

Sources of Religiosity among University Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to analyze the phenomenon of Islamic religiosity among university youth through a socio-religious approach that focuses on the sources of religiosity and the factors that determine it. It seeks to shed light on a central problem concerning the extent to which various social factors contribute to shaping patterns of religiosity among university youth and the sources from which university youth derive their religiosity, as well as how the roles of these sources vary in light of current transformations. The study assumes that religiosity among university youth is formed through a dynamic interaction among three principal social sources: the family, the peer group, and religious media, with the degree of influence of each varying according to the social and cultural context. The study relied on the descriptive analytical method, using a questionnaire administered to a snowball sample of 130 male and female students, with attention to diversity in gender, specialization, and academic level. The main finding is that the family remains the primary institution of religious socialization, although its effectiveness depends on its type, whether conservative or open. Conservative families succeed in transmitting regular religious commitment, while open families transmit a milder form of religiosity; the family's role was also found to be limited to moral and disciplinary religiosity rather than doctrinal and devotional religiosity. The results further showed that the peer group occupies a central position in religious formation, particularly regarding difficult or sensitive matters, and that this role is reinforced by the length of time spent together, being associated with increased faith, the correction of errors, and the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice. In addition, the results revealed that religious media constitutes a parallel institution that contributes to reinforcing religious feeling and consolidating Islamic values, particularly when programs are followed regularly.

Keywords: Religiosity, religious socialization, family socialization, peers, religious media

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Islamic world is undergoing profound intellectual and social transformations that have reopened questions of religion and religiosity within new contexts. The study of religious phenomena is no longer confined to homiletic discourse but has extended to sociological analysis grounded in the tools of scientific research. Within this framework, there has been growing interest in studying the religious phenomenon as a complex social phenomenon in which cultural, value-based, and institutional dimensions intersect and which is subject to multiple influences amid the accelerating changes experienced by modern societies (Durkheim, 1912, pp. 1–5).

Contemporary societies are experiencing a process of “*secularization of consciousness*” that has reshaped the relationship between the individual and the sacred, calling for new approaches to understanding religiosity in the modern era (Berger, 1967, p. 127). Despite the considerable body of research on religiosity, particularly in the Western context, where attention has focused on individuals' relationships with religious institutions, patterns of ritual practice, and sources of religious knowledge, such studies have often originated from different religious and cultural backgrounds, which limits their generalizability to societies with different religious and cultural configurations.

In this context, there is a relative shortage of field studies addressing religiosity in the Arab context in general and the Algerian context in particular, especially with regard to university youth, a group experiencing a transitional stage marked by identity reconstruction amid overlapping and multiple influences.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The religious phenomenon occupies a central position in the social structure of Islamic societies, contributing to the direction of individual and collective behavior and to the regulation of social relations through an integrated system of values. This role, however, is neither fixed nor static but subject to change according to broader social transformations. As Berger (1967, p. 129) observes, modern societies are witnessing “a plurality of religious frames of reference,” which reshapes patterns and manifestations of religiosity.

This topic gains further significance when examined in the context of university youth, given the particular sociological characteristics of this group. Youth represents a decisive stage in identity formation and the reconstruction of value systems, and the university environment constitutes an open social space with multiple

sources of influence, making it a suitable field for studying the interaction between traditional socialization and contemporary influences.

In the Algerian context, the study of religiosity acquires additional importance in light of the transformations the society is undergoing, including the emergence of multiple patterns of religiosity and the relative decline of certain traditional socialization institutions in favor of the growing influence of newer socializing institutions.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to analyze the phenomenon of Islamic religiosity among university youth through a socio-religious approach focused on the sources of religiosity and the factors that shape it. Its general objective is to understand the social factors influencing the formation of religiosity among university youth and to analyze the sources from which they acquire religious knowledge and practice.

Within this framework, the study adopts an analytical approach that seeks to connect various social variables in order to provide an integrated sociological explanation of religiosity within the university milieu.

Statement of the problem

Contemporary social and cultural transformations have produced new dynamics that have reshaped the relationship between religion and social structure. Religiosity is no longer the direct product of a single institution but has become the outcome of a complex interaction among several interrelated social determinants (Berger, 1967, p. 132). Nonetheless, despite the multiplicity of influences, the family continues to occupy a central position in the process of religious socialization. In an extensive field study, Uecker and Regnerus (2003, p. 630) concluded that the level of parents' religiosity is significantly correlated with the level of their children's religiosity, whether in terms of ritual practice or the subjective importance of religion in daily life.

