2528-9705

*Örgütsel Davranış Araştırmaları Dergisi*
Journal Of Organizational Behavior Research
Cilt / Vol.: 8, Sayı / Is.: S, Yıl/Year: 2023, Kod/ID: 23S0-1010

# A SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CYBERSPACE USAGE AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS (CASE STUDY: THE CITY OF JAHROM)

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## *ABSTRACT*

*The present study aims at investigating the effect of using virtual social networks on the religious identity of high school students in Jahrom. The survey method was used in this research. The statistical population are whole male & female high school students in Jahrom, whose approximate numbers are about 7000 in the year 1400, of which 375 are selected as a sample by using multi-stage r&om sampling method. The research instrument is a questionnaire that has been used to determine its validity by face validity method & to determine its reliability by internal coordinated method by Cronbach's alpha method. The descriptive results revealed that the average score of students' religious identity in Jahrom was at moderate to high level. Analytical findings also showed that there was a significant relationship between cyberspace (total) & religious identity (total). Cyberspace (total) affects students' emotional & practical identity, but the relationship between cyberspace (total) & students' beliefs was not significant. Among the demographic variables, there was a significant relationship between gender, grade, field of study, type of schools, father's education, social class & students' religious identity. Explain the dependent variable in terms of the sum of independent variables. Target variables, activity & participation in cyberspace, cyberspace (total), attitude towards the contents in cyberspace, social class, gender, mother's job, field of study, father's job, father's education, are the strongest predictors of students' religious identity, respectively & these factors are able to explain 0. 151 of the variance changes in religious identity.*

***Keywords:*** *Cyberspace, Jahrom, Social Networks, Students, Religious Identity.*

## INTRODUCTION

Religion is one of the undeniable identity elements in our society (Nikpey, 2001). Religious identity refers to the extent to which an individual reproduces the religious institution in society and the importance one gives to religious norms in their chosen lifestyle (Giddens, 1999). In other words, religious identity refers to the effects and consequences of an individual embracing a religion. In better terms, by accepting religion as a fundamental belief and pillar in life, significant changes and important results will certainly occur for the devout individual in various aspects of their life. The first and most important achievement of religious identity is providing answers to people's fundamental and profound questions. According to Huntington, religion provides satisfying answers for those facing questions like: Who am I and where do I belong? In fact, religious identity indicates a sense of belonging to a religion and religious

community as well as commitment to a religion and religious community. Religious identity refers to the effects and consequences of an individual embracing a religion. One factor that influences religious identity is cyberspace.

Cyberspace refers to the interactions and communications of people through computers and new technologies, without regard to physical geography. The term was used by science fiction writer William Gibson to describe the wide range of information resources accessed through computer networks that are exchanged as digital data. In another sense, cyberspace is a real electronic environment where human communications take place rapidly, beyond geographical borders or their own specific tools, directly and live (Abelson, 1998). In other words, cyberspace is not a place, but a passageway between places. While residing in your own place, you can wander in cyberspace and encounter people living in other places, but you can be in your own mental world using cyberspace. Therefore, cyberspace is a kind of meta-space and mental space, a space we manipulate daily and encounter other people, ideas, places and times (Castells & Ince, 2003).

Communication and information technologies as one of the most important forces and tools propelling globalization trends and also pillars of the global cultural sphere, have had various impacts in different areas of human societies. In recent years, through the growing expansion of new information and communication technologies, fundamental transformations have occurred in people's lives in the areas of political, social, cultural and religious relations. The consequence of this has been the emergence of a new kind of human communication and interaction. The advent of cyberspace, especially the Internet, as the most important feature of communication technology, has had significant impacts on people's lives, especially youth, including the formation of an online society whose members communicate through email and chat. Technological developments, in addition to influencing their tastes, preferences and communication needs, have also affected how they spend their leisure time. The two processes of "mediatization" and "domestication" describe how young people in modern societies spend a large portion of their leisure time. Young people increasingly spend their leisure in private and rely more and more on new media for entertainment (Zokaei, 2004). The rapid and inevitable changes in media communications have led to tremendous transformations in social relations and cultural shifts, placing numerous social and cultural domains under the shadow of their networking power. On the one hand, the impacts of cyberspace on family and youth are among the most important concerns of Iran's cultural leaders. Virtual social networks have transformed social values and brought about widespread changes in the ways individuals and groups form religious identities. In the process of using cyberspace during leisure time, based on theories of social psychology and sociology and game theory, new values, norms and behaviors suited to it will emerge. These impacts have been so important and transformative that people speak of virtual identities, second lives, digital families, and so on. What has caused more concern and anxiety for families and cultural leaders is the influence that presence in cyberspace, computer and online games have on the personality, cultural behavior and religious identity of adolescents and users.

