INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF YOUTH, DIGITAL CULTURE AND SOCIETY

VOL.1-NO.1-2026

P ISSN: xxxx-xxx

E ISSN: xxxx-xxx

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL CULTURE IN SHAPING YOUTH VALUES

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ABSTRACT

Digital culture has become an influential force in shaping the values, attitudes, beliefs, and social behaviours of young people. The widespread use of social media platforms, online communities, digital entertainment, and communication technologies has transformed how youth understand themselves, interact with others, and interpret social expectations. Digital environments expose young people to diverse cultural perspectives, lifestyles, ethical debates, and social movements, creating opportunities for learning, creativity, tolerance, and civic awareness. However, these environments may also encourage consumerism, unrealistic expectations, social comparison, misinformation, and the acceptance of harmful behavioural patterns. Research on adolescent identity development indicates that the nature of online engagement and the quality of digital interactions can be more significant than the amount of time spent on social media alone (Avci et al., 2025). This article examines the role of digital culture in shaping youth values through a review of existing scholarly literature. It focuses on cultural identity, moral development, peer influence, social responsibility, and the challenges associated with digital participation. The article argues that digital culture does not influence all young people in the same way; its effects depend on family guidance, educational experiences, cultural background, media literacy, and the content encountered online. Promoting responsible digital participation and critical thinking is therefore essential for helping young people develop balanced values in an increasingly connected society.

KEYWORDS

Digital Culture, Youth Values, Social Media, Cultural Identity, Moral Development, Digital Literacy, Social Behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Digital culture has become an essential part of contemporary youth life, influencing how young people communicate, learn, establish relationships, and understand the world around them. Social media platforms, video-sharing applications, online gaming communities, and digital entertainment provide continuous access to information and cultural experiences beyond traditional family, educational, and community environments. Through these platforms, young people encounter different beliefs, lifestyles, social expectations, and systems of values that may influence their attitudes and everyday decisions. Digital spaces therefore function not merely as communication channels but also as environments in which social meanings and cultural identities are negotiated. Pérez-Torres (2024) explains that social media can serve as a digital social mirror through which adolescents express themselves, receive feedback, compare their

experiences with others, and develop their understanding of personal identity. These processes make digital culture an important area of study for understanding the development of youth values in modern society.

Youth values include the principles and beliefs that guide behaviour, relationships, responsibilities, and decisions about right and wrong. Values such as honesty, respect, tolerance, cooperation, equality, independence, and social responsibility are traditionally shaped through family relationships, education, religious and cultural institutions, and community participation. However, digital communication has expanded the range of influences through which these values develop. Young people can now observe international events, engage with unfamiliar cultures, participate in online discussions, and learn about social issues through digital platforms. This exposure may encourage greater cultural awareness and respect for diversity, although it can also create tensions between established cultural expectations and emerging online trends. The relationship between digital culture and youth values is consequently complex because digital experiences may reinforce existing beliefs, challenge traditional norms, or encourage young people to reconsider their attitudes in response to new perspectives (Soh, 2024).

Social media influencers, online celebrities, content creators, and peer networks also play a significant role in presenting behavioural models to young audiences. Through videos, photographs, personal stories, and public discussions, digital personalities communicate ideas about success, appearance, relationships, consumption, and social status. Young people may adopt certain attitudes after observing the popularity and approval associated with particular online behaviours. At the same time, digital platforms allow youth to express their individuality, explore interests, and connect with communities that share their experiences. Avci et al. (2025) found that different forms of social media engagement have different relationships with adolescent identity development, indicating that the quality and nature of participation deserve attention alongside usage time. This suggests that the influence of digital culture on values should be examined by considering what young people view, share, discuss, and practise online rather than treating all digital activity as equally influential.Digital culture also provides opportunities for promoting positive social values, including empathy, inclusion, environmental responsibility, and civic participation. Online campaigns and educational content can introduce young people to social inequalities, humanitarian concerns, cultural preservation, and community initiatives. Digital platforms may enable young people to exchange ideas, support charitable activities, and express concern about issues affecting their societies. Such participation can strengthen awareness of collective responsibility and encourage constructive engagement with social problems. Nevertheless, the availability of information does not automatically lead to responsible judgement or meaningful participation. Young people may encounter misleading information, hostile communication, discriminatory content, or discussions that reward extreme

opinions. Consequently, the educational value of digital culture depends partly on young people's ability to evaluate information, recognise manipulation, and respond thoughtfully to different viewpoints (Neag et al., 2024).

