

## An Investigation of the Relationship between Religious Beliefs of Internet Users and Their Internet Searching and Browsing (A Case Study: Shiite students at Astara Islamic Azad University)

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**Abstract:** In the present era, internet as a new communication tool has changed human life and in different countries according to some factors such as religion, level of development, culture and etc. it has different uses. The purpose of this study is to investigate if the users who have stronger tendencies to Islam and Shiite avoid searching about unethical issues, counter-values and the factors that cause their decline. **Methodology:** In order to investigate the research questions, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive analysis was done through demographic information. Inferential statistics were applied to examine the statistical hypothesis and data analysis was done using inferential statistics for testing the hypothesis. **Population:** The sample size was calculated using Morgan table. Since the total number of students was 3,500, Morgan table estimated 346 subjects as sample. **Findings:** The findings of this study generally suggested that users with stronger religious beliefs behave according to Shiite jurisprudence and their internet searches pay more attention to ethical issues and values. **Conclusion:** the institutionalization of Islamic ethical and religious training of users are the best strategies that can take them away from immoral internet searches. Besides, some tools can be used in order to make them away from immoral issues such as; the codifying Special Rules of Internet, obtaining permits and commitment based on contents or using filtering in order to ban users from bad sites. However, there is no reliable way to strengthen the values, ethical and religious issues, and to create self-control and self-immunity.

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**Keywords:** religious beliefs, users, Shiite, searching, internet, ethics, identity

### Statement of the problem

The traditional means of communication in recent years have been replaced by electronic devices and remote digital data. New devices with high capacities and capabilities play a decisive role in changing various aspects of society. Technology is a phenomenon that even if a community in any size attempts to avoid using it, but the consequences and results of technology are inevitable (Mohseni, 2002: 30). In the present era, internet as a new communication tool has changed human life (Mirghafouri, 2010). So much so that in 2010, the number of internet sites was more than the number of people on the Earth (Hosseini Beheshtian, 2011).

Internet follow special cultural and behavioral patterns. The most important issues of internet in case of cultural terms is inconsistency of provided content with cultural patterns and behavioral norms in various communities. The plenty of commercial and free pornographic content on internet is one of the most effective moral and family dilemmas, while it highly badly influenced on family foundation and in the meantime the children and teenagers are really threatened (Eftekhari, 2008).

One of the key areas of life which have a significant impact on other aspects is religion. Undoubtedly, in facing with new information and communication technologies along with changing and integrating ideas, cultures and ways of living, the human religion is undergone with some changes (Bakhtiari, 2011).

Since the attractiveness of the internet for students is mostly in behavioral and emotional areas, therefore, using internet by students has the greatest impact on their behavior and religious emotions. On the one hand, the common use of internet communication and entertainment is not in accordance with the Islamic teachings and precepts and on the other hand, in the religious system of student users, behavior and religious emotions towards religious knowledge have been more highlighted, accordingly, the impact of internet use on the students religion have been mostly negative and destructive. Thus, those students who use the Internet, when they are compared to non-users, are less religious. However, regarding the internet users, how much their religious status affecting on their internet use is different. Therefore, this study accurately and critically have examined the relationship between religion and the

Internet among Shiite students in Astara Islamic Azad University.

### Research questions

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any relationship between the students' use of the Internet and their religious beliefs?
2. Is there any relationship between demographic variables such as age, education and marital status with religiosity?
3. What changes have been made in the youth religiosity due to using internet?
4. What impacts does the Internet have on young people's identity?

### Methodology

It should be noted that the present study is practical in case of purpose and data collection was done through descriptive method and it is a correlation and since it investigated the Shiite students at Astara Islamic Azad University it is a case study.

### Population and sample

Since the aim of this study was to examine the Shiite users' religious tendency and their internet searches at Astara Islamic Azad University, the statistical population was chosen from 3,500 students who were studying in this university in 2013.

