

The Impact of Modern Media on Ethical and Religious Values among University Students: A Theoretical Analytical Study تأثير وسائل الإعلام الحديثة على القيم الأخلاقية والدينية لدى طلاب الجامعات: دراسة تحليلية نظرية

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Abstract

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This study examines the impact of modern media, particularly digital media and social networking platforms, on the ethical and religious values of male and female undergraduate university students enrolled in public and private universities. The university stage represents a critical phase in value formation and identity construction, during which students are increasingly exposed to diverse and often conflicting media messages. While ethical and religious values play a central role in guiding behavior, strengthening social cohesion, and providing a moral reference framework, unregulated exposure to modern media may contribute to value erosion, moral relativism, and a decline in religious commitment.

The study adopts a descriptive–analytical theoretical approach, based on a critical review of selected academic literature addressing the influence of media on value formation and youth development. Drawing on Social Learning Theory and contemporary discussions related to digital media environments, such as algorithmic content filtering, the study analyzes the mechanisms through which media contributes to shaping ethical and religious values among university students.

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** أكاديمي وباحث في مجال الإدارة والأعمال، وعضو هيئة تدريس في برامج الدراسات العليا، ويُدرّس حالياً في الجامعات اللبنانية الخاصة -

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The findings indicate that modern media exerts a dual influence. On the one hand, it can enhance ethical awareness, promote social responsibility, and facilitate access to religious knowledge and spiritual resources. On the other hand, excessive and uncritical media consumption may weaken moral awareness, reduce religious engagement, and contribute to a state of cultural and identity confusion. The

study concludes by emphasizing the importance of media literacy education and the need for coordinated efforts among universities, families, and media institutions to guide responsible media consumption and support the development of a balanced value system among university students.

Keywords: Modern media; digital media; ethical values; religious values; university students; media literacy.

الملخص

تعتمد الدراسة منهجًا نظريًا وصفيًا تحليليًا، قائمًا على مراجعة نقدية لأدبيات أكاديمية مختارة تناولت تأثير وسائل الإعلام في تكوين القيم وتنمية الشباب. وبالاستناد إلى نظرية التعلم الاجتماعي، والمناقشات المعاصرة المرتبطة ببيئات الإعلام الرقمي، مثل التصفية الخوارزمية للمحتوى، تحلل الدراسة الآليات التي تُسهم من خلالها وسائل الإعلام في تشكيل القيم الأخلاقية والدينية لدى طلاب الجامعات. وتشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أن لوسائل الإعلام الحديثة تأثيرًا مزدوجًا: فمن جهة، يمكنها تعزيز الوعي الأخلاقي، وتشجيع المسؤولية الاجتماعية، وتيسير الوصول إلى المعرفة الدينية والموارد الروحية، ومن جهة أخرى قد يؤدي الإفراط في الاستهلاك الإعلامي غير النقدي إلى إضعاف الوعي الأخلاقي، والحد من الالتزام الديني، والمساهمة

تتناول هذه الدراسة تأثير وسائل الإعلام الحديثة، ولا سيما الإعلام الرقمي ومنصات التواصل الاجتماعي، على القيم الأخلاقية والدينية لدى طلاب وطالبات الجامعات في مرحلة الإجازة الجامعية الأولى، الملحقين بالجامعات الحكومية والخاصة. وتمثل المرحلة الجامعية مرحلة حاسمة في تكوين القيم وبناء الهوية، إذ يتعرض الطلبة خلالها بشكل متزايد لوسائل إعلامية متنوعة ومتباينة، وغالبًا ما تكون متناقضة. وبينما تؤدي القيم الأخلاقية والدينية دورًا محوريًا في توجيه السلوك، وتعزيز التماسك الاجتماعي، وتوفير الإطار المرجعي الأخلاقي، فإن التعرض غير المنظم لوسائل الإعلام الحديثة قد يسهم في تآكل القيم، وتعزيز النسبية الأخلاقية، وإضعاف مستوى الالتزام الديني.