The use of the internet, and more recently social media networks, has increased tremendously among Iranians and studies show this trend continues. Internet use, especially among Iranian youth, is very prevalent, with a stark gap compared to older generations. Therefore, it is

unsurprising that most research on the internet in Iran indicates the majority of users belong to the younger generation. Given the importance of virtual social networks and the globalization of media today, which enjoy worldwide popularity, and considering that most users of virtual social networks are youth, and most youth are members of virtual social networks, in addition, the demographic and cultural characteristics that shape the fabric of the city of Jahrom, and the steadfast faith and belief of its pious people, who the Supreme Leader describes as the "City of the Faithful," have made the issue of religious identity particular and distinct in this region. In fact, adolescents and youth are one of the most important groups who, due to qualities associated with youth, will be most influenced by cyberspace. Therefore, studying and researching the impacts of social networks and cyberspace on the religious identity of students is considered very important and necessary.

With these details, the main objectives of this study are first, to examine how students interact on virtual social networks, and second, given that virtual social networks are new communication tools emerging after globalization in the communication sphere, what impacts do they have on students' religious identity?

Virtual social networks as an emerging phenomenon have negative effects, including the rapid fragmentation of communities, transformation of the concepts of place, time, space and cultural resources, challenging authentic and traditional identities, prevalence of fluid and unstable identities, anonymity and identity theft. Research shows that social networks influence youth social identity, and as the duration of membership, usage, participation and activity increases, and the content presented on these networks is viewed as more realistic, users' religious identity weakens. Because in our society, the internet, virtual social networks and satellite are often not used logically, and these media and information and communication capabilities mostly promote the materialist, hedonistic and individualistic Western culture, one of the harmful aspects is the reduction of religious and moral affiliations among adolescents and youth. Also, interacting in cyberspace has a dual effect on the religious identity of youth. As accessibility and utilization of new information and communication channels increases, along with increased usage time and consumption, due to expanding mental and intellectual horizons and promoting cognitive, emotional and practical orientations, the intensity of experiential and consequential dimensions is reduced on one hand.

## *Literature Review*

The findings of Ahmadpour and Ghaderzadeh's (2010) study on "Interaction in Cyberspace and its Impact on Youth's Religious Identity" indicate that religious identity is influenced by interaction in cyberspace across five dimensions: experiential, consequential, ideological, ritualistic, and cognitive. Greater interaction in cyberspace reflects the more or less globalized cultural influences and interactions in cyberspace among students, with observable consequences in Iran's transitional society. This situation points to the harmful nature of interacting in cyberspace on students' religious identity. Shamani *et al.* (2016) in their study on the "Relationship Between Using Virtual Social Networks and the Identity of Tehran Youth" found a significant correlation between the extent of using virtual social networks and cultural identity, such that there is a significant inverse correlation between four components - duration of presence, usage, user activity, and perceiving content as realistic in virtual social networks -

and the cultural identity status of youth. The findings of Adlipour's (2012) master's thesis examining the "Impacts and Consequences of Virtual Social Networks on Youth Social Identity" show that as an emerging phenomenon, virtual social networks have both positive and negative effects. The negative effects include rapid fragmentation of communities, transformation of the concepts of place, time, space and cultural resources, challenging authentic and traditional identities, prevalence of fluid and unstable identities, anonymity and identity theft. Bakhtiari and Farrokhi's (2012) study on the "Relationship between Satellite TV Programs and Religious Identity" aimed to examine the relationship between satellite TV programs and the religious identity of youth. They found a significant correlation, with satellite TV having a negative impact on youth religious identity. Therefore, satellite TV influences the religious dimension of youth identity. Hosseinizadeh *et al.*'s (2000) study on "Cyberspace, Globalization and Religious Identity" showed that media, social networks, the internet and cyberspace have a considerable influence on individuals' personal and religious identities, especially their cultural realm and beliefs of individuals and families. The findings of Memar *et al.*'s (2012) study on "Virtual Social Networks and Identity Crisis (with an Emphasis on Iran's Identity Crisis)" indicate that based on a generational breakdown, the third generation constitutes the largest cyberspace users in Iran and are more exposed than other generations to the impacts of virtual social networks. Cyberspace has created a kind of identity crisis among a wide range of youth, and this identity crisis has led to heterogeneous identities at the individual level, somehow affecting social equilibrium. Moreover, virtual social networks have caused fundamental changes in identity-forming institutions and transformed the meaningful identity-forming factors. The results of a 2002 Pew survey show that so far 21% of internet users have searched for religious information online. The findings from Barna Church's 2001 virtual church report states that in 2001, 8% of adults and 12% of teenagers used the internet cyberspace for religious or spiritual purposes. Dawson's (2001) studies demonstrate that the internet can have positive functions such as facilitating the spread of religious messages, establishing new religious fellowships, breaking territorial boundaries, organizing religious ceremonies and rituals, and expanding the knowledge of the devout in new religious domains. Grasmuck's (2009) study on "Facebook and Identity" concluded that the awareness actors gain from being present on Facebook as a life world causes changes in their identity, and also shapes users' global identity. Marcia (cited in Glina, 1997) showed that adolescence and youth are seen as a critical stage in identity formation, and electronic media influence this identity formation, impacting personal, national and gender identity on three levels.

