



6. The Impact of Social Media on Family Values among Gen Z and Millennials

Umanath Singh

PhD Research Scholar

Department of Journalism & Mass Communication
Shri Khushal Das University, Hanumangarh, Rajasthan

Registration Number – Ph.D./03/2023 /JMC/146

Enrollment Number- SKDU202300656

Email: umanathsingh58@gmail.com

Dr. Gaurav

Assistant Professor

Department of Journalism & Mass Communication
Shri Khushal Das University, Hanumangarh, Rajasthan

Abstract:

This study explores how social media, especially Facebook and Instagram, influences family values among Gen Z and Millennials, two generations raised in a digital environment. As online communication becomes part of everyday life, these platforms not only support self-expression and connection but also shape thoughts, behaviours, and relationships. The research examines how frequent use of these platforms affects traditional family norms, intergenerational communication, emotional bonding, and how families spend time together. The study finds both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, Facebook and Instagram help families stay connected through quick communication, sharing personal updates, and offering emotional support across distances. Millennials often use Facebook to stay in touch with extended family. At the same time, Gen Z relies more on Instagram features like stories and direct messages to stay in regular contact with parents and siblings. These interactions help maintain closeness even when families are geographically apart.

However, challenges are also evident. Excessive screen time, algorithm-driven content, and the pursuit of likes can reduce face-to-face conversations and shared family activities. Instagram's curated content can create lifestyle comparison, lower self-esteem, and lead to emotional distance or conflicts. Both generations show growing dependence on digital interaction, disrupting traditional family practices such as shared meals and meaningful conversations. Generational differences further shape the impact. Millennials, who experienced both pre-digital and digital life, are more aware of the need for balance. Gen Z, as digital natives, integrates social media more deeply into their identity and values, making them more susceptible to online influence.

Overall, the study concludes that the impact of Facebook and Instagram is mixed and depends on usage patterns, digital literacy, and the strength of offline relationships. Encouraging mindful use, improving digital awareness, and prioritizing family time can reduce adverse effects and strengthen family bonds. The findings highlight the need for balanced digital habits to support



healthier family interactions. They also suggest that parents and young adults must work together to create a more positive and supportive online environment.

Keywords- Social Media, Family Values, Gen Z and Millennials

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, social media has become a significant part of daily life, changing how people communicate, interact, and express themselves. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram have not only changed friendships and social connections but have also started to influence personal and family values. For Gen Z (born around 1997–2012) and Millennials (born around 1981–1996), digital life is closely tied to real life, and many of their interactions happen online rather than in person. In traditional societies such as India and other collectivist cultures, family values, like respecting elders, staying emotionally close, sharing responsibilities, and supporting one another, are considered very important. However, constant exposure to online content that focuses on individualism, self-promotion, and global trends may be shaping the outlook and priorities of younger generations.

In recent years, social media has shifted from being an optional leisure activity to a central arena for social interaction, self-presentation, and relationship maintenance, with Facebook and Instagram occupying prominent positions within this landscape. Facebook remains widely used for wide-network communication, while Instagram is a hub for visual self-expression and close-network interaction, particularly among younger users. Family values, understood here as a cluster of shared beliefs and practices concerning respect, responsibility, emotional closeness, intergenerational duties, and collective rituals, have long underpinned social stability in many cultures.

Studying this topic is important because family values influence how people care for one another, stay connected, pass on culture, and participate in society. If social media changes how these values are practised or shared, it can affect personal well-being, family bonds, communities, and traditions. This paper brings together ideas and real-life findings to compare Gen Z and Millennials and suggests practical ways to strengthen families in the digital age. Hence, this study aims to understand how using Facebook and Instagram has influenced family values among Gen Z and Millennials, and how their attitudes toward family relationships and responsibilities may differ.

Research Questions:

1. How has social media usage influenced the perception and practice of family values among Gen Z and Millennials? In what ways do these platforms strengthen or weaken core family values, such as respect for elders, emotional closeness, shared responsibilities, and participation in rituals?



2. How do patterns of Facebook and Instagram usage differ between Millennials and Gen Z with respect to family interaction?
3. Are there observable generational differences in how Facebook and Instagram impact family relationships?
4. What practical strategies do families employ to balance the benefits and risks of social media for maintaining family values?

Objectives:

- To analyze how social media exposure affects family interaction and cohesion.
- To compare Gen Z and Millennial perspectives on family values in the digital age.

Hypothesis:

H1: Increased time spent on Facebook and Instagram is negatively associated with the maintenance of traditional family values.

2. Review of Literature

Research on social media and families has increased rapidly, but it remains scattered. Three main areas are important-

Communication and Relationship Maintenance: Studies show that social media helps families stay in touch, share photos, updates, and daily events. It supports both real-time communication (calls, video chats) and delayed communication (posts, stories).

