

# Digitalization, Secularization, and the Need for Soulful Education

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## Abstract

Digitization is the conversion of physical information into digital formats. It has many positive effects including making life easier, connecting people, and helping economic development. However, it has also been responsible for social isolation, mental health problems, and increased concerns around privacy and security. Evidently, the digital revolution, despite many changes in people's life, is not sustainable and not equitable. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digitalization but it has also widened inequalities between those deeply engaged in digitalization and those who are not so engrossed in making life digital. To ensure global digital economy to be equitable, it is essential for governments to come up with new rules and regulations, produce upskilled workers, and encourage a balanced approach to life that incorporates both technology and spiritual practices. Technology should be used in a way that is aligned with one's spiritual or ethical values and beliefs. Though spirituality is linked to such religious association as a mosque, church, temple, or synagogue, there are people who find comfort in a personal relationship with God. Spirituality refers to a sense of connection to something bigger than oneself, a sense of purpose or meaning, and a commitment to ethical principles such as compassion, love, and respect. This can be attained through soulful education and the University with Soul.

**Keywords:** Digitalization, Spirituality, COVID-19, Soulful Education, Spiritual Citizenship

## Introduction

The digital world is an important aspect of people's life. This world is characterised by an extensive use of computers, smartphones, social media, video calls, online shopping, and search engines. The digital technologies include, among others, deep learning-based artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, blockchain technology, and the internet of things (IoT). These are related to one another in myriad ways. Thus, the availability of IoT (i.e., devices and instruments) helps create a well-linked digital ecosystem and allows for the collection of large-scale real-time data to understand the problems at hand, model risk associations, and forecast results. In a digitalized world, people use mobile phones, pay with bank cards, and do all types of transactions online.

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Books and documents are replaced by digitized copies accessible on-line. It should not be a surprise if the libraries and archives disappear. Computers are being programmed to replace such human-centered activities like the postal service, taxi service, and secretaries. Technology has transformed peoples' life-style, mode of working, and communicating with friends, relatives and others. Humans interact through mobile devices losing human touch in interactions.

Digitalization, in addition to transforming the mode of human interactions, has also replaced traditional religious influences with secular values and norms. Secularism is not anti-religious but "areligious". It permits propagation of diverse religious rituals as well as with non-religious perspectives. This has led to an increased debates and discussions on social media often challenging traditional religious beliefs, and questioning the role of religion in promoting peace.

Technology is increasingly changing consumers' relationship with spirituality. Buddhists use digital devices to facilitate their spiritual rituals and community building, and Orthodox Jews broadcast spiritual activities via apps. (Altmann, 2017). During the Covid-19 pandemic, caused by the Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, spiritual seekers resorted to online spaces as they found it difficult to engage in traditional physical ceremonies. The dissemination of religious knowledge has grown alongside the rise of the Internet since 1990s. This relationship has intensified with the rise of app culture and other emerging digital technologies (Imam et al., 2023).

## **Literature Review**

The relationship between the digital world and religion has attracted the attention of many scholars. Helland (2002) found many people using social media for religious purposes as well as others passive to religious materials. Campbell (2005), focusing on Christian communities, noted online practices posing new challenges to offline religious community and culture. Subsequently, Campbell (2010) extended her study to analyse how Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities engage with new media. Despite differences, these communities negotiate complex relationships with these technologies keeping in view their history and beliefs. Some studies use theoretical models to explore how religious groups create media and how media practices change their behavior. The Anglican Cathedral of Second Life has been trying to change people's behavior through medi practices. Similarly, Lundby (2013) provides a brief analysis of key theoretical approaches in studying the linkage between religion and media.

There are many studies examining the relationship between spirituality and digitalisation. (Belk, 2017; Kaur, 2016; Van Laer & Izberk-Bilgin, 2019; Belk et al., 2021). Enstedt, Larsson, and Pace (2015) looked at the relationship between religion and internet. Al-Saggaf and Begg (2004) analysed the differences between online and offline communities in the Arab/Muslim world. Kamarulzaman et al. (2016) explored

the role of social networks in mediating and connecting Muslim communities in their search for ḥalāl food, and how such Internet-based interactions can influence religious identity, commitment, community development, and quality of life. Campbell (2005) examines the manner in which internet is used for religious purposes. These research show that both the digital and the religious/spiritual are irrevocably connected in people's search "for meaningful encounters with one's inner self or a higher external power" (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019, p. 391).

