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Distorted Values, Disturbed Minds? Who Are We Becoming Online? Digital Disorientation and the Quest for Inner Peace

Lamara Kadagidze
Affiliate Professor, Caucasus University, Georgia

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Abstract

In today's hyper-digital environment, peace can no longer be reduced to the absence of physical conflict–it must also include the preservation of mental clarity, ethical orientation, and emotional stability. The study investigates the phenomenon of digital disorientation in Georgia, where rapid digitization, globalized media flows, and limited media literacy intersect to challenge individuals' psychological resilience and moral coherence. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach that integrates 180 survey responses and 12 in-depth interviews, the study employs fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA) to identify the configurations of digital behavior, emotional stress, and coping strategies that contribute to or protect from the erosion of peace of mind across generations. Findings reveal that high screen time, emotional overwhelm, and value confusion, particularly when combined with weak coping mechanisms, are consistently associated with reduced psychological stability. In contrast, the presence of deliberate coping strategies and a sense of ethical clarity mitigates digital overload, even among high-use individuals. Qualitative insights further highlight generational contrasts in media interpretation, emotional response, and moral negotiation. The research emphasizes the need to reconceptualize peacebuilding for the digital age–repositioning ethical clarity and psychological resilience as essential pillars of 21st-century peacebuilding.

Keywords: Digital and ethical disorientation, peace of mind, social media and mental health, psychological resilience, generational perspectives

Introduction

Peace today is no longer limited to the absence of war; it also involves the preservation of mental clarity, ethical stability, and individual autonomy in a world flooded with algorithmic influence, manipulative media, and cultural disintegration. In the Georgian context–representative of societies balancing inherited moral frameworks and accelerated digital influence–inner peace is increasingly threatened by emotional overload, value fragmentation, and ethical confusion. Recent research underlines that digital ecosystems can fragment personal identity, weaken informational self-determination, and erode autonomy in ways that directly challenge psychological and moral stability (Vardanyan, Hamuľák, & Kocharyan, 2024).

While global attention remains focused on geopolitical conflicts such as Russia–Ukraine or Iran–Israel, a more subtle yet pervasive struggle is emerging within the human psyche. Digital warfare, information pollution, and emotional manipulation are steadily undermining psychological resilience and moral orientation. Recent Georgian research highlights how trolls, bots, and propaganda-driven misinformation accelerate these processes, amplifying disorientation and undermining trust in digital environments (Khazhomia, 2025). Studies of digital well-being highlight how constant connectivity and push–pull factors between online and offline life intensify emotional fatigue and mental imbalance, further complicating the preservation of inner stability (Meinhardt, Belz, & Rukzio, 2023). These forces are particularly potent in Georgia, where underdeveloped media literacy structures and unresolved cultural tensions amplify the psychological and ethical impact of digital overexposure.

This study addresses a largely underexplored problem: the erosion of peace of mind and moral coherence in the digital age. We argue that this is not merely a psychological concern but a civilizational rupture, in which digital ecosystems reshape foundational cognitive and ethical frameworks. Recent scholarship demonstrates that identity construction itself is increasingly platform-dependent, shaped by the plurality of digital contexts in which individuals participate (Soh, 2024). Moving beyond generalized media criticism, the research investigates the complex configurations of digital behaviors and socio-emotional conditions that contribute to or protect against psychological and moral disorientation.

The aim of the study is to identify which combinations of factors–ranging from screen time and value confusion to coping strategies and age group–are associated with individuals' perceived ability to maintain peace of mind in a digitized environment. The research employs fuzzy-set Qualitative

Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA) to uncover causal complexity and identify configurations of conditions that may be necessary or sufficient for the erosion or preservation of inner stability. While digital interventions such as mental health apps and AI-driven tools are increasingly promoted, evidence suggests that low engagement and high attrition limit their long-term effectiveness, raising new questions about resilience and coping in digital societies (Smith et al., 2025).

To guide this investigation, the study poses the following primary research questions:

1. How do different generations in Georgia perceive changes in societal values influenced by digital platforms and mass media?
2. What are the reported psychological effects of digital exposure (e.g., social media, online news, algorithm-driven content) across generational lines?
3. To what extent do individuals across age groups experience a sense of inner peace or disorientation in today's digital environment?
4. What coping mechanisms or ethical frameworks (if any) are employed to maintain personal and moral stability amid value fragmentation?

Additionally, secondary questions explore more nuanced dynamics:

- Are there observable generational differences in attitudes toward online content, misinformation, or value conflict?
- How does trust in traditional versus digital media relate to one's sense of stability or peace?
- What types of content or platforms are most frequently associated with emotional unrest?

By bridging insights from peace studies, media studies, and value psychology, this study contributes to a growing interdisciplinary discourse on mental peace in the digital era. It argues for the inclusion of ethical clarity and psychological well-being as central components of peacebuilding in an age where conflict increasingly manifests internally.

The article proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature on digital saturation, psychological fatigue, and ethical disruption; Section 3 presents the mixed-methods design and analytical strategy; Section 4 reports the quantitative, fs/QCA, and qualitative findings; Section 5 discusses implications across generations and societal contexts; and Section 6 offers concluding reflections and directions for future research.

Literature Review

Traditionally, peace has been defined in terms of political stability, absence of war, or structural justice. However, contemporary scholars increasingly argue that peace must include dimensions of psychological and

emotional well-being (Galtung, 1996; Ramsbotham et al., 2011). In digital societies, where conflict can manifest through information warfare and emotional manipulation, the concept of peace expands beyond physical borders to internal landscapes. Mental clarity, emotional regulation, and moral coherence emerge as essential forms of personal peace. This reframing aligns with the growing scholarship on "positive peace," which includes mental health, personal autonomy, and value integrity as components of social harmony (Richmond, 2023).

