



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Structural Relationships between Social Media Usage Patterns and Value Orientation among College-Going Youth in Rural and Urban Tamil Nadu: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach

Jasmine A<sup>1</sup>, G. Arul Selvi<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The present study examines the structural relationship between social media usage patterns and value orientation among college-going youth in rural and urban Tamil Nadu, with special reference to Trichy and Dindigul districts. A purposive sample of 1536 college students were drawn from selected higher education institutions, representing diverse demographic characteristics such as age and gender. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising three sections: demographic profile, multidimensional social media usage behaviours, and value orientation domains. The data were analysed using SPSS and AMOS, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to validate the measurement models and to examine the direct and indirect relationships between social media usage and value orientation. The results of the Social Media Use Scale model indicated that social media usage is a multidimensional construct significantly represented by active self-presentation, entertainment and information consumption, feedback monitoring, passive browsing, social comparison and negative, unsupportive engagement. Passive browsing and active self-presentation emerged as the strongest contributors to overall social media use. The value orientation model confirmed that moral, cultural, personal, spiritual and social values significantly contributed to overall value orientation, with moral values emerging as the strongest predictor. The integrated structural model revealed a statistically significant, though weak, positive influence of social media usage on value orientation, indicating that patterns of digital engagement are associated with subtle variations in youths' value systems. The findings further demonstrate that value orientation among college-going youth is primarily shaped by moral, cultural and spiritual value domains, while social media usage plays a comparatively modest contributory role. The study provides empirical evidence for the multidimensional nature of both social media usage and value orientation and offers important implications for designing value-based digital literacy and educational interventions for rural and urban college students in Tamil Nadu.

**Keywords:** Social media usage patterns, Value orientation, College-going youth, Rural-urban comparison, Moral and cultural values, Structural equation modelling (SEM), SPSS and AMOS, Trichy and Dindigul districts, Tamil Nadu.

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## Introduction

In the contemporary digital environment, social media has become a dominant medium of communication, information exchange, and social interaction, particularly among young people. For college-going youth, who are situated at a crucial stage of identity formation and psychosocial development, social networking platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp and Facebook increasingly influence everyday experiences, interpersonal relationships and perceptions of self and society. While these platforms provide important opportunities for learning, social connection and creative expression, growing concerns have emerged regarding their potential influence on young people's attitudes, social behaviour and value systems.

Value orientation represents a central construct in developmental psychology and sociology and refers to the relatively stable set of beliefs, principles and priorities that guide individual judgement, social conduct and

ethical decision-making. Traditionally, value orientation among young people has been shaped primarily by family, culture, religion, educational institutions and community environments. However, in the present digital era, social media has assumed an increasingly prominent role in shaping perceptions of social norms, moral expectations and lifestyle aspirations. The continuous exposure to online content, peer feedback, social comparison and digital narratives introduces new reference frames through which young individuals interpret social realities and personal goals.

In the Indian context, this transformation is particularly significant. India is characterised by rapid digital expansion, increasing smartphone penetration and widespread adoption of social networking platforms, alongside deeply rooted cultural, moral and social traditions. The coexistence of traditional value systems and digitally mediated cultures creates a complex environment in which young people negotiate between inherited social norms and emerging globalised influences. Moreover, the rural–urban divide further intensifies these dynamics, as differences in access to digital infrastructure, educational opportunities, media literacy and socio-cultural exposure shape the ways in which students engage with social media and interpret its content.

Although previous studies have extensively examined the psychological consequences of social media use such as its associations with self-esteem, anxiety, emotional well-being and problematic usage, comparatively fewer investigations have focused on its influence on value orientation, particularly within the Indian higher education context. Existing research has also paid limited attention to the multidimensional nature of social media engagement, which includes both active behaviours such as content creation and self-presentation, as well as passive behaviours such as browsing, observation, social comparison and validation seeking. Furthermore, empirical evidence remains scarce regarding how these diverse engagement patterns relate to different dimensions of value orientation and how such relationships may vary between rural and urban college students.

