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Values of the Young Generation in the Postmodern World: Challenges for Pedagogy

Wartości młodego pokolenia
w postmodernistycznym świecie.
Wyzwania dla pedagogiki

KEYWORDS

values, young
generation,
postmodernity,
pedagogy, pluralism,
education

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

wartości, młode
pokolenie,
ponowoczesność,
pedagogika, pluralizm,
edukacja

ABSTRACT

The contemporary world, characterized by rapid technological development, globalization, and pluralism of values, influences the belief systems of the young generation. This article analyzes the role of

SPI Vol. 28, 2025/4
e-ISSN 2450-5366

DOI: 10.12775/SPI.2025.4.001

Submitted: 21.05.2025

Accepted: 13.11.2025

Artykuły i rozprawy

Articles and dissertations

values in young people's lives, examining the correlates and predictors of their choices between traditional and postmodern values. Particular attention was given to the influence of sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, and place of residence on the formation of value systems. The theoretical foundation for the study included axiological and sociological concepts concerning value transformations in postmodernity (Bauman, Giddens, Inglehart, Welzel), modernization theory, and approaches to cultural pluralism (Kymlicka, Parekh). The analysis highlights the impact of globalization, individualization, and the relativization of norms on shaping the value hierarchy of the young generation.

Empirical research was conducted among university students in southern Poland ($N = 272$; age 18–54; $M = 27.63$; $SD = 8.64$) using an author-designed survey questionnaire. The questionnaire contained items assessing the importance of value systems (1–7 scale) and 12 statements concerning traditional and postmodern values (Likert scale 1–5). The results indicated that the young generation places considerable importance on values, although their hierarchy depends on social and cultural factors. Key findings include, among others, stronger identification of older respondents with traditional values, greater reflexivity among women in matters of spirituality, and differences in the importance of religious values between urban and rural residents.

The discussion underscores the influence of postmodern tendencies, such as individualism and pragmatism, on contemporary perceptions of values, as well as the difficulties in establishing a coherent value system in a culturally diverse society. In the pedagogical context, the article identifies challenges related to educating the young generation in an era of postmodernity, including the need to integrate diverse value systems, effectively use technology in teaching, and maintain a balance between traditional and modern values.

ABSTRAKT

Współczesny świat, charakteryzujący się dynamicznym rozwojem technologicznym, globalizacją i pluralizmem wartości, wpływa na system wartości młodego pokolenia. W tekście analizowana jest rola wartości w życiu młodych ludzi, badane są korelaty i predyktory ich wyborów między wartościami tradycyjnymi a ponowoczesnymi. W przeprowadzonych badaniach szczególną uwagę zwrócono na wpływ zmiennych socjodemograficznych, takich jak wiek, płeć i miejsce zamieszkania, na kształtowanie systemu wartości. Podstawą teoretyczną badań były koncepcje aksjologiczne i socjologiczne dotyczące przemian wartości

w ponowoczesności (Bauman, Giddens, Inglehart, Welzel), teoria modernizacji oraz podejścia do pluralizmu kulturowego (Kymlicka, Parekh). Podkreślono znaczenie globalizacji, indywidualizacji i relatywizacji norm w kształtowaniu hierarchii wartości młodego pokolenia.

Badania empiryczne przeprowadzono wśród studentów uczelni wyższych w południowej Polsce ($N = 272$; wiek 18–54; $M = 27,63$; $SD = 8,64$) z wykorzystaniem autorskiego kwestionariusza ankiety. Kwestionariusz zawierał pytania o znaczenie systemów wartości (skala 1–7) oraz 12 stwierdzeń dotyczących wartości tradycyjnych i postmodernistycznych (skala Likerta 1–5). Wyniki badań pokazały, że młode pokolenie przywiązuje dużą wagę do wartości, ale ich hierarchia zależy od czynników społecznych i kulturowych. Do kluczowych wniosków należą m.in. silniejsza identyfikacja starszych respondentów z wartościami tradycyjnymi, większa refleksyjność kobiet w kwestiach duchowości oraz zróżnicowanie znaczenia wartości religijnych wśród mieszkańców miast i wsi.

W dyskusji wyników badań podkreślono wpływ tendencji postmodernistycznych, takich jak indywidualizm i pragmatyzm, na współczesne postrzeganie wartości, a także trudności w kształtowaniu jednolitego systemu wartości w zróżnicowanym kulturowo społeczeństwie. W kontekście pedagogicznym artykuł identyfikuje wyzwania związane z edukacją młodego pokolenia w epoce ponowoczesnej, w tym potrzebę integracji zróżnicowanych systemów wartości, efektywnego wykorzystania technologii w nauczaniu oraz zachowania równowagi między wartościami tradycyjnymi i nowoczesnymi.

Introduction

The rapid development of technology, globalization, and the ongoing processes associated with postmodernity pose numerous challenges for the young generation. Changing social, economic, and cultural conditions have a significant impact on the way in which values are perceived and in which the system of values is formed among young people. In this context, the question arises about how important values are in the lives of the young generation and what correlates and predictors guide them in choosing the values that they embrace. This issue forms the basis of the present article, whose aim is to understand how traditional and postmodern values shape the lives of young people, as well as what challenges are faced by pedagogy, which is tasked with educating the young generation in a changing world.

In line with the research questions posed, the article seeks to answer the following: *What role do values play in the lives of the young generation? What are the correlates of value-driven behavior among young people? What factors influence young people's preference for traditional values? What predictors influence their orientation toward post-modern values?*

This article also pays particular attention to cultural pluralism and the perception of values in the context of cultural diversity, as well as the distinctions between traditional and postmodern values. The analysis presented aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges that the contemporary world poses for pedagogy and of how educators can respond to these challenges in their work with the young generation.