Digital platforms increasingly shape the emotional rhythms and mental health of individuals across the globe. Numerous studies highlight how constant connectivity and algorithmically curated content contribute to emotional fatigue, attentional fragmentation, and rising anxiety levels (Rosen et al., 2013; Montag et al., 2020). Social media in particular is associated with overstimulation, identity confusion, and emotional burnout, especially among younger users (Twenge & Campbell, 2010). These effects can undermine the stability of inner peace and contribute to chronic stress or even digital dependency disorders (Andreassen et al., 2012). The accelerated pace of content exposure and emotional provocation has also been linked to increases in psychological fragility and lowered thresholds for distress (Wang & Deng, 2022).

Digital ecosystems not only alter cognition but reshape morality. Scholars have argued that social media platforms foster a kind of moral relativism, where ethical judgments are guided more by online popularity than by consistent value frameworks (Turkle, 2011; Han, 2017). In post-Soviet societies such as Georgia, where traditional values remain culturally significant, the tension between inherited norms and globalized digital ethics can result in moral dissonance and identity instability (Badzaghua, 2018; Tsipuria, 2016). The fragmentation of shared truths–accelerated by disinformation, algorithmic bias, and viral superficiality–can erode civic trust and increase ethical confusion (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Ess, 2020).

Age remains a critical factor in how digital content is perceived, internalized, and coped with. Younger generations tend to adopt technology more quickly but also report higher levels of anxiety, cyberbullying exposure, and emotional exhaustion (Keles et al., 2019). Older adults, while less digitally native, often face confusion or alienation due to the pace and values of online life (Nimrod, 2016). Research shows generational gaps in digital literacy and moral interpretation, with middle-aged users frequently mediating between traditional values and modern digital ethics (Livingstone et al., 2011; Cotten et al., 2014). These differences make generational analysis vital to understanding digital disorientation and inner peace.

The study draws from an interdisciplinary blend of theories. Inner peace, defined as a state of emotional and ethical balance, is often rooted in

traditions of contemplative psychology and peace philosophy (Hanh, 1994; Rinpoche, 1992). Cognitive overload theory explains how excessive digital input disrupts mental organization and reduces the capacity for reflection (Sweller, 1988; Paas et al., 2003). Meanwhile, moral clarity–the ability to distinguish right from wrong–is challenged in contexts where information is overwhelming or contradictory (Bauman, 2000). These frameworks together support the argument that digital life must be evaluated not only technologically, but ethically and psychologically.

These theoretical lenses help explain the layered relationship between media environments and individuals' internal states of peace and confusion. They also reveal the limitations of linear models in capturing the complex, dynamic nature of digital disorientation across individuals and generations. Given the multifaceted nature of psychological and moral disorientation, a methodological approach capable of addressing complexity is essential. Fs/QCA is particularly well-suited for capturing the interplay of multiple conditions and identifying configurations–not just single variables–that lead to specific outcomes (Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). It allows for causal asymmetry and equifinality, meaning different paths may lead to peace of mind or its absence. Recent studies have applied fs/QCA in fields such as health psychology, media effects, and education to explore how combinations of exposure, context, and coping shape mental outcomes (Kane et al., 2014; Misangyi et al., 2017). This makes fs/QCA both a theoretically and empirically appropriate method for investigating digital peace in cross-generational Georgian society. Building on this conceptual foundation and the identified gaps in existing literature, the following section outlines the study's methodological framework, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative strategies to explore how diverse digital experiences influence inner peace across generational lines.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design with an explanatory and exploratory orientation, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the psychological and ethical implications of digital media use across different generations in Georgia. By employing both a structured survey (see Appendix 1) and open-ended in-depth interviews (see Appendix 2), the study combines breadth of coverage with depth of understanding. The methodological framework is situated at the intersection of peace studies, communication theory, and moral psychology, and is supported by fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA) to identify complex causal patterns rather than isolated variables. The inclusion criterion required participants to be aged 16 years or older because individuals below

this age are considered minors under Georgian ethical research standards and would require additional parental consent procedures that were not feasible in an online design. This threshold also ensured sufficient cognitive and digital literacy for valid self-reporting on psychological and moral constructs.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved a total of 192 participants, comprising 180 survey respondents and 12 in-depth interviewees, representing diverse age groups, genders, and geographic settings within Georgia. The survey participants were distributed as follows (see **Figure 1**):

- Youth (16–24 years): 64.4% (n=116)
- Young Adults (25–35 years): 15% (n=27)
- Middle Adults (36–44 years): 4.4% (n=8)
- Older Adults (45–65 years): 11.1% (n=20)
- Elderly (66+ years): 5% (n=9)

The predominance of youth participants (n = 116) reflects both the recruitment channels–university networks and digital platforms most frequented by younger users–and the study's focus on generations most immersed in online life. This larger youth subsample is analytically significant, as it captures the segment of Georgian society most exposed to algorithmic influence and digital value shifts, thereby providing a critical baseline for generational comparison.

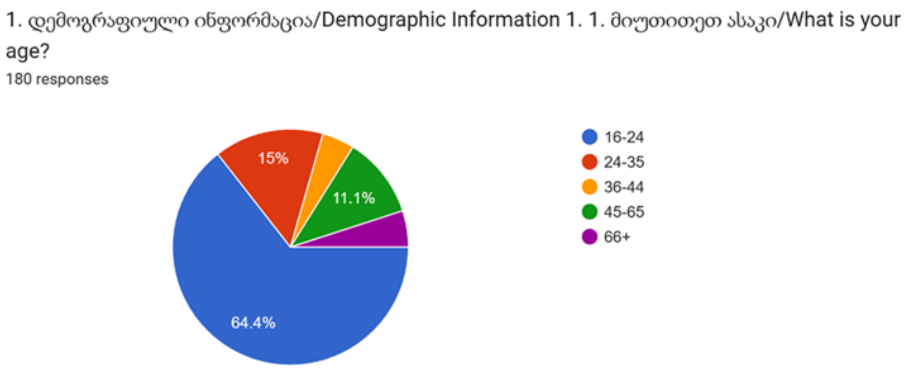

Figure 1: Age of survey participants

The sample was obtained through purposive and snowball sampling, primarily via university student networks, social media platforms, and intergenerational family referrals. This approach allowed for deliberate inclusion of voices from across Georgia's generational spectrum. Interview

participants were selected to reflect variation in age, gender, profession, and digital literacy.