Digitalisation has been defined as "the engagement to explore – and deeply and meaningfully connect one's inner self – to the known world and Beyond" (Kale, 2004, p. 93). People engage in such activities to find meaning and purpose in life, and to create a "meaningful connection" between one's "inner self" and the outside world. It means making a purposeful and conscious effort to bring about the ultimate unity of all being, transcending the mundane material realm. It is a quest for connection with the transcendent or metaphysical aspects of life. Spirituality, as defined above, does not exclude religious practices associated with traditional religious institutions. Religion, however, is a vehicle nurturing spirituality for many individuals by providing a road map to understand and express their spirituality. In Islam, spirituality is the focal point of the religion, and religious rituals are a fundamental part of an individual's relationship with Allah (SWT) (Nasr, 2013).

In short, the impact of digitalization on religion is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It has increased the visibility of religion but has contributed to the spread of secularization. How has this digitalisation affected humanity? What is the linkage between digitalisation and spirituality? How can the adverse effects of digitalisation be reversed to promote spirituality and benefit humanity? This is qualitative research using available data and informal discussion with 17 lecturers in two universities (The International Islamic University Malaysia, and the Universiti Malaya).

### **Digitalization**

Digital technology has enabled people to access information instantly, communicate with people around the globe, work remotely, and engage in social activities online. It has also opened up new avenues for education, healthcare, and business. It enables businesses to provide faster and more convenient customer services, such as online ordering, mobile apps, and real-time customer support. It also enables teams to collaborate more effectively, regardless of their location, through online collaboration tools, video conferencing, and other communication technologies. It can enhance the delivery of healthcare services through telemedicine and remote patient monitoring, increase access to care, and reduce costs.

The COVID-19, as stated above, has led to an increase in the use of digitalization by people and organisations, in many areas. The imposition of social distancing measures

required to stop the spread of virus has forced people to adapt to the digital world. Many companies have adopted work from home; people have avoided in-person doctor visits, and hospitals and clinics resorted to tele-medicine for treatment. The colleges and universities have adopted online education, and adopted digital platforms for teaching and evaluational purposes. The market is also affected in that contactless payments have become popular, and the use of online transactions increased tremendously. QR code, similar to two-dimensional matrix barcode, is used offering self-service and contactless payment options.

In the meantime, people have developed mobile applications in order to “track and trace” the spread of the pandemic; and researchers used artificial intelligence (AI) to learn the multiple nature of the virus and find effective vaccine. COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase of about 60 % in Internet trafficking in some countries (OECD, 2020). The instruments developed to prevent and control the spread of the epidemic have further popularized new digital formats, and their applications. (Ting, et al., 2020, p. 26). The epidemic has enhanced the need for cooperation among enterprises, employees and customers to fully benefit from digitalization (Irawanto, 2020, p. 8).

Digitalisation has reduced reliance on manual labour and increased productivity by automating repetitive operations, streamlining processes, and improving overall efficiency, and thus contributed to economic growth. The reduction of physical resources, paperwork, and human labour has the effect of cost savings over time.

Most importantly, digitalisation has made it possible for the employees to work from anywhere, anytime thus providing flexibility and work-life balance. This has become especially important in times of global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been pointed out that digitalization has promoted globalisation as it enabled easy communication and collaboration across geographical boundaries thus fostering a more connected world.

### **The Debit Side of Digitalization**

Digitalization has many benefits, but it has also given rise to some social problems including the security of information; cyberbullying and online harassment. An increase in digitalization is generally associated with mental health problems, social exclusion, and even suicide. At the simplest level, digitalization has created a distance between those who know and those who do not know the use of digital technologies. This may further increase existing social inequalities with possible adverse consequences on access to education, job opportunities, and public services for some groups.