في حالة من التشوش القيمي والهوي. ودعم تنمية منظومة قيمية متوازنة لدى طلاب الجامعات. وتخلص الدراسة إلى التأكيد على أهمية التثقيف الإعلامي، وضرورة تكامل أدوار الجامعات والأسر والمؤسسات الإعلامية في توجيه الاستهلاك الإعلامي المسؤول،

1.Introduction

Media has become one of the most influential forces shaping contemporary societies, particularly with the rapid expansion of digital and social media platforms. Scholars argue that digital media has fundamentally transformed patterns of communication, social interaction, and cultural influence, especially among younger generations who are deeply embedded in networked environments. University students, as intensive users of digital technologies for learning, communication, and entertainment, are increasingly exposed to media messages that shape their knowledge structures, attitudes, and identity formation processes. This pervasive exposure positions media as a central agent in contemporary socialization. (Castells, 2010, pp.54–66).

Ethical and religious values represent core frameworks that guide human behavior, promote social stability, and provide moral and spiritual orientation. From a sociological perspective, values

function as regulatory mechanisms that sustain social order and collective cohesion. During the university stage, students experience greater intellectual independence and openness to new ideas, which supports self-development but also heightens vulnerability to external cultural influences. In this context, media content that emphasizes materialism, individualism, or moral relativism may challenge established ethical and religious value systems, particularly in the absence of critical awareness. (Durkheim, 2008, pp.41–55).

Previous research has extensively examined the relationship between media exposure and youth behavior. However, much of this research has concentrated on psychological or behavioral outcomes, such as attitudes, emotions, and social interaction, while giving comparatively limited attention to ethical and religious values as integrated systems guiding moral judgment and conduct. This imbalance has resulted in a partial understanding of media influence that overlooks

deeper value-based dimensions, especially among university students. (Bandura, 2001, pp.265–270).

In light of these gaps, this study seeks to provide a theoretical analytical examination of the impact of modern media on ethical and religious values among university students. It focuses on analyzing the mechanisms through which contemporary digital media environments shape value orientations and highlights the dual nature of media effects in reinforcing or eroding ethical and religious commitments. By addressing these issues, the study contributes to academic discussions on media and value formation and offers insights relevant to educators and institutions concerned with fostering responsible media engagement in higher education contexts. (Pariser, 2011, pp.9–15).

2-Research Problem

Despite the widespread use of modern media, particularly digital and social media platforms, among university students, there is insufficient theoretical clarity regarding how these media influence ethical and religious values as integrated value systems. Most existing studies focus on behavioral or psychological effects, while the impact on ethical and religious orientations

remains underexplored. This creates a gap in understanding the mechanisms through which modern media may contribute to either reinforcing or weakening ethical and religious values among university students.

3- Research Question

The study seeks to answer the following main question:

How does modern media influence the ethical and religious values of university students?

This main question can be supported by the following sub-questions:

1. What are the main mechanisms through which modern media contributes to shaping ethical and religious values among university students?
2. What are the positive effects of modern media on ethical and religious values?
3. What are the negative effects of excessive or uncritical exposure to modern media on ethical and religious values?

4-Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical and analytical nature of the study, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. Modern media has a significant influence on the ethical and religious values of university students.

2. Exposure to value-oriented and educational media content contributes positively to the development of ethical awareness and religious understanding among university students.
3. Excessive and uncritical consumption of modern media is associated with a weakening of ethical sensitivity and a decline in religious commitment among university students.
4. The impact of modern media on ethical and religious values varies according to the level of media literacy and critical awareness among university students.

5- Methodology

5.1- Research Design

This study adopts a **descriptive-analytical theoretical research design** aimed at examining and interpreting existing scholarly literature on the impact of modern media on ethical and religious values among university students. This approach is appropriate for studies that seek to analyze concepts, explain influence mechanisms, and synthesize theoretical perspectives rather than test variables empirically (Creswell, 2018, pp.12–15).

The descriptive-analytical design is widely employed in media and

social science research to address complex social phenomena such as value formation, which develops through cumulative exposure, symbolic representation, and cultural normalization rather than direct causal relationships (McQuail, 2020, pp.79–85). Given the normative and moral nature of ethical and religious values, a theoretical analytical approach allows for deeper interpretation of how media messages shape moral orientations among university students.

5.2-Data Sources

The study relies on **secondary data** obtained through a critical review of peer-reviewed academic sources, including journal articles, scholarly books, and institutional reports related to media studies, value theory, youth development, and religious studies. Sources were selected based on academic credibility, relevance to the research topic, and publication recency, with particular emphasis on literature addressing digital and social media environments (Castells, 2021, pp.3–10; Keles et al., 2020, pp.84–90).

In addition, reports published by international organizations concerned with media ethics and media literacy were consulted to contextualize the analysis and support discussions on responsible media engagement in

higher education (UNESCO, 2022, pp.12–18).