Data Collection Procedures

The online survey was administered via Google Forms and consisted of both close-ended and open-ended items. The structured part of the questionnaire was organized into six thematic blocks:

1. Demographic background
2. Digital media exposure and use patterns
3. Perceived emotional and psychological effects
4. Value fragmentation and ethical disorientation
5. Generational perceptions of digital harm
6. Coping strategies and views on peace of mind

The questionnaire was self-developed by the author, drawing upon prior validated scales in media-psychology and ethics research (Rosen et al., 2013; Andreassen et al., 2012). Each thematic block was generated from theoretical constructs identified in the literature review, followed by expert consultation with two psychologists and one communication scholar to ensure face and content validity. The instrument was pilot-tested with 12 participants to check item clarity and internal coherence before full distribution. Response categories such as "frequently," "agree," and "strongly agree" followed the conventional five-point Likert scaling (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), thereby ensuring consistent interpretation across respondents.

Reliability and Psychometric Evaluation

We calculated internal-consistency estimates (Cronbach's alpha) and conducted an exploratory psychometric inspection of the Likert items. Cronbach's alpha for the five items probing value fragmentation and ethical concern (Section 4) was 0.839, indicating good internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha for the four items addressing perceived emotional/psychological effects (Section 3) was 0.645; however, item-level analysis showed that the single item measuring explicit maintenance of inner peace (the "I am able to maintain inner peace …" item) had a very low item–total correlation and, per EFA, loaded on a separate factor. The combined set of the nine Likert items yielded an overall alpha of 0.821. An exploratory factor analysis (PCA/EFA) on complete cases (n = 139) returned three components with eigenvalues > 1 (3.97, 1.33, 1.12) explaining about 70.7% of variance; the "inner peace" item loaded strongly on the third factor, suggesting it taps a conceptually distinct dimension. Given sample-size considerations, more advanced confirmatory procedures (CFA) and item response theory (IRT) analyses were not undertaken here but are

recommended for future validation work The internal consistency and factor structure of the survey scales are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability and Factor Structure of the Survey Scales

Thematic Block	No. of Items	Cronbach's α	Example Item	Key EFA Result
Perceived emotional and psychological effects	4	0.645	"Digital content often makes me anxious or mentally tired."	Single factor; "inner peace" item loaded separately
Value fragmentation and ethical disorientation	5	0.839	"I often feel confused about what is morally right online."	One dominant factor explaining most variance
Combined Likert items (Blocks 3 and 4)	9	0.821	–	Three components (eigenvalues: 3.97, 1.33, 1.12); cumulative variance ≈ 70.7%

Items included Likert-scale ratings, multiple-choice questions, and optional narrative responses. A total of 180 valid survey responses were collected and exported for analysis.

To complement the quantitative findings, 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in Georgian, later transcribed and translated for analysis. The interview guide addressed topics such as:

- Daily experiences with digital platforms
- Emotional reactions to online content
- Shifts in personal and societal values
- Perceptions of AI and algorithmic influence
- Ethical boundaries and coping mechanisms
- Intergenerational concerns and hopes

Each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and was conducted either in person or via secure video conferencing. Participants provided verbal informed consent and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

The interview guide was developed in alignment with the six survey dimensions and reviewed by two qualitative-method experts to confirm conceptual coherence and cultural appropriateness. Questions were open-ended and pilot-tested with two participants to refine wording and sequence. The validation process ensured that both instruments–the survey and the interviews–measured comparable constructs of digital stress, coping, and moral orientation.

Data Analysis Strategy

The quantitative data were analyzed using fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA), the outcome of interest was defined as perceived peace of mind in the digital era. Five key conditions were selected from the survey data:

1. Daily screen time
2. Frequency of emotional stress caused by digital content
3. Perceived value confusion or ethical disorientation
4. Digital coping behavior (e.g., screen time limits, content avoidance)
5. Generational group (based on age category)

Responses were calibrated into fuzzy-set values ranging from 0 to 1, using theoretical and empirical thresholds. A truth table was constructed to examine all logically possible combinations of conditions, and through logical minimization, the analysis identified core configurations that were sufficient or necessary for the presence (see **Table 4**) or absence (see **Table 5**) of the outcome–perceived peace of mind. These configurations are presented in the Results section.

Operational Definitions.

For conceptual clarity, the key constructs were operationalized as follows:

- **Coping strategies** refer to deliberate behavioral or cognitive actions (e.g., screen-time limitation, mindfulness, religious or cultural rituals, social support) aimed at reducing digital-induced stress.
- **Societal values** denote shared cultural and moral norms perceived as guiding collective behavior in Georgian society.
- **Inner peace** is defined as an individual's perceived state of mental clarity, emotional equilibrium, and ethical coherence amid digital stimuli.
- **Value fragmentation** describes the perceived inconsistency or conflict among moral norms encountered online versus offline.

This explicit operationalization ensured consistency between quantitative indicators and qualitative interpretations in the subsequent analysis.

Qualitative Thematic Interpretation

The in-depth interview data and open-ended survey responses underwent inductive thematic interpretation, focusing on generational differences and emotional tone. This qualitative layer was used to:

- Contextualize and interpret fs/QCA findings
- Reveal symbolic and moral language in how individuals describe digital disorientation

- Illustrate coping strategies and generational worldviews
- Highlight contradictions or consistencies between perceived peace and digital experience

Quotes from participants were translated with cultural sensitivity and used to enrich theoretical interpretations in the discussion.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to ethical research principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. Survey participants consented before submitting responses, and no identifying information was collected. Interviewees were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and all conversations were recorded with verbal consent for academic use only.

As the survey was administered online, potential methodological limitations–such as response bias, self-selection, and possible misinterpretation of questions–were acknowledged. Measures to reduce these limitations included clear language, optional open-ended clarifications, and cross-checking quantitative and qualitative results for consistency.

