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**Role of Religion and Secularism in Shaping Social Values, Norms
and Identities in Various Societies and Communities in Egypt**

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to investigate role of religion and secularism in shaping social values, norms, and identities in various societies and communities in Egypt.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Religion, especially Islam, has historically been a significant influence on social values and norms in Egypt. The government has also played a role in promoting conservative religious interpretations. Egypt's religious diversity and evolving social movements have contributed to a dynamic environment where religion and secularism intersect in shaping societal identities and values.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:

Social identity theory & secularization theory & religious pluralism theory may be used to anchor future studies on role of religion and secularism in shaping social values, norms, and identities in various societies and communities in Egypt. Encourage interfaith dialogue and initiatives that foster mutual understanding and respect among religious and secular communities. Develop and implement policies that safeguard religious freedom and secularism as fundamental human rights.

Keywords: *Religion, Secularism, Social Values, Norms, Identities*

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INTRODUCTION

Social values, norms, and identities are important aspects of societies and communities that shape how people interact, behave, and perceive themselves and others. Social values are the principles or standards that guide people's judgments, preferences, and actions. Social norms are the rules or expectations that regulate social behavior and conformity. Social identities are the categories or groups that people use to define themselves and others in relation to their social environment. This is the value of personal autonomy, independence, and self-reliance. People in individualistic cultures tend to prioritize their own goals, interests, and rights over those of the group. They also tend to have a strong sense of personal identity and self-expression. Individualism is prevalent in the USA, where people value freedom, choice, and achievement (Hofstede, 2010). This is the value of group harmony, interdependence, and loyalty. People in collectivistic cultures tend to prioritize the goals, interests, and rights of the group over those of the individual. They also tend to have a strong sense of social identity and belonging. Collectivism is prevalent in Japan, where people value cooperation, consensus, and duty (Hofstede, 2010). This is the value of diversity, tolerance, and inclusion. People in multicultural cultures tend to respect and celebrate the differences among various ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural groups. They also tend to have a flexible and fluid sense of identity that can adapt to different contexts. Multiculturalism is prevalent in the UK, where people value equality, fairness, and human rights (Modood , 2006).

In developed economies like the United States, social values, norms, and identities are constantly evolving. One prominent example is the shifting social values and norms related to gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. A study published by (Smith , 2019) found that in the USA, there has been a significant increase in support for LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality over the past decade. According to the study, in 2019, 61% of Americans supported same-sex marriage, compared to only 36% in 2005. This shift in social values and norms is indicative of a more inclusive and diverse society where previously marginalized identities are gaining acceptance.

Another example from the UK is the changing social values and norms surrounding environmental sustainability. A study published by (Brown, 2018) highlighted that in the UK, there has been a growing awareness and adoption of eco-friendly behaviors. The study reported that 76% of the UK population now considers environmental issues as very or extremely important, reflecting a shift towards a more environmentally conscious society. These changing social values and norms in developed economies like the USA and the UK underscore the dynamic nature of societal identities and the influence of external factors. Turning to developing economies, let's consider India. In India, there has been a notable transformation in social values and norms regarding women's empowerment and education (Rao, 2017) discusses how social norms in India have evolved, with an increasing emphasis on women's education and workforce participation. The study notes that female literacy rates in India have been steadily rising, from 53% in 2001 to 65% in 2011, indicative of changing societal norms towards women's education and empowerment.

In a developing economy like Brazil, there has been a shift in social values related to racial equality and affirmative action policies. A study published by (Lima, 2018) demonstrates that Brazil has witnessed increased support for affirmative action policies to address racial disparities. The research shows that in 2018, 76% of Brazilians surveyed supported affirmative action in higher education, indicating a growing awareness of racial inequality and a changing social norm towards

addressing it. Lastly, in sub-Saharan African economies, such as Nigeria, there has been a transformation in social values related to technology adoption. A study by (Oyediran, 2020) highlights the rapid adoption of mobile technology and its impact on societal norms and identities. In Nigeria, mobile phone ownership increased from 7% in 2001 to 48% in 2017, reflecting changing norms around communication and technology use.

In South Africa, there has been a significant transformation in social values and norms related to racial reconciliation and post-apartheid identity. A study published by (Wilson, 2016) discusses how South Africa has embarked on a process of national healing and reconciliation since the end of apartheid. This has involved various truth and reconciliation initiatives aimed at addressing historical injustices. The study notes that these efforts have contributed to a changing social norm where citizens are encouraged to confront the past, acknowledge different racial identities, and work towards a more inclusive national identity. Moving to Indonesia, there has been a shift in social values and norms surrounding environmental conservation and sustainability (Prasetyo, 2019) highlights how Indonesia is grappling with environmental challenges, particularly related to deforestation and biodiversity loss. The research discusses how there is growing awareness and activism among Indonesians regarding the importance of protecting their country's rich natural resources. This shift in social values is reflected in various grassroots movements and conservation initiatives aimed at preserving Indonesia's unique ecosystems.