Against this background, the present study seeks to address these gaps by examining the structural relationship between social media usage patterns and value orientation among college-going youth in Tamil Nadu, with special reference to Trichy and Dindigul districts. Using a purposive sample of 1536 college students, the study investigates multiple dimensions of social media usage, namely active self-presentation and content creation, entertainment and information consumption, feedback monitoring and validation seeking, passive browsing and observation, social comparison and self-evaluation, and negative and unsupportive engagement. Value orientation is examined through key domains including moral, cultural, personal, social and spiritual values. The study also considers selected

demographic variables such as age, gender, year of study, type of institution, family background and socio-economic status.

Methodologically, the study employs quantitative techniques using SPSS and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) through AMOS to validate the measurement models and to examine the direct relationships between social media usage and value orientation. In addition, rural–urban comparisons are incorporated to understand contextual differences in social media engagement and value formation among college students.

By adopting a comparative and multidimensional analytical framework, this study contributes to the growing literature on youth, digital media and value development in India. It offers empirical insights into how different forms of social media engagement are associated with young people's value orientations and highlights the continuing importance of moral, cultural and social value foundations in an increasingly digitalised society. The findings are expected to inform educators, higher education administrators and policymakers in designing context-sensitive digital literacy and value-based educational interventions for both rural and urban college-going youth in Tamil Nadu.

### ***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 microblogging, enabling short real-time updates. With the rise of smartphones, 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 smartphones and cheaper data plans has fuelled 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 smartphone 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, cyberbullying, 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 has transformed patterns of communication, information sharing and social interaction. While social media offers opportunities for connectivity, learning and civic engagement, an increasing body of research has highlighted its influence on young people's value orientation, ethical sensitivity, empathy and social responsibility (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; Verduyn et al., 2017). Scholars emphasise that the effects of social media are not uniform, but depend on how and why young people use these platforms, especially with respect to active participation, passive browsing and validation-seeking behaviours (Verduyn et al., 2017).

Furthermore, recent studies suggest that digital environments have become an important socialisation context for youth, alongside family, education and culture, contributing to the formation and modification of moral and social values (Arora, 2019). In culturally diverse societies such as India, social media exposure has been found to interact with traditional value systems and influence young people's attitudes, social outlook and identity formation (Arora, 2019). However, empirical evidence examining the structural relationship between multidimensional social media usage patterns and value orientation, particularly among rural and urban college-going youth, remains limited. This gap provides the basis for the present study, which investigates the association between social media usage behaviours and value orientation among college students in Trichy and Dindigul districts of Tamil Nadu.

### **Social Media Usage and Value Orientation**

Value orientation refers to the system of moral, social, cultural, personal and spiritual values that guide individuals' attitudes and behaviour (Rokeach, 1973). During young adulthood, value systems related to empathy, honesty, social responsibility, cultural identity, personal principles and spiritual awareness undergo important developmental changes. In the present study, value orientation is conceptualised through five interrelated domains—moral values, cultural values, social values, personal values and spiritual values. Scholars suggest that patterns of digital media engagement may influence this developmental process by reshaping interpersonal relationships, social comparison and moral reasoning (Twenge, 2019; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

In parallel, social media usage among youth is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct comprising active self-presentation and content creation, entertainment and information consumption, feedback monitoring and validation seeking, passive browsing and observation, social comparison and self-evaluation, and negative and unsupportive engagement. These usage domains reflect

distinct behavioural processes through which students interact with online platforms and are theoretically linked to different aspects of value development.

Several studies have indicated that high levels of social media exposure are associated with reduced face-to-face interaction, emotional detachment and weakened family communication (Kross et al., 2013; Nie et al., 2002). Prolonged screen time has been linked to a decline in shared family activities, which are important contexts for the transmission of moral, cultural and social values (Putnam, 2000). From a domain-based perspective, frequent passive browsing and observation and heavy entertainment-oriented consumption may reduce opportunities for interpersonal engagement and family interaction, thereby indirectly influencing collective value formation and social responsibility.

### **Social Media Usage Domains and Empathy-Related Values**

Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, represents an important component of moral and social values (Davis, 1983). It encompasses both cognitive empathy, involving perspective-taking, and affective empathy, involving emotional responsiveness (Levenson & Ruef, 1992). In the present study, empathy is conceptually related to the domains of moral values and social values.