### Instrument and data collection

Data collection is a process in which researchers have started collecting data from the field and Library

and narrowed down them in an inductive method, and then data analysis was done and the developed hypotheses have been assessed and finally the answers of the stated problem were found. The used methods in this study are as follows: a) Library method, b) questionnaire. Since the alpha level is desirable when it is higher than 0.804, it shows the high and acceptable reliability of the questionnaire.

### Methods of data analysis

In order to investigate the research questions in mentioned population, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. First, a descriptive analysis of demographic information was done. Therefore, demographic data were shown using frequency tables. Then, the inferential statistics were analyzed to test the hypothesis. Since the data are quantitative, ANOVA, t-test and Duncan test were used to investigate the effect of different levels of each variable in order to compare the demographic variables of Shiite religious beliefs of Internet users and their internet searches.

### Investigation of the relationship between religion and the Internet among Shiite students

The sample size was calculated using Morgan table. Since the total number of students was 3,500, table estimated 346 subjects as sample.

**Gender:** The table below shows the total respondents in this study who were 346 patients, while 52.3% of them (181 patients) were male and 47.7% of them (165 patients) were female.

**Table 1:** Description of gender variable

sex			
		plenty	Percent
Valid	woman	165	47.7
	man	181	52.3
	Total	346	100.0

**Age:** As it can be seen in the following table among the total respondents, 43.9% of them (152 patients) aged between 18-22 and 28.6% of the respondents (99 patients) aged between 23-26, and finally, 27.5% of respondents (95 patients) aged between 27-30.

**Table 2:** Description of age variable

age			
		plenty	Percent
Valid	18-22	152	43.9
	23-26	99	28.6
	27-30	95	27.5
	Total	346	100.0

**Educational degree:** As it can be seen in the following table, among the respondents of this study, 30.6% of the respondents (106 patients) had college degree, 57.2 % of them (196%) had bachelor degree and 12.1% (42 patients) had master degree.

**Table 3:** Description of educational degree variable

Education			
		plenty	Percent
Valid	Resource	106	30.6
	Expert	198	57.2
	Master degree	42	12.1
	Total	346	100.0

**Major of Study:** As it can be seen in the following table, among all the respondents of this study, 54% (187 patients) studies Humanities majors, 6.4% (22 patients) studies Basic Sciences, 29.2% (101 patients) studied Engineering Sciences, 10.4% (36 patients) studied Medical Science.

**Table 4:** Description of the major of study variable

Major of Study			
		plenty	Percent
Valid	Humanities	187	54.0
	Basic Sciences	22	6.4
	Engineering Sciences	101	29.2
	Medical Science	36	10.4
	Total	346	100.0

**Economic situation:** As it can be seen in Table 5, among all respondents, 13% of them (45 patients) had poor economic status, 75.4% of them (261 patients) had average economic status, and 11.6% of them (40 patients) had strong economic status.

**Table 5:** Economic status variable

Economic situation			
		plenty	Percent
Valid	weak	45	13.0
	Average	261	75.4
	Strong	40	11.6
	Total	346	100.0

**Shiite users' religious tendency and their Internet searches:** The highest score for the work ethic was 3.4 point and the lowest score was 1.26 point and the mean score on this variable was about 2.50 and the standard deviation was 0.44.

### Testing research hypotheses

After describing variables and responses obtained from the population, the results of hypothesis and statistical tests were discussed. In other word; the findings were analyzed in order to investigate the accuracy of the hypothesis.

- The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to different age groups is different.

To answer this question, a one way ANOVA test was used and the results are listed below:

H0: - The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to different age groups is not different.

H1: - The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to different age groups is different.

