



SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND VALUE ORIENTATION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: EMPATHY, MORALITY, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of social media usage on the value orientation of college students in Tamil Nadu, India, with a particular emphasis on rural-urban differences. A purposive sample of 558 students from Trichy and Dindigul districts was selected, encompassing diverse demographic variables such as age, gender, and educational background. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire featuring sections on demographic profiles, social media usage patterns, and value orientation. The analysis employed quantitative methods using SPSS, including descriptive statistics and ANOVA, to explore the relationships between social media engagement and various dimensions of value orientation, including personal, moral, social, and cultural values. The findings reveal significant differences in social media engagement between rural and urban students, with urban students reporting higher exposure to platforms like Instagram and YouTube, while rural students exhibit more focused usage patterns. The study identified moderate correlations between high-frequency social media use and shifts in value orientation, particularly in areas such as individualism, social responsibility, and ethical flexibility. Urban students displayed more liberal attitudes towards personal autonomy and premarital relationships, whereas rural students maintained more traditional values. These findings underscore the transformative role of digital media in shaping youth attitudes and highlight the necessity for value-based digital literacy interventions tailored to students' socio-cultural contexts. The study contributes to understanding the nuanced effects of social media on the ethical and social values of young individuals, emphasizing the importance of considering socio-cultural factors in educational strategies.

Key Words: Social Media Usage, Value Orientation, College Students, Empathy, Morality, Civic Engagement, Tamil Nadu, SPSS Analysis

Introduction:

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a powerful force influencing not only communication and information sharing but also shaping the values, attitudes, and behaviors of young individuals. For college students, who represent a critical transitional stage in psychosocial development, the use of social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook plays a significant role in constructing personal identities and worldviews. While the benefits of connectivity, access to diverse information, and peer interaction are evident, growing concerns remain about the deeper psychological and socio-cultural implications of continuous digital exposure.

Value orientation, a key construct in developmental psychology and sociology, refers to the internalized principles and beliefs that guide individual decision-making, social behavior, and ethical judgments. These orientations are typically influenced by family, culture, education, and religion; however, in recent years, social media has begun to function as an alternative and often dominant influence. For youth in Indiaa country marked by cultural diversity, generational shifts, and rapid digitization this intersection of traditional values and digital culture presents both opportunities and challenges. Notably, the rural-urban divide further intensifies these dynamics, with variations in access, exposure, and media literacy shaping different value orientations across populations.

Prior studies have explored the psychological effects of social media use, such as its associations with self-esteem, anxiety, and impulsivity, but fewer have critically examined its impact on value orientation, especially in the Indian context. Even less is known about how these effects might differ between rural and urban students, who may approach social media with varying cultural expectations, educational environments, and life experiences. As India continues its journey toward digital inclusion, understanding how social media influences the ethical and social values of young citizens becomes imperative for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals alike.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the influence of social media usage on the value orientation of college students from both rural and urban settings in Tamil Nadu. Drawing on a purposive sample of 558 students from Trichy and Dindigul districts, the research investigates patterns of social media engagement and their relationship with various dimensions of value orientation namely personal, moral, social, and cultural values. The study also considers a range of demographic variables, including age, gender, department, year of study, college system, family background, and socioeconomic status. Utilizing statistical analysis via SPSS, the research seeks to identify significant differences and correlations that could inform value-based interventions in higher education.

By offering a comparative perspective, this study not only contributes to the growing body of research on youth and digital media but also emphasizes the need to understand the socio-cultural context in which value formation occurs. It provides

critical insights into how rural and urban students internalize or resist the value cues they encounter online, pointing toward the broader implications for youth development in a digitally connected but culturally diverse society.

Evolution of Social Media Platforms and Their Impact Across Age Groups:

The evolution of social media platforms has been rapid and dynamic, shaped by technological advancements, shifting user preferences, and emerging communication trends. Understanding this evolution is crucial to comprehending not only the platforms themselves but also their societal impact across different age groups.

Historical Development of Social Media:

The origins of social media can be traced to the early internet era, when bulletin board systems (BBS) and online forums provided spaces for users to interact and exchange information. SixDegrees.com, launched in the late 1990s, was the first platform to allow users to create profiles and connect with others, laying the foundation for online social networking (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The early 2000s witnessed the rise of Friendster and MySpace, which emphasized virtual communities and peer connections. The launch of Facebook in 2004 revolutionized the industry through a user-friendly interface, privacy controls, and a strong network effect, quickly attracting millions worldwide (Ellison et al., 2007).

