



SOCIAL MEDIA USE PATTERNS AND CULTURAL TENSIONS AMONG GEN Z TELUGU MOTHERS IN VISAKHAPATNAM

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Abstract

While young moms in metropolitan India now have more ways than ever to express themselves, connect with others, and learn about parenthood, they are also facing new kinds of societal pressure and identity crises as a result of the rise of social media. Among the Telugu moms of Generation Z (Gen Z) living in urban Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, this study seeks to understand their social media habits and the cultural tensions that exist among them. Using a descriptive sociological methodology, this study uses a structured questionnaire to examine how 75 Gen Z women, aged 18-27, who are mothers of children aged 0-3 years and live in urban Visakhapatnam, use digital platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram to construct their maternal identity and how it interacts with the normative expectations of the Telugu joint family. According to the results, Instagram is the most popular place for mothers to show themselves as they aspire to be, while WhatsApp is the most popular medium for mothers to develop communities with one another. There was cultural friction between the demands of their family and community networks and the digitally circulated ideals of motherhood, according to many respondents, especially those living in joint family households. Within the context of the patriarchal bargain proposed by Kandiyoti (1988) and the subaltern counterpublics proposed by Fraser (1990), the study presents the idea of digital-cultural dissonance to characterize this identity strain that is structurally formed. Policy and community-based support for mothers experiencing mental health issues in metropolitan Andhra Pradesh can benefit from these results.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of digital technology and family life has become one of the defining sociological questions of the early twenty-first century. In urban India, nowhere is this intersection more consequential than in the daily experience of young mothers who navigate, simultaneously, the normative weight of family and community tradition and the relentless visual culture of Instagram, the intimate chatter of WhatsApp, and the para-social companionship of YouTube. For Generation Z women, those born between 1997 and 2012 who have come of age entirely within the social media era, this navigation is not a novel or exceptional activity but the unremarkable texture of everyday maternal life.

This study is concerned with a specific and underexplored dimension of this larger social phenomenon: how social media use patterns and cultural tensions intersect in the lives of Gen Z Telugu mothers in urban Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. Visakhapatnam is one of the fastest-growing cities in South India, home to Andhra University, a significant IT sector, and a large and culturally embedded Telugu-speaking population which represents a particularly productive site for examining the encounter between digital modernity and regional patriarchal tradition. Its social geography contains, within a single city, the highly digitally connected nuclear-family professional household and the culturally conservative joint family industrial worker household making it an analytically rich site for the questions this study pursues.

Unlike other generalized descriptions of parenting and social media, this study is further enriched by the Telugu cultural background. Gender standards in Telugu society portray the ideal mother, as a housewife who puts her children's needs before her own, who is humble in public, and who submits to the power of the joint family and its elder women. Household contacts, in-law expectations, and informal community network surveillance all contribute to the reproduction of these norms, thus they are not purely abstract. Instagram in particular challenges these standards with its incentive structure that prioritizes visibility, self-expression, and aesthetic self-presentation. Specifically, this paper seeks to understand how young Telugu moms deal with this tension by examining the platforms they use, the aims they have, how it impacts their maternal identity, and the cultural cost.

This research adds to three existing areas of study: digital media and identity sociology, feminist gender studies that examine motherhood in South Asian contexts, and the emerging discipline of regional digital sociology that seeks to understand the cultural nuances of digital life outside of Western and metropolitan contexts. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is one of the first sociological studies to focus on 75 Gen Z moms in urban Visakhapatnam. The mothers are Telugu-speaking and live in a non-metropolitan city in South India. The study documents their digital maternal experiences.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The academic literature on social media and identity is extensive, but its engagement with non-Western, regional, and culturally specific contexts remains limited. The foundational frameworks for understanding digital identity are Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model of self-presentation, Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, and Turkle's (1995) account of digital selfhood, which were developed in and for Western social contexts and require careful adaptation when applied to the social conditions of urban South India. Goffman's observation that social life is organised around the management of impressions before audiences acquires new dimensions in the digital context, where the front stage is permanently visible, simultaneously accessible to multiple audiences with divergent expectations, and mediated by algorithmic logics. For young mothers in urban Visakhapatnam, this means that a single Instagram post may be received by digital peers who value self-expression, by in-laws who value modesty, and by community elders who expect domestic invisibility all at once.

