaijani context, digital literacy is more strongly associated with both religiosity and value orientations, while the direct relationship between religiosity and values remains limited. In the Turkish sample, a statistically significant but weaker correlation was identified between Section 1 and Section 2 (r = 0.254, p < 0.05). A moderate and statistically significant relationship was also found between Section 2 and Section 3 (r = 0.454, p < 0.05). In contrast, the relationship between Section 1 and Section 3 was very weak (r = 0.079) and not statistically significant. These results suggest that, although similar patterns are observed across both national groups, the strength of the relationships varies, with stronger associations detected in the Azerbaijani sample compared to the Turkish sample.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the relationship between religiosity and value systems is not direct but is mediated through digital literacy. The consistent significance of correlations involving Section 2 suggests that digital literacy plays a central role in shaping the interaction between traditional belief systems and contemporary value orientations.

Table 9. Independent Samples t-Test Results by Country

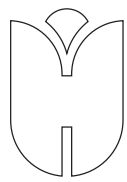
Variable Section	Country	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*	*d*
Section 1	Azerbaijan	33	3.62	0.61	-0.78	100	0.44	-0.16
	Türkiye	69	3.74	0.78				
Section 2	Azerbaijan	33	3.84	0.4	-1.28	100	0.2	-0.27
	Türkiye	69	3.97	0.54				
Section 3	Azerbaijan	33	5.65	0.61	0.101	100	0.92	0.02
	Türkiye	69	5.63	0.77				

Note: *M = mean; SD = standard deviation; p < 0.05 indicates statistical significance. Cohen's d represents effect size.*

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine potential differences between Azerbaijani and Turkish students across the three sections of the questionnaire. For Section 1 (Centrality of Religiosity), the results indicated no statistically significant difference between Azerbaijani students (M = 3.62, SD = 0.61) and Turkish students (M = 3.74, SD = 0.78), $t(100)$ = -0.78, p = 0.44. The effect size was small (d = -0.16), suggesting negligible practical differences between the two groups. Similarly, for Section 2 (Digital Literacy), no statistically significant difference was observed between Azerbaijani (M = 3.84, SD = 0.40) and Turkish students (M = 3.97, SD = 0.54), $t(100)$ =

-1.28, $p = 0.20$. The effect size was again small ($d = -0.27$), indicating a limited magnitude of difference. In Section 3 (Value Orientations), the results also revealed no statistically significant difference between Azerbaijani ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 0.61$) and Turkish students ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 0.77$), $t(100) = 0.10$, $p = 0.92$. The effect size was negligible ($d = 0.02$), further confirming the similarity between the two groups. Overall, the findings indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between Azerbaijani and Turkish students across religiosity, digital literacy, and value orientations. The consistently small effect sizes suggest that any observed differences are minimal and lack practical significance.

These results point toward a convergence of value systems and digital competencies across the two national contexts, potentially reflecting the influence of shared socio-cultural and digital environments.



FINDINGS AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data Preparation and Measurement Framework

Prior to statistical analysis, the dataset was subjected to systematic data cleaning procedures to ensure analytical rigor. Respondents affiliated with foreign universities were excluded to preserve the geographical focus on Azerbaijan and Türkiye, and participants aged 17 or below were removed to maintain consistency with the target population of university students.

All variables were coded numerically, with Azerbaijani respondents assigned the value "1" and Turkish respondents assigned "2." Data cleaning was conducted in Microsoft Excel prior to analysis in **IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 30)**.

The study employed three validated measurement instruments. Digital literacy was assessed using the Digital Literacy Scale, which conceptualizes digital competence across cognitive, technical, and socio-emotional dimensions (Ng 2012; Son et al. 2017). Religiosity was measured through the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS-15), capturing five core dimensions of religious life: intellectual, ideological, public practice, private practice, and religious experience (Huber and Huber 2012). Value orientations were evaluated using the Environmental Portrait Value Questionnaire (E-PVQ), grounded in Schwartz's theory of basic human values and further operationalized in environmental contexts (Schwartz 1992; de Groot and Steg 2008).

Sections 1 and 2 were measured using five-point Likert scales, while Section 3 utilized a seven-point Likert scale. Consistent with established methodological practice, Likert-scale data were treated as continuous variables for parametric analysis (Field 2013).