Literature review

A. Values and the value system of the young generation

Values are a key element that shapes the attitudes and behaviors of individuals in every community. The value system of the young generation is a complex structure that influences the way in which young people perceive the world, take part in social interactions, and make life decisions. These values develop under the influence of many factors, including family, school and peer groups, media, and the broader socio-cultural context in which young people grow up. In the context of postmodernity, the value system of young people is undergoing significant changes, with consequences both for the lives of individuals and for educational processes. Over the years, the values of the young generation have changed in response to social, technological, and cultural developments. In traditional societies, value systems were largely based on religious norms and social hierarchies, which dictated patterns of conduct. In contrast, the contemporary young generation, growing up in a postmodern world, is exposed to value pluralism, which leads to greater individualization and relativization of values.

Recent research indicates that globalization, technological development, and increasing cultural mobility favor the emergence of more diverse and flexible value systems (Korhonen, Lindh 2010; Humphrey,

Bliuc 2022). Contemporary youth live in a world without a single dominant ideology, overarching authority, or unified system of norms. Instead, they contend with a diverse spectrum of values that they select based on their experiences, beliefs, and needs (Giddens 2010; Humphrey, Bliuc 2022). Growing up in a state of “liquid modernity,” today’s young people are exposed to axiological pluralism that encourages greater individualization and the relativization of norms (Bauman 2006; Beyers, Soenens, Vansteenkiste 2024). One of the key aspects of the young generation’s value system is the emphasis on autonomy and individualism (Peret-Drażewska 2014). International research demonstrates that autonomy in adolescence is not only a cultural value but also a developmental factor that supports well-being and adaptability in a rapidly changing world (Beyers et al. 2024).

These values are gaining importance in the context of postmodern societies, which promote individual freedom and the independent shaping of one’s life path. According to modernization theory, the young generation increasingly chooses values related to personal aspirations, the pursuit of self-fulfillment, and the search for identity outside traditional social institutions (Inglehart, Welzel 2012). This phenomenon contributes to the growing emphasis on values such as tolerance, equality, openness to diversity, and respect for individual rights, which are becoming the foundation of contemporary value systems (Heys 2024).

Another important component of the young generation’s value system is their perception of interpersonal relationships. In traditional value systems, social ties were strongly organized around family and community. In the postmodern world, shaped by technology and social media, young people tend to develop more fluid and diverse forms of relationships (Lewicka 2021). According to Bauman (2006), in liquid modernity, young people often seek relationships that allow them greater flexibility, fewer obligations, and more individual space. Values associated with family ties, traditional forms of relationships, or attachment to stability are increasingly giving way to more open and variable interpersonal configurations.

An equally significant aspect of young people’s value systems is their attitude toward religion and spirituality (Marek 2017). In traditional societies, religion played a central role in shaping an individual’s values. Contemporary generations, especially in developed

countries, tend to be less attached to religious institutions. However, as Inglehart and Welzel (2012) note, the decline in religiosity does not imply the disappearance of spirituality. Instead, young people increasingly turn toward individualized forms of spirituality, independent of formal religious structures. Values such as searching for meaning, reflecting on one's existence, and caring for others are becoming key for many young people, though they take less institutionalized forms than in the past. It is also worth noting that the young generation, particularly in developed countries, is becoming increasingly diverse in political and ideological beliefs. In the face of global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and migration, young people are more inclined to engage in activism and social movements that are focused on specific goals, such as social justice, sustainable development, and gender equality. Values related to social, ecological, and justice-oriented responsibility are becoming one of the most important areas of engagement for the young generation (Bauman 2006). The table below (Table 1) summarizes the values of young people in traditional and postmodern societies in relation to various important aspects of their functioning.

Table 1. Youth values in traditional and postmodern society

Aspect	Traditional society (youth in traditional society)	Postmodern society (youth in postmodern society)
Social values	family relationships, hierarchy, respect for tradition, unambiguous system of norms	individualism, flexibility of social roles, diversity, pluralism of values and relativism of values
Authority	high respect for authorities (family, teachers, church)	different values shaped by experiences, beliefs, and needs
Religion	faith as a central part of life (collective and family spirituality, sustained by tradition), religious duties	emphasis on autonomy and independence
Material values	work and frugality as basic life values	relativization of authority, searching for one's own role models
Culture	traditional national culture, stability of values	a pluralistic approach to religion (individual spirituality, related to searching for the meaning of life), frequent indifference, agnosticism or even atheism
Technology	limited access to technology, greater emphasis on personal contact	consumerism, culture of "being here and now," and quick satisfaction of needs

Aspect	Traditional society (youth in traditional society)	Postmodern society (youth in postmodern society)
Future	work, starting a family, traditional social roles	globalization, mixing of cultures, influence of pop culture/media
Interpersonal relations	relationships based on a long-term bond, marriage as a goal	intensive development of technology, social media as an important element of life (often essential for young people)
Education	value of formal education, school as a main element of upbringing	variability of a career, professional flexibility, and other life models
Family	perceived as a relatively lasting relationship ending the period of engagement, with starting a family being one of the main goals and important values	more fluid relationships, less attachment to stable forms of relationships

Source: Author's own research.

The differences presented between traditional and postmodern societies clearly illustrate the shift from collective values (including family ties), hierarchy, and “cultural solidarities” (Heys 2024), toward values tied to individual freedom, flexible social roles, and consumerism, with particular emphasis on the growing importance of autonomy in adolescence and the individualism of younger generations (Beyers et al. 2024).

