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Digitalization and Spiritual Values in the Context of Spiritual Counseling: Impacts of the Internet on Values

Manevi Danışmanlık Bağlamında Dijitalleşme ve Manevi
Değerler: İnternetin Değerler Üzerindeki Etkileri



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A b s t r a c t

This study delves into the influence of digitization and internet usage on spiritual values. The escalating use of the internet in contemporary times has led to substantial shifts in individuals' value systems and spiritual lives. The research thoroughly explores the extensive effects of the internet on individuals' beliefs, values, and spiritual existence. Consequently, the primary objective is to meticulously examine the alterations prompted by internet usage in individual, social, cultural, and spiritual values, alongside assessing how these changes influence the dynamics of society. The examination of the internet's impact on spiritual values has been an ongoing subject of research for many years, presenting a comprehensive perspective through diverse and intricate studies in this field. The impact of the internet on spiritual values is the result of the interaction of various factors. The internet has many advantages, enabling individuals to access information more easily, engage with different cultures, and have various experiences. It is utilized in various fields, such as business, entertainment, and educational materials, with the potential to facilitate and enrich individuals' lives. However, the impact of the internet on spiritual values encompasses not only positive aspects but also negative aspects. While the internet facilitates access to information, it can also make it easier to access inaccurate information, leading individuals to question their values. Additionally, increased interactions on social media platforms may lead individuals to spend more time in the virtual world, potentially diminishing their commitment to real-world relationships. Spiritual values encompass individuals' character, moral principles, and elements that bring meaning to their lives. The impact of the internet on these values can vary depending on how individuals use the internet, the content they are exposed to, and the values they embrace. Therefore, the impact of the internet on spiritual values is an issue involving various factors.

K e y w o r d s

Spiritual counseling and care • Digitalization • Internet
Technological development • Value • Spiritual value

Ö z e t

Bu çalışma, dijitalleşme ve internet kullanımının manevi değerler üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Özellikle günümüzde internet kullanımının hızla artmış olması insanların sahip olduğu değer sistemlerinde ve manevi yaşamlarında önemli değişikliklere yol açmaktadır. Araştırmada internetin bireylerin sahip olduğu inançları, değerleri ve manevi yaşamları üzerindeki geniş çaplı etkileri detaylı bir şekilde ele alınmaktadır. Bu bağlamda internet kullanımının bireysel, toplumsal, kültürel ve manevi değerlerde meydana getirdiği değişiklikleri ve bu değişikliklerin toplumun dinamiklerine olan etkilerini analiz etmek çalışmanın öncelikli hedeflerindedir. Nitekim araştırmacılar tarafından internetin manevi değerler üzerindeki etkisinin incelenmesi uzun yıllardır devam etmekte ve bu konudaki araştırmalar literatüre oldukça geniş bir perspektif sunmaktadır. İnternetin manevi değerlere olan etkisi birçok faktörün etkileşimi sonucu ortaya çıkmaktadır. İnternetin bilgiye hızlı erişim, iletişim kolaylığı, eğlence ve eğitim gibi bir dizi avantajı bulunmaktadır. Bu avantajlar bireylerin bilgiye daha kolay ulaşmalarına, farklı kültürlerle iletişim kurmalarına ve çeşitli deneyimler yaşamalarına olanak sağlamaktadır. İnternet aynı zamanda iş dünyasından eğlenceye, haberlerden eğitim materyallerine kadar birçok alanda da kullanılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda internet bireylerin yaşamlarını kolaylaştırma ve zenginleştirme potansiyeline sahiptir. Ancak internetin manevi değerlere etkisi sadece olumlu değil; aynı zamanda olumsuz yönleri de içermektedir. İnternetin bilgiye erişimi kolaylaştırması, bazen doğru ve güvenilir olmayan bilgilere de erişimi de kolaylaştırabilir. Bu da bireylerin değerlerini sorgulamalarına ve kararsızlık yaşamalarına neden olabilir. Ayrıca sosyal medya platformlarındaki etkileşimlerin artması bireylerin sanal dünyada daha fazla zaman geçirmelerine yol açabilir; bu durum gerçek dünya ilişkilerine duyulan bağlılığı azaltabilir. Manevi değerler bireylerin karakterini, ahlaki değerlerini ve yaşamlarına anlam katan unsurları içerir. İnternetin bu değerlere etkisi, bireylerin interneti nasıl kullandığı, hangi içeriklere maruz kaldığı ve hangi değerleri benimsediği gibi bir dizi faktöre bağlı olarak değişebilir. Örneğin, bir kişi interneti bilinçli bir şekilde kullanarak eğitim materyallerine erişip bilgiye katkı sağlayabilirken; başka bir kişi aynı zamanda internet üzerinden zararlı içeriklere maruz kalarak manevi değerlerinden uzaklaşabilir. Dolayısıyla internetin manevi değerler üzerindeki etkisinin çeşitli faktörleri içeren bir konu olduğu görülmektedir.

