Digital Media and its Impact on Bringing About Value Change Among Young People

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Abstract

The world today is witnessing significant developments in information and communication technologies, one of whose manifestations is the emergence of a new type of media as an alternative to traditional media, namely digital media. The latter has become an essential part of young people's lives, particularly with the increasing reliance of youth on it and their use of its various digital platforms. Due to its widespread diffusion among young people, transformations have begun to appear in their behaviors and values, as well as changes in the system of social, cultural, and religious values within this group, as a result of their engagement with and continuous exposure to digital media.

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Introduction

Youth at all stages and in any country constitute the backbone of nations' civilization and the secret of their advancement, as they are at the age of ambition and sustained effort, the age of giving and contribution, sacrifice and dedication. Youth often represent the largest proportion of the population in developing countries, which necessitates greater attention to them and investment in their potential, since the growth of these societies' resources, their ability to keep pace with the demands of development, and the efficiency and quality of their functional structures depend largely on the effectiveness of their youth component. For the same reason, any society quickly declines and its values are lost if its youth weaken and are deprived of opportunities for knowledge and experience, while other societies progress and surpass others by relying on the timely mobilization of these energies to their fullest extent. The more countries harness the energies of their youth in knowledge, production, and the building of civilization, the greater their productivity and the more successfully they achieve their goals.

Digital media, in its various forms, is considered one of the most important tools shaping youth awareness and their value orientations. Today's youth, thanks to this modern media, are no longer merely recipients of information; rather, they have become active participants in the production, creation, and circulation of content, which enhances the reciprocal influence between digital media and individual and social values.

Youth in the Arab world are experiencing a set of transformations in ways of living, modes of thinking, and patterns of behavior that can be described as a transitional phase characterized by an overlap between the traditional and the modern, whether in terms of social relations, culture, or prevailing values. The interaction between the local and the global, driven by the growing impact of the communications and information revolution, has affected various social strata. However, youth—by virtue of their characteristics, aspirations, and educational qualifications—have been more influenced by these transformations and the resulting effects, whether negative or positive. This situation nevertheless poses challenges that require the presence of digital media awareness among youth, their families, and within societal organization.

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This study aims to identify the nature of the impact of digital media on bringing about value change among youth in light of the transformations experienced by Arab youth, and to shed light on this segment in the context of the widespread dissemination of digital media and the content it carries that influences their behaviors.

Section One: The Nature of Digital Media

– The Concept of Digital Media: Digital media is considered an extension of the technological revolution, as it makes use of the Internet and social media to disseminate news and diverse content through electronic platforms. Digital media is characterized by ease of access and speed, which allows individuals to follow events in real time and interact with them through comments and sharing. It includes electronic news websites, blogs, video platforms, and social media. It is termed "digital" because it relies on digital technologies such as websites, as well as digital video, audio, and images (Ali Khalil Shaqrah, 2014, p. 51).

– Types of Digital Media: Digital media and its tools have multiplied, becoming increasingly diverse, expansive, and interwoven over time. Among these media are interactive television stations, digital cable, electronic journalism, discussion forums, blogs, personal, institutional, and commercial websites, social networking sites, video clips, and digital radio, among others. This also includes mobile phones that transmit digital radio, interactive television broadcasting, Internet sites, music, video clips, stock trading, weather updates, flight traffic, digital maps, text messaging groups, and multimedia services (Fahd bin Abdulrahman Al-Shumaimri, 2010, p. 183).

Richard Davis and Diana Owen classify digital media into three types:

- **The first type:** New media using old technology, which refers to a set of journalistic forms in radio, television, and newspapers, such as interactive radio, television, news magazines, and live news programs (talk shows).

- **The second type:** New media using new technology, represented by all media linked to the Internet. These media have enabled the creation of rapid and live exchange of information, such as various types of social networking sites, blogs, and news websites.

- **The third type:** New media using mixed technology, in which the distinctions between old and new disappear, leading to convergence and the dissolution of boundaries between different types of media, along with an exchange of benefits between traditional and new media. (Fadel Al-Badrani, 2017, p. 17).