Another important consideration is the relationship between digital culture and the preservation of cultural identity. Online platforms can help young people maintain connections with their languages, traditions, histories, and communities while simultaneously exploring global cultural influences. This interaction may produce a broader understanding of identity, allowing traditional values and modern perspectives to coexist. However, repeated exposure to idealised lifestyles and globally popular trends may also create pressure to abandon local practices or measure personal worth through online approval and material possessions. Pérez-Torres (2024) highlights the importance of online self-presentation, social comparison, role models, and audience feedback in adolescent identity development. These processes are relevant to value formation because young people may gradually adjust their preferences and beliefs according to the responses they receive from digital audiences.

Understanding the role of digital culture in shaping youth values is therefore important for parents, educators, policymakers, and communities seeking to support responsible young citizens. Rather than viewing digital technology as entirely beneficial or harmful, it is necessary to examine the conditions under which it encourages positive values or contributes to problematic attitudes. Digital literacy, open family communication, ethical education, and opportunities for meaningful offline relationships can help young people interpret online experiences critically. This article examines how digital culture influences youth values, identifies its positive and negative implications, and considers the importance of guidance and critical thinking in contemporary digital environments. By reviewing existing scholarly literature, the article develops a balanced understanding of digital culture as an influential but not exclusive factor in the development of young people's values and social attitudes.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the influence of digital culture on the values, beliefs, and social attitudes of young people.
2. To identify the positive and negative effects of digital platforms on youth cultural identity and moral development.
3. To explore the role of digital literacy, family guidance, and education in promoting responsible value formation among youth.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does digital culture influence the values, beliefs, and social attitudes of young people?
2. What positive and negative effects do digital platforms have on youth cultural identity and moral development?
3. How can digital literacy, family guidance, and education support responsible value formation among youth?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital culture has increasingly attracted scholarly attention because online environments have become important settings for social interaction, identity exploration, and cultural learning. Young people engage with digital platforms not only to obtain information but also to express opinions, develop relationships, and observe the behaviour of others. Soh (2024) presents identity development in digital contexts as a process involving interactions between individuals and their digital environments. Young people select online spaces, shape their digital presentations, respond to feedback, and incorporate some digital experiences into their understanding of themselves. These processes may also influence their values because beliefs about acceptable behaviour, personal success, friendship, and social responsibility develop partly through repeated interaction with social environments. Digital culture should therefore be understood as a setting in which existing values are reinforced, questioned, and sometimes transformed.Research on social media and adolescent identity development provides further insight into the relationship between digital engagement and youth values. Avci et al. (2025) reviewed research examining social media use and different dimensions of adolescent identity development, including identity exploration, commitment, self-concept clarity, and identity distress. Their findings indicate that the nature of engagement matters: active participation and authentic self-presentation can have different associations with identity development from social comparison and idealised self-presentation. Although identity development is not identical to value formation, it is closely related to how young people evaluate their beliefs, establish personal priorities, and decide which social expectations to accept. This literature suggests that young people's digital experiences should be assessed in terms of content, interaction, and personal meaning rather than simply measuring the amount of time spent online.