A n a h t a r K e l i m e l e r

Manevi Danışmanlık ve Rehberlik • Dijitalleşme • İnternet
Teknolojik gelişme • Değer • Manevi değer

Introduction

Digitization and the internet have become integral components of modern society, permeating deeply into individuals' lifestyles. Rapid advancements in internet technology have given rise to diverse digital platforms, characterized as a technology with both positive and negative applications. Various studies have been conducted to elucidate its advantages and disadvantages, highlighting the multifaceted nature of this technology (Zubair & Raquib, 2020: 244).

The increasing impact and visibility of computer technologies on human lives is an undeniable reality (Friedman & Kahn Jr, 2007: 1178). Whether referred to as the post-industrial society, postmodern society, network society, or information society, the world has witnessed significant technological advancements since the second half of the 20th century, and the realm of communication has been profoundly influenced by these remarkable technological developments. Users, on a psychological level, perceive their computers as extensions of their minds and personalities. However, it is through this extension that thoughts, attitudes, and preferences can be transferred to virtual spaces (Denizci, 2009: 48-51).

In this regard, following the widespread adoption of the internet as a mass medium, numerous different opinions and debates have emerged regarding its societal impacts. In this debate, it can be said that there are two opposing perspectives:

First, the view that sees the internet as a tool for freedom, commerce, connectivity, and other societal benefits. Advocates of this belief argue that the internet facilitates easier access to information for individuals, supports global trade, enhances communication, and encourages individuals' freedom of expression. According to them, the internet is an important tool contributing to the development of societies. Second, the perspective that the internet causes various harms and disadvantages. Those who advocate this view warn that the internet could potentially disrupt existing social structures and institutions, weaken cultural values, increase moral issues, and have negative impacts on human relationships. According to them, the internet can pose a serious threat. However, most people fall somewhere between these two extreme views. They acknowledge both the benefits and drawbacks of the internet. They recognize that the internet facilitates access to information, enhances communication, and creates new opportunities to promote commerce. Nevertheless, they also express concerns about issues such as data privacy, addiction risks, and information pollution that the internet

can potentially lead to. These individuals argue that regulations and conscious usage are crucial to balance the effects of the internet (Brey, 2006: 41).

It is quite natural for different opinions to exist regarding the societal impacts of the internet. The individual and societal effects of the internet present a complex structure, and these effects are often considered in conjunction with their both positive and negative aspects. Among its positive effects are included broad and rapid access to information, ease of global communication, increased economic opportunities, and the promotion of freedom of expression. However, its negative effects cannot be disregarded; in this context, information pollution, issues related to the privacy of personal data, internet addiction, and psychosocial consequences come to the forefront. Conscious and balanced internet usage is one way to make the most of this technology while minimizing its adverse effects.

This study deeply examines the impact of digitization and internet usage on individuals' beliefs, values, and spiritual lives. The increasing use of the internet, in particular, signals significant changes in individuals' value systems and spiritual existences. The aim here is to comprehend how digital technologies and the internet affect the evolutionary processes of individuals' spiritual values and lives. Implementing educational and awareness programs may assist individuals in gaining awareness about preserving and developing their spiritual values on digital platforms. Likewise, creating and disseminating content that fosters spiritual development in digital environments can help individuals maintain and reinforce their spiritual values throughout the digitalization process. These suggestions could be considered significant steps toward safeguarding spiritual values in the digital realm and enhancing individuals' spiritual resilience during the digital transformation.

a. Digitization

Digitization can be defined as a societal transformation process that utilizes digital technologies to interconnect broader social domains (Tritin-Ulbrich et al., 2021: 10).