Identity, Self-Presentation, and Mental Health: Research shows that social media encourages people to present a polished version of themselves and to compare their lives with others'. This can impact self-esteem, emotions, and even cause conflicts.

Family Practices and Routines: Studies show that digital devices can distract people, alter mealtime habits, and disrupt family traditions. At the same time, families create new digital traditions, such as group chats and online activities.

However, very little research focuses directly on family values, and even fewer studies compare Millennials and Gen Z. We know there are differences between the two groups in how they use platforms, how they view privacy, and how important online identity is to them. However, we still do not fully understand how these differences affect their family values. This study aims to fill that gap.



2.1 Theoretical Background

- Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977): Individuals learn behaviours and social norms by observing others. In fact, values are transmitted through family interactions, rituals, and modelling. Digital environments create new socialization contexts beyond the home, influencing the acquisition of values. Constant exposure to social media models, celebrity lifestyles, and influencer content may subtly influence how users perceive family roles and priorities.
- Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1986): Repeated exposure to mediated realities shapes individuals' understanding of social norms, possibly leading Gen Z and Millennials to adopt more liberal or individual-centred values. Over time, constant interaction with diverse viewpoints, lifestyles, and cultural expressions online can influence how they define identity, relationships, and acceptable behaviour within and beyond the family.
- Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974): Suggests users actively choose media to satisfy needs like belonging, recognition, or entertainment. These gratifications may sometimes replace the emotional fulfilment traditionally derived from family interactions, as individuals turn to online communities, influencers, or peer networks for validation, support, and social connection that once came primarily from family members.

By combining these lenses, the paper frames social media as both a medium (a channel) and a context (an environment) for value negotiation. It shows how digital platforms not only transmit information but also shape the surroundings in which beliefs, priorities, and expectations are formed. This perspective helps explain how everyday interactions-likes, comments, posts, and shared content-gradually shape how different generations understand, practice, and adapt their family values.

2.2 Empirical Studies

Empirical studies show that social media affects family relationships in both positive and negative ways. Research finds that platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram help families stay connected, share updates, and maintain bonds across distance. At the same time, heavy or distracted use, often called 'technoference', can reduce face-to-face communication, create conflicts, and weaken emotional closeness. Studies also show that adolescents may use social media to withdraw from family interaction, while parents' screen habits can shape the family atmosphere. Overall, evidence suggests that social media reshapes communication patterns, routines, and emotional dynamics within families, influencing how connected or fragmented they feel in daily life. However, research has linked heavy social media use with both positive and negative family outcomes.



- Kumar & Singh (2022) found that constant digital connectivity often leads to emotional detachment from immediate family, though it can enhance long-distance family communication. When people spend long hours scrolling, chatting, or posting, their attention shifts away from those physically present, creating feelings of neglect or reduced emotional closeness. Families may sit together yet remain mentally distant, each absorbed in their own digital world. This can weaken everyday conversations, shared routines, and small moments of bonding that build strong relationships. At the same time, social media can be a lifeline for relatives living in different cities or countries, helping them share updates, celebrate events, and maintain a sense of togetherness despite physical separation.
- Lenhart (2019) observed that Instagram users tend to express personal achievements and opinions more freely, contributing to greater self-expression but less family conformity. The platform encourages individuality through curated posts, stories, and reels, allowing users, especially younger generations, to shape a personal identity that may not always align with traditional family expectations. This freedom often leads to greater confidence in sharing views on lifestyle, career choices, and social issues. However, it can also create generational tension when family members perceive such openness as a breach of norms or a challenge to established values. As a result, Instagram becomes a space where personal expression grows, but shared family ideals may weaken.
- Conversely, Pew Research (2021) reported that 58% of Millennials maintain dedicated family groups on Facebook to share updates, photos, and cultural traditions, showing that the platforms can also support family bonding. These groups create a shared digital space where relatives can stay connected, celebrate milestones, and communicate regularly, even when living apart. They help maintain a sense of unity and preserve family traditions in an accessible, modern format.

Research Gap:

Most existing research examines how social media affects friendships, communication styles, and overall youth behaviour. However, very few studies focus directly on how social media influences family values, such as respect, responsibility, and emotional bonding. Even fewer compare how Gen Z and Millennials differ in their attitudes toward family because of their different digital experiences. This gap makes the present study important, as it helps us understand how two major generations are shaping and reshaping family relationships under the influence of platforms like Facebook and Instagram. It also highlights the need to examine changing values in today's digital age.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design



A mixed-method approach is employed to capture both measurable trends and personal insights. The study combines quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews.