Results

This section presents findings from both the quantitative survey (n = 180) and the in-depth interviews (n = 12), followed by a fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA) that identifies causal configurations associated with perceived peace of mind. To ensure logical flow and transparency, results are organized into three analytically linked parts: (1) descriptive statistics outlining overall digital behavior and emotional responses; (2) qualitative themes illustrating value-related and generational differences; and (3) fs/QCA configurations showing causal combinations leading to high or low peace of mind. This structure directly reflects the mixed-method and configurational research design described earlier.

Descriptive Survey Findings

Respondents across all age groups reported high levels of digital engagement and emotional reactivity to online content. As shown in **Figure 2**, 38.4% of participants reported spending six hours and more daily on digital platforms. In parallel, 87.8% of respondents use social media frequently or very frequently (see **Figure 3**).

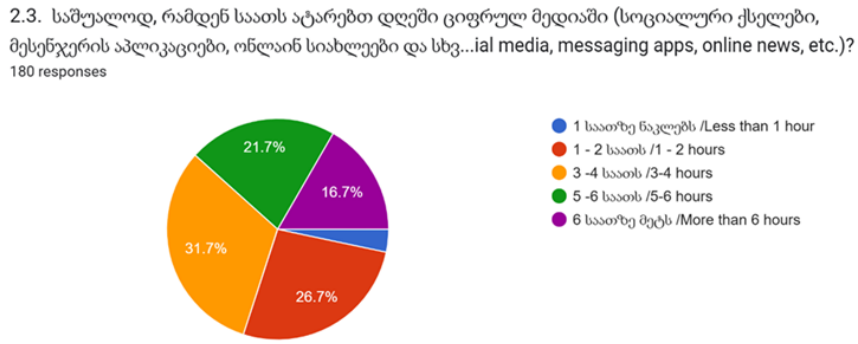

Figure 2: Daily screen time distribution

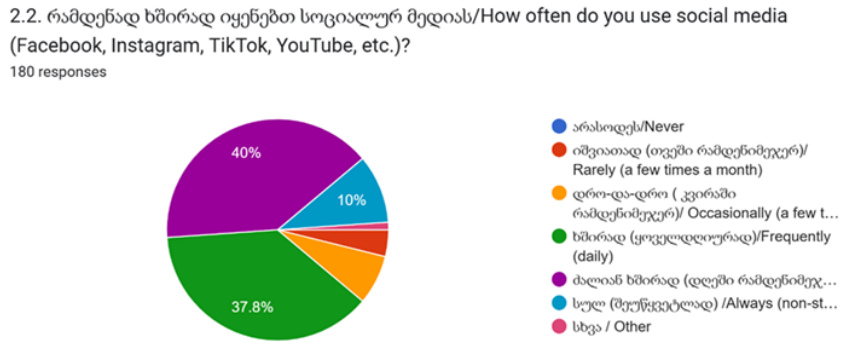

Figure 3: Social media usage frequency

Emotional strain was widespread. A total of 75.4% reported experiencing emotional stress from online content at least sometimes (see **Figure 4**), while 58.4% had attempted digital detox strategies to restore peace of mind (see **Figure 5**). Notably, 45.2% were unsure whether mental peace was possible in the digital era (see **Figure 6**).

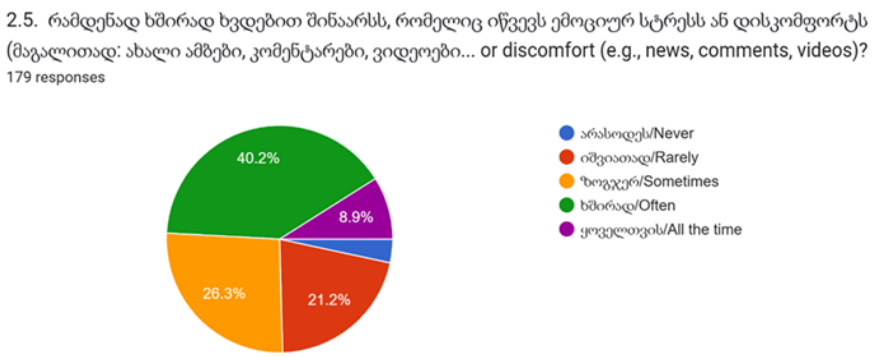

Figure 4: Peace of mind protection attempts

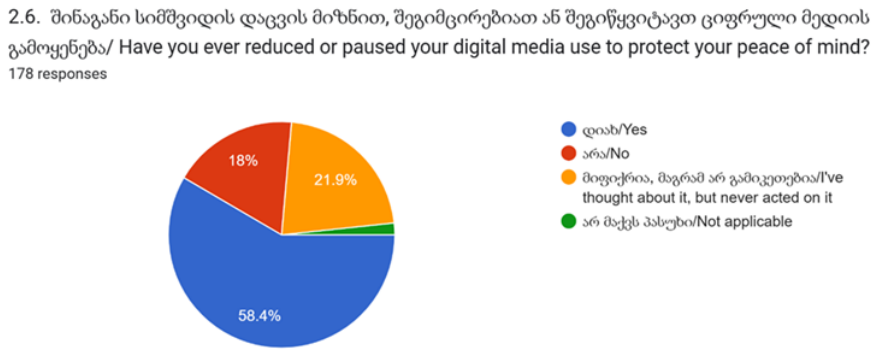

Figure 5: Emotional stress from online content

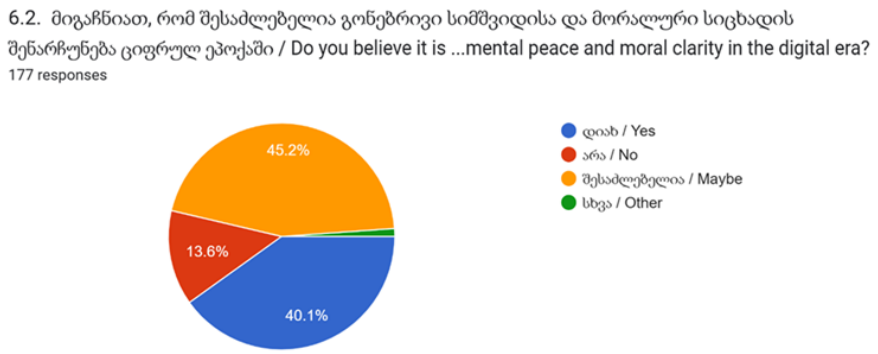

Figure 6: Belief in the possibility of peace of mind

These data indicate that psychological tension and ethical uncertainty are common across generations, confirming that digital saturation in Georgia is accompanied by significant emotional cost. The survey responses also reflect the earlier-defined operational constructs–particularly the coexistence of value fragmentation and coping behaviors–thereby ensuring continuity between the quantitative findings and fs/QCA calibration.