The major disadvantage of digital technology is social evolution. It has given rise to digital addiction, with people spending excessive amounts of time on their devices, leading to social isolation, poor mental health, and reduced productivity. People do

not spend their time in the real world, they feel the need to spend time virtually. In a get-together or any casual gathering, almost everyone is busy on their phones (Figure 1). The younger generation, in particular, is continually living in a world of their own and have lost the sense of sociability. Sramana Mitra (July 3, 2015) points out that:

Human beings are losing their ability to communicate in person. To smile at each other. To converse. To enjoy a meal together without looking at their smartphones. To look into each other's eyes. To touch. To honour food that someone else has cooked with love and care. To be present in the moment without interruption. This is a tremendous loss that cannot be quantified ... a couple sits across from each other, heads down, typing on their smartphones. They are not communicating with each other across the table.



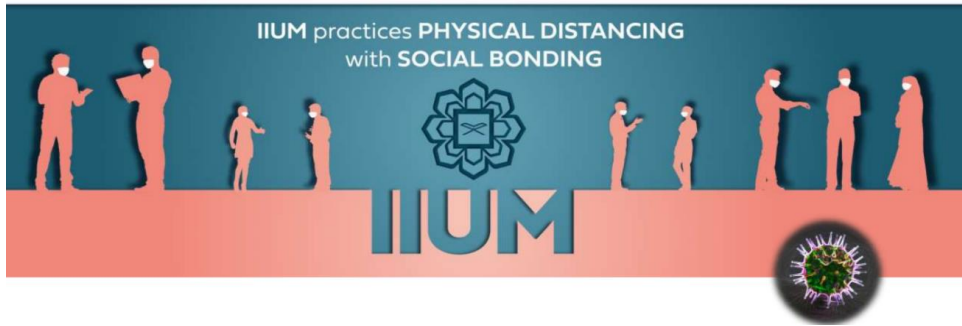
**Figure 1:** Effects of Digital Transformation<sup>1</sup>.

To inform people about the danger of COVID-19, and to prevent its spread, organizations have used the term “social distancing” that requires the public to maintain physical distance of at least six feet from others in order to prevent the spread of the pandemic. The use of the term social distancing, however, has been opposed by experts in the field, on the ground that it conveys the meaning of asking

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<sup>1</sup> freepik, [https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/digital-transformation-isometric\\_26762100.htm](https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/digital-transformation-isometric_26762100.htm)

people to refrain from being social which is unnatural. It has been pointed out that humans, by virtue of being human, associate with each other and thrive by being social. Thus the term “social distancing” is misleading. Instead, the preferred term suggested and used by the International Islamic University Malaysia is “physical distancing” that emphasizes “social bonding” (Figure 2). The World Health Organization (WHO) has, on 20 March, 2020, decided to use “physical distancing,” with the aim of making people remain connected online.



**Figure 2:** Poster promoting physical distancing with social bonding<sup>1</sup>.

Digitalization did help increase the gross national product as well as the depletion of natural resources. It destroyed natural environment, ecological balances, and destroyed a living world in which the generations yet to come can survive and thrive. Digital Economy, as Fournier (2013) points out, is the study of the movement of "zero marginal cost intangible goods" on line. According to Meadows et. al., (1972), digitalization has given rise to five global trends with likely adverse consequences: rapid industrialization, environmental pollution, faster growing population, life-threatening famine, and increased use of non-renewed resources. This report has been repeatedly criticized since its publication, but its warnings about the climate were alarmingly prescient.

Digitalization has also adversely affected the education system such that it started producing workers for a digitalized world. The emphasis of such an educational system is on technical innovation, on training the mind to develop a better economy. The emphasis is on: Manpower, Mind, and Machine, driven by the Market (4 Ms). The education process is less concerned with imparting higher-level thinking skills. Its emphasis is on producing a workforce to operate hi-tech machines and bring about much-admired technological change. The education in the contemporary setting could simply be called WEIRD: Westernized, Economic-centric, Industry-led, Reputation

<sup>1</sup> Courtesy of the office of the Rector, International Islamic University Malaysia.

obsessed, and hence a Dehumanizing exercise (Dzulkifli et al., 2019). The need is to emphasise spirituality.

