

What is the Relationship Between Social Values and Information Technology?

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Abstract

This research paper aims to analyze a pressing contemporary issue that has forcefully asserted itself, particularly in the context of globalization: technological advancements and artificial intelligence, and their various impacts on the prevailing value systems in Arab societies, especially Algerian societies. These advancements play a significant role in altering some of the prevailing values in societies, particularly in the developing world, as the globalization of culture—as it is termed—changes people's ways of thinking. Therefore, this research focuses on the prevailing value system in society and the extent to which technological progress, through material modernization, affects it. It also examines the degree to which modern information technology shapes an inevitable value system, and the implications of this system on the individual's value system.

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Introduction

The emergence of the global economy and the resulting policies, systems, and tools have transformed the world into a single, borderless geographical region. These regions are interconnected through tools designed to serve the global economic power represented by the capitalist system. Consequently, the development of these institutions has become contingent upon the evolution of the global economy, resulting in their current state. Among the most important of these tools is information technology, which carries within it not only the scientific power attained by the human mind but also the cultural implications of the environment in which it originated. Furthermore, this technology contributes to global communication through the exchange of goods and information between diverse peoples and societies, differing from one another due to their cultural and religious specificities, as well as their scientific and economic levels. This global interaction has become laden with diverse cultures, ideologies, and knowledge, which have found in technology a means to achieve decentralization and cultural relativism. This necessitates significant changes in the lifestyles and worldviews of the world's peoples. One of the serious dimensions affecting societies as a result of their interaction with this technology is the cultural transformation of societies and its various aspects. In this presentation, we will address the topic of social values as a dimension of societal culture that is influenced by its interaction with technology. Modern information, of which we will choose the internet as one manifestation, will be analyzed through how social media affects the privacy of social values and the standards that guide human behavior according to the nature of the social and cultural environment to which one belongs. We will also examine how individualism and personal freedom have become an important dimension in the process of cultural change for the individual and their view of the moral reference to which their society belongs, expressing this through specific behaviors, reactions, and attitudes. We will frame our analysis within the specific context of Algerian society as a Muslim society, starting from the following question: How does the internet affect the values of a society that possesses a unique characteristic, perhaps the most important of which is that it is an Islamic society where the Islamic religion represents the primary reference for its moral values?

First: Social Values and Material Modernity

The system of ideas adopted by a particular society, upon which it bases its determination of what is desirable or undesirable, rests on a value system that constitutes the moral framework of that society. This framework is shaped by a set of standards that guide and transform these abstract ideas into specific social

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behaviors within a cultural environment characterized by historical particularities. "Values are nothing but a reflection of the way people think in a particular culture and at a particular time. They also guide the behavior, judgments, and attitudes of individuals regarding what is desirable or undesirable in terms of behavior, in light of the rules and standards established by society. They may even extend beyond the immediate goals of behavior to define the ideal ends in life" (Khalifa, 1992, p. 14). Robert Park defines values as anything that is appreciated and desired. "Values and standards vary and differ significantly from one culture to another. Some cultures place a high value on individualism." While another culture emphasizes the common needs of members of society, values can even be contradictory within a single society or group: some groups or individuals may tend to focus on the value of traditional religious beliefs, while other groups tend to give higher value to progress and science (Giddens, 2005, p. 83).