Advantages of Digital Media: Digital media is characterized by a number of features, including:

- **Interactivity:** In which the communicator and the recipient exchange roles, and communication becomes two-way and reciprocal rather than one-directional, allowing for dialogue between both parties.

- **Asynchronicity:** The ability to interact with the communication process at a time that suits the individual, whether as a sender or a receiver.

- **Participation and dissemination:** New media enables anyone who possesses simple tools to become a publisher and convey their message to others.

- **Mobility and flexibility:** New media can be carried and used by both the sender and the receiver, such as laptops, Internet-enabled devices, and mobile phones, benefiting from wireless networks.

- **Universality:** The communication environment has become global, transcending the barriers of time, space, and censorship.

- **Media convergence:** New media employs all forms of communication, such as text, sound, still images, moving images, and two- and three-dimensional graphics, among others.

- **Attention and concentration:** Since the recipient in new media plays an active role in selecting content and interacting with it, this leads to a high level of attention and concentration, unlike exposure to traditional media, which is often passive and superficial.

- **Storage and preservation:** It is easy for the recipient to store, preserve, and retrieve communication messages as part of the inherent capacities and characteristics of the medium itself (Fahd bin Abdulrahman Al-Shumaimri, 2010, p. 183).

Section Two: The Conceptual Framework of Social Values and Youth

– The Concept of Values: Sociologists argue that defining the meaning of value is based on the existence of a measure and clarifications in light of the individual's interests on the one hand, and in light of the means and capacities that society directs toward achieving these interests on the other. Values thus involve a process of selection conditioned by the available social circumstances. Many sociologists define values as a level, a criterion, or a selection among available social alternatives or possibilities facing the individual in a social situation.

The level or criterion implies the existence of a standard through which the individual measures and compares things in terms of their effectiveness and role in achieving their interests. This standard established by the individual is linked to their social awareness and perception, as well as to the social and economic indicators surrounding the individual, the social class to which they belong, the society they live in, and the historical, economic, and social conditions they experience.

Selection, on the other hand, is a cognitive and intellectual process through which the individual compares and balances things in light of the standard they have set for themselves, which is determined by their social and economic circumstances. This process of selection is not absolute; rather, it is conditioned by the individual's position and opportunities. The higher the individual rises on the social ladder, the more numerous and diverse their opportunities for selection become.

Alternatives refer to the set of means and goals that are oriented toward the multiple and diverse interests of human beings (Zakaria Abdelaziz Mohamed, 2002, p. 29).

– The Importance of Values: The importance of social values is reflected in the following aspects:

- Organizing members of society by coordinating their daily behavior in accordance with the requirements of the interests of the society in which they live.

- Contributing to the service of the social system and the stability of social life, and preventing its disruption.

- Social values are accepted by individuals because they are acquired through the group to which they belong and interact with; they thus represent one of the mechanisms of social control that define and regulate individual behavior.

- Values also unify individual behavior within the group and sanction individuals who violate or deviate from their teachings.

- Values help individuals choose a single behavioral model, and the diversity of values leads to varied behaviors due to the prevailing social values within society.

- Viewing values as part of the social structure (or framework) represents an independent variable, as a particular behavior may lead to change in other parts of the social structure (Ma'n Khalil Omar, 1997, pp. 119, 121).

Customs and traditions fall under the concept of **custom**, defined as "that which people have become accustomed to in their lives until it has become firmly established over time… and it includes both positive and negative aspects" (Guy Rocher, 1983, p. 54).

– Advantages and Characteristics of Values: Values are characterized by a set of features that distinguish them. They are human in nature, meaning that they are linked exclusively to human beings. Values, in all their forms, are not fixed or constant at the same level, as they are subject to change, movement, and development. They are also relative, in the sense that they differ according to the individual's needs, desires, and upbringing, as well as among individuals in general—from one person to another, from one environment to another, and from one culture to another. Values can be acquired through the environment, meaning that they are learned and internalized through various institutions of socialization. Mass media are considered among the most important institutions of socialization and play an active role in shaping values and instilling them in the human psyche through their multiple means, since values are fundamentally acquired from the surrounding environment.

