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Social Media, Cultural Values, and Digital Citizenship: A Study of Iranian Digital Natives

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of social media engagement on cultural values among Iranian digital natives. A quantitative survey was conducted with 384 participants using a random online sampling method. The theoretical framework is based on Goffman's dramaturgical model theory and Rogers' diffusion theory. The findings reveal a significant negative correlation between the frequency of social media usage and adherence to cultural values, indicating that excessive use of social media may erode national cultural values and promote individualistic tendencies. Conversely, engagement with content that aligns with Iranian cultural values positively correlates with adherence to these values, underscoring the potential for social media to strengthen cultural values and preserve cultural heritage. This study highlights that social media engagement can have both positive and negative effects on cultural values, depending on the nature of the engagement. When used thoughtfully, social media can aid in the preservation and dissemination of cultural values. However, it also poses risks, including cyber vandalism and the degradation of

cultural values. In conclusion, fostering media literacy for responsible digital citizenship is crucial for leveraging social media's potential to preserve and promote cultural values. This approach can help create a healthier, culturally aware digital environment that protects cultural heritage.

KEYWORDS

social media, cultural values, digital natives, Iranian culture, Generation Z, digital citizenship, digital culture, media literacy, social media engagement

Introduction

Cultural values constitute a paramount feature of societies; and as social phenomena, they assume a pivotal function in shaping, regulating, forecasting, and predisposing human behavior, thus representing a fundamental constituent of the cultural fabric of societies. The internalization of societal values at a particular juncture engenders the process and modality of individuals' actions (Ali Akbari & Saborikhosroshahi, 2018). The significance of values as the conduit between the culture of a nation and its posterity cannot be overstated, and disregarding this crucial connection may precipitate an existential crisis for societies. In fact, Inglehart posits that values are so fundamental to this relationship that effecting a "silent revolution" in a country necessitates a transformation of its public values, given that values constitute the fundamental determinant of stability or cultural upheaval (Inglehart, 2015).

Cultural values are propagated, transformed, and sustained through the influence of both formal and informal media, with a particular emphasis on social media platforms (Seraj, 2012). According to Sumskeya (2023), the Internet has evolved into a cultural instrument that facilitates the creation of new cultural practices, trends, and interpretations. As a means of communication, social media consciously or unconsciously conveys certain aspects of the culture and values of its users. Conversely, the activities of social media users generate a form of culture that is shaped by their contributions; these users can be considered as both participants and creators within this domain, disseminating modified and virtual culture, ideals, and values (Vodanovich et al., 2017).

Although digital technology has the potential to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and communication, it does not guarantee equal representation of all values and cultures in the public domain. This disparity can lead to limitations in cultural awareness and cultural criticism (Khezri et al., 2022). Furthermore, Iorga et al. (2020) argue that while cyberspace can promote the ideals of dominant cultures, it can also discourage individuals from engaging with their native cultures and effectuate a transformation of their cultural identity. Indeed, social media serves as a pertinent platform for the exchange and interaction of cultural and societal values, contributing to the metamorphosis of these values and behaviors.

Through the provision of cognitive resources, social media nurtures the emergence of new sociocultural paradigms that diverge significantly from the established norms of different societies, including Iran. In this context, certain behaviors are perceived as undesirable and contrary to the prevailing values that are venerated within the social media environment. The ramifications of uncritical emulation and unguided engagement, particularly prevalent among adolescents and young users, can be deleterious not only to their well-being (Sumskaya, 2023), but also to their cultural mores and sense of self (Abramova et al., 2022).

The imperative of scrutinizing this phenomenon is accentuated by the substantial amount of leisure time that digital natives and their families dedicate to this platform. This issue is compounded by the scarcity of culturally relevant cognitive resources and the limited generation of indigenous content within this sphere. As a result, the media in question propagates a homogenized model, the uncritical adoption of which may engender pernicious and enduring consequences.

Therefore, this study endeavors to explore the impact of social media consumption patterns on adherence to cultural values among Iranians aged 15 to 25, commonly referred to as digital natives (Ahn & Jung, 2016), or “digital media generations” (Sumskaya, 2023). This demographic group is significantly influenced—both positively and negatively—by the cultural and value content generated by social media platforms. The research employs survey methodologies to gather data and insights into these dynamics.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined values and adherence to values in Iran (e.g., Ashayeri et al., 2024); however, there has been a lack of focus on cultural values. These studies have primarily concentrated on religious and social values when defining and indexing them, or they have considered individual characteristics as cultural values (e.g., Razazi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the present research adopts a cultural perspective on values, scrutinizing the behaviors that exemplify the Iranian culture of altruism, cooperation, and solidarity.