Research on empathy and social media use presents mixed findings. Exposure to humanitarian issues and social causes through entertainment and information consumption may foster awareness of social problems and global suffering (Gentile et al., 2012). However, excessive passive browsing and observation, together with frequent social comparison and self-evaluation, may limit meaningful interpersonal interaction and reduce empathic concern due to emotional desensitisation and superficial social contact (Konrath et al., 2011). Konrath et al. (2011) reported a decline in empathic concern among college students, coinciding with the increasing dominance of digitally mediated communication. Conversely, active self-presentation and content creation related to social causes and community support, as well as responsible participation in online discussions, have been associated with enhanced empathic awareness and compassionate behaviour (Verduyn et al., 2017).

### **Social Media Usage Domains, Moral Responsibility and Honesty**

Moral responsibility involves adherence to ethical standards such as honesty, fairness and accountability and corresponds directly to the domain of moral values in the present study. Bandura (1999) argues that online environments characterised by anonymity and reduced social accountability may facilitate moral disengagement.

In the context of social media usage domains, negative and unsupportive engagement, such as exposure to online hostility, criticism and conflict, may weaken ethical sensitivity and normalise inappropriate behaviour (Kowalski et al., 2014).

Research indicates that excessive and problematic social media use is associated with higher tolerance of dishonest and harmful behaviour (Gini et al., 2014). Furthermore, feedback monitoring and validation seeking may influence moral judgment when youth begin to prioritise online approval over ethical considerations. At the same time, responsible use of social media for dialogue, learning and awareness creation—often reflected through active self-presentation and constructive information sharing—can strengthen ethical reflection and moral reasoning (Jackson et al., 2020). These findings suggest that the influence of social media on moral values depends strongly on the specific usage domains through which students engage.

### ***Social Media Usage Domains and Social (Civic) Values***

Civic engagement refers to individuals' participation in social and community-oriented activities aimed at collective well-being (Putnam, 2000) and is closely related to the domain of social values in the present study. Social media platforms provide opportunities for information dissemination, mobilisation and youth participation in public life, particularly through entertainment and information consumption and active content sharing (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012).

However, excessive reliance on passive browsing and observation may lead to superficial participation and reduced offline involvement, often described as slacktivism (Morozov, 2011). Scholars argue that meaningful civic outcomes are more likely when youth engage critically and interactively rather than merely consuming online content (Boulianne, 2015). This distinction closely aligns with the active and passive usage domains incorporated in the present study.

### ***Social Media Usage Domains and Prosocial Values***

Prosocial behaviour, including helping, sharing and altruistic actions, is closely connected to both moral values and social values (Batson et al., 2002). Exposure to positive role models and supportive communities through entertainment and information consumption and active self-presentation and content creation can encourage prosocial intentions among college students (Greitemeyer & Mügge, 2014).

In contrast, frequent social comparison and self-evaluation and strong feedback monitoring and validation seeking may promote self-focused orientations and competitive attitudes, potentially weakening concern for collective welfare (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). These contrasting outcomes highlight the importance of

distinguishing between responsible and unreflective forms of social media engagement when examining their influence on value orientation.

### ***Present Study***

The present study examines the influence of multidimensional social media usage on the value orientation of college students in rural and urban contexts, with special reference to Trichy and Dindigul districts of Tamil Nadu. Social media usage is represented through six domains: active self-presentation and content creation, entertainment and information consumption, feedback monitoring and validation seeking, passive browsing and observation, social comparison and self-evaluation, and negative and unsupportive engagement.

Value orientation is examined through five domains, namely spiritual values, moral values, cultural values, social values and personal values. These domains represent students' ethical standards, cultural attachment, social responsibility, personal belief systems and spiritual orientation.

Consistent with the findings of the present study, moral values emerge as the strongest contributor to overall value orientation, followed by cultural values and personal values, while spiritual and social values also show significant but comparatively smaller contributions. Moreover, the structural model demonstrates that social media usage exerts a statistically significant but weak direct influence on value orientation, indicating that although youth social media engagement is associated with changes in value systems, the formation of values among college-going youth in Trichy and Dindigul districts continues to be shaped primarily by established moral, cultural and personal foundations.

By adopting a rural–urban perspective, the study further highlights how socio-cultural context and patterns of digital engagement influence the relationship between social media usage domains and value orientation domains among college students in Tamil Nadu.