The main theoretical framework of this current research is a combination of Gerbner's cultivation theory and Castells' theory on identity in the contemporary world. Identity is a concept that has a specific conceptual space in different sciences. In sociology, the term identity means who one is and the sense of need to identify oneself which provokes a series of cultural and historical elements in an individual or a human group. On this basis, identity refers to the set of personal and social characteristics and feelings and thoughts related to them that an individual obtains through the ability to interact with oneself and find perceptions of oneself, and provides in response to the question "Who am I?". Jacobson considers identity as a sense of personal distinctiveness and a sense of personal independence (Jacobson, 1998; cited in Masoudnia *et al.*, 2016: 114). According to Jenkins, identity is the process through which a

person comes to know himself. In his view, the concept of identity simultaneously establishes two possible relationships between individuals or objects: "on the one hand similarity, and on the other, difference" (Jenkins, 2002). Manuel Castells defines identity as "the process of constructing meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute or a related set of cultural attributes that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning" (Castells, 2001:22). Based on this definition, identities are always produced and reproduced. Gerbner's cultivation theory emphasizes the interaction between media and their audiences, as well as how media influence their audiences. The core assumption of this theory is that there is a direct correlation between the extent of exposure to and use of a medium and the perceived realism of its content and programs. In this way, prolonged exposure to a particular medium leads to changes in attitudes and perspectives aligned with the medium's content. In fact, cultivation theory examines the extent of influence by determining the amount and types of programs used from the media, in order to understand the mechanism and manner of influence (Abbasi Ghadiri and Khalili Kashani, 2011:81). Cultivation theory is a form of media effect at the cognitive level and pertains to the question of to what extent being exposed to media can shape the public's beliefs and perceptions of external reality. Cultivation theory has been explicated with diffusion to provide a model of analysis, in order to demonstrate the long-term impacts of media that fundamentally operate at the level of social perception (Ahmadzadeh Kermani, 2011: 336). In essence, Gerbner's discussion focuses on the historical significance of media being mostly in creating shared ways of selecting issues and topics and perspectives on events and occurrences. These shared ways are the product of using technology and the message delivery system that act as intermediaries, leading to a shared view and shared understanding of the surrounding world. Gerbner calls the product of such a process the cultivation of dominant mental patterns. In his view, media tend to present uniform perspectives on social reality that are more or less identical. Audiences become culturally conditioned based on this kind of mechanism. Gerbner goes so far as to say that due to the order and coordination media have in delivering messages over time, they have tremendous influence; so much so that they should be seen as shaping society (Surin and Tankard, 2005: 392). Based on the cultivation theory, it can be inferred that the extent of use and duration of membership in social networks and perceiving the content of internet social networks as realistic affects users' social identity. It can be said that the more the usage and length of membership in social networks increases, the greater the likelihood of user influence. Conversely, the less the amount, duration of use and length of membership in social networks, the less likely the user will be influenced. Manuel Castells, noting the communication era, considers globalization to be the advent of a kind of network that encompasses the economic, social and cultural realms in the continuation of capitalism (Castells, 2006: 27). Castells states that identity constructs and organizes meaning; with the difference that here, his focus is on collective identity rather than individual identity. His core hypothesis is that, overall, who constructs the collective identity and for what purpose to a large extent determines the symbolic content of the identity in question and its meaning for those who identify with it or imagine themselves outside it. In other words, does the individual choose the traditional local identity or turn to the global identity? Castells sees neither parallelism between what is called globalization and the formation of collective identities, nor peaceful coexistence of macro and micro collective identities, but rather a kind of contradiction and conflict between micro collective identities and the globalization process. Therefore, Castells defines identity as the process of constructing

meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute or a related set of cultural attributes that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning. In Castells' view, in a network society meaning is mostly organized around a fundamental identity for most social actors (Castells, 2006: 22). Additionally, Castells presents a model of the information society in which the role of media is key, and in fact it is the media that reproduces this new type of society. In this social system, communication technologies play a fundamental role, and the tone of discourse, lifestyle and all social values are defined by the media and their owners (Ibid. 27). In this paper, based on the above theories, we assess the impact of virtual social networks on the religious identity of high school students in Jahrom, and based on the theoretical framework of the research, we draw the following theoretical model **(Figure 1)**.