A cultural logic demanding mothers be child-centered, emotionally available, and eternally present has been outlined by Hays (1996) in her notion of intensive mothering, which has had the most impact on the development of research into motherhood as a socially constructed identity. The patriarchal traditions of India, and the Telugu culture in particular, reinforce this model by elevating the role of the selfless mother to that of the family's moral lynchpin. The difference between motherhood as an institution, with its system of normative controls, and motherhood as an experience, as described by Rich (1976), is becoming more pronounced due to the rise of social media, which both legitimizes new standards of motherhood and creates new platforms for the expression of experiences that would otherwise be suppressed by the institution.

The emergence of the momfluencer, the social media figure who monetises and aestheticises her maternal identity for large audiences has transformed the normative landscape of digital motherhood. Abidin's (2017) concept of calibrated amateurism captures the paradox at its heart: content designed to appear spontaneous and authentic is in fact carefully crafted, commercially motivated, and normatively powerful. For young mothers in Visakhapatnam, exposure to momfluencer content creates a doubled standard of maternal

aspiration, the globally circulating digital ideal of the confident, aesthetically composed mother alongside the locally specific Telugu ideal of the devoted, producing what this paper terms digital-cultural dissonance. Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of the patriarchal bargain the implicit negotiation in which women accept patriarchal constraints in exchange for the social recognition that conformity affords to provide a productive framework for understanding why many Gen Z mothers in Visakhapatnam conform to family expectations even when their digital lives have exposed them to alternatives. In the digital age, this bargain must be renegotiated in the continuously visible arena of social media, where every post is simultaneously an act of self-expression and a gamble with family approval.

Fraser's (1990) concept of subaltern, alternative discursive spaces within which marginalised groups develop counter-hegemonic identities and practices that helps explain the specific value that Gen Z mothers in Visakhapatnam derive from WhatsApp groups. These encrypted, semi-private spaces function as counterpublics in precisely Fraser's sense: they operate beneath the radar of family surveillance, enabling forms of candour, solidarity, and cultural critique unavailable in the more publicly visible spaces of Instagram or YouTube. The significance of these vernacular digital communities has been almost entirely absent from the existing literature on digital motherhood in India, which has concentrated on metropolitan, anglophone, and middle-class contexts.

Indian scholarship on gender and digital media has grown substantially in recent years, but its geographic concentration in metropolitan cities and its focus on Hindi and English-language digital cultures means that the experiences of Telugu-speaking, non-metropolitan women remain largely undocumented (Gajjala, 2012; Udupa, 2015; Kalaichelvan, 2019). This paper seeks to address this gap.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A large number of young women from Generation Z, who are well-versed in both the norms of modern internet culture and the traditional practices of Telugu family life, are settling into urban Visakhapatnam. Mothers among them face the daily, consequential, and frequently stressful encounter of digital maternal culture and Telugu cultural tradition. This encounter has not been studied in terms of its sociological dimensions, but it is an important one as they navigate the demands of infant care, joint family expectations, marital relationships, and their own professional or educational goals.

Although it is a demographic fact that young mothers use social media, this paper seeks to address the problem by examining how the unique social conditions of Telugu family life in urban Visakhapatnam impact their specific forms of identity tension, cultural negotiation, and psychological pressure, as well as the platforms they prefer, the communities they join, and the content they consume and create. Their documenting and theorization provide a true addition to sociological understanding, as these forms elude current frameworks crafted in Western or pan-Indian urban environments.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives guided this study:

1. To examine the social media use patterns of Gen Z mothers in urban Visakhapatnam, including platform preference, frequency of use, and type of content consumed.
2. To analyse how social media exposure influences perceptions of ideal motherhood among Gen Z mothers.
3. To explore the cultural tensions arising from the conflict between traditional Telugu family expectations and digitally constructed maternal identities.
4. To understand the role of digital communities in providing emotional and informational support to young Telugu mothers.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An approach common in descriptive sociology is utilized in this investigation. The study's goals which involved documenting, describing, and sociologically interpreting social occurrences rather than testing causal hypotheses were well-suited to the descriptive methodology that was chosen. In the Indian sociological tradition, descriptive research has a long history of use and is especially suited to first-in-field investigations, which chronicle occurrences for which no previous quantitative baseline is available (Kothari, 2004). One example of a first-of-its-kind setting is the online lives of Telugu mothers from Generation Z in Visakhapatnam.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 75 respondents. The questionnaire comprised 35 items covering socio-demographic background, social media use patterns, maternal identity perceptions, cultural tensions, and digital community participation. Likert scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) were used to measure attitudinal and experiential variables. The questionnaire was available in both Telugu and English, with the Telugu version prepared through translation and back-

translation to ensure accuracy. Three open-ended questions were included to supplement quantitative data with qualitative texture.