### ***The objectives of this study are***

- To examine the structural relationship between multidimensional social media usage patterns and overall value orientation among college-going youth in rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu.
- To assess the contribution of the five value orientation domains, namely moral values, cultural values, personal values, spiritual values and social values, to overall value orientation among college students.
- To analyse the influence of different social media usage domains active self-presentation and content creation, entertainment and information consumption, feedback monitoring and validation seeking, passive browsing

and observation, social comparison and self-evaluation, and negative and unsupportive engagement on students' value orientation.

- To compare social media usage patterns and value orientation between rural and urban college-going youth.

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Social media usage patterns will have a statistically significant relationship with overall value orientation among college-going youth.

H2: Social media usage patterns will have a statistically significant influence on the five domains of value orientation, namely moral, cultural, personal, spiritual and social values.

H3: There will be a statistically significant difference between rural and urban college-going youth in social media usage patterns and value orientation.

## **Materials And Methods**

### **Participants**

The sample for the present study consisted of 1536 college-going youth drawn from selected higher education institutions located in Trichy and Dindigul districts of Tamil Nadu. The participants included undergraduate and postgraduate students from arts and science streams. The sample represented students from both rural and urban backgrounds, with adequate representation of gender, type of institution (autonomous and non-autonomous colleges), place of residence (hostel and day scholars), and varied family and socio-economic backgrounds. The inclusion criteria required that participants (a) were currently enrolled in a recognised college, (b) belonged to the age group of 18 to 25 years, and (c) were active users of at least one social media platform.

### **Sampling Technique**

A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select participants who fulfilled the study requirements, particularly active engagement with social media platforms. This method ensured the inclusion of respondents who possessed adequate exposure to digital media necessary for examining social media usage patterns and their association with value orientation among college-going youth.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using a structured and self-administered questionnaire comprising three major sections.

#### *Demographic information*

This section collected information on age, gender, place of residence (rural/urban), district (Trichy/Dindigul), department, year of study, type of institution (autonomous/non-autonomous), family structure and socio-economic status.

### **Social Media Usage Scale (SMUS)**

Social media usage was measured using a multidimensional Social Media Usage Scale developed for the present study. The scale comprised items representing six usage domains, namely active self-presentation and content creation, entertainment and information consumption, feedback monitoring and validation seeking, passive browsing and observation, social comparison and self-evaluation, and negative and unsupportive engagement. Responses were obtained on a Likert-type scale indicating the extent of engagement in each behaviour.

### **Value Orientation Scale**

Value orientation was assessed using a structured scale measuring five value domains, namely moral values, cultural values, personal values, spiritual values and social values. The scale captured students' ethical principles, cultural attachment, personal beliefs, spiritual orientation and social responsibility.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for preliminary and descriptive analyses and AMOS for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Descriptive statistics were used to summarise demographic characteristics and overall levels of social media usage and value orientation. Independent sample t-tests were conducted to examine rural-urban differences in social media usage patterns and value orientation.

Structural Equation Modelling was employed to validate the measurement models of social media usage and value orientation and to examine the structural relationship between multidimensional social media usage and overall value orientation. The SEM approach enabled simultaneous estimation of relationships among the six usage domains and the five value domains and provided an integrated assessment of the proposed conceptual framework of the study.

### **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. (Figure 1)

Figure 1 illustrates the structural relationships among the six behavioural dimensions and the Social Media Use Scale. All specified paths from active self-presentation, entertainment-information consumption, feedback monitoring, passive browsing, social comparison, and negative engagement to SMUS were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). The magnitude of standardized path coefficients indicates that passive browsing and active self-presentation exert the strongest influence on overall social media use. The model supports the conceptualization of social media use as a multidimensional construct shaped by both active and passive engagement patterns. (Table 1)

Table 1 presents the goodness-of-fit indices for the structural equation model of the Social Media Use Scale