Religious societies, such as Arab-Islamic societies, place great importance on religious values, making them the foundation of shared needs among members of society. These values also serve as the normative epistemological framework, requiring that the values and principles of knowledge and science align with the ethical standards of religion. Without this alignment, they will be met with rejection and disapproval. This contrasts with advanced societies, which separate religion from their scientific, political, and economic activities, and prioritize knowledge and science regardless of whether their principles conform to the religious values held by their members. This does not mean that religion is the cause of the intellectual and scientific stagnation in these societies. Rather, the problem lies in the religious mindset, which has refused to subject religious values to epistemological critique within the framework of modern ideas, sciences, and technologies. Modernity has sought to develop and modernize these values to create a bulwark against the dangers they pose. Consequently, Arab-Islamic societies are experiencing a civilizational contradiction, evident in their adoption of Western material civilization, such as technology, while simultaneously rejecting the philosophy, knowledge, and sciences that produced these technologies. This epistemological disconnect has become a missing link or a point of weakness in the face of modern technology and its inherent cultural and value diversity. This is an era where the individual is the master of their choices, convictions, and inclinations, unlike societies before the advent of information technology. In those times, state surveillance agencies determined the types of ideas, ideologies, and values that individuals would receive and interact with. If the state banned the publication of a certain type of book, those books became available on the internet. If state security forces fought against groups with specific beliefs and ideologies, those groups began communicating with individuals through social media, forums, and other platforms. We witnessed this in the affiliation of individuals from around the world with the terrorist organization ISIS, and how the latter was able to change individuals' values and attitudes and plant false ideas in their minds via the internet, causing a recent security and social crisis in Europe. As Giddens (2005, p. 85) explains, "The reality of multiculturalism or cultural diversity witnessed by industrial societies has changed due to migration, colonialism, wars, and globalization, which led to the dispersal of the world's population and their movement from their homelands across borders to settle in new areas." The concept of diversity has become broader than before thanks to information technology; an individual can now move with the click of a button. To other worlds, interacting with their culture and communicating with their people. After the individual used to live in the context of place and time, he now moves freely to any place and at any time he wants. "McLuhan's ideas about the expansive (displacing) effect of media and communication technologies can be observed in his treatment of these technologies in his book *Understanding the Media* (1964) as extensions of man" (Tomnelson, 2008, p. 208). Consequently, the physical presence has disappeared in the experience of individuals, and the relationship between the individual and the environment in which he lives and from which he receives social values has become weak and fragile, especially in the process of receiving knowledge and ideas. Social interaction has become dependent on electronic media, and consequently, the effect of values in determining the pattern of behavior and life of individuals is in a wager with those carried by these media, which possess sufficient technological ability that helps them to present experience, idea, and information quickly, easily, and efficiently, according to a modern vision and precise scientific arguments that place the individual in a position of doubt and review of all the preconceived ideas, convictions, and beliefs that he acquired in the stage of socialization.

Second: The Value Determinism of Modern Information Technology

In the boundless space created by information technology, separating information from technology becomes impossible, especially in the context of the comprehensive and diverse transformations and changes witnessed in the current century. These transformations have led global societies to quantitative and qualitative developments in human communication, influenced by the role played by modern media and the position it occupies in the lives of individuals in particular, and in social phenomenology in general. This has compelled specialists in communication and social sciences to pay attention to this prominent human phenomenon across the globe. Decentralization has become the defining characteristic of global modernity and the resulting cultural and value diversity. Among the most important modern theories that have addressed this influence exerted by information technology and its inherent values is the theory of value determinism by the Algerian thinker Abdel Rahman Azzi. This theory posits that every message transmitted by this technology necessarily carries with it certain values that the individual receives directly or indirectly. However, before presenting this theory, we must introduce the theory from which Abdel Rahman Azzi's ideas stem. McLuhan Marshall's technological determinism posits the inevitability of societies adopting technology, which has become a force upon them due to its essential functional advantages for keeping pace with the modern age.

1- McLuhan Marshall's Theory of Technological Determinism:

McLuhan's ideas can be summarized as follows: how communication technology impacts the reality of different societies. He views these technologies from two perspectives. First, as tools that facilitate the dissemination of information and knowledge, as well as providing various forms of entertainment to human society. Second, he sees them as a process or stage in the technological development of human life, relying on the logic of Marx's economic determinism, which established that economic systems are an integral part of the stages of human development. According to McLuhan, information technology plays a fundamental role in the development of societies and is a logical cause of the cultural and intellectual changes that occur within them. As for the point that will be the focus of our research, it rests on the initial view that information technology constitutes a virtual, universal medium that transmits knowledge and information to and from various human societies. By choosing this idea, our attention will be directed towards the content of that knowledge and information carried by technology from different cultures and ideologies.

McLuhan argues that "the media a society uses, or is forced to use, will determine the nature of that society and how it addresses its problems. Any new medium is an extension of humanity, creating new surrounding conditions that control what individuals living under these conditions do and influence how they think and act" (Tawati, 2013, p. 184). McLuhan also believes that "the medium is the message," meaning that the nature and form of new media constitute the true message directed at society. Changes occurring in societies are not so much related to the content of the message conveyed by these media as they are to the medium itself. For example, the internet and television have shaped a new lifestyle for members of society, such that the time individuals spend in front of this technology exceeds the time they spend interacting with other members of society. The vast and diverse amount of information received online, for instance, surpasses that acquired from reading a printed book. What makes us overlook the meaning of the saying "the medium is the message" is the content of the medium itself, and consequently, we overlook its impact on our social interactions and the nature of the changes occurring within them. Our culture and values.