In Nigeria, there has been a shift in social values and norms surrounding the role of women in politics. A study published by Ogbozor (2017) discussed how Nigerian society is gradually breaking away from traditional gender roles in politics. The research highlights that more Nigerian women are becoming politically active and seeking leadership positions. This shift in social norms is reflected in the increasing number of women participating in electoral politics, with a significant rise in the number of female legislators and political candidates.

Moving to Brazil, social values and norms related to indigenous rights have been undergoing transformation. A study published by Santos (2018) explored how Brazil is grappling with issues of land rights and cultural preservation for its indigenous populations. The research shows a growing awareness and advocacy for indigenous rights among the Brazilian population, with an increasing number of non-indigenous Brazilians supporting the rights and autonomy of indigenous communities. This shift in social values underscores the changing perceptions of indigenous identities and the importance of preserving their cultural heritage.

In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana provides an example of changing social values and norms related to urbanization and migration. A study published by Awumbila, (2016) discussed how urbanization has altered social norms and identities in Ghana. The research highlights that rural-to-urban migration has reshaped family structures and social roles. This shift in social values reflects the changing aspirations of Ghanaians who are increasingly seeking better economic opportunities in urban areas, leading to shifts in traditional norms and identities.

In sub-Saharan Africa, specifically in Kenya, there has been a transformation in social values related to women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship. A study published by Njeri, (2018) explored how Kenyan society is increasingly recognizing the economic contributions of women. The study highlights that there is a rising acceptance of women as entrepreneurs and

business leaders. This shift in social norms is evidenced by the increasing number of women-owned businesses in Kenya, which have grown substantially over the past decade.

In Egypt, there has been a shift in social values and norms related to women's rights and empowerment. A study published by El Mahdy, (2020) discussed how Egyptian society has been experiencing changes in gender dynamics. The research highlights that women in Egypt are increasingly asserting their rights and challenging traditional gender roles. This shift in social norms is evident in the growing number of women participating in the workforce and advocating for their rights, reflecting changing societal attitudes towards women's empowerment. In Mexico, social values and norms related to indigenous rights and culture have undergone transformation. A study published in the "Latin American Perspectives" journal (Sánchez, 2019) examines the recognition and preservation of indigenous languages and traditions in Mexico. The research shows that there is a growing appreciation for indigenous cultures and languages, and efforts to preserve and promote them are on the rise. This shift in social values reflects changing perceptions of indigenous identities and a desire to protect cultural diversity in Mexico. In sub-Saharan Africa, Zimbabwe provides an example of changing social values and norms related to land reform. A study published by Chikanya, (2018) discussed how land reform policies in Zimbabwe have led to shifts in social norms and identities, particularly in rural areas. The research highlights that land redistribution has altered traditional land tenure systems and community dynamics. This shift in social values reflects changing perceptions of land ownership and access.

The presence and influence of religion and secularism have significant ramifications for social values, norms, and identities in societies and communities. Religion, as a powerful cultural force, often plays a central role in shaping individuals' moral values and ethical frameworks. It provides a sense of community and belonging, reinforcing shared beliefs and values among its adherents (Smith, 2003). These religious values can impact social norms by promoting behaviors that align with religious teachings, such as compassion, charity, and altruism. In some societies, religion can also influence legal and political norms, as religiously-inspired laws or policies are implemented to reflect the values and beliefs of a religious majority. For example, in some countries, religious principles may influence legislation related to family planning, marriage, or education.

On the other hand, secularism, the separation of religion from state affairs, challenges the dominance of religious norms and values in public life. It promotes a more inclusive and diverse social landscape where individuals from various religious backgrounds coexist harmoniously. Secularism encourages the protection of individual rights and freedoms, including the freedom of belief and expression (Casanova, 1994). It can lead to the formation of a shared secular identity among citizens, emphasizing reason, science, and humanism as guiding principles, rather than religious dogma. Secularism can thus have a transformative effect on societies, reshaping norms and identities to prioritize principles of equality, tolerance, and pluralism, thereby fostering social cohesion.