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis revealed distinct patterns across the three constructs. The Centrality of Religiosity Scale yielded a mean score of $M = 3.70$ ($SD = 0.73$), indicating a moderate level of religiosity among participants. Digital literacy demonstrated a higher mean ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.50$), suggesting relatively advanced digital competencies within the sample.

The Environmental Portrait Value Questionnaire produced the highest mean score ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 0.72$), reflecting a strong orientation toward value-based and environmental considerations. Distributional analysis indicated acceptable skewness and kurtosis values for most variables; however, Section 3 exhibited a relatively elevated kurtosis (3.36), indicating a more peaked distribution.

The sample (N = 102) consisted predominantly of female participants (n = 75), with 27 male respondents. Age distribution was concentrated in the 18–23 range (n = 68), and the sample included 33 Azerbaijani and 69 Turkish students.

Normality Assessment

Normality assumptions were evaluated using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which is particularly suitable for small to medium sample sizes (Razali and Wah 2011).

When analyzed without country-level differentiation, Section 1 ($p = 0.051$) and Section 2 ($p = 0.052$) did not significantly deviate from normality, whereas Section 3 demonstrated a statistically significant deviation ($p < 0.001$).

When examined separately, the Turkish subgroup exhibited violations of normality in Section 1 ($p = 0.03$) and Section 3 ($p < 0.001$), while the Azerbaijani subgroup did not display statistically significant deviations.

Despite these findings, parametric statistical methods were retained, as correlation and t-test procedures are considered robust to moderate violations of normality in social science research (Field 2013).

Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of the measurement instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, a widely accepted indicator of scale reliability (Cronbach 1951).

The results demonstrated excellent reliability for the Centrality of Religiosity Scale ($\alpha = 0.911$), strong reliability for the Digital Literacy Scale ($\alpha = 0.890$), and satisfactory reliability for the Environmental Value Scale ($\alpha = 0.840$). Subgroup analysis revealed slightly higher reliability coefficients within the Turkish sample compared to the Azerbaijani sample, although all values remained within acceptable thresholds.

These findings confirm that the instruments employed are psychometrically robust and suitable for inferential statistical analysis.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between religiosity, digital literacy, and value orientations.

The results indicated a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between religiosity and digital literacy ($r = 0.317$, $p < 0.05$), as well as between digital literacy and value orientations ($r = 0.474$, $p < 0.05$). In contrast, the relationship between religiosity and value orientations was weak and not statistically significant ($r = 0.101$, $p > 0.05$).

Country-specific analysis revealed stronger correlations within the Azerbaijani sample ($r = 0.514$ and $r = 0.571$) compared to the Turkish sample ($r = 0.254$ and $r = 0.454$), suggesting contextual variation in the strength of these relationships.

These findings support the interpretation of digital literacy as an intermediary variable linking religiosity and value systems.

Comparative Analysis

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences between Azerbaijani and Turkish students across all measured variables.

The results indicated no statistically significant differences between the two groups in religiosity ($t(100) = -0.78$, $p = 0.44$), digital literacy ($t(100) = -1.28$, $p = 0.20$), or value orientations ($t(100) = 0.10$, $p = 0.92$). Effect sizes were minimal, indicating negligible practical differences.

These findings suggest a convergence of digital competencies and value systems across national contexts, potentially reflecting broader processes of digital globalization and cultural integration.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important empirical insight into the evolving relationship between digital literacy, religiosity, and value systems within the context of contemporary technological transformation. Contrary to deterministic interpretations of secularization theory, which posit that modernization inevitably leads to the decline of religiosity, the results of this research suggest a more complex and mediated interaction between technological competence and value formation.

The primary hypothesis (H1), which proposed that digital literacy and AI-mediated environments significantly influence the perception and transformation of values and religiosity, is partially supported. The statistical analysis demonstrated a moderate and statistically significant relationship between religiosity and digital literacy ($r = 0.317$), as well as a stronger relationship between digital literacy and value orientations ($r = 0.474$). However, the absence of a significant direct relationship between religiosity and environmental values ($r = 0.101$, $p > 0.05$) indicates that religiosity alone does not directly predict value orientations in contemporary digital contexts. Instead, digital literacy emerges as a critical mediating variable that reshapes how values are interpreted, internalized, and expressed.