Specialized platforms soon followed: YouTube (2005) transformed video sharing and popularized user-generated content, while Twitter (2006) introduced micro blogging, enabling short real-time updates. With the rise of smart phones, platforms such as Instagram (2010) emphasized photo and video sharing, and Snapchat (2011) popularized ephemeral content.

In the last decade, platforms such as TikTok (2016) and Clubhouse (2020) have reshaped the social media landscape with short-form video and audio-based networking, respectively. The growing integration of artificial intelligence and algorithmic curation has further intensified user engagement, shaping how people consume and create content (Arora et al., 2024).

Social Media Use and Impact Across Age Groups:

Recent studies highlight how social media use varies significantly across age groups. Younger adults (ages 18-29) spend the most time on social platforms, primarily for entertainment, identity formation, and social validation (Bonsaksen et al., 2024). Adolescents and young adults also show higher vulnerability to negative psychological impacts, including stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly with passive scrolling behaviors (Mayo Clinic, 2024).

By contrast, older users tend to engage in more active forms of participation, such as posting, commenting, and using platforms for maintaining relationships and relaxation (Bonsaksen et al., 2024). Middle-aged adults often adopt social media for professional networking, news, and family connections, while younger users focus on short-form video, creative expression, and trends (Politte-Corn et al., 2023).

Algorithm-driven recommendation systems amplify these age-based differences, especially among younger audiences. Teenagers report heightened concerns about peer comparison, digital identity, and social validation due to algorithmic content curation (Arora et al., 2024). These findings underscore the need to contextualize the evolution of platforms within the broader psychosocial impacts they exert on different demographic groups.

Age and Social Media Usage:

Younger adults, particularly those aged 18-29, remain the most active users across multiple platforms, with TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat central to their daily routines. In contrast, older adults show stronger engagement with platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp (Pew Research Center, 2024). These patterns suggest that age significantly shapes both the choice of platform and the intensity of social media use.

Gendered Patterns of Engagement:

Gender differences are evident in how individuals use social media. Women report higher use of visually driven and relationship-oriented platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest, while men engage more with forums such as Reddit and professional networks like LinkedIn (Auxier & Anderson, 2024). These distinctions highlight how gendered preferences intersect with the functions that platforms serve.

Socioeconomic Status and Access:

Socioeconomic status further mediates social media behaviors. Individuals from higher-income and higher-education backgrounds often use platforms for professional networking, information seeking, and civic participation, whereas those from lower-income groups rely more heavily on social media for entertainment, social bonding, and informal learning (Perrin, 2024). Additionally, infrastructural barriers such as limited internet connectivity in rural or economically marginalized regions constrain the intensity and diversity of engagement.

Social Media Usage Patterns in India and Tamil Nadu:

The rise of social media in India has transformed the way people connect, communicate, and share information. Over the past decade, the widespread availability of affordable smart phones and cheaper data plans has fueled rapid adoption across both urban and rural regions. Increasing digital literacy and changing socio-cultural dynamics have further strengthened the influence of social media in everyday life (IAMAI, 2023). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Twitter (now X) dominate the Indian digital landscape, each serving different user needs ranging from entertainment and messaging to professional networking and civic engagement (Pew Research Center, 2024).

Cultural diversity plays a significant role in shaping social media engagement. Indian users often emphasize personal connections, family values, and collective identity in their online interactions. Regional festivals, languages, and traditions are widely celebrated on these platforms, turning them into spaces of cultural preservation and expression (Miller et al., 2016). Among different demographics, youth constitute the largest and most active user group. For them, social media provides avenues for self-expression, networking, and participation in social causes. However, studies also raise concerns about its excessive use, pointing to issues such as mental health challenges, distraction from academics, and weakened face-to-face communication skills (Kaur & Singh, 2022).

The influence of social media on Indian society is therefore multifaceted. On one hand, it facilitates stronger connectivity by bridging geographical and social boundaries, enabling communities to remain linked and encouraging activism for social and

political causes. On the other hand, it has also introduced risks, including the rapid spread of misinformation, online harassment, privacy erosion, and the replacement of authentic in-person relationships with virtual interactions (Banaji & Bhat, 2021).

Within this national context, Tamil Nadu stands out as one of India's most digitally connected states, with high smart phone penetration and strong internet access, particularly in urban hubs such as Chennai, Coimbatore, and Tiruchirappalli (TRAI, 2023). While urban youth dominate online participation, rural regions are rapidly catching up due to affordable mobile networks and government-led digital initiatives. The youth of Tamil Nadu are particularly active on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp, where they consume and produce content for entertainment, education, and political engagement. Regional cultural expressions such as Tamil cinema, folk traditions, memes, and festival celebrations are vividly represented online, highlighting how social media functions as a medium of identity, creativity, and collective belonging in the state.