### **Islamic Spirituality**

Spirituality is generally associated with Islam for its concern about the well-being of individuals and society as a whole, and to ensure safe and nutritious food for all. Islam emphasises the importance of preserving the environment and protecting natural resources as solutions to humankind's many current environmental challenges: "And they go about trying to spread mischief on earth, whereas Allah does not love those who spread mischief (Al-Qur'an, 5:64). Again, (6:141) "It is He Who has brought into being gardens<sup>116</sup> - the trellised and untrellised - and the palm trees, and crops, all varying in taste, and the olive and pomegranates, all resembling one another and yet so different. Eat of their fruits when they come to fruition and pay His due on the day of harvesting. And do not exceed the proper limits, for He does not love those who exceed the proper limits" (Al-Qur'an, 6:141). It is, therefore, necessary to analyse Islam's prescriptions about the world affected by pandemic, the change of climate, and food security.

To tackle food security, Islam encourages believers and communities to take care of those in need. The believers are encouraged to contribute and to take part in organizations that work to alleviate hunger and promote sustainable living. In addition, Islam enjoins upon believers to refrain from wasting resources, even if it is water. The Qur'an is categorical: "Children of Adam! Take your adornment at every time of Prayer; and eat and drink without going to excesses. For Allah does not like those who go to excess" (Al-Qur'an, 7:31).

In response to the pandemic, Islam emphasizes the idea of unity, togetherness, and mutual support among the people, and protecting vulnerable populations. This includes following guidelines issued by responsible organizations. These guidelines include wearing of masks, maintaining physical distance and preventing the virus from spreading far and wide. Islam also urges Muslims to consult qualified medical practitioners and seek treatment whenever needed. Seeking remedy in certain life saving situations is obligatory in Islam.

As for the climate change, Islam wants the believers to be good stewards of the environment and protect the natural world. This includes adopting such sustainable practices as conserving water, protecting biodiversity, controlling carbon emissions, and the like. Islam emphasises conservation rather than wastefulness. Human beings are the agents of God on earth (*khalīfatullāhi fi al-ard*) and in that capacity they are the caretakers of the earth and its inhabitants. "The true servants of the Merciful One", according to the Qur'an (25:63), "are those who walk on the earth gently".

Islam emphasises the purification of one's soul and of doing good and prohibiting evil. The Qur'an 30:30 requires of the believers "to turn your face single-mindedly to the true Faith and adhere to the true nature (fitrah) on which Allah has created human beings." Thus, Allah (SWT) has embedded in every individual a predisposition, fitrah, geared towards having faith in One and only God, and leading a life characterized by virtuous deeds.

Islam requires the believers to take good care of the body and the soul and to live virtuous lives. According to the Qur'an, the physical and the spiritual aspects are interwoven. This can be seen in the daily Muslim prayer which combines spiritual contemplation and bodily movements facilitating a simultaneous connection of the physical and spiritual aspects with God. Prayer must be performed with "khushū' and khudū, with calmness and tranquility of the body and attentiveness of the mind. It must be noted that Islam takes a balanced approach to human desires, recognising the natural appetites for food, drink, and intimacy. However, these appetites are to be satisfied within the boundaries specified in the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet. This Qur'anic perspective brings about an equilibrium, physically and emotionally, and a state of gratitude to Allah (SWT).

It is to be noted that the spirituality in Islam spirituality positively affects personal development as well as the well-being of the society. Believers resort to private worship to establish intimacy with Allah (SWT), the Lord of the universe. Believers are also advised to invite fellow believers to be engaged in worshipping the Creator. Thus, it is required of every Muslim to fulfil their obligations and that they must invite others to the Islamic way of life. They must be generous with resources just as the God is the Most Generous. They must strive to end conflict and promote peace just as the God is the source of peace. In essence, Islamic spirituality is a comprehensive approach that aims to integrate the spiritual, physical, and societal dimensions of human existence.