Table 2 summarizes responses to Likert-scale items concerning emotional fatigue and value confusion. A majority agreed or strongly agreed that digital life contributes to moral ambiguity, cultural distortion, and psychological fatigue.

Table 2: Summary of Likert-scale responses on fatigue and value confusion

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)
a. Digital media often overwhelms me emotionally.	12	16	44	58	50	60.0%
b. I feel mentally fatigued after spending time online.	8	10	41	66	55	67.2%
c. I am able to maintain inner peace despite constant exposure to media.	14	38	51	48	29	42.8% *(reverse scale)*
d. I notice more anxiety or stress when I spend more time online.	9	13	39	63	56	66.1%
e. Social media distorts traditional cultural or ethical values.	6	8	30	62	74	75.6%
f. Online platforms promote superficial lifestyles or materialism.	4	7	28	66	75	78.9%
g. It's harder now to distinguish right from wrong due to digital media.	5	11	34	64	66	72.2%
h. People care more about popularity than morality.	3	9	26	68	74	78.9%
i. Digital media has changed how we define what is "good" or "normal."	7	12	30	64	67	72.8%

The distribution of "agree" and "strongly agree" responses confirms that moral confusion and emotional fatigue are not marginal phenomena but core aspects of digital experience. This alignment strengthens the validity of the constructs used later in fs/QCA modeling.

Qualitative Interview Insights

Twelve in-depth interviews enriched the quantitative data with generationally specific narratives. Younger participants described digital environments as "mentally exhausting" and reported difficulty distinguishing authentic values from algorithmically promoted trends. Middle-aged and older respondents emphasized the erosion of traditional moral anchors and growing intergenerational misunderstandings. Several interviewees noted that AI-driven content personalization contributes to confusion, emotional detachment, or perceived loss of autonomy.

Coping strategies ranged from spiritual practices and screen limitation to conscious media avoidance. A cross-generational consensus emerged around the desire for ethical clarity and inner stability, even as methods and interpretations varied.

Table 3 presents illustrative quotes from participants, organized by theme (emotional exhaustion, moral confusion, coping behavior).

Table 3: Thematic quotes from in-depth interviews (organized by theme)

Theme	Quote	Age Group
Emotional Exhaustion	"Every time I scroll, I feel like I'm losing energy. It's constant noise in my head."	Youth (18)
	"I avoid reading news in the evening. Otherwise, I cannot fall asleep from anxiety."	Middle-aged (41)
	"Digital life is like a fast river. If you stop paddling, you drown in it emotionally."	Elderly (71)
Moral Confusion	"One video tells you how to be kind, the next celebrates cruelty. What are we even learning?"	Young adult (26)
	"I can't explain to my grandson why something is wrong anymore. Morality feels optional now."	Elderly (69)
	"Even religious values online feel filtered – as if they're made for likes, not belief."	Middle-aged (52)
Coping Behavior	"I keep the phone off every Sunday. That's my peace ritual."	Youth (22)
	"I talk to my friends about the disturbing things I see – it helps."	Young adult (30)
	"When I feel overwhelmed, I read or go outside. That's how I balance myself again."	Older adult (47)

These narratives not only contextualize the survey results but also inform the fs/QCA interpretation by clarifying how participants conceptualize "inner peace" and "ethical disorientation." The qualitative evidence thus operates as a triangulation layer that verifies configurational patterns.

fs/QCA Configurational Analysis

The fs/QCA analysis focused on identifying combinations of conditions that are either sufficient or necessary for the presence of perceived peace of mind.

Outcome:

- High or low perceived peace of mind

Conditions:

1. High daily screen time
2. Frequent emotional stress
3. High value confusion
4. Presence of coping strategies
5. Generational category (coded by age)

Survey responses were calibrated into fuzzy-set scores (0–1) using a combination of theoretical anchors and empirical quartiles. A truth table was constructed and minimized using fs/QCA software.

Table 4 presents the minimized configurations associated with high perceived peace of mind. A key pattern emerged: the combination of effective

coping mechanisms and low value confusion was consistently sufficient for maintaining inner peace–even among participants with high digital exposure.

Table 4: fs/QCA configurations for high perceived peace of mind

Configuration	Screen Time	Emotional Stress	Value Confusion	Coping Strategy	Age Group (Older)	Outcome: High Peace	Consistency	Raw Coverage
1	● (High)	○ (Low)	○ (Low)	● (Present)	● (Yes)	● (Yes)	0.91	0.34
2	○ (Low)	● (High)	○ (Low)	● (Present)	○ (No)	● (Yes)	0.87	0.27
3	● (High)	● (High)	○ (Low)	● (Present)	○ (No)	● (Yes)	0.85	0.21

Legend: ● = Presence of condition; ○ = Absence of condition.
Conditions: Screen Time = ≥5 hours/day; Emotional Stress = frequent or constant digital distress; Value Confusion = high agreement with moral disorientation; Coping Strategy = presence of screen limits, mindfulness, spiritual practices, etc.; Age Group (Older) = age ≥45.
Interpretation: All three configurations suggest that peace of mind is most consistently maintained when coping strategies are present and moral confusion is low–regardless of screen time or age. Even participants with high digital exposure reported inner stability when they engaged in intentional ethical or emotional regulation.