It can therefore be generalized that the value system of the young generation is produced through a complex interplay of traditional and modern influences. Values are a key element that shapes an individual's personality and has a direct impact on decision-making and personal attitudes. These values may differ depending on the cultural, social, and family contexts in which a young person is raised. Nevertheless, the value system of the young generation is evolving, shaped by changing social norms, media, and technology. Young people living in the postmodern world are increasingly guided by values related to individualism, autonomy and flexibility, which, in the educational context, poses new challenges for pedagogy in educating young people within such a diverse system of values.

B. Cultural pluralism and value perception

Cultural pluralism, understood as the coexistence of different cultures, traditions, beliefs, and values within a single community, significantly influences how the young generation perceives values. In the contemporary world, marked by globalization, migration, and rapid technological development, young people often encounter multiple value systems. In this context, their perception of values becomes more diverse, flexible, and subject to constant negotiation. Values are no longer fixed or unchanging; instead, they emerge from interactions among the various cultural, religious, and social traditions that young people encounter.

Globalization, as a process linking nations and cultures, contributes to growing cultural pluralism, which reshapes how cultural identity and values are perceived. According to theories of cultural pluralism, contemporary societies exhibit greater openness to diversity and greater acceptance of differing value systems. This, in turn, shapes young people's willingness to adopt new ideas and their ability to understand and integrate values from different cultures (Kymlicka 1995). Young people raised in such diverse environments often face the challenge of constructing their identity amid conflicting beliefs and norms. Cultural pluralism also requires young people to negotiate values, which may lead to a more complex understanding of the world and themselves.

In the educational context, this means that schools and other educational institutions must face the challenge of educating young people in a spirit of tolerance, respect for other cultures, and appreciation of diversity (Parekh 2000). Encouraging young people to embrace cultural pluralism while maintaining their own cultural identity is an important component of contemporary education and is particularly relevant in the context of social development and international interaction.

One of the challenges associated with cultural pluralism is how young people living in multicultural societies negotiate and make sense of different, and sometimes contradictory, values. Although pluralism promotes openness and acceptance, it can also generate conflicts of values, especially when cultural groups hold divergent beliefs regarding social norms, religion, gender roles, or human

rights. In such a context, the perception of values becomes complex and requires young people to develop the ability to select and adapt values in ways that are consistent with their individual belief systems (Giddens 2010). This phenomenon is particularly evident in relation to values connected with family, marriage, religion, and social roles. In traditional societies, these values were clear-cut and widely accepted, whereas in a globalized world, they may be interpreted differently by different cultural groups.

Young people, who frequently encounter multiple cultural paradigms, may experience value conflicts—for example, concerning expectations around gender roles or differing religious norms. For this reason, the perception of values becomes a dynamic process, which is not free from tensions and controversies (Parekh 2000). It is also not without significance that in a world promoting cultural pluralism, young people are increasingly exposed to the influence of social media, which are major sources of information and platforms for exchanging ideas. Social media provide easy access to diverse views and value systems, which makes younger generations more aware of global issues, but also more vulnerable to manipulation and extremist ideologies (Hsu et al. 2021; Weir 2023). On the one hand, the media offer young people a broad spectrum of beliefs and viewpoints; on the other, they can lead to fragmentation and polarization of values, especially in political or religious contexts (Castells 2009).

As regards the perception of values, young people not only adopt external values but also transform them, creating new forms of cultural identity that blend traditional and modern elements. This means that the young generation often chooses values individually, combining them in ways that meet their personal needs and expectations. Values in pluralistic societies are therefore not only inherited from the past but constitute a dynamically shaped belief system that is subject to reinterpretation and transformation in response to new challenges (Bauman 2006).

New research indicates that a climate of cultural pluralism in schools positively correlates with students' self-esteem and sense of self-worth, which in turn promotes their psychological well-being (Oczlon, Bardach, Lüftenegger 2021). Table 2 presents the effects of pluralism on young people, both positive (e.g., the development of empathy, openness to diversity, and personal growth) and negative

(e.g., value conflicts, feelings of disorientation, and isolation). It is worth noting that the positive effects are more strongly associated with educational environments that support diversity, whereas a lack of such support can lead to an increased sense of discrimination and lower self-esteem and self-confidence (see Smith, Wang, and Hill 2020).

Table 2. Positive and negative effects of pluralism on a young person

Effects	Positive effects of pluralism	Negative effects of pluralism
Personal development	the opportunity to explore different ideas, which promotes individual development	the possibility of feeling lost due to an excess of options and a lack of stable values
Tolerance	the development of the ability to accept and respect cultural, religious and social diversity	an increased risk of intolerance and conflicts between groups with different values
Creativity	access to many different worldviews stimulates creative thinking and innovation	identity fragmentation, difficulty in developing a coherent self-image
Openness and readiness for change	increased flexibility and adaptability, which allows youth to better cope in a dynamic world	a lack of stable, enduring principles and values that could provide a sense of security
Independence in decision-making	learning to make informed decisions based on different information and perspectives	information overload and difficulty in choosing the right path in life
Increased empathy	increased ability to understand and empathize with others, recognizing different perspectives	The potential for moral relativism, in which all views and behaviors are treated as equally valuable
Globalization	increased awareness of global issues, international cooperation and solidarity	loss of local traditions and identity due to globalization
Development of social competences	building the ability to cooperate with people with different views and values	isolation from groups with different views, difficulty in finding common ground for interaction and communication
Autonomy	a sense of greater autonomy, freedom in choosing one's own life path and personal development	the risk of social disintegration and difficulty in finding one's place in a diverse world

Source: Author's own research.