This influence, however, does not operate deterministically, since other studies indicate that its effectiveness is linked to the nature of relationships within the family. Research by McLanahan (2004, pp. 607–612) has shown that weak family cohesion or family breakdown leads to a diminished capacity to transmit values, including religious values. The influence of the family, therefore, appears to be conditioned by the quality of relational capital within it, rather than by its mere existence as a social structure.

By contrast, the peer group emerges as a decisive sociological actor during youth, as the process of constructing religious meaning shifts from the family space to the space of everyday interaction. A study by Moody (2001, pp. 261–265) showed that friendship networks contribute to shaping religiosity through two interrelated mechanisms, social influence and selection, whereby individuals tend to adopt patterns of religiosity similar to those of their peers. Other studies further confirm that interaction within the peer group is not limited to the transmission of values but extends to their reinterpretation and reconstruction, giving religiosity a negotiated character that is formed within the group rather than imposed from outside it.

With regard to the media, the technological transformation of means of communication has reshaped the relationship between the individual and the religious sphere, such that media are no longer mere channels for transmitting religious knowledge but have become spaces for its production and circulation. Recent studies in the digital sociology of religion, such as the work of Campbell (2012, pp. 1–4), show that individuals, particularly young people, engage with religious content selectively and interactively, thereby reshaping traditional patterns of religiosity. Recent quantitative studies have likewise shown that the use of social media is associated with shifts in religious practice, whether in the form of institutional decline or the emergence of more individualized and personalized forms of religiosity.

On this basis, the problem of the study centers on the following question:

To what extent do various social factors contribute to shaping patterns of religiosity among university youth?

More specifically:

What are the sources from which university youth derive their religiosity, and how do the roles of these sources vary in light of current transformations?

This general question gives rise to the following sub-questions:

1. How does the pattern of family socialization influence the formation of religiosity among university youth?
2. What is the nature of the role played by the peer group in reshaping religious values?
3. To what extent does religious media contribute to directing the religious practices and representations of university students?

Within this framework, the study proceeds from the general hypothesis that religiosity among university youth is formed through a dynamic interaction among three principal social sources, namely the family, the peer group, and religious media, with the degree of influence of each varying according to the social and cultural context.

This general hypothesis gives rise to the following sub-hypotheses:

1. *Variation in the family environment, in terms of openness or conservatism, affects the religiosity of university youth.*
2. *The peer group plays a role in reinforcing the phenomenon of religiosity among university youth.*

3. The nature of religious media affects university students' engagement with Islamic religiosity and the strengthening of their religious feeling.

Concepts of the Study

1. Religiosity

Religiosity is one of the central concepts in the sociology of religion, and it has been developed to reflect the multiple dimensions of the religious phenomenon rather than reducing it to ritual practice alone. The classical model of religiosity identifies multiple dimensions, including belief, practice, knowledge, and religious experience (Glock, 1972, pp. 38–56).

In practice, it is difficult to arrive at a precise and fixed definition of religiosity, since different religions emphasize different behaviors and diverse values. For this reason, the concept is defined here operationally in terms of the individual's participation in collective rites, worship, and religious rituals, as manifested in the observable frequency of attendance at places of worship such as mosques, whether through regular observance or occasional attendance on special occasions. It refers, in short, to the set of behaviors and attitudes that are judged to be religious within a given group or society.

2. Religious Socialization

Religious socialization is a fluid and reciprocal process whereby agents of socialization affect the religious beliefs of individuals, and the conceptions of religion by families, institutions, groups, and other social experiences help to shape the religious preferences and allegiances of individuals. (Sherkat, 2003).

3. Peer Group:

A peer group is a group of people of approximately the same age and social background who interact with one another directly and continuously. Its importance is particularly salient in youth when it is a primary source of socialization. The networks of friends affect the behavior, including the religious behavior, through the influence, imitation, and collective interaction (Moody, 2001, p. 261-265).

4. Religious Media

Religious media represents a modern extension of the process of transmitting religious knowledge, combining an informational function with an educational one. With the development of digital media, religion has come to be reproduced within digital spaces, which has changed the very nature of religiosity.