This finding demonstrates causal asymmetry: while high screen time alone does not predict low peace of mind, its negative influence is neutralized when individuals report strong coping strategies and moral clarity. These configurations reveal that inner stability arises not from digital withdrawal but from conscious self-regulation and ethical awareness.

Conversely, Table 5 identifies configurations linked to low perceived peace of mind. These typically included high screen time, frequent emotional stress, and absence of moral coping strategies.

Table 5: fs/QCA configurations for low perceived peace of mind

Configuration	Screen Time	Emotional Stress	Value Confusion	Coping Strategy	Age Group (Older)	Outcome: Low Peace	Consistency	Raw Coverage
1	● (High)	● (High)	● (High)	○ (Absent)	○ (No)	● (Yes)	0.89	0.33
2	○ (Low)	● (High)	● (High)	○ (Absent)	○ (No)	● (Yes)	0.86	0.29
3	● (High)	● (High)	● (High)	○ (Absent)	● (Yes)	● (Yes)	0.84	0.22

Legend: ● = Presence of condition; ○ = Absence of condition.
Conditions: Screen Time = ≥5 hours/day; Coping Strategy = absence of screen limits, mindfulness, etc.; Age Group (Older) = age ≥45.
Interpretation: All three configurations suggest that high emotional stress, moral disorientation, and absence of coping are consistently associated with low peace of mind, regardless of age.

This second set of configurations underlines that emotional exhaustion combined with ethical disorientation leads to psychological unrest regardless of age. Together, the two truth tables provide empirical grounding for the conceptual tension between "inner peace" and "ethical disorientation," showing that the same conditions can yield opposite outcomes depending on the presence or absence of moral coping.

Taken together, these results demonstrate that peace of mind in the digital age is shaped by more than just exposure to media–it is the complex interaction of emotional resilience, moral clarity, and coping behavior that determines one's psychological stability. The triangulated structure of findings–quantitative prevalence, qualitative illustration, and configurational causality–ensures analytical coherence between the research design and the reported results. These findings provide a strong empirical basis for the broader theoretical and societal implications explored in the following discussion section.

Discussion

The study aimed to examine how digital media environments affect psychological stability and ethical clarity across generational groups in Georgia, a country where the clash between inherited cultural values and rapidly globalizing digital norms is particularly pronounced. By focusing on this understudied post-Soviet context, the research offers a unique perspective on how digital transformation reshapes inner peace and moral frameworks within societies in cultural transition. Through a mixed-method approach, including both survey data and in-depth interviews, and the application of fs/QCA), the findings reveal nuanced and interdependent patterns of digital behavior, emotional strain, and moral perception.

The results indicate that inner peace in the digital age is not solely threatened by the amount of screen time or frequency of media use. Rather, the presence or absence of coping mechanisms and levels of moral disorientation play a critical role. As shown in the fs/QCA configurations, peace of mind was consistently associated with low value confusion and the presence of intentional coping strategies such as digital detox, spiritual practices, or content filtering. These findings align with theories of cognitive overload (Sweller, 1988; Paas et al., 2003) and psychological well-being under digital strain (Rosen et al., 2013; Montag et al., 2020), confirming that resilience in digital ecosystems depends less on exposure and more on interpretive and behavioral responses.

The intergenerational analysis deepens these insights. Younger respondents, despite being digitally native, expressed high emotional fatigue and identity instability. In contrast, older adults demonstrated both vulnerability to value confusion and a stronger reliance on cultural or religious

factors as stabilizers. This mirrors findings from Livingstone et al. (2011) and Nimrod (2016), who note that age-specific digital literacy and value processing shape psychological and ethical outcomes.

The interviews further illuminated a civilizational tension: many participants, especially middle-aged and older, articulated concerns over the erosion of traditional moral frameworks and the rise of relativistic online norms. These reflections resonate with Han's (2017) critique of psycho-politics and Bauman's (2000) notion of liquid modernity, wherein the loss of stable values contributes to social and internal disorientation.

Significantly, the findings position Georgia within a broader post-Soviet context where inherited cultural norms encounter globalized digital ethics. The strong correlation between ethical confusion and emotional unrest highlights the urgency of addressing digital value fragmentation not just as a technological or cognitive issue, but as a peacebuilding concern.

These findings also suggest practical implications for both policy and education. For instance, the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)10, which has been adopted in Georgia to support the development of digital citizenship education, offers a foundational framework for integrating digital ethics, well-being, and participatory rights into the national curriculum (Council of Europe, 2024). Recent research by Tome, Sikharulidze, Lobzhanidze, and Urchukhishvili (2024), conducted within the Council of Europe's 10-dimension model, reveals key gaps in Georgian teachers' preparedness to address cyber-ethical issues and promote digital value formation in schools. Integrating these dimensions–such as empathy, online communication, data protection, and media literacy–into both formal curricula and teacher training could significantly enhance students' ethical engagement with digital environments, while aligning educational content with both local cultural values and broader global citizenship objectives. Strengthening digital literacy programs–particularly those that include ethical reflection and psychological coping strategies–may equip individuals to manage online challenges with greater resilience and critical awareness. Furthermore, fostering intergenerational dialogue around core values may serve as a stabilizing force in societies experiencing cultural fragmentation. The National Center for Teacher Professional Development (2022) has also published a practical guide on digital citizenship for general education schools in Georgia, underscoring the importance of comprehensive teacher preparation to effectively deliver this content (Lobzhanidze et al., 2022). Their framework highlights the need to embed ethical digital behavior, rights awareness, and responsible participation throughout the school curriculum in order to cultivate informed and engaged digital citizens from an early age. Including artificial intelligence literacy within digital citizenship education

could further help close the gap between technological advancement and ethical readiness.

In sum, the study contributes to an emerging discourse that reframes peace not only in geopolitical or structural terms, but as an internal state of coherence threatened by algorithmic manipulation, information saturation, and moral erosion. By showing how different combinations of exposure, emotion, values, and coping influence inner equilibrium, this research offers a novel contribution to interdisciplinary peace studies, media ethics, and digital psychology.