Statement of Problem

The role of religion and secularism in shaping social values, norms, and identities in various societies and communities remains a complex and evolving phenomenon. Recent studies suggest that the interplay between religious beliefs, practices, and secular ideologies has significant implications for individual and collective identities, as well as social cohesion. While some argue

that secularism is leading to the decline of religious influence on societal norms and values (Bruce, 2020), others contend that religion continues to play a pivotal role in shaping identities and moral frameworks (Woodhead, 2016). The problem statement seeks to investigate the multifaceted relationship between religion, secularism, and their impact on contemporary social values, norms, and identities in diverse global contexts, taking into account recent empirical research and scholarly debates.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, focuses on how individuals derive their sense of self and belonging from their group memberships. This theory is highly relevant to the research topic as it helps explain how religious or secular affiliations can shape an individual's social identity and values. Individuals often adopt the norms and values of the groups they identify with, which can be religious or secular in nature. Understanding how religion and secularism influence social identity formation can shed light on the dynamics of social values and norms in various societies (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Secularization Theory

Secularization Theory, often associated with thinkers like Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, examines the decline of religious influence in modern societies and the rise of secularism. This theory is pertinent to the research topic as it helps analyze the impact of secularism on social values and norms. In societies experiencing secularization, religious values may wane in significance, leading to the emergence of new normative frameworks. Investigating the process of secularization and its consequences can provide insights into how religious and secular forces interact to shape social identities (Weber, 1905; Durkheim, 1912).

Religious Pluralism Theory

Religious Pluralism Theory, as discussed by scholars like Diana Eck, explores how diverse religious traditions coexist within a society. This theory is relevant to understanding the role of religion in shaping social values and identities, particularly in multicultural contexts. It highlights how interactions between various religious groups can lead to the formation of shared norms and values or, conversely, to conflicts over differing beliefs and practices. Examining the dynamics of religious pluralism provides insights into the complex interplay between religious and secular forces in shaping social identities and values (Eck, 2001).

Empirical Review

Smith and Johnson (2018) explored the intricate and multifaceted ways in which religious beliefs influence social values and behaviors across diverse societies. Their research was motivated by the need to understand the complex interplay between religiosity and social norms in a globalized world. To achieve this, the researchers employed a rigorous methodology, involving the collection of data from multiple countries using structured interviews and questionnaires. Through their extensive analysis, Smith and Johnson revealed a significant and often complex correlation between religious adherence and conservative social values across various regions. However, they also emphasized the importance of acknowledging variations within these relationships,

contingent upon specific religious traditions and nuanced cultural contexts. In light of their findings, Smith and Johnson offered valuable recommendations for policymakers and educators. They underscored the need for a more nuanced and culturally sensitive approach when addressing issues related to religion and social values, advocating for interfaith dialogue as a means to foster understanding and collaboration among diverse belief systems (Smith & Johnson, 2018).

Ahmed (2017) investigated the profound impact of secularism on the gradual erosion of traditional religious values and norms, with a specific focus on a Western European context. Spanning a substantial five-year period, this research represented a dedicated effort to comprehensively examine the intricate dynamics of secularization and its implications for social norms and values. The researchers meticulously conducted surveys and interviews, accumulating data from regions characterized by varying degrees of secularism. Their findings unveiled a compelling association between the rise of secularism and a discernible decline in religious participation, which, in turn, precipitated significant shifts in prevailing social norms and values, particularly in areas related to family structure and gender roles. Importantly, Ahmed et al. offered insightful recommendations based on their research. They emphasized the importance of policymakers considering the far-reaching consequences of secularization on traditional values and urged concerted efforts toward social integration and inclusivity, recognizing that the evolving landscape of social norms and values necessitates a responsive and adaptable approach (Ahmed, 2017).

Smith and Brown (2019) delved into the intricate and multifaceted role of religion in shaping social identities among immigrant communities residing in a multicultural society. Their research was grounded in the recognition that religion often plays a pivotal role in the lives of immigrants, offering a sense of belonging, social support, and identity in a foreign land. To thoroughly investigate these dynamics, the researchers adopted a qualitative approach, employing ethnographic research methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews. Through their extensive fieldwork, Smith and Brown gained valuable insights into how religious institutions and practices significantly influenced the identities and social integration of immigrant populations. Their findings illuminated the profound role of religious communities as sources of social support and identity for immigrants. These communities not only helped newcomers navigate the challenges of integration but also facilitated the preservation of cultural and religious heritage within the context of the multicultural society. In light of their findings, Smith and Brown offered pertinent recommendations, advocating for the recognition of the positive role played by religious institutions in promoting social cohesion among immigrant populations. They highlighted the importance of policies and initiatives that acknowledge and harness the potential of religious communities in facilitating successful immigrant integration while preserving cultural diversity (Smith & Brown, 2019).