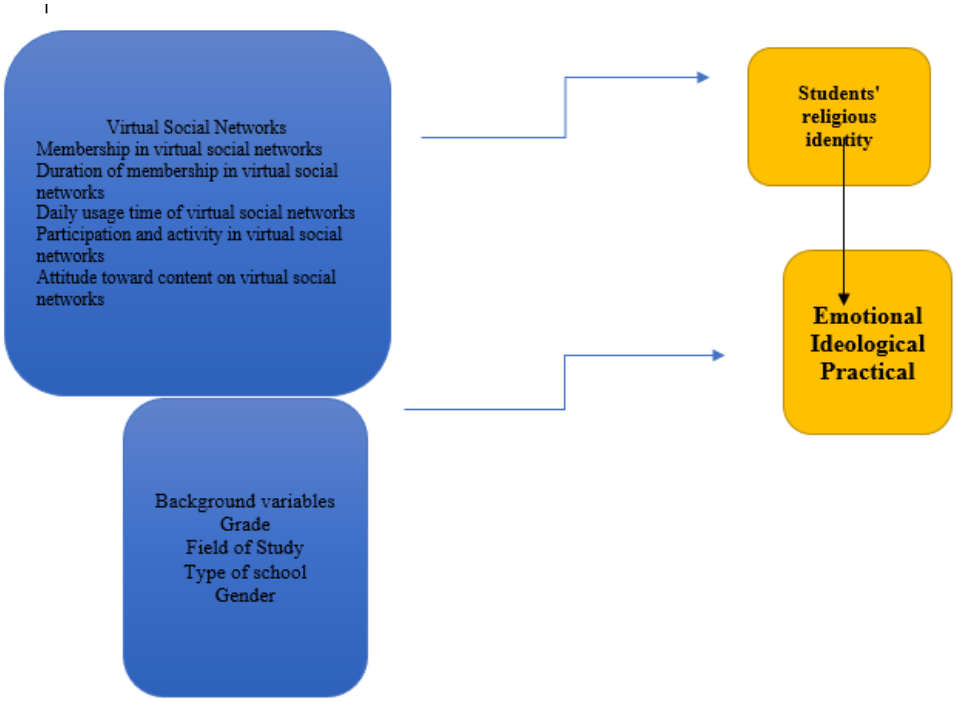


**Figure 1.** The theoretical model of the research

### *Main Hypothesis*

There is a significant relationship between the use of virtual social networks (total) and religious identity (total) among high school students in Jahrom.

### *Secondary Hypotheses*

There is a significant relationship between activity and participation in cyberspace and students' religious identity (total).

There is a significant relationship between attitude towards cyberspace content and students' religious identity (total).

There is a significant relationship between membership in social networks and students' religious identity (total).

There is a significant relationship between years of presence in cyberspace and students' religious identity (total).

There is a significant relationship between daily hours of cyberspace use and students' religious identity.

There is a significant relationship between the use of cyberspace (total) and students' religious identity (emotional dimension).

There is a significant relationship between the use of cyberspace (total) and students' religious identity (ideological dimension).

There is a significant relationship between the use of cyberspace (total) and students' religious identity (practical dimension).

There is a significant relationship between school type and students' religious identity.

There is a significant relationship between grade level and students' religious identity.

There is a significant relationship between field of study and students' religious identity.

There is a significant relationship between family social class and students' religious identity.

There is a significant relationship between gender and students' religious identity.

There is a significant relationship between parents' education and students' religious identity.

There is a significant relationship between parents' occupation and students' religious identity.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method used in this research is a survey. The statistical population comprises all male and female high school students in the second grade in Jahrom in the current academic year (2021-2022). According to Morgan and Krejcie's (1970) table, the sample size for a population of 7,000 is 364, but to achieve a more precise estimate, the sample size was increased to 375. Multi-stage random sampling was used. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed among students, of which only 375 questionnaires were returned. The measurement tool was a questionnaire consisting of two scales - religious identity (five items for the emotional dimension, five items for the ideological dimension, five items for the practical dimension), and cyberspace (twenty-two items) - rated on a five-point Likert scale. For the dependent variable (religious identity), Serajzadeh's (2004) Religious Identity Measurement Questionnaire was used, which considers religious identity based on Goldston's three dimensions (emotional, ideological, and practical). For the independent variable (virtual social networks), measurement tools from Shamani, Vahedi and Norouzi (2016), Adlipour, Ghassemi and Mirmohammadtabar (2014), Ghassemi, Adlipour and Kianpour (2012), Soltani (2016) and Rahbar Gazi (2017) were used, comprising six components: membership in virtual social networks, duration of membership in virtual social networks, daily usage time of virtual social networks, purpose, type and extent of use, user participation and activity in virtual social networks, and attitude toward content on

virtual social networks, to measure the use of virtual social networks. The data collection technique was face-to-face interviews. The documentation method used notetaking. The validity of the research tools was obtained through face validity; the designed questionnaire was modified based on the opinions of several knowledgeable university professors before being completed. After collecting the required data, the questionnaires were coded and the data for each respondent was entered into SPSS for analysis. The results of Cronbach's alpha for the variables of religious identity and virtual social networks are summarized in **Table 1.** SPSS software was used for data analysis. Frequency distribution tables, Pearson correlation coefficient, mean comparison, analysis of variance, linear regression, and multiple regression were used to examine the relationships between variables.

**Table 1.** the results of Cronbach's alpha for the independent and dependent variables of the research

| Scale | Number of items | Cronbach's alpha coefficients |
|---|---|---|
| **religious identity (total)** | 15 | 0.890 |
| **Religious identity (emotional dimension)** | 5 | 0.910 |
| **Religious identity (belief dimension)** | 5 | 0.890 |
| **Religious identity (practical dimension)** | 5 | 0.860 |
| **virtual social networks (total)** | 22 | 0.850 |
| **The purpose of participation and activity in cyberspace** | 11 | 0.880 |
| **Attitude towards the content of online content** | 11 | 0.800 |

*Variable Definitions*

Religious Identity (dependent variable): Religious identity refers to the relationship between man and religion and the affiliation he develops with it. The cornerstone of religious identity is commitment and adherence. Religious identity means a sense of commitment to religion and a sense of belonging to a religious community, and more broadly, a sense of belonging to the nation committed to that religion (Mahrouzadeh, 2013: 162). In other words, religious identity refers to the extent to which an individual reproduces the religious institution in society and the importance one gives to religious norms in their chosen lifestyle (Giddens, 1999: 54). Religious identity refers to the effects and consequences of an individual embracing a religion. The foremost and most significant achievement of religious identity is providing answers to people's fundamental existential questions. According to Huntington, religion provides satisfying answers for those facing questions like: Who am I and where do I belong? (Masoudnia, 2016: 107).