In light of the above data, we can see that, on the one hand, pluralism creates favorable conditions for development, increased tolerance, and openness, but on the other, it can lead to a sense of confusion and even a blurring of values, which poses significant challenges for education and upbringing. It is crucial that the educational process not be limited solely to promoting tolerance, but also cultivate

critical thinking skills, the ability to assess the credibility of information sources, and the ability to consciously choose one's values (to counteract the effects of cultural pluralism) in an era of widespread internet access. Equally important is the ability to skillfully combine tradition with modernity while nurturing one's own culture and identity.

In this context, it is worth examining the young generation's approach to traditional and postmodern values in order to understand how changing value systems influence their attitudes and choices. Pluralism, so important to many today, has both positive and negative consequences for young people. On the one hand, it supports development, tolerance, and openness; on the other hand, it may generate confusion and contribute to the blurring of values. The comparison clearly shows how important the role of proper upbringing is, including appropriate actions by parents and schools. Thus, the ability to thoughtfully balance tradition and modernity becomes especially significant.

C. Traditional vs. postmodern values and their impact on the lives of the young generation

Traditional values constitute the cultural foundation of many societies and are passed down through generations through families, religious institutions, and other social structures. In traditional value systems, a central role is played by norms regarding family, religion, marriage, and social roles, which are clearly defined and widely accepted in society. For the young generation, these values still have considerable influence, although they are increasingly confronted with contemporary values, especially in postmodern, culturally diverse, and globalized societies. Traditional values, particularly those related to respect for family, social hierarchy, religiosity, loyalty, and adherence to norms and authority, remain deeply rooted in the lives of young people, especially in cultures that are strongly connected to religious traditions.

Historically, the family was regarded as the basic social unit in which moral and ethical foundations were formed. Family values (e.g., care for others, community, mutual support) were passed down from generation to generation, thus providing the basis upon which

younger people built interpersonal and social relationships. Over the past few decades, however, young people have increasingly revised their perceptions of traditional values. As Giddens (2010) notes, one of the key outcomes of globalization is that youth are becoming more open to alternative values that may conflict with traditional ones. Postmodern values prioritizing individual freedom, equality, and individualism tend to weaken the influence of traditional norms. Nevertheless, the young generation does not necessarily reject tradition outright; instead, they often select those elements that best suit their needs and experiences (Inglehart, Welzel 2012).

Traditional values also influence the young generation through family upbringing. Parents, especially those in families with strong religious traditions, place great emphasis on transmitting moral values that are based on religion, as well as on building bonds based on respect for family and social traditions (Parekh 2000). These values shape young people's decisions regarding life choices, career paths, marriage, child-rearing, and their role in the community. However, it must be remembered that traditional values are often perceived by younger generations as limiting, outdated, or "unable to keep pace" with social change. Modern society, dominated by technology and globalization, forces young people to choose between traditional and contemporary values (which is particularly visible in issues related to free will, gender roles, personal decisions, marriage, and religion).

As a result, traditional values centered on family, obedience, and clear rules—once the foundation for earlier generations—may give way to more individualistic patterns of thinking and critical thinking (Bauman 2006). At the same time, traditional values associated with social responsibility, respect for elders, solidarity, equality, and cooperation continue to play an important role in shaping young people's attitudes, especially in the context of social life and civic engagement. Despite the growing dominance of postmodern values, traditional values still act as an ethical anchor that helps young people find their way in a rapidly changing world while offering a sense of stability and security (Bauman 2006).

Postmodern values, in turn, reflect the changes taking place in contemporary societies, in which globalization and technological and cultural processes play a dominant role. These values are characterized by flexibility, individualism, and diversity. Unlike traditional

values, which tended to be stable and universal, postmodern values are characterized by heterogeneity, openness to experimentation and pluralism, and a tendency to criticize and deconstruct earlier norms. One example is the rising importance of individualism, personal freedom, equality, and the pursuit of personal goals and self-fulfillment (Bauman 2006). Bauman (*ibid.*) notes that in postmodernity, the notion of a single, unified “truth” no longer applies; instead, diversity becomes the norm, which allows young people to construct multiple life paths and identities. One of the defining features of postmodern values is their relationship to individualism. In the postmodern world, the individual becomes the central point of reference, and the pursuit of personal goals, freedom, and autonomy becomes the overriding goal. Values related to freedom of choice, autonomy, self-fulfillment, and responsibility for one’s own life thus form the basis for the functioning of the young generation.