In Iranian culture, there is a distinct emphasis on rituals, traditions, synchronicity, companionship, and empathy within the family structure (Bar, 2004; Razazi et al., 2024). Additionally, the interactions that shape family relationships, along with virtues such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, and selflessness, play a vital role in Iranian society, which is inherently oriented towards familial bonds and cooperative endeavors (Ashayeri et al., 2024). While these cultural values are integral to Iranian identity, it is crucial to recognize that similar values can manifest in different ways across various cultures, shaped by unique geographical, linguistic, and historical contexts.

To further illustrate this distinction, we consider the concepts of “Taarof,” which is a complex system of politeness and social interaction that reflects Iran’s cultural emphasis on hospitality and respect. It often involves a kind of verbal dance where offers and refusals are exchanged through layers of politeness, demonstrating the value placed on generosity and social harmony. This concept extends to the treatment

of guests, who are accorded the utmost respect and care. Moreover, we consider the concept of “ایثار” [isar] meaning “selflessness” in Iranian culture, which reflects a historical perspective that champions sacrifice for the family and community. This notion is deeply rooted in Iran’s historical experiences, particularly during the Iran–Iraq War, when individuals displayed profound acts of selflessness in service to their nation. This cultural value resonates with contemporary examples of altruism seen during community crises, showcasing how historical memory shapes the Iranian understanding of selflessness today. However, certain traditional values have waned in significance among the younger generation, a trend attributed to the influence of global culture and modern platforms, such as social media.

Rezaei Kamal Abad (2023) conducted a survey of 371 Iranian social media users, revealing that social media presents a complex environment for the adoption and rejection of societal cultural values. The assimilation or rejection of media cultural values is contingent upon the individual’s level of cultural affinity and awareness. When individuals are closely aligned with their cultural values, their social media engagements tend to mirror the patterns and values of their society, thereby reinforcing cultural norms. Conversely, those less connected to their society’s values and more inclined toward the values of another culture are predisposed to easily embrace them. Evidently, the acceptance of values is influenced by users’ attitudes toward both their own cultural values and those of the host culture. Moreover, the extent of user activity and the alignment of social media content with user preferences can contribute to the diminishing significance of traditional values (Rezaei Kamal Abad, 2023). According to Abbasi’s (2021) survey of 364 Tehran residents over the age of 18 who are heavy users of social media, those highly interested in this domain tend to display reduced interest in traditional familial and societal ties as well as traditional clothing. Additionally, such individuals exhibit a heightened propensity toward materialism, avoidance of responsibility, and emotional detachment. They tend to prioritize personal freedom over adherence to social norms and laws, and modern media has further diminished the significance of shared social values in the context of selecting a partner and perpetuating social biases (Abbasi, 2020). These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of social media engagement among digital natives on social values and relationships within the specific cultural context of Tehran.

Mele et al. (2021) conducted a thorough examination of the behavior of social media activists, and their findings revealed that the content produced and published within the social media space reflects diverse cultural and social values. The study emphasized that social media posts often prioritize self-centered perspectives and individualistic values, which are transmitted through the content. These individual values of the users play a significant role in shaping the values and attitudes of others, and the more popular and influential a user is, the more likely their values are to influence others and attract people to their culture and values (Mele et al., 2021).

The use of social media has significantly affected cultural values among young people, particularly digital natives, in various ways. Rezapour (2020) conducted a survey of 384 Iranian students and discovered that the adoption of social media values without knowledge has led to the erosion of family and traditional values among

users. The study found that the self-centered and individualistic values of social media, which prioritize individual interests over collective well-being, have become dominant. Furthermore, the attractiveness and trust-building aspects of new media content play a crucial role in the acceptance of propagandistic values. As digital life and automation become more prevalent, values such as love, altruism, self-sacrifice, and sympathy have weakened. Rezapour (2020) compares social media communication to fire, emphasizing that its effects and benefits depend on the purpose and function of use. While efficient use can be a valuable tool, misuse can lead to the destruction of values. Furthermore, according to Jahromi and Taghiabadi's (2019) investigation into the portrayal of celebrity lifestyles on social media, the platform's emphasis on self-promotion and self-expression, as well as the allure of fame, engenders a proclivity among users to embrace individualistic values and propaganda. The ostentatious nature of social media, coupled with its growing ubiquity and users' reliance on it, is posited to contribute to the erosion of moral and cultural values. Beyranvandzadeh et al. (2019) conducted a study involving 54 experts from an Iranian Advertising Organization, revealing a significant association between the development of culturally and religiously oriented content and social media cultural activities and the preservation of cultural values. The study suggests that purposeful engagement and content creation with a cultural focus in virtual spaces contribute to the reinforcement of cultural values, while inefficient and unfocused utilization may lead to the propagation of non-cultural values and the erosion of cultural integrity.