Virtual Social Networks (independent variable): "Cyberspace is not a place, it is a passageway between places. While residing in your own place, you can wander in cyberspace and encounter people living in other places, but you can be in your own mental space using cyberspace. Therefore, cyberspace is a kind of meta-space and mental space that we manipulate daily and

encounter people and ideas" (Castells & Ince, 2005: 47 cited in Zokaei & Khatibi, 2006: 166). Tim Jordan says in The Power of the Virtual, "The body's dominance over the mind is stifled and shattered by the complex computer system. Cyberspace enables the transcendence of the mental community." Today, the expansion of cyberspace has increasingly accelerated the process of globalization.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Descriptive Findings*

Based on the descriptive results of the demographic variables, out of a total of 375 respondents, the average religious identity among girls (51.78%) and among boys (52.75%) is reported. The average religious identity among 10th graders (52.84%), 11th graders (51.61%), and 12th graders (51.81%) is shown. The average religious identity among students of private high schools (50.24%) and public high schools (52.24%) is presented. The lowest average religious identity (49.31%) belongs to students whose fathers have postgraduate education, and the highest religious identity (51.43%) belongs to students whose fathers have a bachelor's degree. Also, the highest average religious identity (53.09%) belongs to individuals whose mothers are illiterate, and the lowest average religious identity (51%) belongs to students whose mothers have a PhD. Students whose fathers have non-governmental jobs report the highest average religious identity (53.85%), while the lowest average (52.01%) belongs to fathers with freelance jobs. Additionally, the highest average religious identity belongs to students with retired mothers (53.71%), and the lowest religious identity (50.28%) belongs to students whose mothers have non-governmental jobs. Students of the Department of Islamic Studies have the highest religious identity (54.21%) and art high school students have the lowest religious identity (50.8%). Students of middle social class have the highest religious identity (52.4%) and students of lower social class have the lowest religious identity (50.94%).

The average happiness among upper class students is (97.24%), middle class students (86.55%) and lower class students (74.55%). However, based on the descriptive results of the research constructs, the average social happiness is (89.13%), leisure lifestyle (73.50%) and religious lifestyle (22.93%) **(Table2)**.

**Table 2.** shows the mean of the dependent and independent variables

| Variable | Number of items | Average | standard deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **religious identity (total)** | 15 | 52.11 | 4.24 |
| **Emotional identity dimension** | 5 | 18 | 2.06 |
| **Dimension of religious identity** | 5 | 18.03 | 1.47 |
| **Practical identity dimension** | 5 | 16.08 | 2.11 |
| **cyberspace (total)** | 22 | 55 | 10.26 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| The purpose of activity and participation in cyberspace | 11 | 28.48 | 5.92 |
| Attitude towards the content of cyberspace | 8 | 20.08 | 4.65 |

*Analytical Findings*

Examining the Relationship between Cyberspace (Total) and its Dimensions and Religious Identity (Total) and its Dimensions

Based on the results in **Table 3**, there is a significant relationship between cyberspace (total) and religious identity (total). Also, examining the dimensions of religious identity (emotional, ideological, practical) with the dimensions of cyberspace (activity and participation in cyberspace, membership in social networks, attitude towards cyberspace content, years of presence in cyberspace, hours of cyberspace use per day) indicates that the relationship between religious identity (total) and attitude towards content in cyberspace, membership in social networks, hours of cyberspace use per day, and the relationship between cyberspace (total) and emotional and practical identity is significant. But the relationship between cyberspace and ideological identity is not significant. This lack of relationship indicates that the sample under study had strong religious beliefs and faith in the afterlife.

**Table 3.** Examining the relationship between cyberspace (total) and religious identity (total)

| | Average | The correlation coefficient | The coefficient of determination | *f* | *Sig* | t value | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| cyberspace (total) | 55 | 0.165 | 0.027 | 1.476 | 0.001 | 47.323 | 0.001 |
| religious identity (total) | 52.11 | | | | | | |
| Activity and participation in cyberspace | 28.48 | 0.020 | 0.000 | 0.147 | 0.702 | 48.727 | 0.702 |
| religious identity (total) | 52.11 | | | | | | |
| Attitude towards the content of cyberspace | 20.08 | 0.220 | 0.048 | 18.958 | 0.000 | 59.214 | 0.000 |
| religious identity (total) | 52.11 | | | | | | |
| Membership in social networks | ~ | | | 7.885 | 0.005 | 172.93 | 0.005 |
| religious identity (total) | 52.1 | 0.144 | 0.021 | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The number of years of presence in cyberspace | - | | | 1.082 | 0.299 | 78.629 | 0.299 |
| religious identity (total) | 52.11 | 0.054 | 0.003 | | | | |
| Hours of using cyberspace per day | - | | | 19.069 | 0.000 | 92.130 | 0.000 |
| religious identity (total) | 52.11 | 0.221 | 0.049 | | | | |
| cyberspace (total) | 55 | 0.134 | 0.018 | 6.776 | 0.010 | 33.648 | 0.010 |
| Emotional religious identity | 18 | | | | | | |
| cyberspace (total) | 55 | 0.004 | 0.000 | 0.005 | 0.946 | 43.190 | 0.946 |
| Ideological identity | 18.03 | | | | | | |
| cyberspace (total) | 55 | 0.203 | 0.041 | 109/16 | 0.000 | 31.499 | 0.000 |
| Practical religious identity | 16.08 | | | | | | |