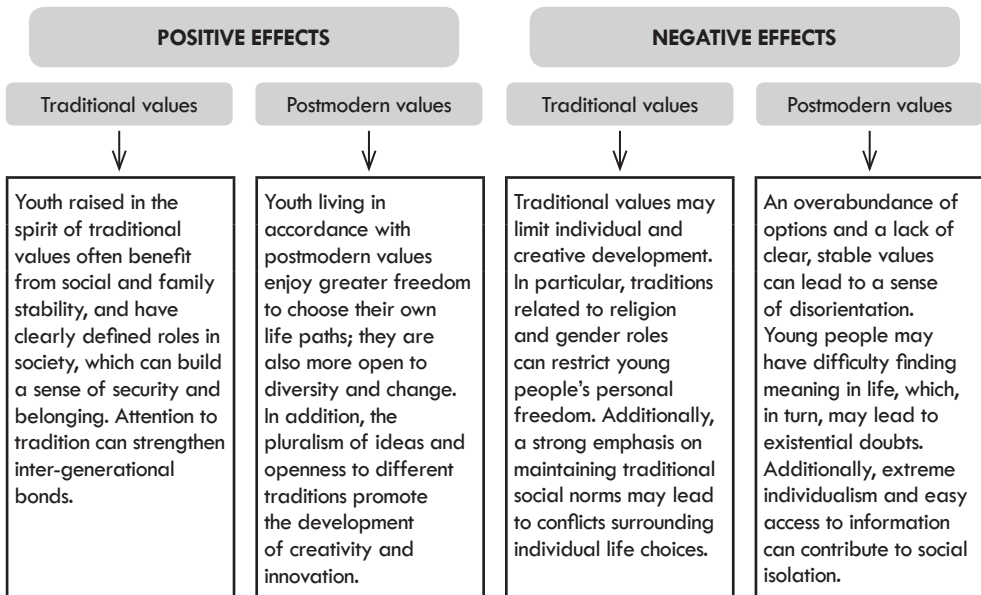
According to Giddens’s theory (*ibid.*), in postmodern society young people live in an atmosphere of constant choice, in which the individual is responsible for constructing their identity and finding their place in the world, often in ways that subvert traditional social norms. The value of individual freedom, especially in the context of work, education, and private life, is of key importance for young people, who become consumers of information and ideas, selecting those that best suit their personal needs.

Another element characteristic of postmodern values is their flexibility and fluidity. In a world where technology, social media, and the rapid flow of information shape perceptions of reality, the young generation is often compelled to adapt to new norms and trends. As Castells (2009) notes, contemporary youth tend to live in a network society, in which traditional forms of social bonds are increasingly replaced by virtual interactions. These changes also affect values, which are becoming more diverse, fragmented, and subjective. The contemporary young generation is no longer bound to a single dominant value system, but has the opportunity to choose and construct their own hierarchy of values, in which flexibility, experimentation, and openness to change play a central role.

At the same time, postmodern societies demonstrate greater acceptance of diversity and pluralism. Values such as equality, respect for other cultures, combating discrimination, and promoting human

rights have become not only widespread but also socially sanctioned. Tolerance for different beliefs, sexual orientations, religions, and other aspects of identity is one of the defining features of the value systems of 21st-century youth (Kymlicka 1996). The following figure shows the positive and negative influences associated with traditional and postmodern values.

Fig. 1. Summary of positive and negative influences of traditional and postmodern values



Source: Author's own research.

Although postmodern values may appear attractive and consistent with contemporary social changes, they also present challenges and come with a price that young people must pay. The value of individualism, while positive in supporting self-fulfillment and freedom, can also weaken social bonds and contribute to alienation, a lack of solidarity, and reduced cooperation. Bauman (2006) notes that postmodern society promotes fragmentation, which may lead to feelings of loneliness and insecurity. Moreover, in a society in which the individual becomes the central point of reference, values such as social responsibility, caring for others and involvement in public affairs may be pushed into the background.

Nevertheless, the younger generation, living in a global culture and exposed to a variety of ideologies, including values related to gender equality, tolerance, environmentalism, and human rights, often manages to combine traditional values with modern ones. This approach enables them to create their own balanced system of values that responds to the demands of the contemporary world while remaining connected to their cultural and family roots. Traditional values, although weakened, do not disappear from the lives of young people. They remain a point of reference that supports them in the process of developing their identity, both individual and social.

Methodology

The survey questionnaire was developed by an interdisciplinary research team (psychologists, educators, and philologists) whose goal was to explore students' opinions on important values in a rapidly changing world. The questions were formulated based on an analysis of the literature on values, religiosity, and their role in life (e.g., axiological concepts, research on religiosity and values in the post-modern world); existing tools and various scales examining similar issues, which were analyzed and partially adapted in modified form (Roccas, Elster 2014; Strosser et al. 2016; Saroglou 2011; Inglehart, Welzel 2012; Huber, Huber 2012; Pearce et al. 2017; Brink, Bekhuis 2024); and consultations with specialists in psychology and pedagogy to ensure appropriate quality and validity. The questions were assessed for consistency with theoretical assumptions and for correlations between items within the subscales.

The questionnaire contained 32 questions, of which selected items related to variables associated with the value system were used for this article: questions about the importance of following a value system in life (participants rated this importance on a scale of 1–7), 12 authorial statements to which participants responded on a 5-point scale (1—strongly disagree, 2—somewhat disagree, 3—no opinion, 4—somewhat agree, 5—strongly agree), as well as items from the participant's personal data. The survey was anonymous, and the selection of questions for publication was based solely on their relevance to the variables analyzed in the article. Research on the values of the young generation was conducted between 18.12.2024

and 13.01.2025 among students at universities in southern Poland. A total of $N = 272$ individuals aged 18–54 ($M = 27.63$; $SD = 8.64$) took part in the study. Regarding gender distribution, women constituted 94.5% ($n = 257$) of the sample and men 5.5% ($n = 15$). The respondents varied in terms of place of residence—46.7% ($n = 127$) lived in rural areas and 53.3% ($n = 145$) in urban areas.

All respondents were students: 64.7% ($n = 176$) were full-time students, and 35.3% ($n = 96$) were part-time students. The majority were enrolled in long-cycle Master's programs (59.2%; $n = 161$), while 19.5% ($n = 53$) were pursuing a Bachelor's degree and 21.3% ($n = 58$) were pursuing a supplementary Master's degree. The sample was also diverse in terms of university type (University: 51.8%, $n = 141$; University of Technology: 27.9%, $n = 76$; Academy: 15.8%, $n = 42$; Other: 4.4%, $n = 12$) and field of study (Pedagogy: 69.1%, $n = 188$; Psychology: 12.5%, $n = 34$; Philology: 1.1%, $n = 3$; Social work: 11.4%, $n = 31$; Applied linguistics: 5.1%, $n = 14$; Other: $n = 2$).