Digital technology, on the other hand, is defined as the conversion of all types of information, such as data, sound, music, text, photographs, and images, into 'bits' or computer language with the assistance of microprocessors (Törenli, 2005: 98-99).

In past years, the combination of audio, visual, and written messages was considered nearly impossible, but with digitization, this task

has become significantly easier. The effects of digitization continue to advance not only in telecommunications but also in all sectors, significantly influencing societal life (Ormanlı, 2012: 32).

With the ongoing technological transformation, it can be argued that the pervasive presence of many digital platforms, particularly social media, has become an inevitable necessity in people's lives. Alongside these developments, various domains, including political, economic, social, and cultural aspects, have undergone a transition from traditional paradigms toward digital forms (Şener, 2022: 31).

Digitization refers to the transformation of traditional physical processes or data into digital technologies and the increased utilization of these technologies. Digitization occurs through the more widespread and effective use of information technologies, computers, the internet, and similar digital tools. Moreover, digitization has become even more prevalent with the rapid advancement of technology, significantly impacting the lifestyles of societies. Therefore, understanding the opportunities and risks brought about by digitization and adapting to these changes is crucial.

b. Value

According to Güngör (2000: 27), value is a belief about whether something is desirable or undesirable. Halstead and Taylor (2000) have expressed values as principles and fundamental beliefs that generally guide behaviors, as well as standards by which actions are judged as good or desirable. Schwartz and his colleagues (2001), similarly, define values as "guiding principles in people's lives, varying in importance, desired, transcendent goals."

Dilmaç (2007) also characterized value as a system of beliefs generated by the human ability to think, which sets humans apart from other living beings. In this context, values qualitatively imbue meaning into people's thoughts, feelings, and emotional experiences. Values are intricately linked to our experiences, relationships, and encounters. These connections play a pivotal role in determining and evolving our personal values. Daily choices, significant decisions, and actions we take have a profound impact. For instance, an individual who highly esteems honesty is inclined to act in accordance with this value, striving to adhere to the principle of honesty in various situations. From this perspective, values serve as a fundamental compass guiding us in all aspects of our lives.

The concept of values serves as a foundation for individuals to assess and explain people and events, reflecting what is considered good, right, appropriate, and desirable by individual actors within society (Schwartz, 1999).

Values can also be defined as things that are valued by someone. In other words, values are things that are considered important by an individual or organization. In this context, the term 'value' has an inherent or intrinsic aspect to it. Anything that is truly loved, valued, respected, desired, approved, or enjoyed by someone is considered valuable. Values are guiding principles in our lives. They are necessary for positive human behaviors and actions in our daily lives. They are shaped based on interests, choices, needs, desires, and preferences (Ojha et al., 2022: 1).

Values can either be innate or acquired. Innate values include divine virtues that are inherent, such as love, peace, happiness, compassion, and kindness. Acquired values, on the other hand, are external values acquired from the place of birth or upbringing and influenced by the environment. These values encompass an individual's clothing style, cultural traditions, customs, habits, and tendencies (Srivalli et al., 2021: 2.2). In other words, our values are shaped by the interactions, experiences, and relationships in our surroundings, and these sources influence our values. Especially during childhood and youth, they are formed by the influence of our families, teachers, friends, our society, the religion we belong to, and our culture. These influences assist individuals in determining and adopting their values.

There are various types of values, including personal values, social values, political values, economic values, religious values, moral values, spiritual values, cultural values, ethical values, behavioral values, instrumental values, intrinsic values, aesthetic values, democratic values, values related to right conduct, values related to peace, values related to truth, values related to love, and values related to non-violence.

Spiritual values are associated with the non-material dimensions of life and are related to the spirit and non-material reality. They do not necessarily have to be religious values. Spiritual values are eternal and immutable. They represent true ideals and promote truth, beauty, goodness, unity, purity, love, joy, self-sacrifice, contentment, wisdom, impartiality, self-discipline, and devotion to God (Srivalli et al., 2021: 2.3). Spiritual values play a pivotal role in human life, significantly impacting societal formations and the consolidation of relationships among individuals. These values not only contribute to shaping one's identity but

also foster personal maturity. The fundamental principles inherent in human nature, reflecting the essence of its existential purpose, encompass concepts such as love, justice, patience, tolerance, humility, forgiveness, responsibility, courage, compassion, and prudence (Yeniyol, 2016: 22-23).