The role of social comparison and online feedback is particularly relevant to the development of youth values. Pérez-Torres (2024) identifies self-presentation, comparison with others, role models, and audience responses as important themes in understanding social media and adolescent identity. Digital platforms often make popularity visible through likes, comments,

shares, follower counts, and other forms of public approval. These indicators may influence how young people understand social acceptance, appearance, achievement, and status. When online popularity is treated as the main measure of personal worth, young people may give greater importance to external approval than to qualities such as honesty, kindness, perseverance, and mutual respect. Conversely, supportive online communities can encourage confidence, creativity, empathy, and acceptance. The literature therefore indicates that the influence of digital culture depends partly on the social norms promoted by the online communities with which young people interact.Digital culture also contributes to the circulation and exchange of cultural values across national and community boundaries. Through online videos, discussion forums, educational resources, and digital storytelling, young people encounter traditions and perspectives that may differ from those within their immediate surroundings. This exposure can promote cultural understanding and encourage respect for diversity, particularly when digital interactions involve meaningful dialogue and accurate information. However, the same processes may contribute to cultural misunderstanding when content presents simplified stereotypes or treats particular lifestyles as universally desirable. Neag et al. (2024), in their scoping review of research on social media and activism involving children and youth, highlight the importance of examining young people's participation and the diversity of contexts in which digital engagement occurs. Their work supports the need to understand youth as active participants in digital culture rather than merely passive recipients of online messages.

Another strand of literature concerns the relationship between digital participation and civic or social responsibility. Online platforms provide opportunities for young people to learn about community issues, discuss public concerns, support social campaigns, and communicate with people who share particular goals. These experiences can strengthen awareness of fairness, equality, environmental protection, and collective action. Digital participation, however, does not necessarily indicate a deep understanding of social issues or a willingness to act responsibly beyond the internet. The quality of information, the tone of discussion, and the extent to which online activity is connected with practical engagement all matter. Neag et al. (2024) demonstrate the value of critically reviewing how youth social media participation and activism are studied, including the need for broader and more inclusive research. This perspective suggests that digital culture can support positive values when it encourages informed discussion, respectful disagreement, and meaningful involvement in social life.Despite its benefits, digital culture may expose young people to misinformation, cyberbullying, consumer pressure, discriminatory attitudes, and unrealistic representations of success. Repeated exposure to such content may normalise disrespectful communication, materialistic aspirations, or harmful social comparisons, especially when young people have limited opportunities to discuss what they encounter online. At the same time, digital media can provide educational material, supportive networks, and opportunities to challenge prejudice. The available literature does not support the assumption

that all young people are affected in the same way. Differences in age, family environment, cultural background, education, personal experience, and digital literacy can influence how online messages are interpreted. The central issue is therefore not simply whether digital culture is good or bad, but how young people engage with it and what resources they have to evaluate its messages critically.

Overall, existing scholarship establishes a strong connection between digital environments, identity exploration, social interaction, and exposure to cultural models, but the specific development of youth values requires further focused examination. Soh (2024), Pérez-Torres (2024), and Avci et al. (2025) provide useful perspectives on digital identity processes, while Neag et al. (2024) broaden the discussion to youth participation and activism. Taken together, these studies suggest that online experiences can shape the beliefs and priorities through which young people interpret social life, but the direction and strength of this influence depend on context. A useful approach to understanding youth values must therefore consider digital content, online relationships, cultural expectations, and the support available from families and educational institutions. This article addresses these interconnected factors through a thematic review of relevant scholarly research.

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a qualitative methodology based on a review of existing scholarly literature concerning digital culture and youth values. Relevant academic studies published in peer-reviewed journals were considered to examine the relationship between digital media, cultural identity, moral attitudes, social behaviour, and identity development. Particular attention was given to research on social media engagement, online role models, cultural exchange, youth participation, and the influence of digital environments on adolescent development. The reviewed literature was interpreted to identify recurring ideas, areas of agreement, and important differences in the ways digital culture may influence young people's beliefs and priorities. As the article is based on secondary sources, it does not involve direct interviews, surveys, or experiments with young people.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The article uses a descriptive and thematic research design to explore how digital culture contributes to the development of youth values. A thematic approach is suitable because the subject involves interconnected social and cultural processes that cannot be fully understood through a single measure of digital use. The literature was organised around major themes, including cultural identity, social comparison, online role models, moral development, civic

responsibility, and digital literacy. These themes were examined in relation to the article's research objectives and questions, allowing the discussion to connect individual digital experiences with wider social and cultural influences. The design aims to provide an organised interpretation of existing research rather than claim new empirical findings from an independently collected dataset.