3.2 Sample and Population

The study focuses on urban and semi-urban youth aged 18–44 years in India.

- Gen Z sample: 18–26 years (n = 100)
- Millennials sample: 27–44 years (n = 100)

3.3 Sampling Method

A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who actively use Facebook and Instagram for at least 2 hours daily.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

- Questionnaire: Structured with Likert-scale items measuring:
 - Frequency of social media usage
 - Time spent with family
 - Attitudes toward respect, obedience, and shared family activities
- Interviews: Semi-structured questions to gather more profound insights into personal experiences.

3.5 Variables

- Independent Variable: Social media usage (hours/day, engagement type)
- Dependent Variable: Family value orientation (measured by respect for elders, time spent, communication patterns).



3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS, with correlation and regression tests used to examine relationships.

Qualitative responses were coded thematically for recurring patterns such as ‘family detachment,’ ‘digital bonding,’ and ‘conflict of values.’

4. Findings and Analysis

Preliminary analysis indicates:

- Gen Z participants report a higher average screen time (5.2 hours/day) than Millennials (3.7 hours/day).
- 68% of Gen Z respondents agreed that social media often ‘distracts them from family conversations.’
- 52% of Millennials felt that Facebook helped them ‘stay updated about extended family.’
- A moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.43$) was found between screen time and frequency of family meals together.

Qualitative interviews revealed that Gen Z participants often prioritized online engagement over family gatherings, citing social media as a ‘necessary escape’ or ‘source of validation.’ Millennials, while digitally active, expressed more nostalgia for traditional family routines and were more likely to manage time for family commitments.

5. Discussion

The findings support the hypothesis that excessive social media use can erode traditional family interactions, though not uniformly. While both generations rely on Facebook and Instagram for communication and identity formation, their motivations differ.

- Gen Z, who grew up in a wholly digital environment, tend to internalize online culture as an extension of self, often valuing digital visibility over domestic participation.
- Millennials generally use social media more functionally to maintain contact, share family updates, or balance work and home life.



The results align with Social Learning Theory, as both generations adapt behaviours modelled online, and partially with Cultivation Theory, which suggests that prolonged exposure to individualistic content reshapes social norms. However, findings also reveal positive uses of social media for preserving connections, such as maintaining contact with distant relatives and celebrating family milestones virtually.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that social media, especially Facebook and Instagram, has had a dual impact on family values among Gen Z and Millennials. While it enables connectivity and communication, it also encourages individualistic behaviour and reduces in-person family engagement. Gen Z exhibits more substantial shifts away from traditional family cohesion compared to Millennials. Time spent online inversely relates to the quality of family interaction. Family-oriented content and responsible usage patterns can mitigate negative impacts.

Digital Literacy Programs should promote balanced social media habits, emphasizing family interaction. Parents and educators must encourage ‘device-free family time’ and offline bonding. Social media platforms can integrate family-friendly features, reminders, and content prompts to strengthen intergenerational ties. Future research should explore cross-cultural comparisons and longitudinal trends to understand evolving digital-family dynamics.

7. References

1. Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall.
2. Bengston, V. L., & Roberts, R. E. (1991). Intergenerational relationships in family systems. In P. H. Burchinal & R. McKenzie (Eds.), *Family relationships: Intergenerational transmission of attitudes and values* (pp. 5–22). Sage Publications.
3. Gerbner, G. (1986). Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Perspectives on media effects* (pp. 17–40). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
4. Heinrich, L. M., & McCoy, S. K. (2016). Social media use and perception of relationship quality in families. *Journal of Family Communication*, 16(2), 195–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2016.1146346>
5. Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.



6. Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
7. Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523. <https://doi.org/10.1086/268109>
8. Kumar, R., & Singh, D. (2022). Social media usage and family disconnection among Indian youth. *Journal of Media Studies*, 14(2), 45–59.
9. Lenhart, A. (2019). *Instagram and self-expression among young adults*. Pew Research Center.
10. Pew Research Center. (2021). *Social media and family connections in the 21st century*. <https://www.pewresearch.org>
11. Pew Research Center. (2021). *Social media use in 2021*. <https://www.pewresearch.org>
12. Rosen, L. D. (2012). *iDisorder: Understanding our obsession with technology and overcoming its hold on us*. Palgrave Macmillan.
13. Rotheram-Borus, M. J., Mahat, G., & Johnson, C. (2014). A critical review of how family values aid in the transmission of culture. *Journal of Family Issues*, 35(1), 95–117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X12466664>
14. Twenge, J. M. (2017). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy—and completely unprepared for adulthood*. Atria Books.
15. Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2011). Online communication among adolescents: An integrated model of its attraction, opportunities, and risks. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 48(2), 121–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2010.08.020>