Tamil Nadu has also demonstrated how digital platforms can be mobilized for activism, as seen during the Jallikattu protests in 2017, where youth-led campaigns on Facebook and Twitter played a pivotal role in shaping public discourse and influencing policy decisions. Beyond activism, social media in Tamil Nadu increasingly supports entrepreneurship, small businesses, and educational outreach, empowering individuals to expand opportunities beyond traditional boundaries. At the same time, local studies show that while digital platforms foster creativity and connectedness, they also contribute to dependency and digital fatigue among young people (Sundararajan, 2021).

Globally, concerns about excessive social media use mirror these Indian and Tamil Nadu-specific findings. In the United States, for instance, scholars have linked rising screen time among adolescents to declining mental well-being and increased anxiety (Twenge et al., 2018). Similar patterns are visible in India, where overuse of social media is associated with sleep disturbances, anxiety, and reduced academic performance (Kumar, 2023). These insights underscore the double-edged nature of social media: while it is a powerful tool for connectivity, cultural expression, and empowerment, it also raises critical challenges for individual well-being, societal trust, and the depth of human relationships.

Rise of Social Media and the Impact on Human Values:

The rapid rise of social media has profoundly reshaped patterns of communication, identity formation, and value orientation, particularly among young people. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook have become embedded in everyday life, influencing entertainment, education, political discourse, and interpersonal relationships (Pew Research Center, 2023; Sharma & Gupta, 2024). In India, college-going students represent one of the most active demographic groups, spending several hours daily online. Studies show that while these platforms foster creativity, networking, and civic participation, they also contribute to new challenges such as distraction from academics, reduced family interaction, and value shifts (Kumar & Raj, 2024).

Demographic factors such as age, gender, family background, and socioeconomic status strongly influence how social media is adopted and experienced. Urban youth often display higher levels of digital engagement, while rural communities are rapidly catching up due to affordable mobile internet and expanding digital literacy (Banerjee, 2024). Similarly, family type and income levels influence access to technology and patterns of use, reflecting broader inequalities in the digital ecosystem.

Social media usage habits reveal how students negotiate between personal interests, cultural practices, and spiritual or religious commitments. For many young users, these platforms serve as outlets for entertainment, self-expression, and political commentary. At the same time, they are also spaces where cultural and religious content circulates, offering opportunities for both value reinforcement and value conflict (Thomas & Varghese, 2023). Patterns of usage such as late-night scrolling, constant notifications, and the need for validation through likes and comments have been linked to stress, anxiety, and reduced well-being (Patel & Singh, 2024).

How young people engage with content also influences their moral and social development. Practices like self-presentation, peer comparison, and following influencers often contribute to the shaping of attitudes toward consumerism, relationships, and personal identity (Narayan & Reddy, 2024). Exposure to diverse viewpoints on social media can broaden horizons and encourage tolerance, yet it can also lead to confusion, moral relativism, or weakened commitment to traditional norms.

In the Indian context, and particularly in Tamil Nadu, social media has become a platform where traditional values intersect with modern aspirations. Tamil youth use these platforms not only for entertainment but also for expressing cultural identity through regional language, cinema, and local traditions (Ramasamy, 2023). Social media activism, such as the digitally coordinated Jallikattu protests, demonstrates the ability of young users to mobilize around issues of cultural pride and social justice. However, alongside these positive outcomes, concerns are raised about the erosion of privacy, cyber bullying, and the replacement of authentic face-to-face relationships with superficial online interactions (Banaji & Bhat, 2021).

Most importantly, social media is actively shaping value orientation. Attitudes toward honesty, family relationships, gender roles, religious tolerance, and social responsibility are being redefined in the digital sphere. While exposure to online campaigns and global discourses has strengthened awareness of equality and human rights, excessive dependence on these platforms has also been associated with individualism, consumerist mindsets, and mental health concerns (Twenge, 2019; Sundararajan, 2021). Thus, the impact of social media on human values is multidimensional simultaneously offering opportunities for growth, awareness, and activism, while posing challenges for authenticity, emotional balance, and moral grounding.

Literature Review:

In recent decades, social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of young adults, particularly college students. The rapid expansion of digital platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook has transformed patterns of communication, information sharing, and social interaction. While social media offers opportunities for connectivity, learning, and civic engagement, growing scholarly attention has focused on its potential influence on value orientation, ethical sensitivity, empathy, and social responsibility among youth. Researchers increasingly argue that the impact of social media is not uniform; rather, it varies based on the intensity, purpose, and responsibility with which these platforms are used.