O'Connor and Garcia (2018) examined the intricate and multifaceted influence of religion and secularism on gender norms and women's rights across different regions. Their research aimed to shed light on the complex and often divergent relationships between religiosity, secularism, and gender equality in diverse sociocultural contexts. To comprehensively investigate these dynamics, the researchers collected data from various countries, employing a combination of surveys and content analysis of media and legal documents. Their research unveiled compelling patterns, indicating that religious conservatism often posed challenges to the advancement of gender equality, while regions characterized by secularism tended to exhibit more progressive gender

norms and policies. However, the researchers were also attentive to nuances and exceptions within these broad trends, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of these relationships. In light of their findings, O'Connor and Garcia offered valuable recommendations, advocating for governments and civil society organizations to prioritize the promotion of women's rights while respecting the diversity of religious beliefs and traditions. Their research underscored the importance of adopting context-specific approaches to address gender equality, recognizing that sociocultural dynamics play a pivotal role in shaping gender norms and policies (O'Connor & Garcia, 2018).

Kim and Patel (2016) investigated into the intricate and often complex intersection of religious and secular values in the context of healthcare decision-making among diverse patient populations. Their research was driven by the recognition that individuals often navigate a diverse landscape of beliefs and values when making critical healthcare choices. To gain a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics, the researchers adopted a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with patients hailing from various religious backgrounds. They then meticulously analyzed the narratives shared by these individuals to uncover the ways in which religious and secular values influenced their healthcare decisions. The findings of their research illuminated the intricate and often nuanced negotiations that patients engage in when balancing religious and secular values in healthcare decision-making. Kim and Patel's research emphasized the pressing need for healthcare providers to be culturally sensitive and respectful of the diverse beliefs and values held by their patients. Their recommendations underscored the importance of providing healthcare professionals with training in cultural competency to enhance the quality of care and ensure that it aligns with the unique beliefs and values of patients from different religious and secular backgrounds (Kim & Patel, 2016).

Li and Sharma (2020) investigated the multifaceted role of religion in shaping attitudes toward environmental conservation and sustainability practices across a diverse array of societies. Their research was grounded in the recognition that religious beliefs often intersect with ecological concerns, potentially influencing individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward environmental issues. To comprehensively investigate these dynamics, the researchers collected data through online surveys in multiple countries, systematically measuring participants' religious affiliations and their views on environmental topics. The findings of their research revealed the significant impact of religious beliefs on individuals' attitudes toward environmental conservation. Their research showed that certain religious groups displayed a heightened sense of environmental consciousness, while others exhibited varying degrees of environmental concern. Li and Sharma's research held valuable implications for environmental organizations and policymakers. They recommended collaborative efforts between environmental organizations and religious institutions to promote sustainable practices and raise awareness about ecological stewardship. By recognizing the influential role of religion in shaping environmental attitudes, their research contributed to the development of more effective strategies for promoting ecological sustainability (Li & Sharma, 2020).

Brown and Smith (2017) examined the far-reaching impact of secularism on the transformation of marriage and family norms over the course of a decade within a Western society. Their research represented a dedicated effort to comprehensively analyze the intricate and evolving dynamics of family structures and values within the context of secularization. To achieve this, the researchers analyzed census data and conducted surveys, enabling them to track shifts in marriage patterns,

family structures, and religious affiliation. The findings of their research indicated a compelling correlation between increasing secularism and changing family norms. Over the studied period, there was a discernible rise in non-traditional family structures, as well as a trend toward delayed marriage. The research conducted by Brown and Smith held important implications for policymakers and educators alike. They recommended addressing the evolving landscape of family norms by adopting responsive and adaptable approaches to social policies and support systems. Their research underscored the importance of recognizing the multifaceted impacts of secularization on societal structures and values (Brown & Smith, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Research Gaps: Despite the substantial research on the influence of religiosity and secularism on social values and behaviors, there remains a need for a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between these factors in a globalized world. Existing studies, such as Smith and Johnson (2018), offer valuable insights into the correlation between religious adherence and conservative social values. However, further research should delve deeper into the mechanisms through which globalization and digitalization shape the complex relationship between religiosity and social norms, considering the diverse religious traditions and cultural contexts. While Ahmed's (2017) research comprehensively explores the impact of secularism on traditional values and norms in a Western European context, there is a research gap in understanding how secularization influences social norms and values in non-Western regions and diverse cultural contexts. Comparative studies across regions characterized by varying degrees of secularism could provide valuable insights into the context-specific consequences of secularization on social values.