All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and factor analysis were applied. Statistical inference assumed a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

The following research questions were posed:

RQ1: *How important are values in the lives of the young generation?*

RQ2: *What are the correlates of value-driven behavior among young people?*

RQ3: *What factors influence young people's preference for traditional values?*

RQ4: *What predictors influence their orientation toward postmodern values?*

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles and with the approval of the Scientific Research Ethics Committee (No. 2024/12/4/E/3 of 17.12.2024).

Findings

(a) Values and value systems of the young generation

We began the analysis by identifying the value system declared by the young respondents and the ranking of selected values. Table 3 presents summary information on the value system of the young respondents.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics / Values and value system declared by respondents

Variables	Range of results	M	SD	Dominant
Salience of the value system	3–7	6.11	0.98	7
1. I believe that religious values are important for building a just society in Poland/the world.	1–5	3.21	1.34	4
2. I believe that honesty is losing its importance in today's world.	1–5	4.08	1.05	5
3. I believe that equality and social justice are key values in building a society.	1–5	4.05	0.85	4
4. In today's world, traditional values are less important than they used to be.	1–5	4.13	.89	4
5. Excessive consumption of material goods and services has a negative impact on the spiritual development of young people.	1–5	3.81	1.04	4
6. I believe that religion is still a relevant source of answers to contemporary challenges faced by humans.	1–5	3.32	1.18	4
7. Different views on morality and social norms weaken the importance of religion.	1–5	3.45	1.00	4
8. I often wonder about the meaning of life and my place in the world.	1–5	3.71	1.18	4
9. I believe that spiritual values are key to a happy life.	1–5	3.56	1.06	4
10. I have the feeling that in the postmodern world it is easy to lose one's moral compass.	1–5	4.03	0.87	4
11. I consider individual freedom to be a key value in building a just society, rather than values based on faith.	1–5	3.34	1.10	3
12. I believe that young people can find new, universal values that combine tradition with modernity.	1–5	3.55	1.00	4

Source: Author's own research.

The results indicate that the respondents attach great importance to being guided by a system of values in life ($M = 6.11$; $SD = 0.98$). They agreed most strongly with the statement *I believe that honesty is losing its importance in today's world*. They expressed no clear opinion regarding the statement *I consider individual freedom to be the key value in building a just society, rather than values based on faith*. They tended to agree with the remaining statements.

(b) *Cultural pluralism, perception of values, and sociodemographic variables in relation to the importance of the value system*

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that the importance placed on a value system in life is positively correlated with age—the older the students, the more important it is for them to be guided by such a system. Moreover, the greater the importance students attributed to being guided by a value system in life, the *more* they agreed that:

- religious values are important for building a just society in Poland and globally,
- honesty is losing its importance in today's world,
- excessive consumption of material goods and services has a negative impact on the spiritual development of young people,
- religion remains a relevant source of answers to contemporary human challenges,
- differing views on morality and social norms weaken the importance of religion,
- spiritual values are crucial for a happy life,
- in the postmodern world, it is easy to lose one's moral compass;
- and the *less* they agreed that:
- individual freedom—rather than values based on faith—is the key value in building a just society.

Table 4. Pearson *r* correlations between values and respondents' gender, age, and place of residence

Questions	Gender	Age	Residence	Salience of value system
Salience of the value system	-.043	.267**	-.109	1
1. I believe that religious values are important for building a just society in Poland/the world.	-.025	.209**	-.269**	.488**
2. I believe that honesty is losing its importance in today's world.	.013	-.081	-.001	.229**
3. I believe that equality and social justice are key values in building a society.	.043	-.133*	.114	.029
4. In today's world, traditional values are less important than they used to be.	.037	-.055	.019	.090

Questions	Gender	Age	Residence	Salience of value system
5. Excessive consumption of material goods and services has a negative impact on the spiritual development of young people.	-.079	.181**	-.112	.285**
6. I believe that religion is still a relevant source of answers to contemporary challenges faced by humans.	-.025	.155*	-.233**	.407**
7. Different views on morality and social norms weaken the importance of religion.	-.060	.065	-.015	.238**
8. I often wonder about the meaning of life and my place in the world.	-.132*	-.065	.089	.040
9. I believe that spiritual values are key to a happy life.	-.081	.102	-.206**	.449**
10. I have the feeling that in the postmodern world it is easy to lose one's moral compass.	-.046	.036	-.075	.364**
11. I consider individual freedom to be a key value in building a just society, rather than values based on faith.	.102	-.151*	.195**	-.230**
12. I believe that young people can find new, universal values that combine tradition with modernity.	-.037	-.167**	.030	-.094

Source: Author's study.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; Coding system: Gender: 1 – Woman; 2 – Man;

Place of residence: 1 – Rural; 2 – Urban

Moreover, the results presented in Table 4 indicate that women reflect more often on the meaning of life and their place in the world than men. In addition, the older the students are, the *more* they agree that:

- religious values are important for building a just society in Poland and around the world;
- equality and social justice are key to building a society;
- excessive consumption of material goods and services has a negative impact on the spiritual development of young people;
- religion remains a relevant source of answers to contemporary human challenges;
- individual freedom is key to building a just society, rather than values based on faith;
- the young generation is capable of finding new, universal values that combine tradition with modernity.