Jamwal (2015) conducted a comprehensive review of scholarly literature, revealing that the forces of globalization and the proliferation of new media have precipitated pervasive transformations across various domains of human existence. Notably, this has engendered a diminishment of cultural values and a fracturing of moral precepts. Consequently, contemporary society is confronted with an unparalleled cultural exodus. The ubiquity of virtual networks has facilitated children's unfettered exposure to a panoply of deleterious content, including violence, sexual content, larceny, and antisocial conduct. Moreover, the social media sphere serves as a conduit for the propagation of distinct values through mediums such as advertising, music, and cinema, which may engender discord with the prevailing cultural and social mores. Individuals are compelled to either affirm or repudiate their value systems in response to the moral didactics promulgated by the media. Furthermore, social media can serve as a catalyst for the dissemination of ethical paradigms such as altruism or, conversely, the propagation of iniquitous principles, including deceit, duplicity, and larceny. The author posits that the exhibition of positive conduct within the social media realm may engender a disregard for media-driven antisocial comportment, thereby potentially exerting a salutary influence on the psyche of its consumers (Jamwal, 2015).

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for preserving and promoting cultural heritage in the digital age. It offers platforms for participatory culture, allowing communities to collectively curate and share their heritage (Pitsillides et al., 2012). Social media facilitates broader public engagement in cultural heritage management, enabling diverse stakeholders to contribute to decision-making processes (Ng et al., 2024). For diaspora communities, social media serves as a vital means of maintaining

cultural identities and practices across geographical boundaries (Panchal & Mago, 2024). Additionally, social media data can be extracted and archived to support the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, as demonstrated in the case of Nineveh (Rashid & Qasha, 2022). While social media presents challenges to traditional heritage preservation, it also offers unprecedented opportunities for community involvement, cross-cultural communication, and the sustainability of cultural practices in an increasingly digital world.

This literature review underscores the significance of comprehending the impact of social media on cultural values, specifically among digital natives, and provides insights into the intricate relationship between social media engagement style and the preservation of traditional values, particularly in the Iranian milieu, where traditional values are deeply entrenched (Tabatabaei, 2020). Consequently, the present study endeavors to scrutinize the influence of social media consumption patterns on adherence to cultural values, specifically concerning purposeful presence and activity, and the acceptance of global and social media culture, while disregarding the religious dimension. By examining the social media engagement style and adherence to cultural values, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of social media in shaping cultural values and attitudes in the specific context of Iranian society.

Theoretical Approach

The cultural structure of a society is shaped by its cultural values, which determine the direction of feelings and behaviors in social life (Ashayeri et al., 2024). The values that a society considers necessary, respectable, sacred, and desirable are among its core values (Pourkiani, 2016, pp. 77–79). The theoretical framework of this research is based on Goffman's dramaturgical model theory and Rogers' diffusion theory. Goffman's theory emphasizes the importance of impression management as a positive social value, which individuals hold for themselves and expect others to recognize in social interactions (Hosseini, 2021, p. 155). The role that a person performs in front of an audience expresses the accepted and official values of society and represents the accepted social and cultural values (Goffman, 1956/2013, pp. 53–54). On social media pages, people expose themselves by posting and showcasing aspects of their personality that they want to be made public. By placing their desired images and texts on their social media pages as a personal medium, they try to communicate and present themselves to their followers. When one appears in front of others, one usually combines one's activities with signs to dramatically highlight and confirm affirmative facts that might otherwise remain invisible or obscure (Mohamadi et al., 2020). In the context of social media platforms, individuals have the opportunity to effectively present their perspectives and demonstrate their ethical, ideological, and global cognitive attractiveness through the deliberate modification and innovation of their modes of communication.

Erving Goffman posits that individuals seek solace in communal environments to cultivate a desired persona, elude the constraints of reality, and evade the

apprehension of social stigmatization. This inclination is exacerbated by extensive engagement with diverse forms of media, wherein individuals strive for validation and financial gain by conforming to sanctioned norms and values through self-presentation (Goffman, 1956/2013, pp. 68–69).

The ubiquity of smartphones, characterized by their constant presence and connectivity, has integrated them into the fabric of our daily routines and ordinary moments of life. This has led to the development of new habits and practices, such as taking photos, updating statuses, leaving comments, or sharing photos on social media platforms. The social media sphere has significantly impacted our daily routines, particularly among digital natives, introducing novel patterns and norms (Ahn & Jung, 2016). As a result, we have experienced a transformation in our media identity and personalization (Mahdizadeh, 2017, pp. 42–43).