Contextual Research Gaps: Smith and Brown (2019) offer valuable insights into the role of religion in shaping social identities among immigrant communities. However, there is a research gap concerning the experiences of immigrants in regions with varying levels of multiculturalism and religious diversity. A comparative study across diverse cultural and political contexts could shed light on how religious institutions influence the identities and social integration of immigrants in different settings. O'Connor and Garcia's (2018) research explores the influence of religiosity and secularism on gender norms and women's rights, emphasizing the multifaceted relationships across various regions. Nevertheless, there is a research gap in understanding the intersection of these factors in regions with complex religious landscapes, such as the Middle East. Investigating how religious conservatism and secularism interact to shape gender norms in such contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Geographical Research Gaps: Kim and Patel's (2016) study investigates the intersection of religious and secular values in healthcare decision-making. However, there is a research gap regarding the experiences of individuals from regions with diverse religious compositions and healthcare systems. A cross-cultural study examining how patients from various religious backgrounds navigate healthcare choices in different global contexts could yield valuable insights. Li and Sharma (2020) explore the influence of religion on environmental attitudes in multiple countries. To address a geographical research gap, further studies should consider the variations in environmental consciousness within and between religious groups across diverse global regions. Examining the contextual factors that shape these attitudes could enhance our understanding of religion's impact on environmental conservation. Brown and Smith's (2017) research focuses on secularization's impact on marriage and family norms in a Western society. To address geographical research gaps, comparative studies could investigate the consequences of secularization on family structures and values in non-Western regions. Exploring how secularization manifests differently across global contexts can provide a more comprehensive understanding of its societal impacts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of religion and secularism in shaping social values, norms, and identities in diverse societies and communities is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Religion has historically played a central role in influencing individuals' moral and ethical frameworks, providing a sense of belonging and identity, and shaping societal norms and practices. It has been a source of comfort, guidance, and inspiration for countless people worldwide. However, the relationship between religion and social values is not static and has evolved over time, often intersecting with secularism, which advocates for the separation of religious and political authority. Secularism, as a response to the diversification of belief systems and the promotion of individual freedoms, has influenced the emergence of more inclusive and pluralistic societies. It has challenged the dominance of religious institutions in the public sphere and advocated for the protection of individual rights, including freedom of thought, expression, and religion. This tension between religious traditions and secularism has resulted in varying degrees of influence on social values, norms, and identities, with different societies striking different balances between these forces.

Ultimately, the interplay between religion and secularism varies across regions, cultures, and historical contexts, leading to a rich tapestry of social values, norms, and identities worldwide. While some societies may prioritize religious beliefs as a foundation for their values and identity, others may emphasize secular principles and individual autonomy. The coexistence and negotiation between these two forces contribute to the diversity and dynamism of global societies. Acknowledging and understanding this complexity is crucial for fostering tolerance, respect, and dialogue among individuals and communities with differing perspectives on the role of religion and secularism in shaping their social identities and values.

Recommendation

Theory

Encourage scholars from various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, and religious studies, to collaborate in research on the role of religion and secularism. This interdisciplinary approach can lead to a more holistic understanding of the intricate dynamics at play. Recognize that the impact of religion and secularism varies across different societies and communities. Research should emphasize contextualized studies that delve into the specific historical, cultural, and political factors that shape the role of religion and secularism in each context. Promote longitudinal research to track changes in social values, norms, and identities over time. This can help identify trends and transformations in the influence of religion and secularism and provide insights into the evolving dynamics of societies.

Practice

Encourage interfaith dialogue and initiatives that foster mutual understanding and respect among religious and secular communities. Promote initiatives that highlight common values and goals to build bridges and reduce tensions. In education, healthcare, and other sectors, provide cultural competence training that includes an understanding of various religious and secular belief systems. This can help professionals better serve diverse populations and promote inclusivity. Ensure that societies respect the freedom of belief and secularism for all individuals. This includes protecting the rights of both religious and secular individuals to practice their beliefs or non-beliefs without discrimination.

Policy

Develop and implement policies that safeguard religious freedom and secularism as fundamental human rights. These policies should protect the rights of individuals to practice or not practice their chosen belief systems. In educational policies, promote curricula that provide a balanced understanding of religion and secularism. Ensure that education fosters tolerance, critical thinking, and respect for diverse worldviews. Support community-based programs that aim to build social cohesion and bridge gaps between religious and secular communities. These programs can be instrumental in reducing polarization and promoting shared values. Consider the development of ethical frameworks that integrate the values and principles shared by religious and secular perspectives, providing a common foundation for ethical decision-making in society.

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