Social Media Usage and Value Orientation:

Value orientation refers to the system of moral, social, and cultural values that guide individuals' attitudes and behaviour (Rokeach, 1973). During young adulthood, values related to empathy, honesty, family bonding, civic responsibility, and prosocial behaviour undergo significant development. Scholars suggest that excessive engagement with digital media may disrupt this process by altering interpersonal relationships and moral reasoning (Twenge, 2019; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

Several studies have indicated that high levels of social media exposure are associated with reduced face-to-face interaction, emotional detachment, and weakened family ties (Kross et al., 2013; Nie et al., 2002). Prolonged screen time has been linked to a decline in family communication and shared activities, which are essential contexts for value transmission and moral socialization (Putnam, 2000). These findings suggest that excessive social media use may negatively influence family bonding and collective value formation.

Social Media and Empathy:

Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, is a crucial component of moral development and social harmony (Davis, 1983). It encompasses both cognitive empathy (perspective-taking) and affective empathy (emotional responsiveness) (Levenson & Ruef, 1992). Research on empathy and social media presents mixed findings. While some studies suggest that online interaction can foster awareness of social issues and global suffering (Gentile et al., 2012), others report that excessive digital engagement may reduce empathic concern due to emotional desensitization and superficial social interaction (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011).

Konrath et al. (2011) documented a decline in empathic concern among college students over recent decades, coinciding with the rise of digital communication. The reduced exposure to real-life emotional cues in online interactions may limit opportunities for empathic engagement. Conversely, studies indicate that responsible and purposeful social media use such as engagement with social causes or helping communities can enhance empathic awareness and compassionate behaviour (Verduyn et al., 2017).

Social Media, Moral Responsibility, and Honesty:

Moral responsibility involves adherence to ethical standards such as honesty, fairness, and accountability in personal and social conduct. Scholars argue that the anonymity and reduced accountability of online environments may encourage moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999). Research has shown that excessive social media use is associated with higher tolerance for unethical behaviours such as dishonesty, manipulation, and justification of harmful actions (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hymel, 2014).

Bandura's theory of moral disengagement explains how individuals rationalize unethical behaviour by minimizing harm or shifting responsibility. Online platforms, where social consequences are often diluted, may facilitate such disengagement, leading to diminished moral sensitivity among heavy users (Kowalski et al., 2014). However, studies also emphasize that ethical awareness and moral reasoning can be strengthened when social media is used responsibly for dialogue, education, and value-based engagement (Jackson et al., 2020).

Social Media and Civic Engagement:

Civic engagement refers to individuals' involvement in social, political, and community-oriented activities aimed at collective well-being (Putnam, 2000). Social media has been recognized as a powerful tool for mobilization, awareness-building, and youth participation in civic life (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Responsible social media engagement has been positively associated with increased civic awareness, volunteering, and social activism among young adults.

However, excessive and passive consumption of content has been linked to political apathy, slacktivism, and reduced offline civic participation (Morozov, 2011). Scholars argue that while social media can facilitate civic engagement, its impact depends largely on whether users engage critically and purposefully rather than merely consuming content (Boulianne, 2015).

Prosocial Behaviour and Responsible Social Media Engagement:

Prosocial behaviour, including helping, sharing, and altruism, is closely connected to empathy and moral responsibility (Batson et al., 2002). Research suggests that exposure to positive social content and role models on social media can encourage prosocial actions, particularly when users engage actively and responsibly (Greitemeyer & Mügge, 2014). Responsible social media engagement characterized by mindful use, ethical interaction, and value-driven participation has been shown to enhance social awareness and prosocial intentions among college students.

In contrast, irresponsible or excessive use may promote self-centeredness, comparison, and moral indifference (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). These contrasting findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between mere exposure and responsible engagement when examining the effects of social media on value orientation.

Present Study:

The present study aims to investigate the influence of social media usage on the value orientation of college students, comparing rural and urban contexts. The rationale for conducting this study is based on several key factors:

- Growing prevalence of social media usage: Social media has become a central aspect of college students' lives. The increasing accessibility of smart phones and internet connectivity, combined with the popularity of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube, raises questions about their potential impact on students' personal values, social responsibilities, and moral behavior. Understanding how social media usage shapes value orientation is essential to comprehend the positive and negative consequences of extensive digital engagement.
- Impact on empathy and social responsibility: Empathy, family bonding, honesty, civic responsibility, and gender equality are critical components of value orientation. Excessive social media usage may diminish empathic tendencies, reduce family interaction, and weaken social accountability. Conversely, mindful engagement with socially responsible content can enhance awareness and prosocial behaviors among students.
- Influence on ethical and moral decision-making: Social media exposes students to diverse opinions, lifestyles, and cultural norms, which can challenge traditional beliefs and ethical frameworks. It is important to examine whether social media promotes reflective thinking, moral responsibility, and value-oriented behavior, or whether it fosters superficiality, peer comparison, and materialistic attitudes.