Conclusion

The research has explored how digital exposure, emotional reactivity, and ethical disorientation interact to affect individuals' sense of inner peace across generations in Georgia. Through a mixed-method design and the application of fs/QCA, the analysis revealed that psychological stability is not determined by screen time alone, but by the interconnection of coping strategies, value clarity, and emotional resilience. Participants who maintained peace of mind were those who engaged in reflective practices and resisted moral confusion, whereas those lacking such coping mechanisms were more vulnerable to digital fatigue and ethical disorientation.

Specifically, the fs/QCA analysis identified three key configurations leading to high perceived peace of mind: (1) high screen time combined with strong coping strategies and low value confusion, (2) moderate stress levels paired with deliberate self-regulation behaviors, and (3) cross-generational resilience linked to ethical clarity. Conversely, low peace of mind consistently emerged in configurations characterized by frequent emotional stress, high moral disorientation, and absence of coping practices. These patterns empirically substantiate the conceptual framework of the study–showing that "inner peace" arises when moral orientation and emotional regulation coexist, while "ethical disorientation" manifests when moral confusion and stress dominate without coping counterbalances.

The findings provide empirical support for rethinking peace as an internal, value-based condition–one increasingly destabilized by the dissonant moral signals and psychological stressors of digital environments. By linking cross-generational perceptions with value fragmentation and cognitive strain, this research enriches the global conversation on how peacebuilding must extend to psychological and ethical well-being.

In this light, peacebuilding for the digital era should prioritize cognitive balance, ethical education, and coping literacy as protective configurations against moral erosion. These empirically grounded pathways illuminate how personal peace and societal harmony can be strengthened even within highly digitalized, post-Soviet contexts such as Georgia.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The survey sample was not fully balanced across age groups, with an overrepresentation of youth. While internal-consistency and exploratory factor analyses supported the instrument's overall psychometric adequacy, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and item response theory (IRT) were not performed due to sample-size constraints; these are recommended for future studies to further verify measurement invariance across generations. Additionally, while fs/QCA offers nuanced causal insights, its findings depend heavily on calibration thresholds and case frequency. The in-depth interview sample, though rich, was limited in size and geographic diversity.

Future research should aim to expand demographic representation, include cross-cultural comparisons, and employ longitudinal designs to track shifts in moral perception and coping strategies over time.

Further inquiry is also needed into the role of AI-generated content and digital recommendation systems in shaping moral cognition and emotional responses. Educational programs, particularly in post-Soviet contexts, should integrate ethical reasoning and digital mindfulness to support young users coping with conflicting values. National strategies promoting intergenerational dialogue and critical media literacy could help rebuild a sense of collective ethical orientation in societies undergoing rapid digital transformation.

By highlighting the psychological and moral dimensions of digital life, the work contributes to a broader, urgently needed understanding of peace– not purely as the absence of conflict, but as the presence of coherence, reflection, and ethical clarity in the digital age.

Ethics Statement

The study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants and received approval from the Research Facilitation Department at Caucasus University. Data collection was conducted through purposive and snowball sampling methods, using university student networks, social media platforms, and intergenerational family referrals to reach a diverse audience across age groups. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, and informed that their participation was entirely voluntary.

In the survey component, participants were presented with an introductory statement explaining the objectives of the research and confirming that no personal identifiers would be collected. Consent was implied by proceeding with the survey after affirming that they were aged 16 or older and understood the nature of the study (see Appendix1)

For the in-depth interviews, participants were similarly informed about the academic purpose of the study and their right to skip any questions they found uncomfortable (see Appnedix2). Verbal or written consent was obtained prior to participation. No identifiable information was recorded, and data were stored securely for academic use only.

The research complied with institutional and international ethical guidelines, ensuring respect for participants' autonomy, dignity, and privacy throughout the research process.

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Generative AI Statement

The author affirms that the manuscript represents entirely original work and is free from plagiarism. All sources and references have been duly credited. Language editing and formatting enhancements were supported by AI-based tools. However, they were not employed to generate content or contribute to the analysis. The author retains full responsibility for all intellectual concepts, interpretations, and conclusions presented in the work.

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Appendix A:

Survey Questionnaire:

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in an academic research study that aims to explore how today's digital media, social networks, and online platforms may be affecting the psychological and moral stability of people across different generations in Georgia. The survey is anonymous and confidential. Your responses will be used solely for academic purposes, and you may stop the survey at any time without any consequences. No names or personal identifiers will be collected.

We are especially interested in hearing from people across different age groups, including youth, middle-aged adults, and elderly persons. The survey may have reached you through a student, a friend, or a social media group–and we sincerely thank you for taking the time to contribute.

By clicking "Next" or proceeding with the survey, you confirm that:

- You are aged 16 or older
- You understand the purpose of the study
- You agree to participate voluntarily

Thank you for supporting research that seeks to better understand the mental and ethical effects of the digital era in Georgian society. Estimated time to complete the survey: 8–10 minutes.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. **Age Group:**
   ☐ 16-24 (Youth)
   ☐ 25–35 (Young adulthood)
   ☐ 36–44 (Middle adulthood)
   ☐ 45–65(Older Adults)
   ☐ 66+ (Elderly)
2. **Gender:**
   ☐ Female
   ☐ Male
   ☐ Prefer not to say
   ☐ Other: _____
3. **Place of Residence:**
   ☐ Tbilisi
   ☐ Other urban area
4. ☐ Rural area
   ☐ Abroad (but originally from Georgia)
5. **Highest Level of Education Completed:**
   ☐ Incomplete Secondary
   ☐ Secondary School
   ☐ Vocational/College
   ☐ Bachelor's Degree
   ☐ Master's Degree or above

6. **Occupation:**
   ☐ Student
   ☐ Employed
   ☐ Unemployed
   ☐ Self-employed
   ☐ Retired
   ☐ Other: _____