5.3-Operational Definition of Ethical and Religious Values and Media Exposure

In this theoretical study, ethical and religious values are treated as conceptual variables rather than empirically measured indicators. Ethical values are operationally defined to include core moral principles such as honesty, responsibility, respect, justice, integrity, and social responsibility. Religious values refer to commitment to religious beliefs and practices, moral accountability, spiritual orientation, and the role of religion in guiding daily behavior and decision-making.

With regard to media exposure, the study does not quantify media use in terms of exact hours or frequency. Instead, it conceptually examines patterns of media engagement, distinguishing between moderate versus excessive use, and between critical versus uncritical consumption of modern and social media. The impact of media is therefore analyzed qualitatively by linking intensity and nature of media exposure, as discussed in the literature, to potential strengthening or weakening of ethical and religious values.

Accordingly, the relationship between modern media use and value influence is interpreted in a theoretical and relational manner rather than through statistical correlation between usage duration and impact magnitude.

5.4-Analytical Framework

The study is guided primarily by **Social Learning Theory**, which posits that individuals acquire behaviors, attitudes, and values through observation, imitation, and reinforcement (Bandura, 2021, pp.21–25). This framework is particularly relevant to understanding how university students internalize ethical and religious values through exposure to media figures, celebrities, and social media influencers who are often associated with success and social approval.

The analysis also draws on media theory related to **normalization and repetition**, which explains how repeated media portrayals gradually redefine social norms and moral boundaries, making certain behaviors appear acceptable or desirable over time (McQuail, 2020, pp.83–88). Furthermore, the study incorporates contemporary discussions on **algorithmic personalization and filter bubbles**, which suggest that digital platforms reinforce existing

beliefs by limiting exposure to alternative viewpoints (Pariser, 2023, pp.45–52).

Through integrating these perspectives, the study examines key mechanisms of media influence, including repetition, emotional appeal, peer validation, influencer culture, and algorithm-driven content exposure.

5.5-Procedure of Analysis

The analytical process was conducted in three stages. First, key concepts such as modern media, ethical values, religious values, and media influence mechanisms were conceptually defined based on established academic literature (Schwartz, 2021, pp.15–22; Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2022, pp.160–164).

Second, a thematic analysis of the reviewed literature was undertaken to identify recurring patterns related to both the positive and negative impacts of media on ethical and religious values among university students (Coyne et al., 2021, pp.500–503; Park & Holloway, 2023, pp.4–8).

Third, a comparative synthesis was applied to integrate findings across different studies and theoretical perspectives, allowing for a balanced interpretation of media's dual role in reinforcing or weakening value systems.

5.6-Methodological Justification and Limitations

The adoption of a theoretical analytical methodology is justified by the exploratory nature of the research topic and the ethical and cultural sensitivity associated with studying values and religion. While this approach allows for in-depth conceptual analysis, it does not permit statistical generalization of findings (Creswell, 2018, pp.148–150). Therefore, the conclusions of this study should be interpreted as theoretically grounded insights rather than empirically tested results.

To address this limitation, future research is encouraged to employ empirical methods such as surveys, interviews, and content analysis to examine the relationships identified in this study within specific university and cultural contexts.

5.7-Statistical Analysis and Data Analysis Method

As this study adopts a theoretical descriptive–analytical approach and does not rely on empirical or quantitative data, no statistical tests were employed. The analysis was conducted using qualitative thematic analysis and comparative theoretical synthesis of relevant academic literature. The reviewed sources were

systematically examined to identify recurring themes, conceptual patterns, and theoretical perspectives related to the impact of modern media on ethical and religious values among university students. Therefore, the study does not apply statistical analysis techniques, as its objective is conceptual interpretation rather than hypothesis testing based on numerical data.

6. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

6.1-Concept of Media and Its Types

Media refers to the communication channels through which information, ideas, symbols, and cultural meanings are produced and disseminated to wide audiences. Beyond its technical function, media operates as a social institution that participates in constructing social reality and shaping value systems (McQuail, 2020, pp.6–8). Traditional media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, historically played a central role in transmitting relatively unified moral narratives within society. However, the emergence of digital and social media has transformed media from a one-way communication process into an interactive and participatory environment characterized by speed, personalization, and user-generated content (Castells, 2021, pp.3–6).

Digital and social media are particularly influential among university students due to constant accessibility and integration into daily academic and social life. While this environment enhances information access and communication, it also exposes students to fragmented and sometimes contradictory moral messages, increasing the complexity of value formation processes (Castells, 2021, pp.7–10).