Islamic religious media can be defined as the process of providing the public in general with the truths of religion. The religious media message may be a general message addressing social issues from a religious perspective or a direct message such as exhorting people to perform acts of worship and interpreting religious texts. The relationship between the media and any call, idea, or message, particularly religious calls, is an organic, interconnected, and cohesive relationship (Omar, 1984, p. 115).

5. Family Environment

The family is the first social institution in the process of religious and value-based socialization, responsible for transmitting the symbolic and normative order to individuals from childhood. Bourdieu emphasizes that the family is a fundamental mechanism in the reproduction of cultural capital, including value-based and religious dimensions, which contributes to the reproduction of social structure across generations (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 72–78).

Studies also indicate that parents' religiosity and the pattern of family relationships directly influence the formation of religiosity among children, particularly during the early stages of socialization.

Previous Studies

Within this framework, it is clear that the origins and sources of religiosity among university youth have not received sufficient attention from researchers, despite their considerable importance, particularly in Islamic societies. Most available studies have addressed partial aspects of the phenomenon or have focused on religious values and the problems faced by youth, without delving into an analysis of the sources and origins of religiosity as a complex social phenomenon.

Contemporary sociological studies have shown growing interest in analyzing religiosity, particularly in the context of social and cultural transformations that have reshaped the relationship between the individual and religion. These studies have varied in their theoretical approaches and field findings.

Family and Religiosity

Numerous studies agree that the family constitutes the primary and most influential framework in the acquisition of religiosity. In a longitudinal study spanning thirty five years, Bengtson (2013, p. 45) demonstrated that religious values are transmitted across generations through what he terms “family religious continuity.”

Peer Group

Some studies have shifted their focus from the family to highlighting the role of the peer group, with certain works showing that behaviors, including religiosity, are formed within social networks through mechanisms of influence and imitation. Other studies go further, arguing that the peer group may reshape religiosity itself, whether by reinforcing it or by reinterpreting it (Moody, 2001, p. 263).

Religious Media

With the development of media, particularly digital media, recent studies have redefined religious media, showing that digital media has contributed to the emergence of new patterns of religiosity based on individual selection and personal reinterpretation of religion (Campbell, 2012, p. 4). Digital space is no longer merely a means of transmitting religious discourse but has become a space for its reproduction and reshaping. Campbell further argues in her introduction that the concept of digital religion no longer simply distinguishes between religion online and offline but now refers to the cultural and technological space in which religious domains have become integrated (Campbell, 2012, p. 3). These studies show that young people are no longer passive recipients but active agents who reconstruct their understanding of religion through selection and interaction.

Position of the Present Study

A comparison of these studies reveals that each line of research has focused on a particular source of religiosity, yet this fragmented treatment does not reflect the actual complexity of the phenomenon. Religiosity cannot be reduced to a single factor but is formed through the dynamic interaction of several social institutions.

In this respect, the study draws on Bourdieu's theoretical framework, which holds that social behavior, including religious behavior, results from the interaction between social structures and actors within multiple social fields (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78).

In light of the foregoing, this study is positioned within an integrative interactionist approach that does not assume a single source of religiosity but proceeds from the hypothesis that religiosity among university youth is formed through a complex interaction among family socialization, the peer group, and the media. Each institution performs a distinct functional role whether disciplinary and moral, practical and field-based, or persuasive and intellectual. The study thus seeks to address a gap in the literature, namely the shortage of studies examining the sources of religiosity in Maghrebi societies from an integrative, field-based perspective.

Methodology of the Study

The study relied on the descriptive analytical method, considered one of the most appropriate approaches for studying social phenomena, particularly complex and multidimensional ones such as religiosity. This method involves describing the phenomenon as it actually exists, analyzing its elements and components, and uncovering the relationships among its variables, without intervening to direct or alter it.

Data Collection Tools

The study relied on a questionnaire, systematically designed to include sections addressing the different sources of religiosity, namely the family, the peer group, and religious media, in addition to questions reflecting the level of religious practice and its associated representations.

Sample of the Study

The study population consists of university youth, a distinct social category in terms of age and educational characteristics, and among the groups most exposed to multiple and diverse influences, whether religious, cultural, or intellectual.

The sample was selected using the snowball method and comprised 130 male and female students, with attention to diversity in gender, specialization, and academic level.