Spiritual values encompass the entirety of values associated with the metaphysical realm, finding manifestation in an individual's cognitive world through emotions and belief. Within this context, religious values pertaining to faith and the sacred, alongside national values like patriotism, cultural heritage such as flags, and universal values like humanity and compassion, fall under the domain of spiritual values (Korlaelçi, 2005). Moreover, fundamental human values like love, respect, mercy, tolerance, sensitivity, and responsibility, often categorized as societal or universal values, also hold a place within the realm of spiritual values. In essence, spiritual values constitute a broader context encapsulating humanitarian values (İnan Kılıç, 2020: 811).

Psychologically satisfying condition is that good things are valuable. This is referred to as 'good' morally for things that serve to improve human behaviors and choices (Das, 2023). Spiritual values represent the fundamental moral principles considered "good" by people, and these values help individuals in their relationships, roles and responsibilities in their societies, ethical decision-making, and finding meaning in life. When people internalize and apply these values, they can often lead a more satisfying and meaningful life.

c. The Impact of Internet Usage on Spiritual Values

The Internet, as one of the most powerful and ubiquitous cognitive technologies, has made information more accessible in a way unprecedented in human history. Given the vast number of people worldwide who continuously use the internet, this phenomenon is not only important for individual internet users but also a crucial aspect that needs to be understood by society as a whole (Heersmink, 2016). Today, the internet plays a vital role in various aspects of our lives, including work, social interactions, and leisure activities (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000).

The impact of technology on a person's emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and value judgments is related to the role that technology plays in human-world relationships. This situation is related to the role of technology in human action and human experience (Verbeek, 2006: 363). For instance, individuals who are shy, reserved, or not inclined to

engage in face-to-face communication may naturally find the internet very useful in overcoming geographical and psychological barriers to communicating with others. For them, breaking the ice with strangers is like adopting a new strategy. This reflects the idea that detecting non-verbal cues online is not possible. Therefore, individuals who are apprehensive about various expressions of others can now be less cautious (Matusitz, 2007).

In this context, virtual interactions can be influenced and shaped by users' social, physical, and cultural experiences (Hardey, 2002: 570). Additionally, virtual interactions can also impact individuals and their held spiritual values. This is because spiritual values are a significant component that includes individuals' beliefs, moral values, and worldviews.

Eken's qualitative study (2020: 57) revealed that the internet and social media serve as a platform for religious individuals to express themselves and connect with like-minded individuals sharing similar beliefs. The functionalities provided by these digital platforms are believed to have the potential to bolster communal unity through certain measures such as planning, collaborative projects, charitable endeavors, interaction, and information sharing. This perception underscores the potential of these digital tools to foster a broader sense of communal awareness among religious individuals. Gezginci and Işıklı's (2018: 119) study reveals that one out of every three users engages in sharing religious content on social media platforms. The research indicates that 35% of users share content to exercise their "right and freedom to express their religious beliefs," while 28% do so to achieve a "spiritual well-being." Additionally, 20% of participants share content to communicate with individuals who share similar feelings and thoughts, whereas 13% share content with the purpose of "promoting and delivering religious guidance."

The potential consequence of the internet and the emerging mass communication tools is the loss of local characteristics within universal culture (Kaya, 2010: 30). Individuals who extensively use internet technologies and social networking platforms tend to distance themselves from their families and surroundings. After this distancing, individuals who continue to be present on social media gradually adopt the values of the virtual culture they interact with during this process through the content they share. The adopted cultural values, over time, can replace the individual's own cultural values, leading to a gradual loss of the in-

dividual's identity and roots (Karagülle & Çaycı, 2014: 4-8). The disappearance or alteration of local characteristics within universal culture can raise identity issues. People may try to strike a balance between preserving their own cultural identity and integrating with international culture. This situation can lead individuals to question their spiritual values and cultural ties. The loss of reference points in the phenomenon of identity has complicated individual self-definition within the context of globalization. Evolving trends in fashion and lifestyle have posed challenges in preserving personal values. Mass culture commodifies cultural artifacts indiscriminately, transforming them into mere commercial commodities. The function of this culture extends beyond mere entertainment, diverting attention and passively nullifying consciousness (Swingewood, 1996; cited in Akdemir, 2004: 46).