Values generally have two poles: either one state or its opposite—right or wrong, good or evil—meaning that they possess a dualistic nature. Every value has an opposite, which gives it a positive pole and a negative pole. Thus, there are positive, constructive values that are consistent with universal human values, and there are negative, destructive values that cause significant harm to society and are met with rejection and disapproval. Values are also hierarchical, as they are ranked by each individual in a graduated order of importance according to personal preference. Every individual has a value system that represents part of their psychological makeup and guides their behavior. Moreover, values possess a normative characteristic, meaning that they serve as a standard for making judgments through which human behavior is measured, interpreted, and explained.

Values are also subjective, as each person experiences values in their own particular way; it is the human being who carries the value and attributes it to objects (Abdul Razzaq Mohammed Al-Dulaimi, 2012, p. 212).

– Functions of Values: Values perform several functions, among the most important of which are the following:

- Achieving integration or solidarity within society through a general value system that legitimizes collective interests and goals and defines responsibility.

- Preserving the identity and culture of society; each community has its own distinctive cultural identity that values work to maintain.

- Assisting in resolving conflicts and making decisions, as values constitute a set of principles that individuals learn in order to help them choose among different alternatives, resolve conflicts, and make decisions in situations they face.

- Serving as a guiding standard for speech, action, and behavior in various situations.

- Playing a major role in building individual personality.

- Contributing to the organization, regulation, continuity, and stability of society, and preserving the social structure.

- Maintaining adaptation to emerging conditions affecting the individual (Majed Al-Zyoud, 2006, p. 416).

Values also have other functions, including:

- Linking the components of culture together.

- Providing members of society with a purpose and meaning to life.

- Determining individuals' choices among different alternatives (Ma'n Khalil Omar, same reference, p. 416).

– Components of Values: Values consist of three main levels: the cognitive component, the affective (emotional) component, and the behavioral component. Associated with these components are criteria that govern the processes and practices of values, namely: choice, appreciation, and action.

a. The Cognitive Component: Its criterion is choice, meaning the selection of a value from among different alternatives with complete freedom, whereby the individual considers the consequences of choosing each alternative and assumes full responsibility for their choice. This implies that involuntary reactions do not constitute value-based choice. Choice is considered the first level in the hierarchy leading to values and consists of three successive steps: exploring possible alternatives, considering the consequences of each alternative, and then making a free choice.

b. The Affective Component: Its criterion is appreciation, which is reflected in attachment to the value, pride in it, a feeling of happiness for having chosen it, and the desire to declare it openly. Appreciation represents the second level in the hierarchy leading to values and consists of two successive steps: feeling happiness for choosing the value and publicly affirming commitment to it.

c. The Behavioral Component: Its criterion is practice and action, which includes the actual practice of the value or behavior consistent with the chosen value, with such practice being repeated continuously in different situations whenever possible. Practice constitutes the third level in the hierarchy leading to values and consists of two successive steps: translating the value into practice and building a value-based pattern of behavior (Fuad Ali Al-Ajiz & Atiyah Al-Amri, 1999, p. 6).

Section Three: The Conceptual Framework of Youth

– The Concept of Youth: Many specialists in the field of youth have differed in providing a comprehensive definition of the concept of youth, despite their agreement that the youth stage represents a decisive turning point in the formation of an individual's personality. It is the phase during which the human being—whether male or female—is capable of and prepared to accept new values, beliefs, ideas, and practices through which they are able to live within society and interact with individuals and groups (Izzat Al-Hijazi, 1978, p. 33).

From a sociological perspective, youth is a social reality rather than merely a biological phenomenon. It is a social phenomenon that refers to a stage of life in which signs of social, psychological, and biological maturity become clearly evident. Sociologists describe it as the stage of education, the crystallization of individual personality, and the refinement of talents through the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Youth are also characterized by a high degree of dynamism, vitality, and flexibility, marked by enthusiasm, initiative, liberation, and sacrifice. Every society has its own youth who differ in type and degree from the youth of other societies, depending on the diversity of societies. The relationship between youth and society essentially passes through the institutions of the family and education, through which individuals are socialized, and their rights and duties are defined. Through these institutions, the socialization of the individual (*la socialisation de l'individu*), in the words of Émile Durkheim, is achieved. Youth thus become a force for social change, as they constitute the most ambitious segment of society, the most receptive to

change, and the most capable of adaptation and alignment with transformations in a flexible manner, while enjoying enthusiasm, vitality, and activity in both thought and action.