**Table 6:** Religious tendency based on the age of the respondents

Descriptives								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
18-22	152	47.0461	8.65248	.70181	45.6594	48.4327	24.00	65.00
23-26	99	46.8586	8.89968	.89445	45.0836	48.6336	26.00	61.00
27-30	95	49.2316	7.33028	.75207	47.7383	50.7248	25.00	66.00
Total	346	47.5925	8.42211	.45278	46.7019	48.4830	24.00	66.00

**Table 7.** One way ANOVA, the difference between the different age levels and the tendency of Shiite internet users in searching about ethical issues and values

**ANOVA**

	Sum of squares	Free surface	Mean square	F	Significance level
Between Groups	353.937	2	176.969	2.517	.082
Within the group	24117.603	343	70.314		
Total	24471.540	345			

**Table 8.** Duncan test of the Shiite users' tendency to search about ethical issues and values

Duncan <sup>a,b</sup>			
age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
23-26	99	46.8586	
18-22	152	47.0461	47.0461
27-30	95		49.2316
Sig.		.868	.054

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 110.269.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

Regarding the results of above table and based on 0.05 significance level, it is concluded that there is no significant difference between the different age of the respondents and their religious tendency, so H0 is confirmed. Duncan test also don't show any relationship, so higher or lower ages of respondents was ineffective on their religious tendencies to do internet searches.

- The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their gender is different.

H0: - The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their gender is not different.

H1: - The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their gender is different.

In order to answer the mentioned question, the independent t-test was used and the results were listed in the following table:

**Table 9:** Religious tendency based on the gender of the respondents

	sex	Abundance	Average	Deviation	Standard deviation of the mean
Users tend to ethical values Shia councilor	man	164	47.1524	8.92683	.69707
	woman	182	47.9890	7.94386	.58884

Regarding the results of above table and since significance level 0.071 is higher than 0.05, it is concluded that there is no significant difference between the gender of the respondents and their religious tendency, so H0 is rejected.

- The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their economic statuses is different.

H0: - The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their economic statuses is not different.

H1: - The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their economic statuses is different.

In order to answer to the mentioned question, the one way ANOVA test was used and the results were listed in the following table:

**Table 10.** Religious tendency based on the economic statuses of the respondents

**Descriptives**

gh

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
weak	45	46.7111	10.49593	1.56464	43.5578	49.8644	26.00	66.00
Average	261	47.5134	8.15975	.50508	46.5188	48.5080	24.00	65.00
Strong	40	49.1000	7.48606	1.18365	46.7058	51.4942	35.00	64.00
Total	346	47.5925	8.42211	.45278	46.7019	48.4830	24.00	66.00

**Table 11.** One way ANOVA of the difference between the different economic status and the tendency of Shiite internet users in searching about ethical issues and values

**ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	127.493	2	63.746	.898	.408
Within Groups	24344.048	343	70.974		
Total	24471.540	345			

Regarding the results of above table and since 0.408 significance level is higher than 0.05, it is concluded that there is no significant difference between the economic status of the respondents and their religious tendency, so H0 is confirmed and H1 is rejected.

Duncan test also don't show any relationship between the different economic status and their tendency, so higher or lower economic status of the respondents was ineffective on their religious tendencies to do internet searches.

- The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their educational degree is different.

H0: - The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their educational degree is not different.

H1: - The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their educational degree is different.

**Table 12.** Duncan test of the Shiite users' tendency to search about ethical issues and values  
gh2

Duncan<sup>a,b</sup>

economic situation	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05
		1
weak	40	2.4750
Average	45	2.5111
Strong	261	2.5594
Sig.		.521

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 58.762.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

In order to answer to the mentioned question, the one way ANOVA test was used and the results were listed in the following table:

**Table 13.** Religious tendency based on the educational degree of the respondents

**Descriptives**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Resource Expert Master degree	106	46.8302	8.11051	.78776	45.2682	48.3922	24.00	66.00
	198	46.9192	8.53084	.60626	45.7236	48.1148	26.00	65.00
	42	52.6905	6.95802	1.07365	50.5222	54.8587	40.00	65.00
Total	346	47.5925	8.42211	.45278	46.7019	48.4830	24.00	66.00

**Table14.** One way ANOVA of the difference between the educational degree and the tendency of Shiite internet users in searching about ethical issues and values

**ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1242.914	2	621.457	9.177	.000
Within Groups	23228.627	343	67.722		
Total	24471.540	345			

Regarding the results of above table and since 0.00 significance level is lower than 0.05, it is concluded that there is a significant difference between the educational degree of the respondents and their religious tendency, so H1 is confirmed.