This finding aligns with the theoretical framework of post-secular transformation, particularly as articulated by José Casanova, who argues that religion does not disappear under modern conditions but undergoes a process of "refashioning" within new social and institutional contexts. In this study, digital environments appear to function as precisely such a context, enabling religion to persist not as a rigid institutional structure but as a flexible and adaptive value system.

One of the most significant contributions of this study lies in identifying digital literacy as a structural mediator between religiosity and value systems. The statistically significant relationship between digital literacy and both religiosity and environmental values suggests that individuals do not simply abandon traditional belief systems in the presence of technology. Rather, they reinterpret them through digitally mediated cognitive frameworks.

This supports the argument advanced in digital society theory that technological competence fundamentally alters epistemological processes. Individuals with higher digital literacy are better equipped to navigate algorithmically curated environments, evaluate competing narratives, and synthesize diverse sources of information. As a result, values are no longer transmitted solely through traditional institutions such as family or religious organizations but are instead constructed through dynamic interactions within digital networks.

In this sense, digital literacy functions not merely as a technical skill but as a cognitive filter that shapes moral reasoning and identity formation. This interpretation is consistent with the multidimensional understanding of digital literacy as encompassing cognitive, socio-emotional, and ethical competencies.

The results challenge classical secularization theory, particularly the assumption that increased modernization leads to a linear decline in religiosity. While the theoretical framework presented in the literature review suggests that existential security

reduces reliance on religion, the empirical findings of this study indicate that religiosity remains present and meaningful, even among digitally literate populations.

This supports the argument of Norris and Inglehart that secularization is not universal but context-dependent. In societies such as Azerbaijan and Türkiye, where religion is embedded within cultural identity, modernization does not necessarily erode religious values but instead transforms their expression.

The absence of a direct correlation between religiosity and environmental values further reinforces this argument. Rather than acting as a direct determinant of ethical orientations, religiosity appears to operate indirectly, mediated by digital literacy. This suggests that religious identity is being recontextualized within a broader framework of globalized, digitally mediated value systems.

AI and the Transformation of Value Perception

A central question of this research concerns the role of artificial intelligence in shaping value perceptions. Although AI was not directly measured as a variable, its presence as an underlying infrastructural force in digital environments is critical for interpreting the findings.

AI-driven systems—particularly algorithmic recommendation engines and content curation mechanisms—play a key role in structuring the informational environment within which individuals form beliefs. As discussed in the theoretical framework, these systems create "information cocoons" that reinforce existing preferences and reduce exposure to alternative viewpoints.[39]

From this perspective, AI can influence value systems in three primary ways:

1. Reinforcement of Existing Values

AI systems tend to prioritize content that aligns with users' prior behavior, thereby reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and values. This mechanism may explain why religiosity remains stable even in highly digital environments.

2. Transformation of Value Interpretation

Rather than replacing traditional values, AI-mediated environments reshape how these values are understood. Religious concepts, for example, may be reframed in terms of global ethics, sustainability, or social responsibility.

3. Fragmentation and Personalization of Values

AI contributes to the fragmentation of collective value systems by enabling highly individualized experiences. This aligns with Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity," where identity and values become fluid, adaptable, and continuously reconstructed.

Islam as a Value-Based Model in Digital Contexts

One of the most innovative aspects of this study is the attempt to conceptualize Islam not merely as a religious doctrine but as a universal value-based model within a technologically mediated world.

The findings provide cautious support for this proposition. The persistence of religiosity, combined with its indirect relationship to value systems, suggests that religion may function as a cultural and ethical framework rather than a strictly doctrinal system.

In this context, Islam can be understood as offering a set of normative principles—such as justice, community, and responsibility—that can be translated into universal ethical discourse. This interpretation resonates with contemporary intellectual traditions in the Turkic world, where scholars emphasize the role of Islam as a civilizational value system rather than a purely theological construct.

Importantly, this framing avoids the pitfalls of religious essentialism by positioning Islam within a broader framework of intercultural dialogue and ethical pluralism. Rather than imposing a fixed set of beliefs, it presents Islamic values as adaptable and compatible with modern technological realities.

The concept of "soft presentation" emerges as a crucial mechanism through which religion operates in digital environments. Unlike traditional forms of religious authority, which rely on institutional structures and formal doctrine, digital religion is characterized by flexibility, personalization, and accessibility.