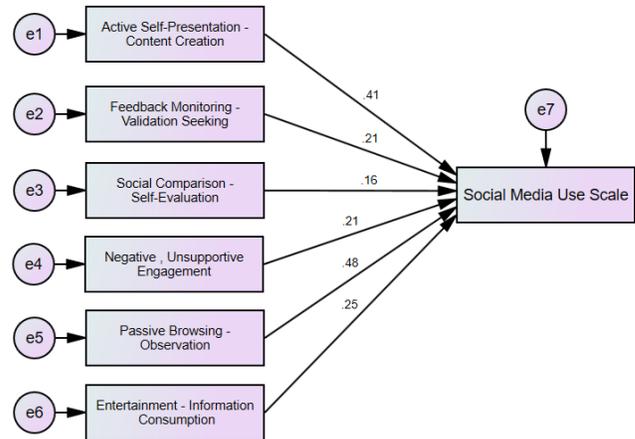


Figure 1: SEM MODEL: Social Media Use Scale

(SMUS). The normed chi-square value,  $\chi^2/df = 4.278$ , was within the recommended limit of less than 5, indicating an acceptable model fit. The goodness-of-fit indices also demonstrated satisfactory fit, with  $GFI = .921$  and  $AGFI = .901$  exceeding the recommended threshold of .90. In addition, the comparative fit indices showed adequate model fit ( $CFI = .939$ ;  $NFI = .937$ ). The RMSEA value of .089 was below the acceptable upper limit of .10, indicating a reasonable approximation error. Overall, the results indicate that the proposed SMUS measurement model adequately fits the observed data. (Table 2)

Table 2 shows the unstandardized regression weights, standard errors, critical ratios, and significance levels for the predictors of the Social Media Use Scale. All six dimensions of social media behaviour significantly predicted SMUS (all  $p < .001$ ). Active self-presentation-content creation ( $B = .252$ ), entertainment-information consumption ( $B = .182$ ), feedback monitoring-validation seeking ( $B = .126$ ), passive browsing-observation ( $B = .282$ ), social comparison-self-evaluation ( $B = .098$ ), and negative, unsupportive engagement ( $B = .118$ ) were positively associated with overall social media use. These results indicate that each behavioural dimension contributes significantly to the formation of overall social media usage.

**Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)**

		Estimate
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Active Self-Presentation - Content Creation .408

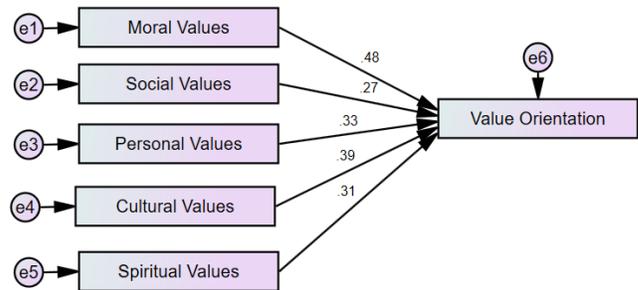
Table 1: Results of the Goodness of Fit Test for Structural Equation Modelling (Sem)

Model	Normed chi-Square ( $\chi^2/df$ )	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Study model	4.278	.921	.901	.939	.937	.089
Recommended model	Less than 5	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	< 0.1

**Table 2:** Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Active Self-Presentation - Content Creation	.252	.010	24.539	***
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Entertainment - Information Consumption	.182	.012	14.928	***
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Feedback Monitoring - Validation Seeking	.126	.010	12.787	***
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Passive Browsing - Observation	.282	.010	28.809	***
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Social Comparison - Self-Evaluation	.098	.010	9.869	***
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Negative, Unsupportive Engagement	.118	.009	12.918	***

			Estimate
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Entertainment - Information Consumption	.248
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Feedback Monitoring - Validation Seeking	.213
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Passive Browsing - Observation	.479
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Social Comparison - Self-Evaluation	.164
Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)	<---	Negative, Unsupportive Engagement	.215



**Figure 2:** Value Orientation

As presented in Table Z, passive browsing–observation emerged as the strongest predictor of SMUS ( $\beta = .479$ ), followed by active self-presentation–content creation ( $\beta = .408$ ). Entertainment–information consumption ( $\beta = .248$ ), negative, unsupportive engagement ( $\beta = .215$ ), feedback monitoring–validation seeking ( $\beta = .213$ ), and social comparison–self-evaluation ( $\beta = .164$ ) also showed statistically significant positive effects (all  $p < .001$ ). The standardized coefficients indicate that passive and observational forms of engagement play a more dominant role in explaining overall social media use than active production-oriented behaviours. (Figure 2)