Consequently, drawing from Goffman's theory, one can assert that the pursuit of self-expression on social media is closely linked to adherence to social values, and the influence of users' presence and activity on those values is also a significant factor. Additionally, Rogers posits that the media occasionally intervenes in safeguarding other cultures and exploits their thematic and content capabilities, mirrors media products originating from other societies, or conforms to the course of cultural diffusion, thereby acquainting the audience with unfamiliar value systems and enabling cultural-value juxtapositions (Rogers, 2006). Hence, the media serves as a conduit for the individual and communal values of a given society (Windhal et al., 1992, p. 76). The media's content serves as a conduit for a diverse array of ideas, attitudes, and innovations disseminated within societies, potentially posing challenges to and undermining national cultures. For instance, social media, through its portrayal of events, construction of pseudo-realities, establishment of a virtual realm, selective shaping of perceptions, manipulation of temporal and spatial dimensions, artistic allure, diverse program formats, uniformity and persistence of content, as well as curation and treatment of popular topics in accordance with audience preferences, plays a role in the cultivation and dissemination of cultural elements and desired cultural values (Mahdizadeh, 2017). In this manner, social media contributes to the modulation of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains by disseminating and advocating for diverse societal values, as well as fostering global perspectives. This influence can result in the intentional or unintentional alteration or fortification of individual values. As Rogers' theory places emphasis on the content and structure of messages on social media and their relationship to values, it can be concluded that there is a correlation between the content of social media and adherence to values.

According to Rogers, the media serve as conduits or catalysts for novel ideas, thoughts, and societal values, thereby challenging conventional norms (Zhang et al., 2020). In essence, the media foster innovation across various domains, such as social, political, cultural, and economic, playing a pivotal role in the establishment and evolution of new values and innovations while concurrently eschewing traditional values (Abbasi, 2020). The utilization of social media engenders the cultivation of fresh perspectives within the audience's psyche, elevating their aspirations and engendering a desire to supplant their current circumstances with the idealized conditions prevalent

in the virtual realm of social media (Beheshti et al., 2020). Social media facilitates the audience in embracing innovation and delineates the means to attain it, engendering trust and aiding in the identification of values that align with their individual and social mores, which are synonymous with traditional values, thereby effecting change and anchoring them with new global values (Ashayeri et al., 2024). Furthermore, Rogers underscores the significance of individuals' affirmative disposition towards the virtual sphere and technology in shaping social values, alluding to trust. Consequently, it can be posited that a correlation exists between attitudes towards social media content and adherence to cultural values.

In conclusion, this theoretical framework draws from Goffman's dramaturgical model and Rogers' diffusion theory to explore the relationship between social media engagement styles and adherence to cultural values. Goffman's theory emphasizes the importance of impression as a positive social value, while Rogers posits that the media serve as conduits for the individual and communal values of a given society. Based on the literature review and theoretical approach provided in this research, the concepts under investigation are defined and measured.

Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship encompasses the ability to engage in online society, emphasizing participation, equality, and responsible behavior in digital spaces (Heath, 2020; Sadiku et al., 2018). It extends traditional notions of citizenship into cyberspace, requiring specific skills such as media literacy and digital ethics, as well as access to technology (Heath, 2020). The concept also addresses moral education in the context of digital interactions, highlighting issues such as cyberbullying and privacy violations (Balinska-Ourdeva, 2015). Furthermore, digital citizenship promotes social inclusion and economic opportunity, with evidence suggesting that regular Internet use correlates with higher wages and increased civic engagement (Mossberger et al., 2007). However, significant disparities in access and skills persist, particularly among marginalized groups, necessitating public policy interventions to foster equitable participation in the digital age (Mossberger et al., 2007).

The Proper Use of Social Media

The proper use of social media requires adherence to ethical guidelines and responsible engagement. A systematic analysis of social media cases led to the development of fifteen ethical guidelines for digital engagement. Normative moral theory is presented as a way to initiate a discussion that fosters a deeper understanding of ethics in the burgeoning realm of digital engagement (Bowen, 2013). This study emphasizes the importance of moral principles in social media use, highlighting integrity, transparency, and respect in digital communication.

The first guideline advocates for fairness and justice, underscoring the importance of considering the audiences right to access information. It is strongly advised to avoid any form of deception, as even ambiguous representations can

undermine credibility. Maintaining the dignity and respect of all individuals involved is essential for fostering positive interactions. Additionally, unless confidentiality pertains to legitimate trade secrets, any initiative that requires secrecy should prompt ethical scrutiny.

The guidelines also encourage users to contemplate the reversibility of their messages, urging them to evaluate how they might feel if the message were directed at them. Transparency is critical, particularly regarding paid content, which should be clearly labeled to avoid confusion. Distinctions between personal opinions and official communications must be made for clarity. A rational analysis of messages is advised to foresee potential misinterpretations across diverse audiences, and efforts should be made to enhance the clarity of all communications. Transparency concerning the creation of messages and the factual information they contain is vital for informed decision-making.

Furthermore, maintaining credibility depends on verifying all sources and data rather than relying on speculation. Each message should reflect a commitment to ethical responsibility and good intentions, promoting connections and community engagement among audiences. Finally, consistency in messaging builds trust, allowing audiences to understand and have confidence in the communicator's intentions.

Collectively, these guidelines are intended to foster ethical engagement and principled practices in the realm of social media (Bowen, 2013). Therefore, "proper use of social media" can be articulated as responsible and ethical engagement with social media platforms, aimed at fostering constructive interactions, respect for diversity, and the positive sharing of content while adhering to community standards and guidelines.