Islamic teachings are widely available online. Various sources of Islamic education, texts, teachings, and discussions are available on websites. People can access sacred texts, sermons, and spiritual guidance online. Digital platforms offer various apps and tools designed to promote mindfulness, meditation, and overall well-being. It has also created a more interconnected world, allowing people to connect with spiritual communities and teachers globally. Muslim scholars have issued their understanding of the different aspects of Islamic law online reaching to about 14,000 by the year 2000 and continued to increase significantly on a yearly basis (Brockner, 2001). The Internet also brings issues related to ijihad (independent reasoning by an expert in Islamic law) into public view making it possible for every individual to proclaim himself to be an Islamic authority with the right to issue legal judgements on Islamic matters. These statements have created confusions and caused concern among Muslims worldwide (Chawki, 2010). Islamic websites have been disseminating



knowledge about various aspects of Islam but not about Islamic spirituality which requires education with a soul.

### **Soulful education in the world of digitalisation**

Islam emphasizes education with a soul requiring soulful higher educational institutions. It is essential in the world of digitalization for an educational approach that considers not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also the development of ethical values, empathy, and emotional intelligence. This requires a comprehensive examination of the educational system with an eye on personal and physical dimensions of students and the curriculum (Sierk, 2014). The existing curricula, however, ignore the spiritual dimensions in their pursuit of a mechanistic and partial view toward human beings. As pointing out by Miller (2010; 2019), the emphasis in the existing curricula is on objective tests resulting in distancing students from nature. Contemporary educational programs aim at filling students' minds with information and mental content of teachers neglecting the heart and soul of students in learning process.

A soulful education would find ways for identifying students' talents (Nutall, 2006; Miller, 2019). It engages students and encourages them to question the purpose of their life, and appreciate vitality, develop creative capacities, and passes through various phases of life with not much tension (Nutall, 2006). Incorporating such soulful elements as meditation, imagination, and contemplation in the school curriculum will yield much positive results. It will help reduce level of stress among teachers and students, and increase concentration, and enhance safe interpersonal relations. Conversely, it would help reduce addictive and destructive behaviours, and enhance creativity and positive attitude to life. The soul gives meanings to human life, and provides vitality. Ignoring the soul in the educational system would make students nothing but automated robots.

Soulful education can promote responsible and ethical behaviour in the digital world, encouraging students to be respectful, honest, and responsible online. It can help students develop critical thinking skills, enabling them to evaluate information critically, identify biases, and assess the credibility of sources; and thus help them understand the meaning and purpose of life and pass on these feelings to others, which is essential for developing healthy relationships and promoting well-being. Soulful education should foster creativity, encouraging students to use digital tools to express themselves in unique and meaningful ways, promoting innovation and artistic expression.

Soulful education is very much linked to a university which is likened to a living body characterised by the soul as its essence. The university while producing technocrats, bureaucrats, and other professionals for employment must give due emphasis on the physical, social, and spiritual aspects to produce individuals of high quality. While

emphasising knowledge, skills, and expertise, the university should not marginalise the spiritual and moral development of the students. In transmitting knowledge, the university must combine reason with revelation. The "university with a soul" will lay due emphasis on students' excellence and technical expertise but will prioritise the development of such values, such as integrity, and social responsibility. It will focus on developing students' intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual capacities, along with technical and academic knowledge. However, the university with a soul often prioritises values, community, and social responsibility again without neglecting the technical and mechanical parts.

In sum, a university with a soul will help students develop the skills and values required in navigating the complex digital world while promoting fellow-feeling, creativity, human interaction, and social connection. If students are imparted with skills and values, they are more likely to be successful in their studies and in life.

### **The Need for Spirituality**

The digital world provides unprecedented access to resources and knowledge to benefit in many areas including resource consumption, reducing green house gas emissions, and the like. It connects like-minded people and provide access to such activities as religious teachings, information gathering, and resource utilisation. There have also emerged virtual communities arranging conferences, workshops, and virtual getaways. Many people join these virtual programmes from the comfort of their own homes, and take part in sacred practices remotely.