In psychological, social, and economic interpretations, youth is associated with temperament, intellectual inclination, and strength. For some sociologists, the term youth is synonymous with change and revolution, meaning that it represents the society's capacity for radical transformation. Accordingly, youth may be regarded as a social category that essentially refers to a specific stage of life following adolescence, during which signs of social, psychological, and biological maturity become apparent.

In reality, there is no single definition that can be considered purely scientific. Age is usually the only indicator through which this social category can be delimited, as it is the easiest method for conducting statistical analyses and the most verifiable or falsifiable. Generations do not differ from one another only in age, but also in their social conditions and lived experiences, particularly in their orientations and future aspirations. This makes it logical for definitions of youth to vary according to temporal and spatial contexts.

In addition, cultural, social, and political conditions vary from one period to another. For this reason, some sociologists consider youth a new social class that aspires to profound change in various social networks. Generally, however, large numbers of youth are found in schools, universities, and vocational education and training sectors.

At the present time, adolescence no longer represents a genuine crisis, or at least no longer occupies the forefront of developmental crises, due to generations' greater openness to the world, the availability of knowledge resources, increased freedom of behavior, and growing social tolerance. The current challenge has instead shifted to the youth category, whose situation requires careful examination and analysis, especially in light of the increasing impact of media and information technologies on their behaviors and even their morals.

– Characteristics and Needs of Youth: One of the most important characteristics of the youth stage, which has granted it a distinctive status in society and a comprehensive influence upon it, is that it represents the segment characterized by the highest degree of activity and vitality, owing to its unique dynamic attributes. It is also the segment of society most inclined toward renewal and most open to embracing new ideas and experiences.

A simple review of the characteristics of youth can be summarized in a single word: **"fertility,"** not in the narrow sense of the term, but in its broad meanings that encompass the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual surges characteristic of this valuable stage of human life. These are manifested in vitality, ambition, initiative, adventure, love of life, and acceptance of challenges. In short, it is the vitality of giving and the capacity for abundant contribution, provided it is properly invested (Abdul Rahman Al-Wafi, 1996, p. 33).

– Effectiveness: This effectiveness arises from the level of growth and completion of biological and physiological development attained by the university youth on the one hand, and from psychological and social development on the other. The university stage brings together the conclusion of adolescence and the fulfillment of youth, during which manifestations of close proximity to full masculinity or femininity become clearly evident. This is accompanied by the emergence of intellectual readiness and the differentiation of inclinations and attitudes, leading to the initial preparation of university youth to assume social roles and responsibilities.

Moreover, the conditions of the university educational stage, and the awareness it fosters, contribute to a deeper understanding among university youth of their surrounding environment, particularly the societal problems they face. The effectiveness of this stage is also attributable to the nature of the biological and physiological constitution and the social position of the youthful personality, which is typically sensitive to all that is new, as it has not yet reached a state of stability. This, in turn, places youth in a constant state of aspiration for change.

– Anxiety and Tension: The source of this anxiety— in addition to its general presence among youth— stems from the nature of the transitional stage between preparation for a social role and the assumption and performance of that role. This transition is often accompanied by choices imposed on young people that may not suit them. This is clearly evident in the choice of type and direction of education, as university youth frequently fall under the pressure of anxiety and tension due to unrealistic parental aspirations imposed in determining their educational paths, or as a result of university admission coordination offices standing between them and the type of education they desire. Anxiety and tension also arise from another source represented by the ambiguity of the professional future awaiting university graduates. If the specter of admission coordination haunts them before entering university, the specter of the labor market awaits them after graduation. In addition, there is another factor that reinforces the characteristic of anxiety in this age group, namely the tendency of youth to reject stable and familiar changes.