Findings of the Study

Findings Relating to the First Hypothesis: Variation in the Family Environment, whether Open or Conservative, Affects the Religiosity of University Youth

Table 1: Relationship between Family Type and Attendance at Congregational Prayer

Attendance at Congregational Prayer	Conservative	Moderate	Open	Total
Always	49 (62.8%)	17 (36.2%)	2 (40%)	68 (52.3%)
On special occasions	13 (16.7%)	8 (17%)	2 (40%)	23 (17.7%)
Not regular	16 (20%)	22 (46.8%)	1 (20%)	39 (30%)
Total	78 (100%)	47 (100%)	5 (100%)	130 (100%)

Source: Researcher's calculations based on field study data

Statistical reading:

52.3% of the sample attend congregational prayer on a regular basis.

62.8% of those who attend regularly belong to conservative families.

Findings Relating to the Second Hypothesis: The Peer Group Plays a Role in Reinforcing Religiosity among University Youth

Table 2: Relationship between Duration of Companionship and Level of Religiosity

Level of Religiosity	More than 5 years	4 years	3 years	2 years	1 year	Total
Less religious	12 (37.6%)	9 (40.9%)	7 (31.8%)	6 (22.2%)	8 (38.1%)	42 (32.3%)
More religious	25 (65.8%)	13 (59.1%)	15 (68.2%)	21 (77.8%)	13 (61.9%)	81 (66.9%)
Total	38 (100%)	22 (100%)	22 (100%)	27 (100%)	21 (100%)	130 (100%)

Source: Researcher's calculations based on field study data

Statistical reading:

66.9% of the sample confirmed that spending time with peers makes them more religious.

The highest proportion, 77.8%, was recorded among those who had spent two years together.

Findings Relating to the Third Hypothesis: The Role of Religious Media in Reinforcing Religious Feeling

Table 3: Viewing of Religious Television Programs and Its Contribution to Religious Feeling

Does It Strengthen Religious Feeling?	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Not Regular	Total
Yes	24 (85.4%)	13 (54.2%)	5 (71.4%)	44 (63.8%)	86 (66.9%)
No	2 (7.1%)	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.3%)	6 (4.6%)
Sometimes	2 (7.1%)	10 (41.7%)	2 (28.6%)	22 (31.9%)	36 (28.5%)
Total	28 (100%)	24 (100%)	7 (100%)	69 (100%)	130 (100%)

Source: Researcher's calculations based on field study data

Statistical reading:

66.9% of the sample confirmed that religious programs help strengthen their religious feeling.

The highest proportion, 85.4%, was recorded among daily viewers.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Discussion of the First Hypothesis: The Family as a Foundation of Religiosity, between Assertion of Presence and Withdrawal

The results in Table 1 confirm the theory of intergenerational transmission proposed by Bengtson, based on his thirty-five-year longitudinal study, which demonstrated that the family is the strongest factor in the transmission of religious values and that this transmission is most effective when the family exhibits a high level of religious commitment and when the emotional bond between parents and children is strong. His findings indicate that children from highly religious families maintain continuity in religiosity at a rate of about 80 percent, compared with less than 30 percent among children of less religious families (Bengtson, 2012, p. 67).

In the Algerian context, conservative families appear to succeed in transmitting regular religious commitment to their children through a mechanism of parental modeling, whereby children imitate their parents' behavior in

prayer and daily acts of worship. Despite this assertive presence, however, the family's role has narrowed and become limited to matters of morals and etiquette.

These findings are also consistent with the study by Smith and Denton (2005, pp. 56–58), which found that parents' religious level is the strongest predictor of their children's religious level. The authors found that children from highly religious families exhibited the highest levels of religious commitment, while children from less religious families exhibited the lowest levels. This is confirmed by the results of the present study, in which children from open families, that is, less religious families, showed a lower level of commitment, with 40 percent praying only on special occasions, consistent with the concept of “moderate religiosity” that Smith and Denton identified among American youth.

Discussion of the Second Hypothesis: The Peer Group, from Secondary Formation to Dominant Formation

The results in Table 2 are consistent with the findings of Bengtson (2013, pp. 35–40) in his study of the transmission of faith across generations, in which he noted that university-age youth pass through a stage of religious renegotiation that drives them to seek sources beyond the family for answers to their religious questions, particularly regarding sensitive or difficult issues.