Examining the Relationship between Demographic Variables and Students' Religious Identity

Examining the relationship between seven variables - gender, grade level, field of study, school type, father's education, parent's occupation, and social class - with students' religious identity (total dimensions), the results of which are described in **Table 4**, indicates a significant relationship between grade level, social class, gender, field of study, father's education and school type with students' religious identity, with the highest religious identity belonging to 10th grade students and the lowest to 11th graders. Also, middle class individuals have a higher average religious identity, and lower class individuals have the lowest religious identity. Boys have a higher religious identity compared to girls. Also, public school students have a higher religious identity.

**Table 4.** Examining the relationship between genders, school type, parent's occupation, grade level, field of study, social class, and parent's education with religious identity (total dimensions).

| gender | Number | Average religious identity | t value | *Df* | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Girl | 246 | 51.78 | -2.095 | 355 | 0.037 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Boy | 126 | 52.75 | | | |
| Type of schools | Number | Average religious identity | t value | Df | Sig |
| Governmental | 350 | 52.24 | 6.112 | 373 | 0.022 |
| NGOs | 25 | 50.24 | | | |
| Father's job | Number | Average religious identity | | | |
| Governmental | 69 | 52.07 | | | |
| free | 265 | 52.01 | t value | Df | Sig |
| Private sector employee | 7 | 53.85 | 0.584 | 3 | 0.626 |
| Retired | 34 | 52.58 | | | |
| Total | | 52.11 | | | |
| mother's job | 375 | Average religious identity | | | |
| housewife | Number | 52.14 | | | |
| Governmental | 320 | 51.92 | t value | Df | |
| NGOs | 41 | 50.28 | 0.796 | 3 | Sig |
| Retired | 7 | 53.71 | | | 0.497 |
| Total | 7 | 52.11 | | | |
| Grade | 375 | Average religious identity | | | |
| the tenth | Number | 52.84 | | | |
| Eleventh | 134 | 51.61 | F value | Df | |
| twelfth | 136 | 51.81 | 3.205 | 205/3 | |
| Total | 105 | 52.11 | | | sig |
| Social class | 375 | Average religious identity | | | 0.042 |
| Top | Number | 52.21 | | | |
| medium | 37 | 52.40 | F value | Df | |
| Down | 267 | 50.94 | 3.401 | 2 | Sig |
| Total | 71 | 52.11 | | | |
| Father's education | 375 | Average religious identity | | | 0.034 |
| illiterate | Number | 51.53 | | | |
| elementary | 15 | 53 | F value | Df | Sig |
| guidance | 6 | 52.20 | 2.142 | 7 | 0.039 |
| diploma | 144 | 51.59 | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Associate Degree | 77 | 51.96 | | | |
| Bachelor's degree | 52 | 53.43 | | | |
| Master's degree | 60 | 49.31 | | | |
| P.H.D | 16 | 52.60 | | | |
| Total | 5 | 52.11 | | | |
| mother's education | 375 | Average religious identity | | | |
| illiterate | Number | 53.09 | | | |
| elementary | 11 | 52.47 | | | |
| guidance | 38 | 51.80 | | | |
| diploma | 102 | 52.10 | | | |
| Associate Degree | 92 | 52.56 | F value | Df | Sig |
| Bachelor's degree | 58 | 51.89 | 0.345 | 7 | 0.933 |
| Master's degree | 65 | 51.71 | | | |
| P.H.D | 7 | 51 | | | |
| Total | 2 | 52.11 | | | |
| Field of Study | 375 | Average religious identity | | | |
| human | Number | 51.64 | | | |
| experimental | 213 | 53.32 | | | |
| Math | 83 | 52.38 | | | |
| education | 34 | 54.21 | | | |
| school of Art | 14 | 50.80 | | | |
| Total | **31** | **52.11** | | | |

Explaining Religious Identity Based on the Sum of Independent Variables (Simultaneously)