– Tendency toward Independence and the Attempt to Escape Pressures and Various Forms of Social Domination: The attempt to rid themselves of all forms of imposed pressures in order to affirm self-expression and the desire for liberation is one of the distinctive characteristics of university youth. This tendency appears more anxious and disturbed when they compare themselves with other categories of youth outside the university stage. Many non-student youth have already entered adult activities such as marriage and earning and spending money freely, whereas only a small number of student youth earn what covers their living expenses, with the majority remaining financially dependent on their families. Moreover, society largely continues to treat them without entrusting them with substantial social responsibilities.

– The Existence of a Youth Culture Prevailing among the Youth Segment, Especially University Youth: Several globally rooted factors have contributed to the formation of this culture, including the expansion of the youth demographic worldwide, as population pyramids in many developing and developed societies tend to favor youth. In addition, globalization has imposed a blending, integration, and fusion of cultures and subcultures, as well as increased interdependence among countries, as if the world were a single village. In recent years, the world has drawn much closer together due to the enormous revolution in communication, transportation, computing, and the Internet. Mass media—especially satellite channels— have also played a role in unifying the world and creating high potential for the transmission of culture from one society to another. This has enabled university youth, by virtue of their ability to engage with contemporary developments, to become more capable of comprehension and communication.

– Malleability: The enthusiasm, idealism, and heightened sensitivity of university youth to social reality make them more receptive to new ideas and more inclined to internalize them. This explains the rapid growth and spread of intellectual and ideological movements among university youth, and consequently the efforts of many of these movements to attract youth and disseminate their ideas through them.

Section Four: Digital Media and Its Effects on Youth Behavior

In the contemporary world, means of communication and the transmission of ideas and information have developed in an unprecedented manner, traveling at the speed of light and sound and spreading across the world within seconds.

There are vast numbers of institutions, agencies, and tools dedicated to mass education, the formation of public opinion, and the shaping of personality. Media and information outlets—such as television, Internet networks, computers, newspapers, radio, books, and magazines—have become dominant forces influencing thought and playing an effective role in shaping patterns of behavior.

Digital media contributes to the formation of political thought and the promotion of personalities and ideas, and it also plays an influential role—particularly through sexual appeal, the presentation of fashion, behaviors, ideas, and stimulation—in directing public opinion.

Youth in adolescence are more predisposed than others to role imitation and to being influenced by figures appearing on mobile screens, television, or cinema, including actors, fashion models, gang members, and figures associated with violence, among others.

Youth are also influenced by figures who play roles of political, social, and revolutionary leadership, as well as by great historical personalities, because adolescents—both male and female—are in the process of forming their personalities and selecting role models they are influenced by.

Given that instincts and emotions—especially sexual instinct—are at the peak of their intensity and exert strong pressure on adolescents while seeking avenues for expression and release, digital media has significantly contributed to the stimulation of sexual instincts through films, explicit and provocative images, romantic stories, literature, and culture. Likewise, gang and crime films have contributed to the deviation of many adolescents and to training them in criminal behavior. For this reason, censorship in some countries prevents the screening of sexual films and gang-related movies (http://hayatelshabab.blogspot.com).

Some countries also impose censorship on explicit and provocative video films, or those that promote drug use and criminal activity.

Dr. **Iskandar Al-Daila** recorded statistical findings from a study he conducted in Lebanon concerning video viewing, which indicated that **watching social and romantic films ranked first, while crime (police) films ranked second**. Over the past two decades, as a result of tremendous scientific and technological developments, the communications revolution, the Internet, satellite channels, and the world's entry into the era of globalization as a cultural, political, economic, and social system reflecting the alliance of major global capitalist forces, youth crises have intensified further in poorer countries. Youth in these countries have come to suffer from a **dual crisis** generated by inherited and already existing complex crises, alongside new crises resulting from influences transmitted through the Internet and satellite channels, which reflect foreign cultures and concepts and portray a level of imaginary affluence compared to the realities of youth in poor countries. This global tide thus threatens youth in these societies with new crises.

Another report indicated that a study conducted in the United States on **110 inmates of a correctional institution** revealed that **49%** of this group developed a desire to carry weapons as a result of cinema exposure, while **12–21%** developed a desire to commit theft.