Cultural Value

Cultural value refers to the significance or worth assigned to specific beliefs, practices, artifacts, and behaviors within a particular culture or society. It encompasses the ideas, norms, and symbols that shape a community's identity, social structure, and interactions. According to Schwartz (1992), cultural values act as guiding principles that influence individual goals and behaviors. These values can be categorized into universal principles that manifest differently across cultures, reflecting the unique priorities of each society.

Additionally, Geertz (1973) underscores that cultural values must be understood within their socio-historical contexts, highlighting the variability in what is regarded as valuable or meaningful across diverse cultures. Hofstede (1980) further identifies how differences in cultural values impact communication styles, organizational behavior, and social interactions. The researcher posits that understanding cultural values is crucial for fostering effective cross-cultural relationships in our increasingly globalized world (Hofstede, 1980).

Thus, cultural values are fundamental to comprehending human behavior within societies, influencing individual decision-making and broader social dynamics. They are shaped by a complex interplay of historical, social, and environmental factors, and they represent a vital area of study within the social sciences.

Iranian Cultural Values

Cultural values not only form the basis for our moral judgments regarding human actions but also embody the essence of a society's culture (Ashayeri et al., 2024). These values serve as both goal-setting determinants and guides for the behavior of community members. In this survey, we aim to assess the following four key dimensions of cultural values as they relate to behaviors and beliefs within Iranian society:

1. *Social Commitment and Sense of Responsibility.* This dimension emphasizes voluntary adherence to societal norms, a strong sense of loyalty to the community, and a sensitive awareness of responsibilities towards the environment and others. For instance, in many Iranian cities, there are Basij groups, which are volunteer organizations initially founded during the Iran–Iraq War. These groups organize various community support initiatives, ranging from disaster relief efforts to educational projects for underprivileged areas. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many Basij volunteers distributed masks and food packages to those in need, demonstrating communal solidarity and a strong sense of responsibility towards fellow citizens.

2. *Honesty and Integrity.* In this aspect, honesty in both speech and actions, along with trustworthiness, plays a critical role. A common practice is to maintain transparency in negotiations, as seen in traditional bazaars where merchants are expected to be forthright about pricing and product quality. This builds trust and long-lasting relationships within the Iranian community.

3. *Adherence to Family Values.* This dimension highlights the significance of communication, relationships, synchronicity, and empathy within the family unit. In Iranian culture, family gatherings hold immense significance, particularly during pivotal events such as Nowruz, the Persian New Year, and the Yalda Night (Shab-e Yalda) celebration. During Yalda Night, which occurs on the longest night of the year, families unite to share fruits, nuts, and specially prepared meals. The evening is often enriched by the recitation of poetry, particularly the works of Hafez, along with the sharing of stories from family history. Such traditions not only foster deep connections among family members but also emphasize the critical importance of familial ties and cultural heritage. Through these gatherings, families reinforce their bonds and promote open communication, support, and empathy, illustrating the fundamental role of family in Iranian society.

4. *Traditional–Historical Value.* This dimension encompasses altruism, a preference for fellow countrymen, affiliation with local culture and rituals, and participation in festivals. A prime example of this is the annual celebration of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, which is deeply imbued with historical significance and traditional values. One notable practice during Nowruz is the arrangement of the Haft-Seen table, which features seven items that begin with the Persian letter S. Each item symbolizes distinct hopes for the new year, including health, wealth, and rebirth. Families devote considerable effort to preparing this table, thereby reflecting their

connection to cultural heritage and embodying the values of renewal and prosperity that are central to Iranian identity. All these values have been assessed to provide a comprehensive understanding of their impact on individuals and society as a whole.

The present study also examines social media engagement styles, which refer to the patterns of engagement and social media consumption behavior. Specifically, the engagement style is operationalized in terms of four dimensions: (a) the duration of social media usage and the level of presence on the platform; (b) the purpose of activity on social media, including sharing or producing content related to Iranian values, rituals and ceremonies, social issues, altruism, and respect; (c) the degree of self-expression on social media, encompassing the inclination to display personal life, employ various tactics to gain user approval and views, constantly follow the lives of influencers, and derive satisfaction from receiving likes; and (d) social snacking, which refers to using social media as a means to graze on content that is appealing and entertaining. These four dimensions have been assessed in the current investigation.

Methodology

The research conducted in this study is both applied in purpose and descriptive and correlational in nature, utilizing a survey-based quantitative research method. The statistical population of the study consists of Iranian social media users aged between 15 and 25. The sample size was estimated to be 384 individuals based on Cochran's formula.

A random sampling method was employed, and the research instrument used was a questionnaire developed by the researchers. Its validity was assessed through face validity, while its reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Data collection was conducted online. Furthermore, the internal reliability of the research variables was examined using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which exceeded 70%, indicating acceptable reliability.