The sample was drawn through purposive and snowball sampling. Inclusion criteria were: female-identifying; born between 1997 and 2006; currently a mother of at least one child aged 0–3 years or pregnant with a first child; residing in the urban areas of Visakhapatnam; an active user of at least one social media platform; and Telugu-speaking as a primary or co-primary language. The restriction to mothers of children aged 0–3 years was deliberate as this is the period when the cultural-digital tensions the study examines are most acute, as decisions about infant feeding, traditional practices, and domestic management are being actively negotiated. Recruitment was conducted across three urban localities in Visakhapatnam which includes Madhurawada/MVP Colony, Akkayyapalem/Siripuram, and Gajuwaka. These were selected to ensure diversity of family type, socio-economic background, and degree of cultural conservatism.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics: frequencies, percentages, and simple cross-tabulations. No advanced statistical techniques were employed. Analysis was conducted in Microsoft Excel. Findings were interpreted through the sociological theoretical frameworks described in the literature review. The study was conducted in accordance with standard research ethics and informed consent was obtained from all participants in their preferred language, confidentiality was assured, and pseudonymisation was applied to all qualitative data.

6. RESULTS AnD DISCUSSION

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 75)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–20 years	12	16.0
	21–23 years	34	45.3
	24–27 years	29	38.7
Education	Secondary School (10th/12th)	10	13.3
	Undergraduate	32	42.7
	Postgraduate	28	37.3
	Doctorate / PhD	5	6.7
Occupation	Homemaker	22	29.3
	Student	14	18.7
	IT / Software	16	21.3
	Healthcare / Teaching	13	17.3
	Business / Other	10	13.3
Family Type	Joint Family	43	57.3
	Nuclear Family	32	42.7
Child Age	0–6 months	18	24.0
	7–12 months	21	28.0
	1–2 years	24	32.0
	3 years	12	16.0

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher (2024–25)

As seen in Table 1, the majority of respondents fall in the age group of 21 – 23 years (45.3%) while 16% of them are in the 18 – 20 age group and 38.7% are in age group of 24 – 27 years. The age distribution is as it is because in urban Andhra Pradesh, early marriage combined with social norms and expectations of motherhood by the early years of marriage, have resulted in a significant female population of Gen Z being mothers. This is a relatively educated cohort, as reflected in the educational profile of which 80% have at least an undergraduate degree, and as expected in the urban middle-class localities where this sample was

recruited. Because family type was among the most important variables in the cultural tension findings reported below, it is analytically important that the near-even split between joint (57.3%) and nuclear (42.7%) family households was found.

Table 2: Social Media Platform Usage among Respondents (N = 75, Multiple Responses)

Platform	Use Regularly (n)	Use Regularly (%)	Daily Hours (Mean)
WhatsApp	73	97.3	3.2
Instagram	56	74.7	2.1
YouTube	49	65.3	1.8
Facebook	21	28.0	0.6
ShareChat	18	24.0	0.9
Moj	11	14.7	0.4
Twitter / X	8	10.7	0.3

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher (2024–25). Note: Multiple responses permitted.

Table 2 shows that there is a platform hierarchy among urban mothers of Gen Z in Visakhapatnam. Nearly universal, WhatsApp had 97.3% of respondents using it regularly, and the mean was 3.2 hours a day, which was by far the highest time spent on any single platform. It fits into the overall trend of digital communication in urban India (IAMAI, 2023) and also has a sociological resonance when it comes to the experience of maternal life; WhatsApp is not just a medium used for communication, but as the open-ended responses from the respondents clearly indicate, it is the most important platform for maternal communities, emotional support and even for the free expression of emotions. Instagram is second with the 74.7% of people using it regularly, but with a lower mean daily engagement of 2.1 hours, it is a place for consumption and selective self-presentation rather than a constant daily-communicator. The high rate of reach (65.3%) of YouTube is noteworthy and showcases the rising significance of long-form maternal content, notably in Telugu language, where it serves not just as a source of information but also as a form of ‘para-social’ companionship. ShareChat (24%) and Moj (14.7%) were among the platforms used to a relatively small extent, even though they are mostly in the Telugu language, this may be due to an urban, educated sample orientation that may lead to using more popular platforms. However, the free text answers indicate that some of the interviewees had listened to Telugu material on such platforms, but did not consider themselves to be regular users, implying an undercount.