DATA ANALYSIS

The reviewed literature was analysed through thematic synthesis. Findings and arguments from the selected studies were compared to identify recurring patterns concerning how digital environments present values, influence social expectations, and provide opportunities for cultural learning. The analysis focused on both constructive influences, such as cultural awareness, self-expression, tolerance, and civic participation, and potential risks, including social comparison, consumerism, misinformation, and the normalisation of harmful online behaviour. Particular consideration was given to the role of online interaction and self-presentation, as research suggests that the quality of social media engagement may be more informative than time spent online alone (Avci et al., 2025).The analysis also considered the contextual factors that may shape young people's responses to digital content, including family guidance, educational experiences, cultural background, and media literacy. Rather than assuming a direct cause-and-effect relationship, the article interpreted the literature in terms of associations, possible mechanisms, and differences across contexts. The resulting themes were used to develop an integrated discussion of how digital culture may reinforce, challenge, or transform youth values. Since the study relies on previously published literature, its conclusions are interpretive and should not be treated as statistical estimates of the effects of digital culture on all young people.

FINDINGS

The literature review indicates that digital culture is an important environment in which young people encounter, interpret, and negotiate social values. Online platforms expose youth to diverse cultural perspectives and behavioural models, creating opportunities to develop openness, creativity, communication skills, and awareness of social issues. Digital participation can also help young people express their identities and connect with communities that support shared interests and experiences. Research on adolescent identity development highlights the importance of self-presentation, social interaction, and feedback in shaping how young people understand themselves and their place in society (Pérez-Torres, 2024; Avci et al., 2025). These findings suggest that digital culture can contribute to value development when online experiences encourage reflection, constructive interaction, and respect for others.The review also identifies potential negative influences associated with digital environments. Exposure to

idealised lifestyles, online popularity measures, misleading information, and hostile communication may encourage social comparison, unrealistic expectations, or the acceptance of harmful norms. Young people may experience pressure to conform to popular trends or evaluate themselves according to online approval rather than personal principles. However, these outcomes are not inevitable, and digital participation varies in meaning and impact across individuals and contexts. The literature on youth engagement and activism also indicates that online participation should be understood in relation to the quality of interaction and the circumstances in which young people participate (Neag et al., 2024).A further finding is that the influence of digital culture is shaped by factors beyond technology itself. Family communication, education, cultural traditions, peer relationships, and digital literacy can affect how young people interpret online messages and decide whether to accept or reject them. When young people are encouraged to question sources, recognise persuasive techniques, respect different viewpoints, and reflect on the consequences of their online behaviour, they may be better prepared to make responsible choices. The literature therefore supports a balanced approach that recognises both the opportunities and risks of digital culture while emphasising guidance, critical thinking, and ethical participation.

CONCLUSION

Digital culture plays a significant role in shaping youth values by influencing cultural awareness, identity development, social relationships, and perceptions of acceptable behaviour. Through social media and other digital environments, young people encounter a wide range of beliefs, lifestyles, role models, and social expectations that may reinforce existing values or encourage them to reconsider their attitudes. These experiences can promote tolerance, creativity, self-expression, and social responsibility, but they can also expose young people to misinformation, harmful comparisons, consumer pressure, and disrespectful communication. Existing research suggests that the influence of digital culture depends not only on access to digital platforms but also on the nature of online engagement and the meanings young people attach to their experiences (Soh, 2024; Avci et al., 2025).The development of positive youth values therefore requires cooperation among families, educational institutions, communities, and digital platforms. Parents and educators can support young people by encouraging open discussion, critical evaluation of online information, respectful communication, and an understanding of cultural and ethical responsibilities. Digital literacy should include not only technical skills but also the ability to recognise misinformation, evaluate online role models, and consider the social consequences of digital behaviour. Ultimately, digital culture should be understood as an influential part of young people's social environment rather than the sole determinant of their values. Further empirical research across different cultural and educational settings would help clarify how specific digital experiences influence the development of values over time.

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