Figure 2 depicts the structural relationships between the five value dimensions and overall Value Orientation. All structural paths from spiritual, moral, cultural, social, and personal values to Value Orientation were positive and statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). The strongest contribution was observed for moral values, followed by cultural and personal values. The model supports the multidimensional nature of value orientation and confirms that multiple value domains jointly contribute to individuals’ overall value systems. (Table 3)

Table 3 presents the goodness-of-fit indices for the Value Orientation model. The normed chi-square value ( $\chi^2/df = 3.143$ ) was below the recommended cutoff value of 5,

**Table 3:** Results of the Goodness of Fit Test for Structural Equation Modelling (Sem)

Model	Normed chi-Square ( $\chi^2/df$ )	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Study model	3.143	0.817	.896	.901	.914	.071
Recommended model	Less than 5	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	< 0.1

**Table 4:** Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Value Orientation	<---	Spiritual Values	.301	.014	21.169	***
Value Orientation	<---	Moral Values	.478	.015	32.544	***
Value Orientation	<---	Cultural Values	.363	.014	25.960	***
Value Orientation	<---	Social Values	.273	.015	18.392	***
Value Orientation	<---	Personal Values	.368	.017	22.126	***

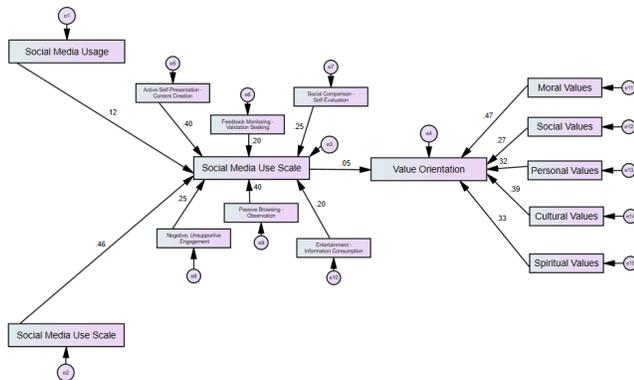


Figure 3: Overall Model: Social Media Usage and Value Orientation

Table 5: Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate
Value Orientation	<---	Spiritual Values	.314
Value Orientation	<---	Moral Values	.483
Value Orientation	<---	Cultural Values	.385
Value Orientation	<---	Social Values	.273
Value Orientation	<---	Personal Values	.328

indicating a good model fit. Although the GFI value (.817) was below the conventional .90 criterion, the remaining fit indices demonstrated acceptable to good fit (AGFI = .896; CFI = .901; NFI = .914). The RMSEA value of .071 indicated a reasonable approximation error. Taken together, these indices suggest that the Value Orientation model demonstrates an overall acceptable fit to the observed data. (Table 4)

Table 4 presents the unstandardized regression estimates for the five value dimensions predicting Value Orientation. Spiritual values (B = .301), moral values (B = .478), cultural values (B = .363), social values (B = .273), and personal values (B = .368) were all statistically significant predictors of Value Orientation (all p < .001). These findings indicate that each value domain contributes meaningfully to the overall value orientation of the respondents. (Table 5)

As shown in Table C, moral values exhibited the strongest standardized effect on Value Orientation ( $\beta = .483$ ), followed by cultural values ( $\beta = .385$ ), personal values ( $\beta = .328$ ), spiritual values ( $\beta = .314$ ), and social values ( $\beta = .273$ ). All standardized effects were statistically significant (p < .001). The pattern of coefficients indicates that ethical and cultural dimensions play a more prominent role in shaping overall value orientation than social value considerations. (Figure 3)

Table 6: Results Of Goodness Of Fit Test For Structural Equation Modelling (Sem)

Model	Normed chi-Square ( $\chi^2/df$ )	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Study model	3.017	.918	.827	.971	.829	.901
Recommended model	Less than 5	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	< 0.1