However, these pursuits cannot be termed spiritual. These virtual programmes have many benefits but they adversely affect the practice of Islam and the spiritual well-being of individuals. Some of these virtual programmes have frequently interrupted Muslim prayers and religious ceremonies making it almost impossible for people to maintain a sense of presence and devotion while praying. Additionally, there are complaints from Muslim religious authorities about improper or contradicting material, or narratives that are hostile to Islam. On several occasions, they have expressed dissatisfaction about inaccurate or misunderstood religious decrees propagated by fake authorities online. The internet could also be a platform for the spread of extremist ideologies and misinterpretations of Islamic teachings.

Digitalisation has also led to ecological drawbacks. "Evil has appeared throughout the land and sea because of what the hands of mankind have created" (Al-Qur'an, 30:41). It is necessary, therefore, to understand the impacts of "what the hands of mankind have created" and use these technologies to promote fellow-feeling, privacy, and human well-being. It is essential to rethink science and religion from the perspective of spirituality.

It is, therefore, essential to think of Spiritual citizenship in the digital world, and to think of ways and means to maintain a sense of purpose, meaning, and belonging in the digital space. The digital technology must be aligned with one's spiritual or ethical values and beliefs and contribute positively to the community. Spirituality would help transcend the limitations of technology and maintain a deeper connection to oneself and others, and most importantly, would help bring about a sense of meaning of life and a commitment to promote virtue and prohibit vice.

In order to cultivate “spiritual citizenship” it is essential to use technology as an instrument to bring a positive change in the society. This may require an effective use of social media platforms to raise awareness about issues affecting the society or to take part in online communities that support socially and ethically the positive changes needed in the society. The use of technology in a positive direction will contribute to the welfare of the public and thus align with Islamic spirituality.

Spiritual citizenship requires probing deeply on the impact of online actions, and making conscious choices to promote positivity, being respectful to others, and instill a sense of compassion. The emphasis here is on the intention of using or sharing the content online, and to reflect on the type of impact it will have on the people. The user must be fully aware of his/her biases, and take steps to avoid harmful behaviour and to stay away from such acts as cyberbullying, and refrain from spreading misinformation. In short, they must shun negativity and divisiveness, and do their best to make the online community to build bridges for a sane society.

The burden is on the educational system to produce students not simply for the market but also with a sense of higher purpose in order to make the world sustainable (Machin & Vignoles, 2018). Education as a fundamental right is enshrined in various national and international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the United Nations Education 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). The Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (OIC, 1990), in its Article 9, states:

- a. The quest for knowledge is an obligation and the provision of education is a duty for society and the State. The State shall ensure the availability of ways and means to acquire education and shall guarantee educational diversity in the interest of society so as to enable man to be acquainted with the religion of Islam and the facts of the Universe for the benefit of mankind.
- b. Every human being has the right to receive both religious and worldly education from the various institutions of, education and guidance, including the family, the school, the university, the media, etc., and in such an integrated and balanced manner as to develop his personality, strengthen his faith in God and promote his respect for and defense of both rights and obligations.

It is essential to note that many Muslim and non-Muslim countries are committed to all 17 goals under the United Nations SDG 2030. These countries, however, have not taken positive steps to include universal education and thus deprived the dreams of millions for benefitting from early education.

Education must be equitable in that educational policies, curricula, and resources are geared towards all students regardless of race, gender and nationality. Each student must experience high-quality learning experiences to benefit the self and others and thus promote a sustainable society (Skelton & Kigamwa, 2013). Equity in education would boost student skills needed for employment and productivity but it definitely would lead to improved economic, social, and individual outcomes (OECD, 2012).

Equity in education, as explained by Field, Kuczera, and Pont (2007), has two inter-related dimensions: fairness and inclusion. Fairness requires everyone, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, or family background, have equal access to educational success. The dimension of equity emphasises the provision of a basic minimum level of education for all students. Thus understood, equitable education systems is fair and inclusive allowing students full freedom to reach their learning potential, and thus offsetting the impact of broader social and economic inequalities. Students would reap the full benefits of education and training without any hindrances or barriers (Faubert, 2012; Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007). Students should benefit from educational resources, classroom instructional practices, curricula, and assessments. A cursory look at various national and international documents shows that despite public commitments to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030), the culture and structures of higher education institutions in many countries are yet to undergo the required change (UNESCO 2008: 13).