Internet technology can make users vulnerable to manipulations in ways that can endanger their psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. Internet usage has the potential to create addiction and can also have the ability to alter, reshape, and cause a loss of meaning in people's fundamental human and spiritual values (Zubair & Raquib, 2020: 245).

There are researchers who assert the negative impact of the internet on society, particularly highlighting its significant repercussions on social life (Putnam, 2000). Individuals who increasingly dedicate more time to navigating the virtual space due to the novel discoveries facilitated by the internet may gradually detach themselves from the real world, delving deeper into their inner realms. This behavioral shift can lead to consequences such as isolation, alienation, and withdrawal from society. As individuals progressively distance themselves from the community, they risk becoming isolated from those around them. This disconnection may hinder their integration into society, weakening social bonds, and potentially leading to the complete dissolution of social interactions (Karaca, 2007).

According to Postman (1993), integrating life into virtual communities is problematic because online users can never find accountability and mutual obligations as they do in the real world. Therefore, in some cases, they are more real than in real life, knowing that they can remain anonymous while revealing themselves further. Weinreich (1997) supports this argument by saying that virtual communities will never resemble physical communities because a physical community is generally a kinship network community with a common religion, a common geographical area, a common history, and a common value system.

Another negative consequence is that some aspects of online interaction will never exist in the real world (See Matusitz, 2007: 24).

Behaviors such as individuals spending more time on the internet than they planned, neglecting important responsibilities such as family, education or career, making efforts to hide these usage habits, experiencing sleep deprivation due to internet use, preferring the internet over social interactions, and feeling pessimism and irritability when there is no internet connection not only cause problems in individuals' personal lives but also harm their social relationships (Ayten & Acat, 2019: 860). Internet usage within the family can potentially lead couples to engage in external relationships, thereby jeopardizing marriages. This commonly addressed issue in the media notably highlights the ease of reconnecting with past relationships and establishing new ones facilitated by the internet. Moreover, household computer usage may hinder the sharing of time among family members, impeding their ability to allocate sufficient time to each other's needs. In an environment where familial bonds are already fragile, the impact of the internet could exacerbate these issues further (Yalçın, 2003: 86).

In the study conducted by Vardi (2013: 84-85), a survey was carried out regarding the impact of materials accessible through the internet-such as information, documents, videos, and audio recordings-on participants' religious knowledge and spiritual lives. Among the respondents, 8.2% considered these materials highly impactful, 50% perceived them to be somewhat influential, 18.4% stated minimal impact, 15.6% reported no effect, 6.6% expressed uncertainty, and 1.2% refrained from participating. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that internet usage has a minimal effect on the religious knowledge and spiritual lives of the surveyed individuals. In the research conducted by Meydan et al. (2018: 140-141), a statistically significant differentiation was observed among variables such as social media usage duration, the perception of life's meaning, the sense of preparedness for the future, and trust in social media. Findings indicated that individuals spending more time on social media tended to assess life as more purposeless compared to those spending less time. Another outcome from the study highlighted that individuals spending less time on social media tended to feel more optimistic about their readiness for the future. In the study by İrk (2018: 132), it was found that over half of the participants were affected by the content on social networking sites. 58% of the participants indicated being affected, with 4% partially influenced by such sites. Among those affected, 18% expressed positive religious impacts, while 14% reported being bothered by inappropriate religious content or photos and

reacted by showing their discontent to friends. Concerning the impact of the internet on religious life, a small fraction of participants (12%) mentioned improving their religious lives, while 48% stated that the internet had a negative impact on their religious lives.