Table 7: Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Social Media Use Scale	8.054	.227	35.460	***
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Social Media Usage	.325	.034	9.550	***
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Feedback Monitoring - Validation Seeking	3.037	.199	15.293	***
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Passive Browsing - Observation	6.165	.197	31.239	***
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Negative, Unsupportive Engagement	3.663	.185	19.851	***
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Active Self-Presentation - Content Creation	6.436	.207	31.136	***
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Social Comparison - Self-Evaluation	3.805	.199	19.096	***
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Entertainment - Information Consumption	3.818	.246	15.513	***
Value Orientation	<---	Social Media Use Scale	.003	.001	3.423	***
Value Orientation	<---	Moral Values	.458	.015	31.530	***
Value Orientation	<---	Personal Values	.349	.016	21.199	***
Value Orientation	<---	Social Values	.268	.015	18.283	***
Value Orientation	<---	Cultural Values	.367	.014	26.512	***
Value Orientation	<---	Spiritual Values	.312	.014	22.206	***

**Table 8:** Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			<i>Estimate</i>
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Social Media Use Scale	.455
Social Media Use Scale	<---	SMU_TOTAL	.123
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Feedback Monitoring - Validation Seeking	.196
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Passive Browsing - Observation	.401
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Negative, Unsupportive Engagement	.255
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Active Self-Presentation - Content Creation	.400
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Social Comparison - Self-Evaluation	.245
Social Media Use Scale	<---	Entertainment - Information Consumption	.199
Value Orientation	<---	Social Media Use Scale	.051
Value Orientation	<---	Moral Values	.469
Value Orientation	<---	Personal Values	.315
Value Orientation	<---	Social Values	.272
Value Orientation	<---	Cultural Values	.394
Value Orientation	<---	Spiritual Values	.330

Figure 3 illustrates the integrated structural model linking multiple dimensions of social media engagement with overall social media use and value orientation. All paths from social media behaviour dimensions to the Social Media Use Scale were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). The strongest effects were observed for passive browsing and active self-presentation. The path from social media use to value orientation was statistically significant but small in magnitude, indicating a limited direct influence of social media use on individuals' value orientation. In contrast, moral, cultural, spiritual, personal, and social values demonstrated substantially stronger effects on value orientation. The model highlights that value orientation among college-going youth is primarily shaped by established value domains, while social media use plays a comparatively modest contributory role. (Table 6)

Table 6 presents the goodness-of-fit indices for the integrated structural equation model linking social media use and value orientation. The normed chi-square value ( $\chi^2/df = 3.017$ ) indicated an acceptable model fit. The GFI value (.918) exceeded the recommended threshold of .90, supporting the adequacy of the model. Although the AGFI (.827) and NFI (.829) were slightly below the conventional criterion, the CFI (.971) indicated an excellent comparative fit. The RMSEA value should be interpreted carefully; if the reported value represents .090, it falls within the acceptable limit of less than .10. Overall, the combination of fit indices suggests that the integrated model provides an adequate representation of the relationships among the study variables. (Table 7)

Table 7 presents the unstandardized regression estimates for the integrated model. All dimensions of social media

engagement significantly contributed to the Social Media Use Scale ( $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, social media use significantly predicted Value Orientation ( $B = .003, p < .001$ ). In addition, moral, personal, social, cultural, and spiritual values all significantly predicted Value Orientation (all  $p < .001$ ), indicating that both media-related and value-based constructs contribute to the overall explanatory structure of the model. (Table 8)

As shown in Table 8, passive browsing-observation ( $\beta = .401$ ) and active self-presentation-content creation ( $\beta = .400$ ) were the strongest predictors of social media use, followed by negative, unsupportive engagement ( $\beta = .255$ ), social comparison-self-evaluation ( $\beta = .245$ ), entertainment-information consumption ( $\beta = .199$ ), and feedback monitoring-validation seeking ( $\beta = .196$ ). Social media use exerted a statistically significant but weak influence on Value Orientation ( $\beta = .051$ ). Among the value domains, moral values ( $\beta = .469$ ) showed the strongest effect, followed by cultural values ( $\beta = .394$ ), spiritual values ( $\beta = .330$ ), personal values ( $\beta = .315$ ), and social values ( $\beta = .272$ ).