Table 3: Type of Motherhood-Related Content Followed Online (N = 75, Multiple Responses)

Content Type	Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Baby care tips and health advice	64	85.3
Telugu mothers sharing daily experiences	55	73.3
Feeding and nutrition content	52	69.3
Parenting influencers and momfluencers	48	64.0
Traditional practices and home remedies	43	57.3
Mental health and emotional support for mothers	36	48.0
Pregnancy and postpartum recovery	31	41.3
I do not watch motherhood-related content	3	4.0

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher (2024–25). Note: Multiple responses permitted.

Table 3 shows that baby care and health advice (85.3%) is the most widely consumed category of motherhood-related content, followed by content from Telugu mothers sharing their daily experiences (73.3%). The prominence of the second category which is Telugu-language, culturally specific maternal content, is a finding of particular sociological significance. It suggests that respondents are not passive

consumers of globalised English-language momfluencer culture but are actively seeking out content that reflects their own cultural and linguistic context. The 57.3% who follow content about traditional practices and home remedies reflect the widespread relevance of the cultural tension this study investigates and the negotiation between traditional Telugu practices and modern medical advice. Content related to mental health and emotional support (48%) also commands significant engagement, pointing to an unmet need for psychological support that young mothers are partially addressing through digital communities.

Table 4: Perceived Influence of Social Media on Maternal Identity — Likert Scale Responses (N = 75)

Statement	Agree Strongly Agree (n)	/ %	Disagree Strongly Disagree (n)	/ %	Mean
Social media has helped me understand what kind of mother I want to be.	51	68.0	14	18.7	3.6
I feel pressure to present a good mother image online even when things are hard at home.	57	76.0	9	12.0	3.9
My digital identity as a mother differs from who I am at home.	49	65.3	16	21.3	3.5
Posting about my motherhood makes me feel more confident.	38	50.7	22	29.3	3.2
Social media has given me a language to describe my maternal experience.	44	58.7	18	24.0	3.4

Note: Mean scores based on 5-point Likert scale. Source: Primary data collected by the researcher (2024–25).

Table 4 shows the sociometric responses related to social media's impact on the mother's image. The most striking is the very strong agreement with 'I feel like I have to portray a good mother online, even when I find that difficult at home' with 76% agreeing or strongly agreeing, and a mean of 3.9. This discovery is a powerful reminder of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy: even if life in the backstage of the house is far less pleasant, there is a performance of composed, competent motherhood that must be enacted in the frontstage of the house. The second highest agreement (68%) was with the statement "social media has enabled me to understand of what type of mother I want to be" which suggests that social media does not only exert passive normative influence but also creates an active manifestation of identity and aspirations. This dichotomy that social media would give mothers the chance to know who they want to be, while also, at the same time, pressuring them to perform an unrealistic version of that self that encapsulates the main ambivalence of digital maternal life that has emerged from this study.

Table 5: Cultural Tensions — Comparison between Joint and Nuclear Family Respondents (N = 75)

Statement / Experience	Joint Family (n=43) %	Nuclear Family (n=32) %
My family monitors or pays attention to my social media activity	79.1	37.5
I have deleted or changed a post because of family/community reaction	69.8	28.1
I feel limited by Telugu cultural expectations in what I can share online	76.7	43.8
My in-laws have commented negatively on something I posted	58.1	15.6
I feel caught between what social media offers and	81.4	53.1

what family expects		
I post differently in Telugu vs. English — feel more free in English	65.1	43.8

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher (2024–25). Percentages indicate proportion who agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 5 presents what is arguably the most sociologically significant finding of this study: the sharp difference in cultural tension experiences between mothers living in joint family and nuclear family households. Across every dimension measured, joint family mothers reported substantially higher levels of cultural constraint, family monitoring, and digital-cultural dissonance. The most striking contrast is in family monitoring of social media activity: 79.1% of joint family mothers reported that their family pays attention to their social media activity, compared to 37.5% of nuclear family mothers. Similarly, 69.8% of joint family mothers had deleted or changed a post because of anticipated family reaction, compared to just 28.1% of nuclear family mothers. The statement 'I feel caught between what social media offers and what my family expects' was endorsed by 81.4% of joint family respondents, a figure that encapsulates the experience of digital-cultural dissonance as theorised in this paper.