As observed in **Table 5**, the correlation coefficient of the independent variables for determining the dependent variable (religious identity) is 0.365. The R2 (coefficient of determination) is 0.151, meaning 0.151% of the variations in the dependent variable are explained by the independent variables. The linear relationship between the variables is significant at the 99% level (sig = 0.000). The t-value of each regression coefficient is also calculated and their significance levels are presented in the table. As the significance level (sig) indicates, the effects of the variables - purpose of activity in cyberspace, cyberspace (total), hours of cyberspace use, membership in social networks, and school type - are significant, while the effects of other variables are not significant, having a weak influence in predicting the dependent variable. However, to judge the importance and role of independent variables in predicting the regression equation, beta values must be used. Since beta values are standardized, they can be used to judge the relative importance of variables. A larger beta value indicates greater relative importance

and role in predicting the dependent variable. Here it can be inferred that the variable "purpose of activity and participation in cyberspace" contributes much more compared to other variables in predicting the dependent variable, since a one unit change in its standard deviation causes the standard deviation of the dependent variable (religious identity) to change by 0.535. The variables cyberspace (total), attitude towards content in cyberspace, social class, gender, mother's occupation, field of study, father's occupation, father's education are next in rank, because a one unit change in the standard deviation of cyberspace (total) causes a 0.209 change in the standard deviation of the dependent variable. Meanwhile, the variable attitude towards content in cyberspace causes a 0.099 change, social class 0.078, gender 0.069, mother's occupation 0.057, field of study 0.051, father's occupation 0.049, father's education 0.012, hours of cyberspace use -0.143, membership in social networks -0.141, school type -0.129, mother's education -0.127 in the standard deviation of the dependent variable. But other variables have a weak influence on the standard deviation of the dependent variable.

The findings of this study demonstrate the reality that the lack of planning and failure to address the needs of audiences, especially in terms of content based on religious culture, leads adolescents and youth to cyberspace and social networks, and will gradually diminish Islamic values and the identity of audiences. The influx of satellite and internet programs in the developing world leads to the adoption of new ideas and imported lifestyles among adolescents and youth, causing this group to rebel against many of the traditional customs and habits of their society and constantly imitate Western culture. The findings of this paper are consistent with the results of Armfield and Holbert's (2003) study which found religion has a negative relationship with internet use at the individual level, and interacting in cyberspace increases the encouragement of secularism.

Table 5. The results of multivariate regression explaining students' religious identity

| *Predictors (Independent variables)* | *β* | *t* | *sig* | *correlation coefficient (total)* | *determination coefficient (total)* | *F(Total)* | *Sig(Total)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Constant value** | - | 29.017 | 0.000 | | | | |
| **The purpose of activity and participation in cyberspace** | 0.535 | 3.623 | 0.000 | 0.635 | 0.151 | 4.563 | 0.000 |
| **cyberspace (total)** | 0.209 | 1.876 | 0.004 | | | | |
| **Attitude towards the content of online content** | 0.099 | 0.641 | 0.522 | | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social class | 0.078 | 1.432 | 0.153 |
| gender | 0.069 | 1.292 | 0.197 |
| mother's job | 0.057 | 1.025 | 0.306 |
| Field of Study | 0.051 | 1.010 | 0.313 |
| Father's job | 0.049 | 0.986 | 0.325 |
| Father's education | 0.012 | 0.200 | 0.841 |
| Hours of use of cyberspace day and night | -0.143 | -2.419 | 0.016 |
| Membership in various social networks | -0.141 | -2.694 | 0.007 |
| Type of school | -0.129 | -2.556 | 0.011 |
| mother's education | -0.127 | -1.917 | 0.056 |
| Grade | -.082 | -1.605 | 0.109 |
| **The number of years of membership in cyberspace** | **-0.032** | **-.0636** | **0.525** |

Based on the research findings, the average religious identity overall, on a scale ranging from 15-75 with an actual mean of 45, is equal to 52.11. This indicates that the religious identity of students in Jahrom is above average. Examining the dimensions of religious identity indicates that the average emotional religious identity on a scale ranging from 5-25, with a score range of 5 (minimum) to 25 (maximum), is equal to 18%, which is higher than the average emotional identity (15%). Therefore, the emotional identity of students in Jahrom is at a moderately high level. This research finding is inconsistent with the results of Heydari *et al.*'s (2015) study in

Marvdasht, which showed that students' religious identity is at a moderate level, and the religious identity of students in Jahrom in the present study is higher than that of students in Marvdasht.

The average ideological identity on a scale ranging from 5-25, with a score range of 5 (minimum) to 25 (maximum), is equal to 18.03%, which is higher than the average ideological identity (15%). Therefore, the ideological identity of students in Jahrom is at a moderately high level. The average practical identity is also on a scale ranging from 5-25, with a score range of 5 (minimum) to 25 (maximum), equal to 16.08%, which is slightly higher than the average practical identity (15%). Therefore, the practical identity of students in Jahrom is slightly above moderate. In Heydari *et al.*'s (2015) study, the ideological dimension had the highest average and the practical dimension had the lowest average among the three identity dimensions. In the present study as well, the ideological dimension has the highest average (18.03%) and the practical dimension has the lowest average (16.08%).