Through social media, online communities, and AI-driven platforms, religious ideas can be communicated in ways that are less prescriptive and more dialogical. This allows for a form of engagement that is particularly suited to younger, digitally native populations.

In this study, the absence of strong direct correlations between religiosity and value systems may reflect this shift. Rather than imposing values directly, religion operates as a background framework that informs individual interpretation without determining it.

The results of the independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between Azerbaijani and Turkish students across all variables. This finding is particularly significant, as it suggests a process of value convergence across national contexts.

This convergence can be interpreted as evidence of digital globalization, where shared technological environments produce similar patterns of value formation. Despite cultural and historical differences, students in both countries appear to engage with digital technologies in ways that lead to comparable outcomes.

At the same time, the stronger correlations observed in the Azerbaijani sample suggest that local contexts still play a role in shaping the intensity of these relationships. This indicates that globalization does not eliminate cultural specificity but interacts with it in complex ways.

Theoretical Integration, Contribution and Implications

Taken together, these findings contribute to a growing body of literature that challenges simplistic narratives of secularization and technological determinism. By integrating theories of modernization, network society, and digital religion, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how values are constructed in the twenty-first century. The key theoretical contribution lies in the identification of digital literacy as a mediating variable that links traditional and modern value systems. This perspective moves beyond binary oppositions between religion and technology, instead highlighting their dynamic interaction.

The findings of this study carry important implications for education, digital policy, and intercultural communication, particularly within the context of rapidly evolving AI-mediated environments. By demonstrating that digital literacy functions as a mediating variable between religiosity and value systems, the study highlights the need to reconsider how values are cultivated, transmitted, and transformed in contemporary societies. One of the most significant implications of this study concerns the role of education in shaping not only cognitive competencies but also ethical and value-based orientations. The strong relationship between digital literacy and value systems suggests that educational institutions must move beyond a purely technical understanding of digital skills. Instead, digital literacy should be conceptualized as an integrated competence that includes ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and value awareness.

In practical terms, this requires the incorporation of interdisciplinary curricula that combine digital education with philosophy, ethics, and social sciences. Such an approach would enable students to critically engage with algorithmically curated information environments and to reflect on the implications of digital technologies for identity and moral judgment.

Moreover, the absence of significant differences between Azerbaijani and Turkish students indicates that educational strategies can be developed within a shared regional framework. This is particularly relevant within the context of the Turkic world, where initiatives such as the Turkic World Summer Forum aim to foster intellectual exchange and cooperation. The convergence observed in this study suggests that common educational policies

focusing on digital literacy and value formation are both feasible and necessary.

Implications for Digital Policy

The findings also have important implications for digital governance and policy-making. As artificial intelligence increasingly shapes information flows, it becomes essential to recognize that digital platforms are not neutral spaces but active agents in the construction of values.

The mediating role of digital literacy implies that individuals with lower digital competence may be more vulnerable to algorithmic manipulation, misinformation, and ideological polarization. Therefore, policymakers must prioritize the development of national and regional strategies aimed at enhancing digital literacy as a form of societal resilience.

Furthermore, the role of AI in reinforcing and transforming values raises important ethical questions. Algorithmic systems tend to amplify existing preferences, potentially leading to the reinforcement of cognitive biases and the creation of "echo chambers."[40] To address this, regulatory frameworks should promote transparency, accountability, and diversity in algorithmic design.

In the context of Azerbaijan and Türkiye, where digital transformation is advancing rapidly, these findings underscore the importance of aligning technological development with ethical and cultural considerations. Digital policy should not only focus on economic innovation but also on the preservation and transformation of value systems in a balanced and sustainable manner.

Intercultural Communication and Value Convergence

The lack of statistically significant differences between Azerbaijani and Turkish students suggests a process of value convergence driven by shared digital environments. This has important implications for intercultural communication, particularly within regions characterized by cultural, linguistic, and historical proximity.

Digital platforms create spaces where individuals from different backgrounds can engage in continuous interaction, leading to the emergence of hybrid value systems. These systems are neither purely traditional nor entirely global but represent a synthesis of local cultural norms and global digital influences.

This convergence opens new opportunities for intercultural dialogue, as shared digital experiences can facilitate mutual understanding and cooperation. At the same time, it raises questions about the preservation of cultural specificity and the potential homogenization of values.