These findings are consistent with the sociological literature on the joint family as a site of intergenerational authority and normative reproduction (Donner, 2008; Karve, 1965; Uberoi, 2006). The joint family extends its regulatory function into the digital domain: the mother-in-law who follows a daughter-in-law on Instagram, who monitors her WhatsApp status, or who discusses her online behaviour with other family members is exercising a form of domestic surveillance that has adapted to the digital age without losing its fundamental patriarchal character. Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of the patriarchal bargain is directly relevant here as many joint family mothers implicitly accept digital self-censorship as part of the bargain by which they maintain family relationships and social recognition. The finding that 65.1% of joint family mothers feel more free to express themselves in English than in Telugu is particularly revealing: language functions as a cultural marker, and the English-language digital self can carry meanings and assert identities that the Telugu-language family self cannot.

Table 6: Role of WhatsApp Groups in Maternal Support (N = 75)

Aspect of WhatsApp Group Participation	Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Member of at least one maternal WhatsApp group	69	92.0
Finds WhatsApp groups more useful than Instagram for maternal support	58	77.3
Prefers Telugu-language WhatsApp groups over English-language groups	52	69.3
Has shared things in WhatsApp groups they would not share on Instagram	61	81.3
Describes a WhatsApp group as their 'most important' source of peer support	44	58.7
Has experienced mummy shaming or criticism within a WhatsApp group	19	25.3

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher (2024–25).

Table 6 documents the centrality of WhatsApp groups to the maternal social lives of respondents. With 92% of respondents belonging to at least one maternal WhatsApp group, and 58.7% describing such a group as their most important source of peer support, it is clear that WhatsApp functions not merely as a messaging tool but as the primary infrastructure of maternal community in urban Visakhapatnam. The finding that 81.3% of respondents have shared things in WhatsApp groups that they would not share on Instagram captures the essential sociological difference between these two platforms: Instagram is a performance space, subject to the norms of family surveillance and aspirational self-presentation; WhatsApp is a backstage space, which is semi-private, encrypted, and relatively sheltered from the gaze of in-laws and community networks.

Fraser's (1990) concept of the subaltern counterpublic illuminates the specific social function of these groups. In them, mothers can voice experiences of family problems, fatigue, criticism by in-laws and postpartum depression that would otherwise be unspeakable and unadvisable in the family sphere, and in front of the public eye on their Instagram. The preference of groups who speak Telugu (69.3%) among respondents highlights the cultural embeddedness of this support – the most valued maternal community is the one that shares not only the experience of motherhood, but also the cultural, linguistic and social context in which this experience is lived in Visakhapatnam. The 25.3% who said they had faced mummy shaming in a WhatsApp group is also quite sociologically significant because it shows that not all counterpublic spaces are immune to the normativities of Telugu culture.

7. SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

The findings of this study can be read together through the concept of digital-cultural dissonance as the specific form of identity strain that arises when the identity possibilities opened up by digital platforms collide with the normative constraints of culturally conservative family structures. Digital-cultural dissonance, as documented in this study, is not simply the generic pressure of digital maternal perfectionism described in Western literature. It is a structurally produced and culturally specific experience that compounds the generic pressures of social media with the particular demands of Telugu patriarchal family life, the authority of in-laws, the expectations of joint household living, the community-level surveillance of feminine conduct, and the normative requirement of modesty that conflicts directly with the visibility rewarded by Instagram.

Goffman's dramaturgical framework helps explain the mechanics of this dissonance. For joint family mothers in particular, the management of a digital front stage that is simultaneously visible to digital peers and family members requires a form of impression management of unusual complexity and psychological cost. The high percentage of joint family mothers who have deleted or changed posts (69.8%) and who feel unable to express themselves freely in Telugu on public platforms (65.1%) reflects the daily effort of this impression management, what Hochschild (1983) would recognise as a form of emotional labour applied to digital self-presentation.