- Rural-urban perspective: Rural and urban students experience social media differently due to disparities in access, digital literacy, and cultural context. Urban students often have greater exposure to global content and trends, which can broaden perspectives but may also encourage comparison and less responsible behavior. Rural students, while increasingly connected, may retain stronger community-oriented and traditional value systems. Comparing these two groups can highlight the nuanced effects of social media on value orientation.

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine the relationship between social media usage and value orientation, including empathy, family bonding, honesty, civic responsibility, gender equality, and spiritual engagement.
- To identify patterns of responsible versus less responsible social media engagement and their impact on moral and ethical behavior among young adults.

Hypotheses:

- H1: Higher social media usage will be associated with reduced empathy and family bonding.
- H2: Higher social media usage will be associated with diminished honesty, moral responsibility, and civic engagement.
- H3: Responsible social media engagement will enhance empathy, civic awareness, and prosocial behavior among college students.

Materials and Methods:

Participants:

The sample for this study consisted of $n = 558$ undergraduate college students drawn from rural and urban districts of Tamil Nadu, specifically Trichy and Dindigul. The participants represented both arts and science streams, with a balanced mix of genders, college types (autonomous and non-autonomous), living situations (hostel and home), and family backgrounds. The inclusion criteria required participants to be between 18 and 25 years of age and currently enrolled in undergraduate programs.

Sampling Technique:

A purposive sampling method was employed to identify and recruit students who were active social media users and met the eligibility criteria. This approach ensured the selection of participants with relevant exposure to social media, thereby aligning with the objectives of the study.

Data Collection:

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of four main sections:

- Demographic details: age, gender, district, department, year of study, type and nature of college, family structure, and monthly income.
- Social Media Usage Scale (SUMS): 17 items rated on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from Never (1) to 1 hour or more daily (9), measuring the frequency and intensity of social media usage.
- Value Orientation Questionnaire: items assessing key values such as empathy, honesty, family bonding, civic responsibility, gender equality, and spiritual engagement.
- Patterns of engagement: classification of behaviors into responsible (ethical, disciplined, and value-oriented use of social media) and less responsible (overuse, misuse, or neglect of values in digital contexts).

Data Analysis:

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed for data analysis. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic patterns and overall trends in social media use and value orientation. Inferential analyses, including mean comparisons and correlation tests, were used to explore the relationships between social media usage and value orientation. Rural-urban comparisons were conducted to highlight differences in value adherence and social responsibility among college students.

Descriptive Statistics:

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the levels of social media usage, behavioural patterns, and value orientations among the respondents ($N = 558$), as presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

- Social Media Usage: With regard to social media usage, the mean score for social media exposure/intensity was $M = 80.8417$ ($SD = 32.55835$), indicating a moderate to high level of engagement with social media platforms among the respondents. Social media platform usage recorded a mean of $M = 2.3071$ ($SD = 0.33791$), suggesting regular engagement across multiple platforms. Content consumption preference showed a mean score of $M = 2.5765$ ($SD = 0.31565$), reflecting a moderate level of exposure to diverse types of online content. The usage situation variable yielded a mean of $M = 2.5323$ ($SD = 0.57774$), indicating moderate consistency in the contexts in which social media is accessed.
- Behavioural Patterns: In terms of behavioural patterns related to social media, respondents reported relatively higher levels of positive social media behaviour, with a mean score of $M = 3.6308$ ($SD = 0.60065$), suggesting responsible and constructive engagement online. Notably, social comparison and passive use recorded a comparatively high mean score ($M = 4.2360$, $SD = 0.80693$), indicating a pronounced tendency toward comparison-based behaviour and passive consumption of social media content.
- Value Orientations: Regarding value orientations, respondents demonstrated relatively high levels of empathy and compassion ($M = 3.3858$, $SD = 0.61898$) and social responsibility ($M = 3.5497$, $SD = 0.60285$), reflecting a strong orientation toward prosocial values. Family and relationship values showed a moderate mean score ($M = 3.1165$, $SD = 0.36989$). The mean score for sexual and marital liberalism was comparatively lower ($M = 2.3078$, $SD = 0.95519$), indicating limited endorsement of liberal attitudes toward sexual and marital norms. Moral integrity and ethical values reflected a moderate orientation ($M = 2.7664$, $SD = 0.39961$). Respondents also reported relatively strong religious and cultural values ($M = 3.3017$, $SD = 0.58813$). Finally, personal achievement and individualism recorded a mean score of $M = 2.9486$ ($SD = 0.30952$), indicating a balanced inclination toward both personal success and collective considerations.