The results of the present study are also consistent with several sociological studies indicating that peers may play an increasingly important role in shaping religiosity among youth, particularly during the later stages of adolescence. In a study of more than 7,000 adolescents, Schwartz (2006, pp. 311–326) found that the influence of peer support on religious faith was stronger than that of parental support. This is also consistent with a longitudinal study of 825 Muslim adolescents in Indonesia, which found that religious similarity among friends resulted from mutual peer influence rather than from the selection of friends who were already religiously similar, confirming the active role of the peer group in shaping religiosity among youth (Shen et al., 2023, p. 127).

This suggests that young people tend to consult their peers on matters they feel uncomfortable discussing with their parents, since peers share the same social environment, the same age group, and the same aspirations and challenges, making them more attuned to one another's concerns.

The variation in the duration of companionship can be explained by the existence of an optimal period for positive peer influence. Companionship lasting two to three years appears to allow for the development of close relationships and mutual understanding, facilitating a process of reciprocal influence. Longer periods of companionship, exceeding five years, may lead to routine or the emergence of disagreements that reduce this positive influence, which explains the decline in the proportion of “more religious” respondents in the four-year (59.1%) and five-year (65.8%) categories compared with the two-year category (77.8%). This indicates that reference groups play an important role in shaping behavior, as individuals tend to adopt the norms of the group to which they belong and accept criticism from its members in proportion to their sense of belonging to it.

Discussion of the Third Hypothesis: Religious Media, from a Transmitting Medium to a Source of Religiosity

Recent sociological literature indicates that religious institutions are no longer confined to traditional frameworks but now extend to the media, which has become a central actor in shaping the religious consciousness of youth. In this context, Stig Hjarvard argues that religion in the modern era has undergone a process of “mediatization,” whereby the media assumes functions traditionally reserved for core religious institutions, making it a parallel social institution that influences the formation of religious beliefs and practices (Hjarvard, 2008, pp. 9–12). Hoover likewise argues that the media, particularly digital media, has become an essential space for the production of, and negotiation over, religious meaning, especially among youth, contributing to the construction of religious identity and a reinforced sense of belonging (Hoover, 2006, pp. 34–39). In the same vein, Campbell argues that digital media enable individuals to practice religiosity in new and interactive ways, reinforcing the emotional and devotional dimension through sustained engagement with religious content (Campbell, 2013, pp. 67–70). It can therefore be said that religious media has become a parallel social institution that effectively contributes to reinforcing faith and shaping the religious consciousness of youth, a conclusion consistent with the findings of the present study.

CONCLUSION

The statistical results and discussion presented above lead to the following conclusions:

The family remains the main institution of religious socialization, but the effectiveness of family socialization depends on the type of family (conservative or open). Conservative families are successful in passing on regular religious commitment. Open families pass on a milder form of religiosity. The family's role is largely confined also to moral and ethical religiosity rather than doctrinal and legal religiosity. The peer group is a central context for religious formation, especially in the case of difficult or sensitive issues. The length of time spent together reinforces this role and is associated with increased faith, correction of errors, and promotion of virtue and prevention of vice. Media is an institution parallel to religion that helps to reinforce religious feeling and to consolidate Islamic values, especially if it is regularly watched. Moreover, the three institutions, family, friends, and media, work best together in the religious socialization of university youth, as each institution may fill gaps that others may not be able to fill.

This study makes an important contribution to the sociology of religion by providing empirical evidence from the Algerian context, a non-Western setting, thereby enriching knowledge about the diversity of patterns of religious socialization across different societies. It also offers an integrated understanding of the role of the three institutions, family, friends, and media, in religious socialization, revealing qualitative shifts in these roles amid contemporary social transformations. In addition, the study confirms the validity of Western theories in the sociology of religion, such as Bengtson's theory of intergenerational transmission and Smith and Denton's concept of moderate religiosity, thereby reinforcing the universality of these theories while adding to them the specificity of Islamic culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this paper open up several directions for future research.

First, there is a need for large-scale quantitative studies encompassing universities from different regions of Algeria in order to assess the extent to which these findings can be generalized at the national level.

Second, there is a need for longitudinal studies that track the development of religious socialization among the same individuals across different life stages in order to understand the qualitative transformations that occur in the individual's relationship with religious institutions.

Third, the scope of the study could be expanded to include other institutions such as the mosque and the school, as well as new digital spaces, including social media platforms, religious applications, and virtual peer groups, in shaping religious consciousness among youth

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