Vedic Communication Ethics in the Age of Social Media: Reconstructing Youth Well-Being Through Ancient Frameworks

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Abstract

The emergence of social media as the dominant communicative ecosystem for contemporary youth has generated profound ethical, psychological, and social challenges that existing Western communication ethics frameworks have proven inadequate to address. This paper argues for the relevance and urgency of Vedic communication ethics-particularly as articulated through the doctrines of Vak (speech), Satya (truthfulness), Ahimsa (nonviolence), and Swadhyaya (self-study) in classical Sanskrit texts-as a framework for reconstructing youth well-being in social media environments. Drawing on textual analysis of primary Vedic and Upanishadic sources alongside empirical data from a mixed-methods study of 450 Indian youth aged 16–24, the paper develops the Vedic Communication Ethics Framework (VCEF) as an integrative model bridging ancient communicative wisdom with contemporary digital media psychology. The study finds significant associations between exposure to Vedic

communication principles and improved well-being outcomes, including lower social anxiety, higher relational satisfaction, and greater resilience to online harassment. The paper further examines how specific Vedic communicative doctrines-including the four qualities of Satyam (truthful), Priyam (pleasant), Hitam (beneficial), and Mitam (measured)-can be operationalized as media literacy standards and behavioral guidelines for youth social media engagement. Implications for digital media education, policy, and psychological intervention are discussed, with recommendations for culturally grounded programs that draw on India's rich communicative heritage. The paper contributes to the emerging discourse on decolonizing communication studies and to the practical project of designing culturally resonant well-being interventions for Indian youth.

Keywords: Vedic communication ethics, social media, youth well-being, Vak, satya, ahimsa, media literacy, digital communication

Introduction

Communication ethics in the Western academic tradition has its roots in Aristotelian rhetoric, Kantian deontology, and Habermasian discourse ethics-a lineage that, whatever its intellectual merits, reflects specific historical, cultural, and philosophical commitments that do not translate universally across global contexts (Christians & Traber, 1997). As social media platforms developed primarily in Silicon Valley export the communicative norms and affordances of American corporate culture to the world's youth, the need for alternative ethical frameworks rooted in diverse cultural traditions becomes increasingly urgent (Aarzoo & Lal, 2024). Among these alternatives, Vedic communication ethics represents a particularly rich and largely untapped resource.

The Vedas-among the world's oldest extant bodies of knowledge-contain sophisticated theories of language, communication, consciousness, and ethical conduct that remain remarkably relevant to contemporary communicative challenges. The concept of Vak, or sacred speech, constitutes the foundational premise of Vedic communication ethics. In the Rigveda, Vak is personified as a goddess (Vak Devi) and positioned as the generative medium through which reality itself is constituted: 'Aham Rashtriy Sanganamani' (I am the Queen, the assembler of peoples, the mighty one who gives aid; Rigveda 10.125). This elevation of communicative speech to a metaphysical and ethical category reflects a view of communication as

fundamentally formative-as shaping individual consciousness, social relationships, and collective reality-that has profound implications for how we understand the communicative environments created by contemporary social media platforms.

The four classical standards of ethical speech identified in Vedic literature-Satyam (truthful), Priyam (pleasant/compassionate), Hitam (beneficial/constructive), and Mitam (measured/appropriate)-constitute a comprehensive ethical framework for communicative conduct that anticipates many of the challenges characteristic of contemporary digital communication. The epidemic of misinformation and fake news violates the principle of Satyam; the culture of online hate speech and cyberbullying violates Priyam; the proliferation of content designed for engagement rather than genuine benefit violates Hitam; and the compulsive, excessive communication characteristic of social media addiction violates Mitam. The Vedic framework, in other words, diagnoses with remarkable precision the communicative pathologies of the social media age, even as it offers a coherent alternative ethical vision.