Islam as a Value-Based Framework in the Digital Age

A particularly important implication of this study lies in the conceptualization of Islam as a value-based framework rather than a strictly doctrinal system. The findings suggest that religiosity continues to play a role in shaping identity, but its influence on value systems is indirect and mediated by digital literacy.

This opens the possibility of presenting Islamic values in a manner that is compatible with contemporary digital environments. Rather than focusing on prescriptive religious discourse, Islamic principles can be articulated in terms of universal ethical values such as justice, responsibility, and community.

Such an approach aligns with the concept of "soft presentation," where religious ideas are communicated through inclusive, dialogical, and context-sensitive frameworks. In digital spaces, this allows for a form of engagement that is accessible to diverse audiences and conducive to intercultural understanding.

Importantly, this perspective avoids the reduction of Islam to either a purely private belief or a rigid institutional structure. Instead, it positions Islam as a dynamic and adaptable value system capable of contributing to global ethical discourse.

Artificial Intelligence and Ethical Responsibility

Finally, the study highlights the need to consider artificial intelligence not only as a technological tool but also as a moral actor within digital ecosystems. AI systems shape the informational environment in which individuals form beliefs, make decisions, and construct identities.

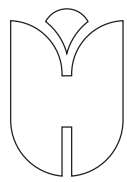
This raises important questions about responsibility and accountability. If AI influences value formation, then the design and regulation of these systems must be guided by ethical principles. Developers, policymakers, and educators all share responsibility for ensuring that AI contributes to the development of inclusive, reflective, and ethically grounded societies.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the sample size (N = 102) is relatively modest, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Although the sample includes participants from both Azerbaijan and Türkiye, it does not fully capture the diversity of the broader population. Second, the study is geographically limited to two countries within the Turkic world. While this provides valuable comparative insight, future research should expand the scope to include additional cultural and regional contexts in order to examine whether similar patterns emerge globally. Third, the use of self-reported survey data introduces the possibility of response bias. Participants may provide socially desirable answers or may not accurately reflect their true beliefs and behaviors. Future studies could incorporate mixed-method approaches, including qualitative interviews or experimental designs, to provide deeper insight into the processes underlying value formation.

Another limitation concerns the indirect measurement of artificial intelligence. While AI is central to the theoretical framework, it was not operationalized as a distinct variable. Future research should aim to develop more precise measures of AI exposure and interaction, allowing for a more direct assessment of its impact.

Finally, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in examining how digital literacy, religiosity, and value systems evolve over time.



CONCLUSION

This study has examined the complex relationship between digital literacy, religiosity, and value systems within the context of contemporary digital transformation. The findings challenge simplistic assumptions about the decline of religion in modern societies and instead highlight the dynamic interaction between technological competence and value formation.

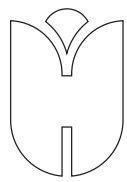
The results demonstrate that digital literacy plays a central mediating role, linking religiosity and value systems in ways that reflect broader processes of digital globalization. While religiosity remains present, its influence on values is indirect, suggesting a shift from traditional forms of authority toward more flexible and individualized modes of interpretation.

At the same time, the absence of significant differences between Azerbaijani and Turkish students points to a process of convergence driven by shared digital environments. This convergence does not eliminate cultural specificity but interacts with it, producing hybrid value systems that reflect both local traditions and global influences.

Importantly, the study highlights the potential of artificial intelligence to both reinforce and transform value systems. AI-mediated environments shape the way individuals access information, interpret beliefs, and construct identities. As such, they play a crucial role in the ongoing transformation of social and cultural life.

Within this context, religion—particularly Islam—can be understood not as a static doctrine but as a dynamic value-based framework. By emphasizing universal ethical principles, it can contribute to global discussions on morality, identity, and social responsibility in the digital age.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to move beyond binary oppositions between tradition and modernity, religion and technology. Instead, it demonstrates that these domains are deeply interconnected and must be understood as part of a broader, evolving system of meaning-making in the twenty-first century.



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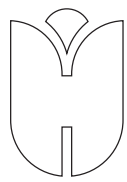
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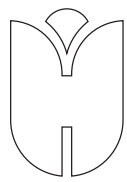
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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, VALUE FORMATION, AND DIGITAL IDENTITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN AZERBAIJAN AND TÜRKIYE

SABINA MAMMADOVA

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