One-Way Analysis of Variance:

The number of hours spent on social media per day was operationalized as a categorical variable termed social media exposure. Based on self-reported usage patterns and prior empirical practices distinguishing intensity of media use, participants were classified into three exposure groups. Those who reported spending 2-8 hours per day on social media were categorized as low exposure, individuals spending 9-12 hours per day were categorized as moderate exposure, and those reporting more than 12 hours per day were categorized as high exposure.

This categorization enabled meaningful group comparisons reflecting varying intensities of social media use. Social media exposure was treated as the independent variable in the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) conducted to test Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 which examined differences in empathy, family bonding, honesty, moral responsibility, and civic engagement across exposure levels.

H1: Higher social media usage will be associated with reduced empathy and family bonding

Dependent Variable	df (Between)	df (Within)	F	p
When I see a beggar/needy, I feel hatred	2	555	15.789	.001
Sex outside of marriage is acceptable	2	555	184.315	.001
Marriages must take place only within one's caste	2	555	70.857	.001
I am unable to spend time with my family	2	555	11.645	.001
Old people are a burden to society	2	555	58.805	.001
It is right to punish someone who has harmed me	2	555	79.800	.001
I have a duty to help those in need	2	555	11.547	.001
I am willing to sacrifice what is dear to me for the benefit of others	2	555	38.001	.001
In marriage matters, parents should take the final decision	2	555	92.837	.001
My friends are more important to me than my family	2	555	57.360	.001
Being faithful to one's spouse is an outdated tradition	2	555	74.936	.001

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether levels of social media usage differed significantly in relation to empathy- and family bonding-related attitudes among college students. The results revealed statistically significant differences across low, moderate, and high social media usage groups for several indicators of empathy, family bonding, and prosocial values.

With respect to empathy, significant group differences were found for the attitude “When I see a beggar/needy, I feel hatred”, $F(2, 555) = 15.79, p < .001$, and for the belief “Old people are a burden to society”, $F(2, 555) = 58.81, p < .001$. Similarly, attitudes reflecting reduced compassion and increased hostility, such as “It is right to punish someone who has harmed me”, differed significantly across levels of social media usage, $F(2, 555) = 79.80, p < .001$. In contrast, prosocial orientations, including “I have a duty to help those in need”, $F(2, 555) = 11.55, p < .001$, and willingness to sacrifice for others, $F(2, 555) = 38.00, p < .001$, also varied significantly among the groups.

Regarding family bonding, significant differences were observed for the statement “I am unable to spend time with my family”, $F(2, 555) = 11.65, p < .001$, as well as for “My friends are more important to me than my family”, $F(2, 555) = 57.36, p < .001$. Traditional family and marital values also showed significant variation across social media usage levels, including beliefs related to parental authority in marriage decisions, $F(2, 555) = 92.84, p < .001$, and marital fidelity, $F(2, 555) = 74.94, p < .001$.

The ANOVA results indicate that the level of social media usage is significantly associated with differences in empathy, prosocial attitudes, and family bonding among college students. These findings support Hypothesis 1, suggesting that higher levels of social media usage are linked to reduced empathy and weaker family bonding.

H2: Higher social media usage will be associated with diminished honesty, moral responsibility, and civic engagement

Dependent Variable	df (Between)	df (Within)	F	p
When I see a beggar/needy, I feel hatred	2	555	15.789	.001
Sex outside of marriage is acceptable.	2	555	184.315	.001
Old people are a burden to society.	2	555	58.805	.001
It is right to punish someone who has harmed me.	2	555	79.800	.001
Cheating others to promote myself is acceptable.	2	555	28.140	.001
Being insincere in relationships is acceptable.	2	555	78.712	.001
I try to avoid my duties without feeling guilty.	2	555	38.627	.001
My needs are more important than the needs of others.	2	555	53.157	.001
Premarital sex is acceptable.	2	555	33.021	.001

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether levels of social media usage differed significantly with respect to honesty, moral responsibility, and civic-related attitudes among college students. The results indicated statistically significant differences across low, moderate, and high social media usage groups for all the dependent variables examined.

Significant group differences were observed for attitudes reflecting diminished moral sensitivity and social concern, including “When I see a beggar/needy, I feel hatred”, $F(2, 555) = 15.79, p < .001$, and “Old people are a burden to society”, $F(2, 555) = 58.81, p < .001$. Attitudes endorsing moral permissiveness and reduced ethical restraint also differed significantly across social media usage levels, such as “Sex outside of marriage is acceptable”, $F(2, 555) = 184.32, p < .001$, and “Premarital sex is acceptable”, $F(2, 555) = 33.02, p < .001$.