The quest for approval and validation in users' social media usage indicates the impact of digital media on emotional responses. This signifies that digital platforms operate on structures influenced by emotional reactions. Content shared on these platforms, particularly problematic internet use, may escalate tendencies towards ostracism, segregation, and a sense of superiority (Kurttekin, 2021: 787-788).

d. Internet Use and Protection of Values

Values, while having a cognitive dimension, are primarily related to the emotional and moral dimensions of a person. Conscience, on the other hand, can only play a proper role for an individual when it is nourished by "good". Values are often associated with what is considered "good". The goal in this regard is to achieve behavior that aligns with fundamental values. Values that have been internalized and harmonized with one's conscience can influence and guide behaviors beyond just affecting emotions (Güneş, 2015: 1355). Values, when not merely accepted at the level of thought but internalized and in harmony with one's conscience, can influence and guide people's behaviors. This can assist individuals in making the right choices in online and virtual environments.

Choosing the right behavior in the virtual realm can represent one aspect of preserving moral values:

1. *Adapting Values to Internet Use:* As a part of internet usage, adapting personal values to online behavior is crucial. For instance, if honesty is a value, it is important to exhibit honest and ethical conduct on online platforms.

2. *Conscious Internet Usage:* Using the internet consciously can assist in adhering to spiritual values. Conscious internet usage involves elements such as time management, content selection, and evaluating online interactions. The internet offers numerous opportunities for individuals to develop themselves in areas such as language learning, coding, software development, design, digital photography, and digital music. Leveraging these opportunities can also provide significant contributions on a spiritual level. For instance, the process of language acquisition allows for interaction with different cultures, fostering empathy and cultural enrichment by understanding others' lifestyles. Learning coding

and other digital skills can enhance problem-solving abilities, boost self-confidence, and stimulate creativity. Acquiring these skills and achieving success in the digital sphere can positively contribute to individuals' self-expression and self-discovery processes. Consequently, these opportunities facilitated by the internet can significantly enrich individuals' personal development, thereby contributing to their spiritual enrichment.

3. *Information and Awareness*: Access to information on the internet can either strengthen or challenge spiritual values. Individuals should actively seek and choose sources that align with their values in a conscious manner. Individuals evaluate and seek to understand objects, individuals, events, and phenomena they encounter. This ongoing process relies on the information gathered throughout one's life. Particularly, possessing the skill to use information and communication technologies accurately and effectively is crucial, along with cultivating a critical approach towards every piece of accessed information.

4. *Evaluating Online Relationships*: Assessing relationships in the virtual world is crucial. Individuals should strive to establish relationships online that are based on spiritual values such as respect, empathy, and forgiveness. Respect involves showing consideration for diverse opinions and being sensitive to the ideas of others. Empathy entails understanding the emotions of others and making an effort to comprehend them. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is crucial for approaching conflicts with understanding, even after conflicts arise, in order to mend relationships. These values, when practiced on online platforms, mirror our real-life interactions, fostering healthier and more positive engagements.

5. *Value-Based Decision-Making*: Decisions made on the internet should be based on personal values. For instance, the content disseminated on online platforms or the interactions one engages in should be selected based on their compatibility with spiritual values. Before sharing content in the digital realm, considering the accuracy and potential impacts of the content is crucial. Particularly, approaching someone with a different viewpoint respectfully in a virtual discussion could be a decision reflecting your values. Such value-based decisions contribute to fostering more positive and healthy relationships in online interactions.

In his book "Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine" published in 1948, Norbert Wiener, considered the founder of the cybernetics discipline, used the term "cybernetics" in its contemporary sense. According to Wiener (1954), leading a

good life involves achieving the "great human values" through creative and flexible adaptation to an environment made possible by sophisticated learning, reasoning, and thinking. Wiener employed at least three strategies to address issues in information ethics:

1. To investigate or anticipate the impact of information technology on fundamental human values and to examine them with a view to advancing and defending these values.

2. To identify ethical issues generated by information technology and subsequently propose ways to address these issues: Should we do many of the new things made possible by computer technology?

3. To explore ways of proactively using information technology to create a better world: Technology should be used not only for evil but also for good, and it should take into account the interests of others in creating a better world (See Bynum, 2005: 4-6).