Furthermore, a study conducted on **252 delinquent girls aged 14–18** showed that **25%** of them engaged in sexual relations as a result of watching sexually provocative scenes in cinema; **41%** were led by such scenes to attend noisy parties and night theaters; **54%** skipped school to watch films; and **17%** left their homes due to conflicts with their families over going to the cinema.

In England, some studies—based on interviews with **1,344 specialists** regarding the relationship between cinema and juvenile delinquency among those under sixteen—found that **600** respondents affirmed the existence of a relationship between juvenile delinquency and cinema. Some studies in Western countries have also shown that certain major thefts were motivated by juveniles' repeated attendance at cinemas.

All these statistics and studies concerning the media and its impact on youth cannot be overlooked, ignored, or forgotten. With each passing year and the emergence of new researchers, such findings increase and become more complex. Today, however, we are witnessing a series of changes that have affected the personality and formation of youth, influencing all aspects of life—ideas, beliefs, and even behaviors. As a result, the young person has come to live without a clear identity, adopting an imported culture and a lifestyle that is not their own, unaware of their past and uncertain of their future, living in an ambiguous present fraught with doubts and errors.

Where societies were once founded upon the vitality and determination of youth—who make history, build nations, and shape their future, establishing enduring foundations and opening avenues through their experiences and ambitions—youth have now become a testing ground for media tools. Through the content and messages they disseminate, these media have, in one way or another, influenced youth and the social systems of societies around the world.

– The Impact of Digital Media on the Value System:

In light of the inevitability of modern communication technologies, the intensity of interest in them, and the diversity and increasing complexity of their use by individuals and institutions, Algerian society may witness changes at the level of the structures that constitute the social system. Given that social systems are core structures, their functions may be affected by such change, potentially creating dysfunction at the level of social roles, particularly with the influx of foreign cultural elements that do not rise to the level of authentic values.

Accordingly, communication functions as a mechanism for transmitting values and traditions from previous generations to subsequent ones. With the development of societies and the increasing isolation and fragmentation among individuals, the function of transmitting heritage through the media has become a fundamental and necessary task in order to preserve the cultural heritage of society. Within the field of values and social norms, communication represents interaction among members of society, as behaviors transmitted from generation to generation come to constitute culture. From this perspective, education emerges, along with its activation and practice, both within the system of local media institutions and within the family as a transmitter of ideas and values.

Moreover, the techno-media communication system, distinguished by its structural and networked components and its interactive features, has demonstrated a power that exceeds material dimensions, moving toward the creation of virtual formations and generating a crisis of profound transformations in social structures. These transformations are centered on the expansion of communicative space, temporal and spatial proximity, connection with others, and the structural transformation of individual needs in terms of their multiplicity and diversity. This has led to the creation of new needs and desires among individuals, resulting in various patterns of extravagance and irrational consumption, as well as the spread of new values that are distant from Islamic values.

Consequently, the field of values in the era of the media and communication society has been characterized by relativity and change. This may be attributed to the nature, particularities, and diversity of the needs of social structures, as well as to the demands imposed by the characteristics of the techno-media communication system, including rapid development in terms of modernization and quality, and the transformation of the structures constituting the contemporary communicative framework. Therefore, the technological media system is not limited to the continuous modernization of structural components alone; rather, it often extends to the inevitability of its practice by individuals, sometimes surpassing the user's conscious awareness. This leads to transformation and acknowledgment that unstructured or unregulated use gives rise to profound societal crises (Hassan Imad Makawi, 2006, p. 80).

Conclusion:

Digital media, since its emergence, the development of its uses, the diversity of its forms, and the multiplicity of its characteristics, has gained a dedicated audience and has become a standard for success and continuity. Recently, this audience has become a unique type—focused primarily on tracking information as its main objective. In this context, digital media has become the primary means and channel available to them for communication and delivering their messages to the world, thereby reinforcing modern orientations in social science.

Through our review of the new media and its various impacts, it is clear that digital media has become a dominant feature in all fields of life. Its success and wide reach are largely due to the specific characteristics it offers. These features have elevated digital media to the level of a socialization tool, influencing the formation of values and behaviors. Accordingly, it is necessary to direct digital media toward optimal use, focusing on how to activate its potential and benefit from it effectively.

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