Dzulkifli and Moten (2022) have summarised the existing overall orientation of education in a five-letter word, WEIRD (Westernized, Economic-centric, Industry-led, Reputation obsessed, and Dehumanizing exercise). This system of education needs to be changed and replaced with a framework termed WISER: Worldwide, Inclusive, Sustainable, Equitable, and thus be mercy to all (rahmatan lil 'ālamīn), (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** WEIRD and WISER<sup>1</sup>

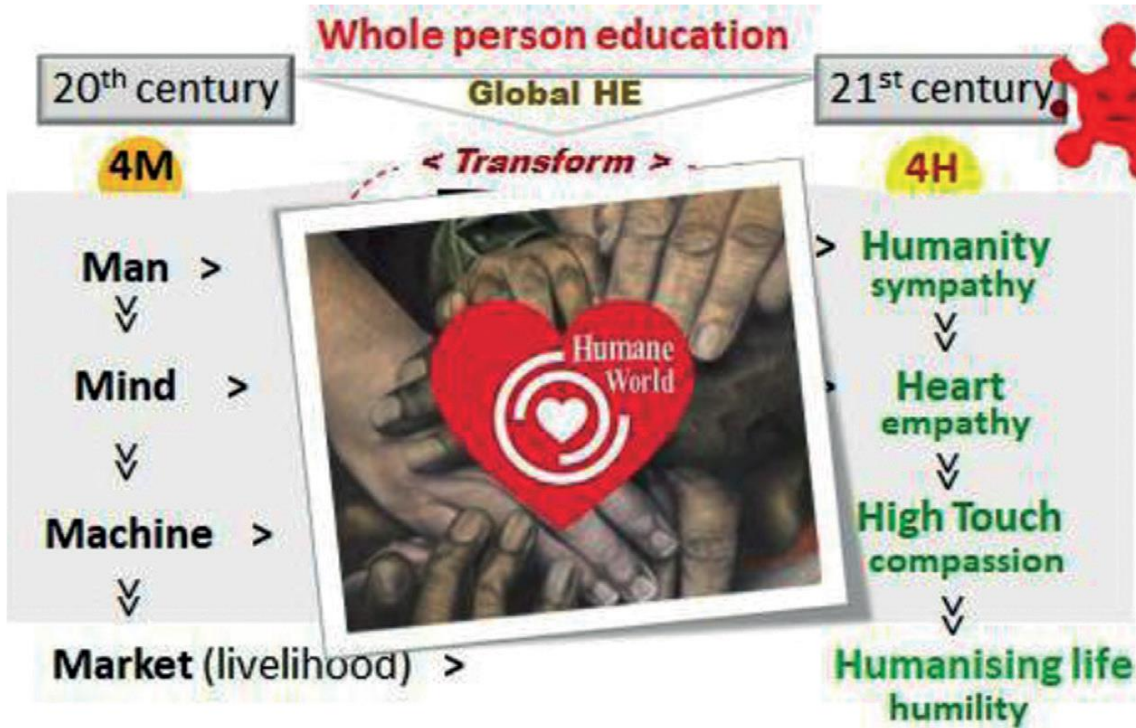
This WISER framework has a higher purpose of life and will result in just and humane world. This framework is in conformity with Education 2030 and is aligned to UNESCO’s five Pillars of Learning for the 21st Century: learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together; learning to be; and lastly, learning to become (UNESCO, 2014, p. 93). The fifth pillar of “learning to become” requires realigning knowledge and understanding to make the humanity and the planet to prosper in future.