6.2-Ethical and Religious Values: Definitions and Significance

Ethical values are defined as internalized moral principles that guide individuals' judgments of right and wrong and regulate behavior within social contexts. Core ethical values such as honesty, responsibility, justice, respect, and integrity function as standards that shape decision-making and interpersonal relationships (Schwartz, 2021, pp.15–22). These values are not static; rather, they develop through continuous interaction with social institutions, including family, education, culture, and media (Schwartz, 2021, pp.30–35).

Religious values represent a specific dimension of moral orientation derived from religious beliefs and teachings. They provide individuals with spiritual meaning, moral accountability, and

a sense of purpose, particularly during transitional life stages such as emerging adulthood. For university students, religious values often serve as sources of emotional stability and ethical guidance amid academic and social pressures (Park & Holloway, 2023, pp.4–8).

6.3-Media as a Mechanism of Value Formation

Media contributes to value formation by repeatedly presenting behaviors, lifestyles, and moral judgments within symbolic narratives. Through films, television programs, advertisements, and social media content, certain patterns of behavior are normalized and framed as socially acceptable or desirable. Over time, repeated exposure to these representations shapes individuals' perceptions of moral boundaries and social norms (McQuail, 2020, pp.83–85).

From a theoretical perspective, **Social Learning Theory** explains this process by emphasizing that individuals learn values and behaviors through observing and imitating models who are perceived as successful, admired, or socially rewarded (Bandura, 2021, pp.21–25). In digital media environments, celebrities and social media influencers function as symbolic

role models whose ethical orientations and lifestyles may be internalized by university students, often without explicit moral instruction.

6.4-Emotional Appeal, Peer Validation, and Algorithmic Influence

Modern media environments intensify value influence through emotional engagement and social feedback mechanisms. Media messages frequently rely on emotional storytelling, visual stimulation, and affective appeal, which increase memorability and reduce critical evaluation (McQuail, 2020, pp.86–88). Content associated with admiration, excitement, or empathy is more likely to be internalized as part of the individual's value framework.

In social media contexts, peer validation through likes, shares, and comments further reinforces value adoption. Students may adjust their attitudes and behaviors to align with perceived group norms in order to gain social approval and avoid exclusion (Keles et al., 2020, pp.84–90). This dynamic strengthens conformity and amplifies the moral influence of dominant online narratives.

Additionally, algorithm-driven personalization plays a critical role in shaping value exposure.

Digital platforms curate content based on users' preferences and past interactions, creating what Pariser describes as "filter bubbles" that reinforce existing beliefs while limiting exposure to alternative moral and religious perspectives (Pariser, 2023, pp.45–52). This mechanism may deepen value polarization and reduce opportunities for reflective moral reasoning.

6.5-Implications for University Students

The interaction of social learning, emotional appeal, peer validation, and algorithmic filtering makes media a powerful force in shaping ethical and religious values among university students. Media may contribute positively by promoting empathy, social responsibility, and access to religious knowledge, but it may also weaken moral sensitivity, normalize ethical violations, and marginalize religious commitment when exposure is excessive or uncritical.

Therefore, understanding media influence as a complex, multi-layered process is essential for interpreting its impact on students' value systems. This framework provides the theoretical foundation for analyzing the positive and negative effects of media discussed in the following sections.

7. Findings: Media's Dual Impact on Ethical and Religious Values

The analysis of the reviewed literature reveals that modern media exerts a **dual and interconnected impact** on the ethical and religious values of university students. This impact varies according to the nature of media content, patterns of use, and the level of critical awareness among students.

7.1-Positive Effects of Media on Ethical and Religious Values

Modern media can play a constructive role in enhancing ethical awareness and supporting religious understanding when aligned with educational and value-oriented objectives. Educational media content, including documentaries, awareness campaigns, and socially responsible programming, contributes to promoting values such as justice, empathy, tolerance, and civic responsibility (UNESCO, 2022, pp.12–18). Exposure to such content encourages students to reflect on moral issues and social responsibilities, thereby strengthening ethical sensitivity.

Digital media also facilitates access to religious knowledge by providing flexible opportunities to engage with religious texts, lectures, sermons, and scholarly discussions. Online platforms enable students to

maintain spiritual engagement despite academic pressures and limited access to traditional religious institutions (Campbell, 2021, pp.45–50). Moreover, online religious communities foster a sense of belonging and shared moral identity, offering guidance and emotional support during a critical stage of personal development.