Hays's (1996) intensive mothering ideology finds a new digital vehicle in the momfluencers whose curated presentation of aspirational domesticity sets normative standards that young Telugu mothers encounter through their daily scrolling. But in the Visakhapatnam context, the intensive mothering ideology arrives with an additional cultural layer: the manchi amma ideal, which demands not only intensive care but self-effacement and the suppression of individual identity. For the Gen Z mother who has been formed as a social subject partly through digital culture, who has been taught by Instagram to value visibility, self-expression, and the public celebration of personal achievement and the demands of intensive mothering and the manchi amma ideal together constitute a double burden of normative expectation against which she measures herself and is found wanting.

The WhatsApp group as subaltern counterpublic (Fraser, 1990) represents the most sociologically interesting adaptation that Gen Z mothers in Visakhapatnam have made to these conditions. By migrating their most authentic maternal expression to a semi-private, encrypted, Telugu-language space beneath the radar of family surveillance, they are engaging in a form of everyday resistance, what Scott (1990) would call a 'hidden transcript' that allows the patriarchal bargain of the joint family to be maintained in public while creating a small but significant space of freedom in private. This is not liberation, but it is agency. It is the creative navigation of constrained conditions that feminist sociologists have consistently documented in the lives of women who operate within patriarchal structures without the means or the will to directly challenge them.

8. CONCLUSION

The study has recorded for the first time in the writings of Academics, the patterns of social media usage and cultural tensions among Gen Z Telugu mothers in urban areas of Visakhapatnam. Its conclusions reveal that WhatsApp and Instagram are social spaces of different nature, with different functions in young women's maternal lives: WhatsApp as a backstage counterpublic to nurture and build an authentic maternal community, Instagram as a front stage to establish an aspirational and heavily curated maternal self-presentation. Joint family household emerges as the predominant institutional setting to which these digital spaces and the norms of the Telugu culture are situated, with mothers in the joint families revealing significantly higher levels of digital monitoring, self censorship and cultural dissonance than the nuclear family mothers.

The study makes two original conceptual contributions to the socio-scientific literature on digital motherhood in India. The digital-cultural dissonance as a concept and theory refers to the particular kind of identity conflict that is felt by Gen Z mothers as a result of the conflict between digital modernity and the regional

culture of patriarchy, which is qualitatively distinct from, and more pronounced than, the broad social media tensions that have been documented in Western scholarship. The documentation of the Telugu-language WhatsApp groups as subaltern counterpublics, meanwhile, is a much-needed addition to digital media research and Indian feminist scholarship that have thus far largely ignored the vernacular digital publics of Indian women outside metropolitan cities.

There are some limitations to be recognized in the study. The sample size of 75 respondents, selected from three urban localities in the city of Visakhapatnam cannot be generalised to the entire Gen Z Telugu mothers or the general population of the city of Visakhapatnam. It's designed in such a way that it's a cross section of a moment in a process rather than a process. Its urban-centric approach ignores the large number of Gen Z mothers in rural and semi-urban areas of Andhra Pradesh, with varying levels of digital penetration and culture. The limitations point towards positive ways in which future research can be conducted, including comparative studies between urban and rural Andhra Pradesh, long-term follow-ups of maternal identity among Gen Z students, and caste-comparative studies in the city of Visakhapatnam, which the present study did not attempt.

9. POLICY SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study have several direct implications for policy and practice in urban Andhra Pradesh. There is a need to reimagine maternal mental health care in Visakhapatnam to recognise the psychological aspects of digital-cultural dissonance. The current maternal policy in AP is mostly targeted towards physical health outcomes and not specifically towards the psychological stressors of digital identity in culturally conservative family structures. Access to culturally sensitive, Telugu-language mental health services on the same digital platforms where young mothers are already accessing them is a pressing need.

Second, student and early graduate mother student welfare packages in higher education institutions, and especially at Andhra University, should recognize the unique challenges of “digital maternal life.” A new generation of digital literacy initiatives targeting young mothers, which would both educate about critical engagement with Instagram's hegemonic culture, and provide hands-on guidance on how to manage digital privacy and audience settings, would directly tackle several of the mechanisms of distress documented in this study.

Third, community organisations in the field of welfare for women in Visakhapatnam need to understand the importance of maternal communities in the Telugu language on WhatsApp as a place of true support and suggest ways to strengthen and expand these communities instead of creating formal groups. These communities are already doing welfare work; not taking over welfare work is the most culturally intelligent and cost-effective policy choice.

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