## Conclusion

The present study examined the structural relationship between multidimensional social media usage patterns and value orientation among college-going youth in rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu, with special reference to Trichy and Dindigul districts. Value orientation was conceptualised through five domains, namely moral, cultural, personal, spiritual and social values, while social media usage was represented through six behavioural domains, including active self-presentation and content creation, entertainment and information consumption, feedback monitoring and

validation seeking, passive browsing and observation, social comparison and self-evaluation, and negative and unsupportive engagement.

The findings of the Structural Equation Modelling analysis revealed that all six social media usage domains significantly contributed to overall social media usage, with passive browsing–observation and active self-presentation–content creation emerging as the most prominent forms of engagement among college students. The value orientation model further demonstrated that moral values constituted the strongest contributor to overall value orientation, followed by cultural and personal values, while spiritual and social values also made significant but comparatively smaller contributions.

The integrated structural model indicated that social media usage exerted a statistically significant but weak direct influence on value orientation. This suggests that although patterns of digital engagement are associated with students' value systems, value orientation among college-going youth in the study region continues to be shaped primarily by established moral, cultural and personal foundations rather than by social media exposure alone. The results therefore do not support a strong deterministic effect of social media on youth values, but instead point to a subtle and indirect influence operating alongside traditional socialisation agents.

This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the role of social media in contemporary youth value formation. It highlights that social media is not inherently detrimental to value development; rather, its influence depends on the nature of engagement and the behavioural patterns through which students interact with digital platforms. The findings underline the importance of promoting reflective and responsible digital engagement among college students and strengthening value-based education in higher education institutions, particularly in both rural and urban contexts of Tamil Nadu, in order to support ethical awareness, cultural continuity, personal development and social responsibility in the digital age.

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### Implications

The findings of the present study have important theoretical, educational and practical implications for understanding the relationship between social media usage and value orientation among college-going youth in Tamil Nadu.

From a theoretical perspective, the study extends existing literature on digital media and youth development by demonstrating that social media usage is a multidimensional behavioural construct and that its influence on value orientation operates through distinct engagement patterns rather than through overall exposure alone. The Structural Equation Modelling results show that different forms of engagement—such as passive browsing, active self-presentation, validation seeking, social comparison and negative interactions—collectively shape overall social media use, while value orientation is predominantly explained by moral, cultural and personal value domains. The weak but statistically significant direct effect of social media usage on value orientation further refines social learning and media effects perspectives by highlighting that digital media functions as a supplementary socialising agent alongside traditional influences such as family, culture and education, rather than as a dominant determinant of youth values.

From an educational perspective, the results indicate that higher education institutions should move beyond an exclusive focus on limiting screen time and instead emphasise the quality and purpose of students' digital engagement. Integrating digital citizenship, media literacy and value-based education into the curriculum can help students develop ethical awareness, critical reflection and responsible online behaviour. Particular attention may be given to guiding students towards constructive engagement, meaningful content creation and reflective information consumption, while discouraging excessive passive browsing, validation-driven behaviour and negative online interactions.

From a practical and policy perspective, the findings highlight the need for context-sensitive digital interventions for both rural and urban college students. Educational administrators, counsellors and student support services

can design programmes that promote responsible social media use, encourage respectful online communication and strengthen moral and cultural awareness among youth. In addition, policymakers and social media platform designers may utilise these insights to create digital environments and guidelines that promote positive interaction, social responsibility and well-being, while reducing exposure to harmful and unsupportive online behaviours.

### Limitations

Despite its contributions, the present study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design of the study restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between social media usage patterns and value orientation. Longitudinal research would be more suitable for examining changes in youth values over time and the long-term influence of digital engagement.

Second, the study relied on self-reported measures of social media usage and value orientation, which may be subject to social desirability bias and recall errors. Although care was taken to ensure anonymity and clarity of items, the possibility of response bias cannot be completely eliminated.

Third, the sample was limited to college-going youth from selected institutions in Trichy and Dindigul districts of Tamil Nadu. As a result, the findings may not be directly generalisable to students from other regions, age groups or socio-cultural contexts.

Finally, the study focused only on selected behavioural domains of social media usage and five value domains. Other potentially influential factors such as personality traits, parenting styles, peer influence, academic stress and platform-specific content characteristics were not included in the structural model. Moreover, the possibility of reciprocal relationships, whereby existing value orientations influence patterns of social media usage, cannot be ruled out and should be explored in future research.

### 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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