It should also be noted that, compared to students living in rural areas, students living in cities:

- agree *less* with the statements that:
 - religious values are important for building a just society in Poland and around the world;
 - religion remains a relevant source of answers to contemporary human challenges;
 - personal development is more important than following traditional religious patterns;
- and agree *more* with the statement that:
 - individual freedom is key to building a just society, rather than values based on faith.

(c) *Traditional values and postmodern values*

A factor analysis was conducted (principal component method with Varimax orthogonal rotation) on the authors' statements ($KMO = 0.835$; $\chi^2 = 837.355$; $p < 0.01$). The Kaiser criterion was used to determine the number of factors. Two component factors were identified. The analysis explained a total of 46.84% of the variance. The rotated component matrix with factor loadings is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Rotated component matrix: Factor analysis of declared determinants of the studied values

Variable	Component	
	1	2
9. I believe that spiritual values are crucial for a happy life.	.767	–.119
1. I believe that religious values are important for building a just society in Poland/the world.	.752	–.245
10. I have the feeling that in the postmodern world it is easy to lose one's moral compass.	.730	.219
6. I believe that religion is still a current source of answers to contemporary challenges that people face.	.726	–.260
5. Excessive consumption of material goods and services has a negative impact on the spiritual development of young people.	.707	.122
2. I believe that honesty is losing its importance in today's world.	.591	.329
7. Different views on morality and social norms weaken the importance of religion.	.528	–.044

Variable	Component	
	1	2
4. In today's world, traditional values are less important than they used to be.	.433	.427
3. I believe that equality and social justice are key values in building a society.	.060	.702
11. I consider individual freedom to be a key value in building a just society, rather than values based on faith.	-.425	.579
12. I believe that young people can find new, universal values that combine tradition with modernity.	-.288	.541
8. I often wonder about the meaning of life and my place in the world.	.115	.443

Source: Author's study.

Content analysis of the items allows us to assign the following names to the component factors: factor 1—traditional values: religious, spiritual, moral (reliability measured using Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$); factor 2—postmodern values (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.475$).

In the next step, indicators of traditional values (sum of items 9, 1, 10, 6, 5, 2, 7, and 4) and postmodern values (sum of items 3, 11, 12, and 8) were calculated. Correlation analysis indicates that traditional values and postmodern values are negatively correlated ($r = -0.176$; $p < 0.01$). The more strongly an individual identifies with traditional values, the less strongly they identify with postmodern values. Table 6 presents the Pearson r correlations between these factors, sociodemographic variables, and the importance of following a value system in life.

Table 6. Traditional and postmodern values and sociodemographic variables, and the importance of the value system in life

Variables	Traditional values	Postmodern values
Age	.128*	-.202**
Gender	-.050	-.017
Place of residence	-.184**	.172**
The importance of the value system	.495**	-.106

Source: Author's own research.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ Codes: Gender: 1 – Woman; 2 – Man; Place of residence: 1 – Rural; 2 – Urban

Age correlates positively with traditional values (the older the respondents, the more they are guided by traditional values) and

negatively with postmodern values (the older the respondents, the less they are guided by postmodern values). In addition, place of residence correlates positively with traditional values and negatively with postmodern values. People living in the city are guided more by postmodern values and less by traditional values than those living in the countryside. The importance of the value system correlates positively only with traditional values: the more important the value system is in life in general, the more the individual is guided by traditional values, but not by postmodern values.

In the next step, taking into account all significant correlates of the factors simultaneously, we verified which correlates are significant predictors of traditional values and which predict postmodern values. Two regression analyses were conducted. The results for traditional values are presented in Table 7, and those for postmodern values in Table 8.

Table 7. Traditional values—regression analysis

Model		Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance
		B	Standard error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	15.191	2.249		6.754	< .001
	Age	-.012	.036	-.018	-.327	.744
	Place of residence	-1.501	.597	-.133	-2.513	.013
	Importance of the value system	2.785	.314	.485	8.876	< .001

Source: Author's own research.

The results indicate that, for traditional values, the strongest significant predictor is the overall importance of the value system in life ($\beta = 0.485$; $p < 0.01$). A weaker predictor is place of residence ($\beta = -0.133$; $p < 0.05$), while age proved to be statistically insignificant.

In turn, for postmodern values, both age ($\beta = -0.183$; $p < 0.01$) and place of residence ($\beta = 0.149$; $p < 0.05$) emerged as significant predictors.

Table 8. Postmodern values—regression analysis

Model		Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance
		B	Standard error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.977	.739		20.257	< .001
	Age	-.055	.018	-.183	-3.067	.002
	Place of residence	.768	.308	.149	2.497	.013

Source: Author's own research.

Discussion

The results of the study provide valuable information on the values that guide the young generation, particularly in relation to sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, and place of residence. An important conclusion is that young people attach great importance to being guided by a system of values in their lives, although their value preferences vary depending on these factors. The respondents expressed strong agreement with the claim that a value system plays a significant role in their lives (Smyła 2024). However, the statement that honesty is losing its importance in today's world proved more controversial. The results suggest that some respondents perceive this value as less consistently upheld today, which may reflect the influence of postmodern trends promoting a more individualized and pragmatic approach to social norms (Giddens 2024). At the same time, the absence of a clear stance on the question of whether individual freedom is the key value in building a just society indicates difficulties in forming a coherent value framework in contemporary society, which is characteristic of the postmodern condition (Bauman 2006).