Results

Based on the outcomes of the survey conducted in this study, it was observed that among 384 participants, the mean duration of social media usage is 5.32 hours per day, with the minimum and maximum durations being one and 10 hours, respectively. Furthermore, a majority of the respondents (51.6%) indicated an average daily usage of social media.

Table 1 presents findings indicating that the majority of respondents (53.4%) exhibit a low level of engagement with social media content that aligns with Iranian cultural values. Additionally, 46.9% of respondents express a strong desire for self-expression on social media. However, the majority of respondents (51.3%) demonstrate a low level of social snacking in their social media consumption style.

Furthermore, our analysis reveals that the majority of respondents (53.9%) exhibit a moderate level of adherence to cultural values. Breaking down this response further, it is noteworthy that a significant majority (57.8%) of participants demonstrate

a moderate level of commitment to honesty and integrity, while a substantial proportion (51.9%) adhere to traditional-historical values at a high level. In contrast, the level of social commitment and sense of responsibility is reported to be relatively low among 50.8% of respondents, as is the case for adherence to family values and relationships, which is also reported to be low among 58.6% of our sample size.

Table 1
Percentage Distribution of Social Media Engagement Style and Adherence to Cultural Values

Variable		Mean	Median	Mod	SD	Low	Moderate	High
Social media engagement style	Engagement in content aligned with Iranian cultural values	18.13	18	16	4.73	53.4	31.8	14.8
	Self-expression on social media	25.71	29	34	10.19	34.6	18.5	46.9
	Social snacking	20.70	20	19	4.61	51.3	44.5	4.2
Adherence to cultural values	Social commitment and sense of responsibility	18.62	18	16	3.59	50.8	48.4	0.8
	Honesty and integrity	16.95	17	17	5.39	25.3	57.8	16.9
	Adherence to family values and relationships	6.53	6	8	2.07	58.6	39.3	2.1
	Traditional-historical value	9.71	10	7	2.22	1	47.1	51.9
	Total	51.82	52	50	7.05	21.6	53.9	24.5

Based on the results in Table 2 and the Pearson test, a statistically significant negative correlation was observed between adherence to cultural values and the extent of social media usage ($r = -0.446$), self-expression on social media ($r = -0.368$), and social snacking ($r = -0.396$) at a 95% confidence interval with a significance level of $sig = 0.000$. This indicates that individuals who spend considerable time on social media, possess a desire to express themselves, and use social media to graze on appealing and entertaining content exhibit lower levels of adherence to cultural values. Consequently, they demonstrate a reduced sense of social commitment and responsibility, exhibit less honesty in their behavior and speech, prioritize their personal and material gains over traditional-historical values, and display less concern for family values and relationships while preferring free and individualistic relationships. Conversely, a statistically significant positive correlation was observed between adherence to cultural values and engagement with content aligned with Iranian cultural values ($r = 0.591$). This implies that individuals who consciously engage on social media in accordance with their cultural values and utilize this platform purposefully

exhibit higher levels of adherence to cultural values. As a result, they demonstrate greater social commitment and responsibility, exhibit more honesty in their behavior, prioritize collective interests, and display greater concern for family relationships, family opinions, and traditional-historical values.

Table 2
Pearson's Test Between Social Media Engagement Style and Adherence to Cultural Values

Social media engagement style		Extent of social media usage	Engagement in content aligned with Iranian cultural values	Self-expression on social media	Social snacking
Adherence to cultural values	<i>r</i>	−0.446	0.591	−0.368	−0.396
	<i>sig</i>	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Discussion

The rise of social media has solidified its position as the premier platform for social interaction, particularly among digital natives. This study, in line with previous research (Ashayeri et al., 2024; Tabatabaei et al., 2024), confirms that social media has emerged as a primary platform for socialization, with its influence extending far beyond mere communication, particularly among digital natives. Instead, it has been shown to transform, solidify, restructure, and reform the cultural value systems of digital citizens at both the individual and societal levels. Through the manifestation of images, symbols, behavioral styles, and responses, social media content exerts a profound influence on digital citizens' value frameworks. Notably, social media has the potential to both reinforce and challenge cultural values, underscoring the importance of examining its impact on digital citizenship.