Educationists must carry out research in the area of the learning crisis and find viable strategies for a sustainable future. The COVID-19 pandemic is an eye opener for the educationists to be prepared for the emerging shocks to the world’s education system. The existing system of education with the emphasis on man, mind, machine, and market has exacerbated the problems of unfairness and inequity. Consequently, there is a dire need, as shown in figure 4, to emphasise humanity and sympathy especially for those at the lowest level of society; to complement Mind and innovation with Heart and empathy to feel the pain suffered by others; to expand machine and high tech to High touch in order to be compassionate and react appropriately to the sufferings; and

<sup>1</sup> Courtesy of the Office of the Rector, IIUM.

de-emphasise the notion of the market with humanising life. What is being emphasised in the desired transformation from 4M to 4H is to use mind not simply for machine and market but more so to value humanity in all interactions. If the world wants to live a healthy and dignified life, it must learn to sympathise, empathise, be compassionate and cultivate humility. The values are generally missing in the existing educational system geared towards financially secured future which is delusional. What is needed is the system of education with a soul.

An education with a soul will transform young people into adults who will take responsibility for society with excellence and humanity. The existing educational systems have abandoned their mission. The loss of purpose in the colleges and the universities at the local and global levels are highly consequential. The need of the hour is education with a soul. Students must learn to handle subjects in schools for livelihood as well as for life. They must learn a subject, learn to articulate ideals, and undertake their responsibilities to realise those ideals.



**Figure 4:** The whole person education characterized by 4Hs<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Courtesy of the Office of the Rector, IIUM.

## Conclusion

Digitalization has revolutionized the way people live, work, and communicate. It has brought numerous benefits and drawbacks. Digitalization has made many tasks faster and more efficient, made many things more convenient, and has connected people from all over the world. People can now interact and collaborate with others from different countries and cultures. It has spurred innovation and created new industries and job opportunities and help economies develop. However, it has made people heavily reliant on technology, has created new concerns around privacy and security, has created addictive behaviors and made it easier for people to connect virtually leading to social isolation and reduced face-to-face interactions.

Digital platforms certainly offer a plethora of religious materials, lessons, and information giving rise to virtual communities based on shared religious interests. These communities have arranged conferences and workshops from the convenience of their homes. But these pursuits are not spiritual in the traditional sense and hence raised concerns that can impact the practice of Islam and the spiritual well-being of individuals. Addressing these challenges requires a conscious effort from individuals, religious leaders, and the broader community to navigate the digital landscape in a manner that aligns with Islamic values and promotes spiritual well-being. This may involve digital literacy education, promoting online behavior, and fostering a balance between the benefits of digitalization and the preservation of Islamic spirituality.

The educational system must give priority to human interaction and well-being. Digital technology with its emphasis on mind, machine and market, and learning across distances should not be allowed to undermine values, freedom of speech, informational self-determination or lead to oppressive surveillance. A shift to remote online learning has received good deal of emphasis but online learning is definitely not the best option to promote spirituality. This calls for education with soul and the university with soul. Soulful education would encourage students to be respectful, honest, and responsible online, and would promote responsible and ethical behaviour in the digital world.

As digitalization becomes more pervasive, the need for spiritual citizenship becomes more pressing. Spiritual citizenship requires using digital platforms and technology to be consistent with one's spiritual beliefs. It has to do with the ways in which individuals and communities associate the "faith" with digital technologies and the online environment. People should respect their spiritual values, avoid actions contrary to spiritual principles, encourage positive interactions, and be aware of the effects of their online actions upon the society they live. They must promote justice and encourage a healthy online community respecting oneself and others. Spiritual citizenship can help in myriad ways: ethical decision-making that prioritizes human

values and well-being, compassion and empathy, a sense of meaning and direction, and help people feel more connected world-wide.

To conclude, digitalization has pros and cons. It has brought about speed and efficiency in accomplishing many task but it has somewhat eroded privacy and promoted social isolation. In an age where digitalization has become pervasive, the need for spiritualisation becomes more pressing. Islamic spirituality provides a framework for promoting humane, sustainable development. Spirituality does not belittle digitalisation but encourages a balanced approach to life where spirituality and technology comingles. The university with a soul would produce students using technology responsible and ethically and help create, and helps develop a holistic perspective on the world, one that acknowledges mutual relationship, and recognizes the importance of values such as compassion, empathy, and kindness. Cultivating these qualities would enable students to become responsible and ethical users of technology ensuring a harmonious coexistence with fellows and with nature, a sustainable world, and a healthy planet for generations to come.



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