Section 2: Digital Exposure and Use Patterns

7. How often do you use social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.)?
   ☐ Never
   ☐ Rarely (a few times a month)
   ☐ Occasionally (a few times a week)
   ☐ Frequently (daily)
   ☐ Very Frequently (multiple times a day)
8. On average, how many hours per day do you spend on digital media (including social media, messaging apps, online news, etc.)?
   Less than 1 hour
   1–2 hours
   3–4 hours
   5–6 hours
   More than 6 hours
9. Which platforms do you use most frequently? (Select up to 3)
   ☐ Facebook
   ☐ Instagram
   ☐ YouTube
   ☐ TikTok
   ☐ Telegram
   ☐ Twitter/X
   ☐ News websites/apps
   ☐ Other: _____
10. What is your main reason for using social media?
    ☐ Social connection
    ☐ Information/news
    ☐ Entertainment
    ☐ Educational purposes
    ☐ Professional networking
    ☐ Other: _____
11. How often do you encounter content that causes emotional stress or discomfort (e.g., news, comments, videos)?
    ☐ Never
    ☐Rarely
    ☐Sometimes
    ☐Often
    ☐All the time

12. Have you ever reduced or paused your digital media use to protect your peace of mind?
    ☐Yes
    ☐No
    ☐I've thought about it, but never acted on it
    ☐Not applicable

Section 3: Perceived Impact on Mental and Emotional Well-Being

13. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:
(*1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree*)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
a. Digital media often overwhelms me emotionally.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. I feel mentally fatigued after spending time online.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. I am able to maintain inner peace despite constant exposure to digital information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. I notice more anxiety or stress in myself when I spend more time online.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 4: Perception of Value Distortion and Ethical Concerns

14. Please rate your agreement with the following:
(*1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree*)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
a. Social media contributes to the distortion of traditional cultural or ethical values in Georgia.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Online platforms promote superficial lifestyles or materialism.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. It is harder now to distinguish right from wrong due to conflicting digital content.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. People today care less about morality and more about appearance or popularity.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. I feel that digital media has changed the way I or others define what is "good" or "normal."	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 5: Intergenerational Perspective & Reflections

15. In your opinion, which generation is most negatively affected by digital disorientation?
    ☐ Children/Adolescents
    ☐ Young Adults (18–30)
    ☐ Middle-aged Adults (30–59)
    ☐ Elderly (60+)
    ☐ All generations equally
    ☐ Not sure
16. 16.Have you ever had disagreements within your family about values, traditions, or beliefs influenced by online content?
    ☐ Yes

☐ No
☐ Prefer not to say
☐ If yes, can you give a short example (optional): _____

Section 6: Coping, Resistance, and Peace Strategies

17. How do you cope with digital overload or emotional stress from online content? (You may choose multiple)
☐ I limit my screen time
☐ I avoid certain platforms or content
☐ I talk to others about it
☐ I use religious/spiritual practices
☐ I don't do anything specific
☐ Other: _____
18. 15.Do you believe it is possible to maintain mental peace and moral clarity in the digital era?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe
☐ Please explain your answer (optional): _____
19. In your view, what is the biggest psychological or ethical danger posed by digital media in Georgia today? (*Select up to 3 options*)
    1. ☐ Rising anxiety and emotional burnout
    ☐ Loss of critical thinking and attention span
    ☐ Spread of misinformation and fake values
    ☐ Decline of empathy and interpersonal trust
    ☐ Increase in aggression and online hate
    ☐ Erosion of traditional cultural/moral norms
    ☐ Unrealistic standards of beauty, success, or life
    ☐ Confusion between truth and opinion
    ☐ Isolation and lack of real-world socialization
    ☐ Other (please specify): _____
20. What practical or societal strategies could help restore peace of mind and moral balance in today's digital culture?
(*Select all that apply*)
☐ Media literacy education in schools and universities
☐ More ethical content regulation on social platforms
☐ Promotion of digital detox and mental wellness campaigns
☐ Support for family-based value education
☐ Increased access to psychological support and counseling
☐ Community discussions or public dialogues on ethics and values
☐ Stronger online protection for vulnerable groups (e.g., children, elderly)
☐ Encouraging spiritual, cultural, or nature-based activities
☐ National or regional public awareness programs
☐ Other (please specify): _____

21. **(Optional)** Would you like to share a personal story, experience, or thought about how digital life has affected your peace of mind or sense of morality? *(Open-ended text box)*.

Appendix B:

In-Depth Interview Guide

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this conversation. Your insights will help us understand how different generations in Georgia perceive the impact of digital technologies – especially artificial intelligence – on their peace of mind, values, and sense of ethical orientation. This interview is anonymous, and you are free to skip any questions you are not comfortable with.

General Digital Experience

1. Can you describe how digital media has become part of your daily life?
2. Have you noticed any changes in your emotional or psychological state as a result of spending time online?
3. In your view, has the digital environment affected the values people hold today?

AI-Specific Reflections

4. Have you interacted with or used any AI-based tools (e.g., ChatGPT, AI filters, newsfeed algorithms, recommendation systems)? If so, how often?
5. Do you trust AI-driven information (e.g., AI-written news, AI-generated images/videos)? Why or why not?
6. Have you ever felt confused, misled, or emotionally triggered by content that might have been produced or amplified by AI (e.g., deepfakes, fake news, manipulated images)?
7. Do you think people in Georgia are aware of how much AI shapes what they see, believe, or feel online?
8. How do you think AI influences moral values or emotional well-being in your generation?
9. Are you concerned that AI might be gradually replacing human thinking, reflection, or empathy in daily communication?

Coping, Meaning, and Ethical Clarity

10. When you feel overwhelmed or uncertain because of online content, how do you try to restore peace of mind?
11. What role does your cultural, religious, or family background play in how you interpret digital content – including AI-generated material?
12. What do you think should be done in Georgia (at the level of education, media, or policy) to help people maintain ethical clarity and mental well-being in the AI age?
13. Looking at future generations, are you hopeful or worried about how AI and digital technologies will shape their minds and moral compass?
14. Is there anything else you'd like to add about how AI, digital life, or modern media affect your inner peace or sense of morality?