As for "from a geopolitical perspective, McLuhan sees that new media have turned the world into a small village" (Matlar, 2005, p. 140), and thus the fall of the authority of limited time and space, distinguishing with this idea two types of communication means that connect the parts of this small village to each other and make them interact with each other. The first he called the term "hot media": which presents information ready and complete – according to its own assessment – to the recipient, which causes him to lack the ability to think and investigate, and thus he builds his perception of reality according to this information. The second type is the "cold" approach, characterized by its objective presentation and the freedom it affords individuals to choose. This is achieved by presenting diverse opinions and information

in a neutral and objective manner. In this case, individuals seek truth according to their own reasoning, judging events and topics as true or false and assigning value to everything they interact with. This raises questions about the values and ideas individuals receive in light of the knowledge and information they acquire within the virtual realm. To mitigate the potential threats posed by information technology, McLuhan emphasizes the importance of providing people with as much information as possible about media. He argues that by understanding how technology shapes our environment, we can control it and overcome its influence or deterministic power. In fact, instead of speaking of technological determinism, it might be more accurate to say that the recipient should feel like an independent being capable of overcoming this determinism (Tawati, 2013, p. 184). By monitoring the factors driving change in this technology, we can control it in a way that serves and elevates our social values.

The cold approach is characterized by its objective presentation and allows for greater individual choice.

2- Value Determinism of Abd al-Rahman Azzi:

Abd al-Rahman Azzi's theory of value determinism presented ideas that contradicted those of McLuhan in his theory of technological determinism. Value determinism is based on the variable of values as a normative dimension. It posits that the medium is not the message, but rather the message is the value-laden content that the medium carries within the information received by the individual. "This means that any media element or phenomenon is interpreted or understood in terms of its proximity to, contradiction with, or distance from the value... therefore, the message is the value" (Bouali, 2014, p. 89). Since Arab and Islamic countries in general, and Algeria in particular, are religious societies, the primary source of value for them is the Quran and Sunnah. This means that any content carried by information technology in its messages can be evaluated based on its proximity to or distance from the Islamic values adhered to by the Muslim community. From this perspective, we can assess the nature of the media's impact on social values. If the values conveyed by electronic media are close to the social values of Islam, for example, this indicates a positive impact. The benefit of the message to the individual Muslim is that when the values carried in the media messages with which the individual interacts via the Internet, for example, are far from his moral values, the effect is negative, which calls for avoiding these media materials and communication tools or interacting with them cautiously if necessary.

The theory of value determinism, in evaluating media and their messages, bases its assessment on the culture of individuals and their distinctive religious or value-based characteristics. "The message represents the reference point in regulating the relationship between culture and media. Culture is a fixed reference point in history and is renewed through action and practice, while the medium is born within the cultural sphere and seeks to express some of its manifestations. If communication media have produced what is called mass culture, it has not become a culture in itself, because mass culture is a product of mass society, not the other way around" (Bouali, 2014, p. 90). According to this logic, the theory of value determinism views social reality in light of information technology with a more neutral and objective perspective. This means that each society judges the message its members receive based on and stemming from the religion or values it adopts. This contrasts with the analyses made by Western theories, especially those of sociologists in their study of the phenomenon of digital communication, such as Giddens's stance on globalization, which was characterized by subjectivity in analysis and a condescending view of other societies, considering them... A consumer, not a producer.

If the Algerian researcher Abdel Rahman Azzi presented this unique theory, he "stirred the stagnant waters of Arab-Islamic research in the field of communication and media, contributing a set of original, interconnected, and experimental scientific studies based on a single key variable: the value derived from religion" (Fouad, 2014, p. 119). These studies are consistent with clear principles, the most important of which is viewing media as a message carrying values that are examined, evaluated, and filtered based on their proximity to or distance from religious values. Then, we determine whether the impact of information technology content benefits or harms members of society.