Every use, function, and presentation of media, especially digital media platforms with internet infrastructure, is fundamentally based on manipulation, and even in its most innocent activities, there is an ideological function. These platforms, which are the biggest supporters of a culture that is mentally and emotionally destructive, prone to violence, and detached from reality, may seem to balance something, but in fact, they create a vicious cycle, setting aside living meaningfully, and simplifying meaningful things (Bilginer, 2008: 31-32). Content containing violence, sexuality, or moral disinformation, especially, can lead to the normalization of negative behaviors, make people less sensitive to moral values, and consequently harm these values. Steering people towards online interactions can weaken social relationships in the physical world, which can lead to the weakening of social bonds based on moral values. Additionally, advertisements and commercial content can promote consumer culture, potentially overshadowing material values over moral ones. Negative behaviors like cyberbullying and online harassment may become more widespread. Encouraging users to compare their lives with others can lead to self-esteem issues. This can result in personal values and self-esteem being undermined.

In this regard, the following measures can be articulated to minimize the negative impact of the internet on moral values: having a critical perspective and acquiring skills to question digital content, emphasizing the importance of values within the family to help children become conscious internet users and setting examples of beauty, focusing

on content that promotes moral values and positive human relationships, and highlighting the significance of values such as kindness, love, and respect. Because in both daily life and the online environment, we encounter numerous situations that test our patience, character, and inner peace every day. We may have to make difficult decisions every day. What guides us in these circumstances are our values. When our actions and words are in harmony with our values, life feels good, and we feel happy, confident, and satisfied. However, when our behavior does not align with our values, we feel a growing sense of unease within us. This unsettling feeling tells us that everything is not right at the moment, and as a result, we may feel uneasy. These emotions can be the source of anxiety and unhappiness (Ojha et al., 2022: 1).

C o n c l u s i o n

Research has shown that a propensity for values and personal values are associated with internet addiction, and this relationship is negative in nature. Excessive internet use has been found to have adverse effects on emotional well-being, making it difficult to fulfill daily responsibilities and potentially leading to feelings of guilt. Furthermore, it has been emphasized that an increase in positive attitudes such as respect, love, honesty, justice, cooperation, and others is associated with a decrease in levels of internet addiction. It is suggested that placing greater emphasis on positive values may help prevent internet addiction. Therefore, research results indicate that internet usage has an impact on personal values, personality traits, and behaviors. In this context, raising awareness and promoting balanced usage are important to enhance the positive outcomes of internet usage and reduce its negative effects. In a study conducted by Ayten and Acat (2019: 860), it was found that there is a significant negative relationship between a propensity for values and internet addiction. Based on these findings, it is stated that as individuals' attitudes and behaviors, such as showing respect and love for others, being honest, patient, fair, impartial, entrepreneurial, and a role model, and enjoying collaboration, increase, the levels of internet addiction are likely to decrease. Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2000) explain pathological internet use, stating that this type of usage is a factor that negatively affects a person's emotional state. They also mention that such internet use can make it difficult for individuals to fulfill important responsibilities and may lead to symptoms like guilt. In other words, excessive internet use can potentially harm a person's emotional health, disrupt daily responsibilities, and result in feelings of guilt. Özcan and Sengir (2016), in their research focusing on the relationship between perso-

nal values and internet addiction, found a significant negative relationship between internet addiction and values such as discipline and responsibility, honesty and sharing, respect, and truth. However, they did not find a significant relationship between internet addiction and values like trust and forgiveness, sharing and respect (as cited in Ayten & Acat 2019: 860). Personality traits such as kindness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability are shown to be significantly and negatively associated with unethical internet behaviors in university students (Karim et al., 2009).

There are also studies in the literature indicating that excessive use of information technologies can lead to negative behaviors among adolescents, showing that individuals who excessively use the internet are in search of an exciting life, and explaining that the level of moral maturity predicts problematic internet use. According to these studies, in situations where moral maturity is low, problematic internet use might be more prevalent. Values related to power, hedonism, and stimulation could encourage excessive internet use. Internet addiction might adversely affect the level of possessing humane values, while individuals with spiritual and respectful values tend to display less inclination toward social media addiction.