The analysis further shows that age has a significant influence on the importance respondents attribute to values: older participants rely more strongly on an internalized value system. This may stem from greater emotional maturity and reflectiveness, as individuals become more aware of their beliefs and values over time. This observation is consistent with theories suggesting that value systems tend to stabilize and become more firmly established with age (Perry 1970; Ahn et al. 2022). Correlations with gender also provide noteworthy

insights. The findings indicate that women more often reflect on the meaning of life and their place in the world, which may be linked to gender differences in emotionality and reflectiveness. Spiritual and religious values, as well as concerns about the impact of consumerism on spiritual development, are clearly more important to women, suggesting a more complex perception of the issue of spirituality and self-fulfillment compared to men (Mariański 2021).

Another interesting aspect of the results is the variation in value preferences depending on place of residence. Respondents living in cities are less likely to agree that religious values are important for building a just society, and they also view religion as a less relevant source of answers to contemporary challenges. This phenomenon may stem from the greater cultural and ideological diversity found in urban environments, which tends to promote more pluralistic attitudes (Beck 2006). In contrast, respondents from rural areas are more likely to emphasize the importance of religion and its role in social life, which may result from stronger religious traditions and less social diversity. With respect to religious values, these results indicate a clear divide between young people living in cities and those living in the countryside, which also confirms theories about the importance of cultural context in shaping value systems (Smyła 2024).

The analysis also indicates a strong correlation between preferences for traditional and postmodern values. Respondents who place great importance on traditional values tend to regard postmodern values as less important, suggesting a clear distinction between these two value systems. In addition, older participants adhere to traditional values more often, while younger people show greater openness to postmodern values, which emphasize individualism and a more subjective approach to morality (Bauman 2006). This pattern mirrors the evolution of beliefs over time and the social changes encountered by younger generations (Rawicka 2020).

Challenges for pedagogy: Summary

Contemporary pedagogy faces numerous challenges stemming from the rapid changes taking place in postmodern societies, particularly regarding the evolving value systems embraced by younger generations. Youth in the postmodern era encounter various pressures

that shape their attitudes, behaviors, ways of thinking, and the value systems that they tend to prefer. The most significant challenges that these changes pose for pedagogy include the pluralism of values, the integration of technology into the teaching process, dilemmas related to tradition and modernity, and the need to adapt to an ever-changing society.

The young generation lives in a world where they encounter a wide spectrum of values—traditional and contemporary, local and global, as well as culturally and religiously diverse. Therefore, one of the central challenges for contemporary pedagogy is the need to understand and integrate this pluralism into the educational process. Striving to transmit universal values such as respect for others, tolerance, and equality becomes crucial, yet questions arise regarding how young people orient themselves in situations in which different value systems often collide. In this context, education should not only impart knowledge but also help young people develop critical-thinking skills that enable them to make conscious choices about the values they adopt (Świtała 2019). Values such as pluralism, diversity, openness to other cultures, and the ability to understand different points of view are becoming essential components that pedagogy must incorporate into its educational goals (Beck 2002; Giddens 2010).

Another major challenge facing contemporary pedagogy is the need to effectively incorporate technology into the teaching process. The Internet, social media, artificial intelligence, and educational platforms are fundamentally transforming how young people acquire knowledge and shape their values. On the one hand, technology offers unprecedented educational opportunities, enabling global access to information and supporting interactivity and independent learning. On the other hand, educators must address negative aspects of technology, including social-media addiction, distraction, misinformation, and difficulties related to the lack of critical information-processing skills. In the context of values, educating young people about digital responsibility and ethics also becomes an urgent challenge. Questions arise concerning the role of media in shaping values, the formation of competences, and the influence of online environments on social identity. Addressing these issues requires educators to continually refine their teaching methods and strategies in response to a rapidly evolving digital world (Carr 2011; Prensky 2001).

Contemporary pedagogy also struggles with dilemmas arising from the tension between traditional and postmodern values. On the one hand, there is a need to preserve values such as respect for tradition, family, and authority, which form the cultural foundation of many societies; on the other hand, contemporary societies require young people to be flexible, open to change, and capable of adapting to a rapidly changing world. Thus, a key challenge for pedagogy is balancing the transmission of traditional values with preparing young people to face postmodern challenges. One of the questions that has no clear answer concerns the forms of education that help maintain cultural roots while not closing young people off from new ideas and perspectives. Although this question cannot be resolved in a definitive or universally convincing way, pedagogy must nevertheless focus on supporting students in navigating this tension while preserving the coherence of their value system.

Finally, contemporary pedagogy must respond to a society that is increasingly diverse, global, and pluralistic. The young generation faces new forms of uncertainty—economic, social, and political—that shape their perception of the future. Pedagogy must meet these challenges by adapting its methods to the changing realities of youth life (Sroczyński 2022). This requires approaching the task with openness and objectivity, regardless of personal preferences or attitudes. The research conducted shows significant differences in value orientations depending on sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, and place of residence. Traditional values still play an important role in the lives of younger generations, yet there is also a growing openness toward postmodern values. The results illustrate the diversity of contemporary approaches to values and highlight the challenges that pedagogy must confront in order to effectively integrate these differing value orientations into the educational process (Smyła, Szempruch 2024). Education must support young people not only in acquiring knowledge but also in developing the ability to cope with uncertainty, remain flexible in decision-making, and cultivate a constructive response to the challenges posed by postmodern society. This challenge requires the introduction of educational methods that help young people adapt to a rapidly changing world while also preserving their sense of identity and belonging to the community with which they wish to identify (Bauman 2006; Beck 2002).

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