Third: The Impact of Information Technology on the Individual's Value System

During the socialization process, an individual acquires a set of values that, as a whole, form a coherent system where each value occupies a specific priority relative to the others. This hierarchical or stratified order of values (Emad, 2008, p. 146) includes two types of values. The first type is holistic in nature, related to the essential goals of human existence and its connection to the unseen world. These values frame the individual's worldview and its associated events (e.g., the values of justice, freedom, and benevolence). These are referred to as teleological values. The second type of values determines the individual's behavior during their interaction with other members of society or their pursuit of personal goals. These are termed instrumental values, meaning they serve as ethical means that the individual employs in their interaction with their social environment. The process of influence and being influenced between these two types of values is reciprocal and reflexive. In other words, the negative influence of instrumental values on the individual leads to the weakening and erosion of the authority of their core values. For him, instrumental values are the impenetrable barrier that protects ultimate values from weakening and collapse. Furthermore, ultimate values bolster the legitimacy of instrumental values in the individual's mind, making them the primary reference point for his behavior when interacting with others.

(The sentence is incomplete in the original Arabic text.) Given the diverse ideologies, ideas, and values inherent in information technology, instrumental values face significant risks when individuals interact with its content, unlike ultimate values. "For example, major religious systems like Christianity and Islam maintain their continuity and core values, rooted in ideas and practices that emerged two thousand or fourteen centuries ago, respectively. However, it is clear that modern societal institutions are changing at a faster pace than those in traditional societies" (Gaddens, 2005, p. 106). In light of information technology and virtual media such as social networks, websites, and forums, individuals interact with other global cultures under a cultural and civilizational shock. This shock stems from the absence of the reference points that guided a large part of their social lives. These reference points no longer possess the strength or immunity necessary to counter the diverse cultural values with which individuals interact. Consequently, these subcultures, alien to societies—whether conservative or scientifically and intellectually underdeveloped—play a significant role in shaping a virtual space that accommodates individual freedom of expression through technological media. Presenting ideas and beliefs that contradict or oppose the dominant cultural values of individuals within a specific time and place, "the content circulated digitally carries values, especially since influence in the context of a networked society takes on an emotional character, particularly if it occurs within a digital environment that facilitates achieving the desired effect. Moreover, the logic of action and reaction within social networks is constantly changing, governed by the demands of synchronous and asynchronous virtual communication, which may require an immediate or intermittent response, thus impacting the logic of human communication" (Bebemon, 2016).

Consequently, human relationships have become characterized by the virtual aspect and its associated dimensions, making the communication process distinctly different from what it was previously. Thus, the media-driven values guiding human behavior have clashed with this quantitative and qualitative change in the individual's social and global relationships. Discussions on social media networks have become rich with diverse ideas, knowledge, and cultures with which the individual interacts, compelling them to respect freedom of expression and the right to voice their opinions, or to participate positively in virtual social circles. For example, in online forums, respecting the privacy of others by refraining from hacking their accounts or personal devices becomes a fundamental requirement. Adherence to these ethics shapes a set of modern media values imposed by the logic of virtual communication via information technology. Those who violate or disrespect these values are considered negative and ostracized members of virtual communities, potentially leading to their removal or legal action. Thus, we observe that the value system shaped by information technology and its associated websites and networks influences the classification and prioritization of values for individuals interacting with these virtual environments.

Thus, "information technology and its globalization come to warn us of a new world full of possibilities and uncertainty, as if we are being driven to a destiny we know nothing about. We live in a world in which the dividing lines between order and chaos, between private and public, between subjective and objective, and between life in the real world and the inhabiting of symbolic space have been lost due to its extreme complexity" (Ali, 2001, p. 407). The greatest victims are those societies that lag behind the march of

civilization scientifically and intellectually, causing their backwardness to lead to a decline in the higher social and human values carried by a tolerant universal religion like Islam.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Algerian society faces numerous social changes, such as population growth and economic shifts, which have led to the emergence of various deviant behaviors and problems, including violence, drug addiction, intolerance, negativity, and apathy. Many social institutions, such as the family, schools, places of worship, and social clubs, are unable to fulfill their role in social control. These institutions are crucial in instilling in young people their society's culture, values, customs, and traditions through the effective use of modern technologies.

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