About honesty and interpersonal ethics, statistically significant differences were found for “Cheating others to promote myself is acceptable”, $F(2, 555) = 28.14, p < .001$, and “Being insincere in relationships is acceptable”, $F(2, 555) = 78.71, p < .001$. Similarly, attitudes indicating diminished moral responsibility and self-centeredness, including “I try to avoid my duties without

feeling guilty”, $F(2, 555) = 38.63, p < .001$, and “My needs are more important than the needs of others”, $F(2, 555) = 53.16, p < .001$, showed significant variation across the three groups.

In addition, a significant difference was observed for the belief “It is right to punish someone who has harmed me”, $F(2, 555) = 79.80, p < .001$, indicating variations in attitudes toward justice and moral accountability across levels of social media usage.

The ANOVA results demonstrate that the level of social media usage is significantly associated with differences in honesty, moral responsibility, and civic-related values among college students. These findings provide empirical support for Hypothesis 2, suggesting that higher levels of social media usage are linked to diminished ethical sensitivity, moral responsibility, and concern for others.

H3: Responsible social media engagement will enhance empathy, civic awareness, and prosocial behaviour among college students

Dependent Variable	df (Between Groups)	df (Within Groups)	F	P
I have a duty to help those in need	2	555	11.55	.001
Willingness to sacrifice for others	2	555	38.00	.001
When I see a beggar/needy, I feel hatred	2	555	15.79	.001
Old people are a burden to society	2	555	58.81	.001
I try to avoid my duties without feeling guilty	2	555	38.63	.001
My needs are more important than the needs of others	2	555	53.16	.001

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether levels of responsible social media engagement differed significantly in relation to empathy, civic awareness, and prosocial behaviour among college students. The results revealed statistically significant differences across low, moderate, and high levels of responsible social media engagement for all selected indicators. Significant group differences were observed for empathy-related variables, including the sense of moral obligation toward others (“I have a duty to help those in need”), $F(2, 555) = 11.55, p < .001$, and willingness to sacrifice for others, $F(2, 555) = 38.00, p < .001$. These findings indicate meaningful variation in empathic and helping orientations across levels of responsible engagement.

With respect to civic awareness, statistically significant differences were found for attitudes toward vulnerable social groups, including “When I see a beggar/needy, I feel hatred”, $F(2, 555) = 15.79, p < .001$, and “Old people are a burden to society”, $F(2, 555) = 58.81, p < .001$, suggesting differences in social sensitivity and civic concern among the groups. Prosocial behaviour also differed significantly across levels of responsible social media engagement, as reflected in the statements “I try to avoid my duties without feeling guilty”, $F(2, 555) = 38.63, p < .001$, and “My needs are more important than the needs of others”, $F(2, 555) = 53.16, p < .001$. Overall, the ANOVA results indicate that responsible social media engagement is significantly associated with higher empathy, stronger civic awareness, and greater prosocial orientation among college students. These findings provide empirical support for Hypothesis 3, suggesting that responsible engagement with social media platforms may play a positive role in fostering socially constructive values.

Discussion:

The present study examined the relationship between social media usage, responsible social media engagement, and value orientation among college students, with specific reference to empathy, family bonding, honesty, moral responsibility, civic awareness, and prosocial behaviour. The findings provide empirical support for all three hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3), reinforcing the view that social media functions as a double-edged phenomenon, exerting both detrimental and beneficial influences depending on patterns of use and levels of responsibility.

Social Media Usage, Empathy, and Family Bonding (H1):

Consistent with H1, higher levels of social media usage were significantly associated with lower empathy and weakened family bonding. Students with greater exposure expressed reduced concern for the needy, diminished respect for elders, and a preference for peer-centric relationships over family interaction. These findings align with earlier research reporting a decline in empathic concern among young adults alongside the rise of digital communication (Konrath, O’Brien, & Hsing, 2011; Twenge, 2019).

The displacement hypothesis proposed by Nie et al. (2002) suggests that excessive online engagement reduces time spent in emotionally rich, face-to-face interactions. Turkle (2011) similarly argues that constant digital connectivity may create emotional distance within families. The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that such displacement is reflected not only in behavioural changes but also in attitudinal erosion of family-oriented and empathic values, particularly among high-usage college students.