There is a significant relationship between the use of cyberspace (total) and the religious identity (total) of students. The average use of cyberspace (total dimensions) among students in Jahrom is 55%. Given that the score range of cyberspace (total) used in this study is between 22 (minimum) and 110 (maximum), with an average of 66%, it is lower than the average cyberspace use (55%). Therefore, since the questionnaire scores range from 22 to 110, the level of cyberspace use among students in Jahrom is below moderate. This research finding is consistent with the results of Ahmadpour and Ghaderzadeh's (2010) study suggesting the harmful nature of interacting in cyberspace on students' religious identity, Shamani *et al.*'s (2016) study indicating a significant relationship between the extent of using virtual social networks and the cultural identity of Tehran youth, Bakhtiari and Farrokhi's (2012) study showing that satellite TV networks influence the religious identity dimension of youth, and Niazi's (2011) study demonstrating a significant relationship between the extent of satellite use and identity, Hosseinizadeh *et al.*'s (2000) study, the 2002 Pew survey results, Dawson's (2001) studies, Khaled's (2007) study, and Short's (2015) study, but inconsistent with Soltani *et al.*'s (2016) study.

There is no significant relationship between activity and participation in cyberspace and students' overall religious identity. The average activity and participation in cyberspace among students in Jahrom is 28.48. Given that the activity score range in cyberspace used in this study is between 11 (minimum) and 55 (maximum), with an average of 33, it is lower than the average cyberspace activity (28.48%). Therefore, cyberspace activity among students in Jahrom is below moderate. This research finding is consistent with the results of Adlipour's (2012) study suggesting an inverse significant relationship between user activity level in virtual social networks and youth cultural identity, Niazi's (2011) view that increased satellite usage leads to decreased social and religious identity, and Shamani *et al.*'s (2016) study.

There is a significant relationship between attitude towards content in cyberspace and students' overall religious identity. The average attitude towards content in cyberspace among students in Jahrom is 20.08. Given that the activity score range used in this study is between 8 (minimum) and 40 (maximum), with an average of 24, it is lower than the average cyberspace activity (20.08%). Therefore, attitude towards content in cyberspace among students in Jahrom is below moderate. This research finding is consistent with Shamani *et al.*'s (2015) view that the more

realistic and reliable the content produced and available to them in this space, the more significantly their religious and cultural identity is influenced, diminishing their sensitivities to their own cultural identity.

There is a significant relationship between membership in social networks and students' overall religious identity. But there is no significant relationship between years of presence in cyberspace and students' overall religious identity. This research finding is also consistent with the results of Soltani *et al.*'s (2016) study.

There is a significant relationship between daily hours of cyberspace use and students' overall religious identity. These research results are consistent with the studies of Shamani *et al.* (2016) and Soltani *et al.* (2016).

There is a significant relationship between cyberspace use and students' emotional and practical identity. But cyberspace use has no significant relationship with students' ideological identity. This research finding is inconsistent with the results of Heydari *et al.*'s (2015) study which showed that internet and satellite use has a significant negative correlation with all three dimensions of students' religious identity. The highest correlation between the variable of internet use and religious identity dimensions was in the practical, emotional and ideological dimensions, respectively. Thus, in Heydari *et al.*'s (2015) study, greater use of satellite and internet media aligns with decreasing students' religious identity across the practical, emotional and ideological dimensions.

Among the demographic variables, there is a significant relationship between gender, grade level, field of study, school type, father's education and social class with students' religious identity. But there is no significant relationship between parents' occupation and father's education with students' religious identity.

Explaining religious identity in general based on the sum of independent variables indicates that the variables purpose of activity and participation in cyberspace, cyberspace (total), attitude towards content in cyberspace, social class, gender, mother's occupation, field of study, father's occupation, father's education, respectively, are the strongest predictors of students' religious identity and can explain 15.1% of the variance in religious identity.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study were consistent with George Gerbner and colleagues' cultivation theory regarding the negative role of media (excessive TV viewing) in shaping identity among youth and adolescents (influencing beliefs and cultivating viewers' perspectives). Based on cultivation theory, it can be inferred that the extent of use and duration of membership in social networks and perceiving the content of internet social networks as realistic affects users' social identity. It can be said that the more the usage and length of membership in social networks increases, the greater the likelihood of user influence. Conversely, the less the amount, duration of use and length of membership in social networks, the less likely the user will be influenced.

Also, according to Castells' view, transformations in communication and information lead to the emergence of a new culture among individuals, which in this study is manifested as an influence on religious identity. Additionally, Castells presents a model of the information society in which

the role of media is key, and in fact it is the media that reproduces this new type of society. In this social system, communication technologies play a fundamental role, and the tone of discourse, lifestyle and all social values are defined by the media and their owners.

The findings of this study demonstrate the reality that the lack of planning and failure to address the needs of audiences, especially in terms of content based on religious culture, leads adolescents and youth to cyberspace and social networks, and will gradually diminish Islamic values and the identity of audiences. The influx of satellite and internet programs in the developing world leads to the adoption of new ideas and imported lifestyles among adolescents and youth, causing this group to rebel against many of the traditional customs and habits of their society and constantly imitate Western culture. The findings of this paper are consistent with the results of Armfield and Holbert's (2003) study which found religion has a negative relationship with internet use at the individual level, and interacting in cyberspace increases the encouragement of secularism.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:** None

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** None

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT:** None

**ETHICS STATEMENT:** None

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