Ulusoy (2008) conducted research with the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades of students to examine the relationship between adolescents' use of information technologies and aggression. In the study, it was reported that there was a significant relationship between adolescents who claimed to use computers and the internet for more than 20 hours per week and their levels of aggression. An association was found between internet use and the hedonistic value of seeking an exciting life. Additionally, the degrees of importance attributed to universal, hedonistic, and individual values were not in alignment with behaviors. Therefore, although these values were highly esteemed, they may not have translated into actual behaviors, indicating that these values were considered as opinions or included in the main perspective regarding their accuracy and significance (Avcioğlu, 2011: 16-19). In a study conducted by Ekşi and Çiftçi (2017: 190), it was found that the level of moral maturity in high school students was a significant predictor of problematic internet use. In a research conducted by Doğan (2018: 282) with high school students, positive significant relationships were identified between internet addiction and the value orientations of power, hedonism, and stimulation. Negative significant relationships were found between internet addiction and the values of universality, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and religiosity. When power, hedonism, and stimulation value

orientations are the sole values adopted and emphasized by young individuals, it can be said that they may become individuals oriented toward pleasure, entertainment-centered, selfish, and solely focused on the material aspects of life. These value orientations may not help individuals answer their most fundamental existential questions and make sense of life, and they can trigger existential crises, leading to psychological problems. Thus, young individuals, including internet addiction, can become dependent on or enslaved by materialistic values. However, considering the aspects of values such as "universality, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and religiosity," which encompass fundamental human values, positive personality traits, give meaning to life, and protect individuals from existential crises, they can be said to serve as a buffer against internet addiction. Güneş and Toprak (2022: 1467) found that spiritual values and respect were negatively related to all dimensions of social media addiction (virtual tolerance, virtual communication, virtual problems, and virtual information). It was determined that individuals with high internet addiction had low scores in human values (Kılınç & Gündüz, 2017: 278). In Yılmaz's (2006: 166) study it was determined that games and chat had a prominent place among the entertainment-oriented activities in participants' internet use. Although the majority of participants thought that the sites with sexual contents that should be avoided, it is revealed that these kinds of sites were accessed by almost half of the participants in the internet cafes.

When utilized incorrectly, the prevalent mass communication tools fostered and expanded by digitalization can undermine societal values, intrude upon individuals' private lives and privacy, promote biased broadcasting, sensationalize information, and propagate false news-actions that defy ethical standards. This normalization of such behaviors might contribute to the emergence of a morally compromised generation over time (İnan, 2013: 21).

Technology often finds itself in a conflictual relationship with traditional or established cultural values due to both direct and indirect influences. The potential adverse impacts of technology on human culture and social structures indicate that established cultures cannot entirely resist technological change. The core issue lies in ensuring that technological advancements progress in alignment with universal human objectives, defining what constitutes "human good." In essence, the prevailing value system within the human mindset guiding technological development remains pivotal (Akgül, 2017: 195-196).

In conclusion, research in the literature indicates that internet

usage affects individuals' spiritual values. Particularly, excessive internet usage can reduce positive values and promote internet addiction. However, individuals with spiritual values are found to be less prone to internet addiction, and social media addiction is also associated with these values. Therefore, it is important to create awareness, promote conscious usage, and provide education to balance the effects of internet usage and preserve positive values. Additionally, organizing programs and activities that support young individuals in developing their values and emphasizing spiritual values, as well as developing policies based on the results of research in this field, are important steps.

Recommendations: In light of these studies, the following recommendations can be considered to reduce the negative effects of the internet and preserve spiritual values:

1. *Conscious Internet Usage:* Individuals should be encouraged to use the internet consciously. The beneficial aspects of the internet should be emphasized, and individuals should avoid harmful content.

2. *Educational Programs:* Educational institutions and social organizations should organize educational programs that emphasize spiritual values. These programs can help individuals understand and strengthen their values.

3. *Family Communication:* Parents should educate their children about the proper and improper use of the internet, share their values, and keep communication channels open.

4. *Promotion of Spiritual Values:* The importance of spiritual values should be emphasized in society. Efforts can be made through educational institutions, civil society organizations, and media channels to raise awareness. People should be informed about the positive effects of values such as respect, honesty, and justice.

5. *Research and Awareness:* More research should be conducted on the effects of internet usage, and the results of these studies should be disseminated to the public. Individuals should understand the potential risks and benefits of the internet.

In conclusion, the impact of the internet on spiritual values is a complex issue involving various factors. However, measures such as conscious usage, education, and emphasizing values can enhance the positive effects of the internet while mitigating the negative ones. Collaboration among society, families, and educational institutions is crucial

in this regard. Through the judicious utilization of the internet, it is possible to preserve spiritual values.

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