Based on the research findings, there is a significant negative correlation between the frequency of social media usage and adherence to cultural values ($r = -0.446$) among Iranian digital natives, which is consistent with the results of previous studies (Abbasi, 2020; Mele et al., 2021; Rezaei Kamal Abad, 2023; Rezapour, 2020; Tabatabaei et al., 2024). In essence, the use of social media, similar to any new media, has the potential to influence the cultural values of a society, particularly among Iranian digital natives who are heavy users of these platforms (Khajeheian et al., 2020). This research finds that digital natives who frequently engage with social media and maintain an ongoing presence on these applications are more likely to adopt the values and trends prevalent in these digital environments. This phenomenon may prompt a re-evaluation and modification of the cultural values originally instilled in them by society (Abbasi, 2020). Consequently, due to the significant time spent on social media, these individuals often do not feel a strong social commitment or sense of responsibility and are more inclined to engage with popular topics in virtual spaces and global culture rather than focusing on national identity (Tabatabaei, 2020). As noted by Rezaei Kamal Abad (2023) and Tabatabaei et al. (2024), addictive and

continuous use of social media can lead to the acceptance of propagandistic values and a decline in adherence to family values and relationships. Moreover, excessive social media use can lead to information overload, contributing to an increase in fake narratives (Menczer & Hills, 2020). All these factors suggest a pressing need for media literacy education for digital natives that fosters balanced social media consumption to cultivate healthier and more responsible digital citizens and promote a culturally aware digital environment (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013).

Furthermore, findings corroborated by other studies suggest that social media plays a significant role in promoting and educating society about values. This influence can lead to a decrease in adherence to traditional cultural values and a shift in people's perspectives (Abbasi, 2020; Mele et al., 2021). The objectivity, realism, and diverse nature of social media allow users to have different and varied experiences of life, ultimately influencing their value-related decisions. As Rogers argues, the modern world and the process of modernization contribute to the adoption of rational and material values by digital citizens (Rogers, 2006). The more time an individual spends in this virtual space, the stronger their interest and attachment to it become. They are increasingly influenced by an environment that continually promotes individualistic and materialistic values. The extent of this influence varies based on the individual's societal context and the degree to which they have internalized their traditional cultural values (Vakilha, 2013).

Moreover, according to Goffman, social media serves as a comprehensive platform for showcasing users' lives and constructed identities, enabling them to express themselves and adapt to the evolving realities of human interaction with technology across different eras (Goffman, 1956/2013). In particular, social media has become a profound reflection of global realities and the ways in which digital natives engage with technology, influencing and shaping their modes of representation and values (Abbasi, 2020). This platform has significantly impacted individuals and has the potential to engender a diminished sense of belonging and reduced reliance on cultural values (Rezaei Kamal Abad, 2023).

The results reveal a negative correlation ($r = -0.368$) between self-expression on social media and adherence to cultural values. From Goffman's perspective, self-expression on social media represents a fundamental need to attain an artificial and ideal identity, serving as an escape for individuals who have not internalized societal values and struggle to embrace them. Additionally, Mele et al. (2021) argue that the promotion of self-centered perspectives and individualistic values on social media may undermine communal values, with the popularity of a post's creator influencing the attitudes and values of their audience. Consequently, individuals assimilate these cultural precepts and values through their engagement with such content (Jahromi & Taghiabadi, 2019). According to Rezapour (2020), social media serves as a platform for the creation of influencer personas and the conspicuous display of luxurious lifestyles, both of which rely heavily on visual representation. To attract and retain their audience, influencers consistently present an aesthetically pleasing and skillful façade that often contradicts cultural and societal norms. This performative existence not only undermines established constructs and manipulates the emotions of digital natives,

leading to emotional discord, but also exposes intimate relationships. Moreover, the unrestrained and affective nature of this environment contributes to the erosion of traditional and familial values (Tabatabaei et al., 2024).

The current research reveals a significant negative correlation between social snacking and adherence to cultural norms ($r = -0.396$) among Iranian digital natives. This finding indicates that individuals who tend to use social media for entertainment purposes, such as grazing on content, are less likely to uphold their cultural norms and values. This finding aligns with the outcomes of prior studies (Beyranvandzadeh et al., 2019; Mele et al., 2021; Rezapour, 2020). Social snacking behavior can be characterized as novelty-seeking, where individuals continuously search for new and engaging content to consume. According to Rogers' theory of innovation adoption, novelty seekers are more inclined to embrace new innovations, including those found on social media platforms. In this context, social snacking may enable individuals to explore and adopt new values and trends presented on these platforms, potentially leading to a decline in adherence to traditional cultural norms. Additionally, social snacking is relatively low-commitment, allowing individuals to easily switch between various types of content. This ease of access may encourage users to prioritize entertainment and novelty over the commitment required to maintain traditional cultural values. Furthermore, when individuals engage in social snacking, they may experience cognitive dissonance due to exposure to conflicting values and beliefs. This dissonance can further contribute to a decrease in adherence to established cultural norms. When individuals are targeted for their cultural beliefs or practices, it can lead to self-censorship and a reluctance to openly express their cultural identity. This can contribute to a climate of fear and intolerance, ultimately affecting the preservation and promotion of diverse cultural values.