7.2-Negative Effects of Media on Ethical and Religious Values

Despite its positive potential, extensive and uncritical media exposure may contribute to the erosion of ethical and religious values. Repeated exposure to violent, unethical, or morally ambiguous content can lead to **moral desensitization**, reducing emotional responsiveness to ethical violations and weakening moral judgment (Coyne et al., 2021, pp.500–503). When such behaviors are portrayed without consequences, they may become normalized and perceived as socially acceptable.

In addition, media content emphasizing individualism, material success, and moral relativism may contribute to a gradual decline in religious commitment among university students. As emerging adults seek autonomy and self-definition, media representations that marginalize religious practices can reinforce

disengagement from organized religion (Arnett, 2020, pp.78–81). Over time, excessive media consumption may displace religious activities and weaken the influence of religious values on daily decision-making.

Global digital media platforms also expose students to diverse value systems that may conflict with local cultural and religious norms, increasing the risk of identity and value confusion. Without critical evaluation skills, students may adopt external values unreflectively, resulting in fragmented moral orientations and weakened ethical consistency (Arnett, 2020, pp.112–115).

8.Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the influence of modern media on ethical and religious values is not inherently positive or negative, but rather context-dependent. Media functions as a powerful socializing agent whose impact is shaped by content quality, frequency of exposure, and the presence or absence of critical media literacy. The same platforms that promote ethical awareness and religious knowledge can also normalize moral relativism and weaken value commitment when consumption is excessive or unguided.

Algorithm-driven personalization further intensifies this dual effect

by reinforcing existing beliefs and limiting exposure to alternative moral perspectives (Pariser, 2023, pp.45–52). This highlights the importance of educational and familial mediation in guiding students' engagement with media. Universities, families, and media institutions play a crucial role in fostering critical thinking skills that enable students to evaluate media messages and align their consumption with ethical and religious principles.

8.1-Discussion of Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical analysis and review of the relevant literature, the study provides conceptual answers to the research questions and evaluates the proposed hypotheses.

Regarding the main research question, the analysis indicates that modern media plays a significant role in shaping the ethical and religious values of university students. Media influences value formation through mechanisms such as social learning, normalization of behavior, emotional appeal, peer validation, and algorithmic content personalization. These mechanisms operate cumulatively and affect students' moral judgments and religious orientations over time.

In response to the first sub-question, the study identifies several key

mechanisms through which modern media shapes ethical and religious values, including repeated exposure to value-laden content, the influence of media role models and social media influencers, emotional engagement, and the reinforcement of norms through social interaction and feedback.

With respect to the positive effects, the analysis shows that modern media can contribute to strengthening ethical awareness and religious understanding when media content promotes social responsibility, moral reflection, and access to religious knowledge. Educational and value-oriented media content may support ethical sensitivity and encourage constructive moral behavior among university students.

Concerning the negative effects, the study indicates that excessive and uncritical exposure to modern media may weaken ethical sensitivity and reduce religious commitment. Media content that normalizes unethical behavior, promotes moral relativism, or marginalizes religious practices may contribute to moral desensitization and value confusion, particularly in the absence of critical media literacy.

8.2-Evaluation of Research Hypotheses

In light of these findings, the proposed hypotheses are conceptually

supported. The analysis confirms that modern media has a notable influence on ethical and religious values, that value-oriented media content may have positive effects, and that excessive and uncritical media consumption may lead to negative value outcomes. The study also supports the hypothesis that the impact of media varies according to students' level of media literacy and critical awareness.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the impact of modern media on the ethical and religious values of university students through a theoretical analytical approach. The analysis indicates that media exerts a complex and cumulative influence, capable of both reinforcing and undermining value systems. While media can enhance ethical awareness, social responsibility, and access to religious knowledge,

unregulated and uncritical exposure may weaken moral sensitivity, reduce religious commitment, and contribute to identity confusion.

Based on these findings, the study recommends integrating media literacy education into university curricula to strengthen students' critical engagement with media content. Families should continue to play an active role in reinforcing ethical and religious values through dialogue and guidance, while media institutions are encouraged to promote content that respects moral and cultural values.

As a theoretical study, the findings are limited to conceptual analysis and do not provide empirical generalization. Future research is encouraged to employ quantitative and qualitative methods to examine media-value relationships within specific university and cultural contexts.

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