Social Media Usage, Moral Responsibility, and Civic Values (H2):

Supporting H2, the results indicate that higher social media usage is significantly associated with reduced honesty, weakened moral responsibility, and diminished civic orientation. Students with higher exposure were more likely to endorse morally permissive attitudes, avoidance of social duties, and self-centered value positions. These findings are consistent with Bandura’s (2016) theory of moral disengagement, which explains how repeated exposure to morally ambiguous environments can normalize unethical reasoning and weaken self-regulation.

Research on online disinhibition further suggests that anonymity and reduced accountability in digital spaces can facilitate moral laxity and civic disengagement (Suler, 2004). Gentile et al. (2017) similarly reported links between problematic internet use and reduced moral sensitivity. The present study corroborates these findings within an Indian college context, demonstrating that excessive social media exposure is associated with attenuated civic awareness and moral accountability, thereby strengthening concerns raised in prior literature.

Responsible Social Media Engagement and Prosocial Development (H3):

In contrast to the negative outcomes associated with excessive usage, the findings strongly support H3, indicating that responsible social media engagement enhances empathy, civic awareness, and prosocial behaviour. Students who reported mindful and ethical engagement exhibited stronger helping attitudes, greater willingness to act for collective good, and lower endorsement of self-centered beliefs.

These results align with research highlighting the positive social capital-building potential of social media when used constructively (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). Kahne and Bowyer (2018) found that participatory and reflective social media activities promote civic learning and youth engagement. Similarly, Metzger et al. (2015) emphasized that critical digital literacy and responsible participation foster ethical awareness and social responsibility.

The present study extends this body of work by empirically distinguishing quantity of use from quality of engagement, demonstrating that responsible social media practices can function as a protective and promotive factor, mitigating moral decline while strengthening empathy and civic-minded prosocial values among college students.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the present study examined the relationship between social media usage and value orientation among college students, with a particular focus on empathy, family bonding, honesty, moral responsibility, civic engagement, and prosocial behaviour. The study also distinguished between levels of social media exposure and responsible social media engagement to understand their differential impact on students' value systems.

The findings provide clear support for the proposed hypotheses. Higher levels of social media exposure were significantly associated with reduced empathy, weaker family bonding, diminished honesty, moral responsibility, and civic engagement. These results suggest that excessive and unregulated social media use may negatively influence students' moral and social value orientation. Such findings are consistent with earlier research that highlights the adverse effects of prolonged digital engagement on ethical sensitivity and social responsibility.

In contrast, responsible social media engagement demonstrated a positive association with empathy, civic awareness, and prosocial behaviour. This finding underscores the importance of the quality and purpose of social media use rather than mere duration. When social media is used mindfully and ethically, it can serve as a platform for social connection, awareness-building, and constructive civic participation among young adults.

Overall, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of social media's role in shaping value orientation among college students. It highlights that social media is not inherently detrimental; rather, its impact depends on patterns of use and levels of responsibility exercised by users. These findings emphasize the need for educational interventions, digital literacy initiatives, and value-based guidance to promote responsible social media engagement, thereby fostering empathy, moral responsibility, and civic consciousness in the digital age.

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Implications:

The findings of the present study have important theoretical, educational, and practical implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on social media and value orientation by demonstrating that responsible social media engagement is positively associated with empathy, moral responsibility, civic awareness, and prosocial behaviour, whereas excessive usage is associated with weaker value orientations. These findings extend social learning and media effects theories by emphasizing the qualitative dimension of social media use rather than mere exposure.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that interventions should focus on promoting ethical and responsible online engagement instead of solely limiting screen time. Educational institutions can integrate digital ethics, media literacy, and value-based learning into higher education curricula to foster critical thinking, empathy, and social responsibility among students. Additionally, policymakers and social media platform developers may utilize these insights to design guidelines and digital environments that encourage respectful interaction, civic participation, and prosocial conduct in online spaces.

Limitations:

Despite its contributions, the present study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional research design limits the ability to draw causal inferences between social media usage and value orientation. Second, the reliance on self-report measures may have introduced response biases, such as social desirability or recall bias. Third, the sample was confined to college students from a specific geographical and socio-cultural context, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other populations.

Furthermore, the study focused on selected value dimensions and did not account for other potentially influential factors, such as personality traits, family background, peer influence, or platform-specific content exposure. The possibility of bidirectional relationships, wherein existing value orientations influence patterns of social media use, also cannot be ruled out.

Future Research Directions:

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of social media usage on value orientation and to establish causal relationships. Experimental studies manipulating types and levels of social media engagement would further clarify the mechanisms underlying these associations. Incorporating qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus group discussions, may provide richer insights into students' lived experiences and ethical decision-making in digital environments. Additionally, future studies should explore mediating and moderating variables, including personality traits, cultural context, and social support systems, to better understand the complex relationship between social media use and value development.

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