The present study further elucidates the relationship between types of social media activity and adherence to cultural values, revealing a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.591$) between engagement with content that aligns with Iranian cultural values and adherence to those values. This finding is consistent with the results of other studies (Beyranvandzadeh et al., 2019; Rezaei Kamal Abad, 2023; Rezapour, 2020), thereby supporting the notion that social media can effectively enhance digital natives' understanding of cultural values and promote the preservation of cultural heritage. According to Rezapour (2020), social media functions as a platform that enhances users' knowledge and awareness of the cultural values of diverse communities. This includes insights into a country's conditions, native culture, and various ethnic and cultural values. Social media allows digital natives to gain a more authentic and realistic understanding of the world, thereby facilitating the effective introduction and development of cultural elements and values (Rezapour, 2020). This harmonization of cultural values on social media is a testament to the platform's growing influence and the digital natives' increasing trust in social media (Khajeheian et al., 2020). By republishing cultural elements and values, social media has the potential to shape and mold cultural identity, thereby contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage and the dissemination of cultural values among digital natives (Vakilha, 2013). Rogers emphasizes the

significance of social networks in diffusing and fostering shared ways of perceiving and selecting events. With the increased activity and production of content in social media, it is possible to influence the direction of cultural values and mitigate the one-sided influence of global media (Gasabi & Naghibulsadat, 2015). By fostering motivation among digital natives for cultural activities and stimulating emotions, social media can enhance public mobilization and participation, which is a key factor in the sustainability of culture. Supporting opinion leaders, as noted by Rogers, who are active and purposeful users, social media can effectively showcase both the historical and current state of society while promoting moral and cultural values such as friendship, respect for parents, and honesty. These efforts have the potential to shape digital natives' attitudes toward cultural values.

Therefore, the present study's findings suggest that social media may be a double-edged sword concerning cultural values. While excessive use may lead to cultural homogenization, engaging and appealing content can promote cultural preservation. Future studies should examine how we can balance these competing forces to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage in the digital age. Further research could explore the mechanisms through which social media platforms influence the cultural values of digital natives, as well as potential strategies for leveraging these platforms to promote shared cultural values and foster a more cohesive society of digital citizens. Additionally, future studies can compare research conducted in other cultural contexts, such as among international students and community-based organizations, to identify similarities and differences in the influence of social media engagement on cultural value adherence, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of the role of social media in shaping cultural values across diverse populations.

The results suggest that social media can both reinforce and challenge cultural values, highlighting the significant impact of social media on cultural values among Iranian digital natives as digital citizens. This study contributes to our understanding of the complex relationship between social media and cultural values in the digital age. Based on the findings of this study, to mitigate the potential negative effects of excessive social media on cultural values, we recommend developing a media literacy framework that promotes responsible and balanced social media use among digital natives. As digital citizens become more aware of the potential impact of social media on cultural values, they are likely to become more conscious of their online actions and the possible costs they may have on themselves and others. This heightened awareness fosters a sense of responsibility, encouraging users to think twice before engaging with content that may undermine their cultural values or those of their peers. Educational programs can incorporate discussions on the characteristics of culturally valuable content and their societal impact. This approach helps individuals become more discerning consumers of content, enabling them to recognize and resist the influence of self-centered perspectives and individualistic values that may undermine communal values. Additionally, it is crucial for media policymakers to develop culturally relevant and engaging content on social media platforms that align with national culture and values. This can be achieved by

leveraging social media platforms to promote shared cultural values and create opportunities for social interaction and engagement. By doing so, social media can play a key role in promoting cultural preservation and adherence to cultural norms. Furthermore, monitoring and regulating social media content can help mitigate the potential negative effects of social media on cultural values. It is essential to elucidate the mechanisms involved in this process, including the establishment of community guidelines, content moderation practices, algorithmic oversight, and user reporting systems. Moreover, we must acknowledge the complexities surrounding these mechanisms, particularly the need to balance censorship with freedom of expression, as well as the implications for cultural preservation.

Conclusion

The unlocalized nature of social media's structure and content poses significant challenges to national and ethnic cultures, potentially undermining them. This occurs through selective portrayals of events, the creation of pseudo-realities, the establishment of virtual realms, and the dissemination of curated impressions. Additionally, social media manipulates concepts of time and space, curates artistic appeal, offers diverse program formats, ensures content homogeneity and continuity, and selectively processes subjects. Opinion leaders on social media constantly propagate their desired cultural values. This research indicates that while excessive social media use and social snacking challenge traditional cultural values and may lead to cultural homogenization, social media can also serve as a medium that disseminates cultural values, stimulates intellectual engagement, and fosters an interactive environment aligned with Iranian culture. This can contribute positively to the preservation and perpetuation of social and cultural values. However, without careful consideration of digital natives' consumption patterns and styles, as well as the implementation of effective media literacy education and measures, this digital space risks becoming a breeding ground for virtual hooliganism and the erosion of cultural values. Policymakers, by promoting culturally relevant content, fostering a sense of community, monitoring and regulating content, and conducting further research, can harness the potential of social media to promote shared cultural values and foster a more cohesive society.

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