Duncan test also showed that there is no significant difference between the first level of educational degree of the respondents and their religious tendency, however, in the second level, the effect of master degree on religious tendency of the Shiite users was higher.

- The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their major of study is different.

H0: - The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their major of study is not different.

**Table 15.** Duncan test of the Shiite users' tendency to search about ethical issues and values  
Duncan<sup>a,b</sup>

Education	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Resource	106	2.4811	
Expert	198	2.5152	
Master degree	42		2.8333
Sig.		.746	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 78.341.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

H1: - The tendency of Shiite users to search about the ethical issues and values according to their major of study is different.

In order to answer to the mentioned question, the one way ANOVA test was used and the results were listed in the following table:

**Table 16.** Religious tendency based on the major of study of the respondents

**Descriptives**

gh

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Humanities	187	49.0963	7.66372	.56043	47.9906	50.2019	31.00	66.00
Basic Sciences	22	48.9091	8.59074	1.83155	45.1002	52.7180	24.00	61.00
Engineering Sciences	101	45.4653	8.91130	.88671	43.7061	47.2245	25.00	65.00
Medical Science	36	44.9444	9.08042	1.51340	41.8721	48.0168	28.00	60.00
Total	346	47.5925	8.42211	.45278	46.7019	48.4830	24.00	66.00

**Table 17.** One way ANOVA of the difference between the major of study and the tendency of Shiite internet users in searching about ethical issues and values

**ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1170.437	3	390.146	5.726	.001
Within Groups	23301.103	342	68.132		
Total	24471.540	345			

Regarding the results of above table and since 0.00 significance level is lower than 0.05, it is concluded that there is a significant difference between the major of study of the respondents and their religious tendency, so H1 is confirmed.

Duncan test also showed that there is no significant difference between different levels of the respondents' major of study and their religious tendency, so, each major based on its own situation can be effective on the users' tendency.



**Table 18.** Duncan test of the Shiite users' tendency to search about ethical issues and values  
Duncan<sup>a,b</sup>

Major of Study	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Humanities	36	2.2778		
Basic Sciences	101	2.4356	2.4356	
Engineering Sciences	187		2.6310	2.6310
Medical Science	22			2.7273
Sig.		.251	.156	.484

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 45.207.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The results showed that since significant level is 0.05, there is a significant difference between education of Shiite users' tendency to ethical issues and values. The results of the tests showed that the higher the education of users, the more ethical issues and values they tend to search about which is more effective. Besides, when the significance level is 0.05, there is a significant difference between the Shiite users' major of study and their tendency to search about ethical issues and values, while the tests showed that some majors are more effective on the users' internet searches. Although the effect of users' major of study on their personal character and their values cannot be ignored, it can be significantly influenced by caring, faithful and committed instructors and educators, because such instructors and educators can integrate the Shiite Islamic values and valuable scientific knowledge and provide them to the students in a coordinated and integrated system. Finally, based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that it is expected that young people use internet and cyberspace properly, and avoid surfing in immoral and counter-value sites which is not possible but by caring about culture and strengthening religious beliefs. Moreover, increasing the students' understanding of the positive and negative aspects of the internet, improving their skills in professional and constructive use of possibilities and capabilities of this media, implementing good plans in university as the main

trustee in human educations in order to strengthen the students' religious teachings and developing the recreational and sport places for youth in order to spend their free time and get motivated to do proper activities.

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