This paper makes three main arguments. First, it argues that Vedic communication ethics offers a theoretically sophisticated and practically relevant framework for addressing the communicative challenges of the social media age, particularly as experienced by Indian youth. Second, it presents empirical evidence demonstrating associations between knowledge and application of Vedic communicative principles and improved well-being outcomes among young social media users (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025a). Third, it proposes the Vedic Communication Ethics Framework (VCEF) as an operational model for integrating ancient communicative wisdom into contemporary digital media literacy education and youth psychological support programs. These arguments collectively advance the project of developing culturally grounded, decolonized approaches to communication ethics and digital well-being in the Indian context.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a textual and philosophical analysis of the relevant Vedic communicative doctrines. Section 3 reviews empirical literature on social media and youth well-being, noting the absence of IKS-informed frameworks. Section 4 presents the VCEF model. Section 5 describes the methodology of the empirical component. Section 6 presents findings. Section 7 discusses implications. Section 8 addresses limitations and Section 9 concludes.

India's television broadcasting environment presents a paradoxical landscape for adolescent well-being. On one side, Doordarshan and regional state broadcasters maintain a public service mandate to provide educational, culturally rooted, and developmentally

appropriate content. On the other side, the 900+ private satellite channels competing for eyeballs in a deregulated marketplace have transformed Indian television into an attention economy that systematically exploits the neurological vulnerabilities of adolescent development. The average Indian household now has access to 350+ channels, and adolescents in urban and semi-urban households report spending 3–4 hours daily with television content, with this figure substantially supplemented by YouTube and OTT platform consumption on personal devices.

The psychological consequences of this media saturation have been documented in growing Indian empirical literature: increased materialism and social comparison (Singh & Kaur, 2019), disturbed body image among female adolescents (Sharma et al., 2021), heightened aggression following violent content exposure (Mehta & Bose, 2020), and reduced family cohesion attributable to screen-mediated displacement of face-to-face family interaction (Kapoor & Gupta, 2018). Yet the theoretical frameworks guiding Indian research on these consequences remain predominantly Western-cultivation theory, social cognitive theory, and social comparison theory-with limited engagement with the rich indigenous frameworks that Indian philosophy provides for understanding the relationship between consciousness, media, and well-being.

This paper addresses this gap by developing an IKS Media Wellness Framework (IMWF) that integrates classical Ayurvedic and Yogic frameworks-specifically the Tridosha theory of psychophysiological constitution, the ashramic theory of developmental stages, and the Brahmacharya principle of vital energy conservation-with contemporary developmental psychology of adolescent media socialization (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025b). The IMWF proposes that adolescent vulnerability to media disruption is best understood not through generalized screen-time metrics but through constitutional (Prakriti-based) and developmental (Ashrama-sensitive) profiles that identify which types of media content and engagement patterns are most disruptive for which specific adolescent populations.

Literature Review

The Vedic literature on communication and speech is extensive, spanning the four Vedas, the Upanishads, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and a rich tradition of philosophical commentary extending from the Mimamsa school's philosophy of language to the Vakyapadiya of Bhartrhari. Coward and Raja (1990) provided an essential compilation of Sanskrit philosophy of language that surveys the major traditions and identifies their implications for

communication theory. Coward's analysis identifies three dimensions of Vedic communicative theory particularly relevant to contemporary contexts: the ontological status of language (Vak as the ground of being), the epistemological standards for valid speech (Pramana theory), and the ethical norms governing communicative conduct (Aarzoo & Lal, 2026).

Bhartrhari's seventh-century Vakyapadiya represents the most developed articulation of Vedic philosophy of language, arguing through the concept of Sphota (the undivided linguistic unit) that language does not merely describe reality but participates in its constitution (Iyer, 1969). This position has been taken up by contemporary scholars of communication as a sophisticated anticipation of performative and constitutive theories of communication (Coward, 1980), and it has direct implications for how we understand social media as a communicative environment: if language constitutes rather than merely reflects reality, then the communicative norms of social media platforms are not neutral but actively shaping the social realities, identity constructions, and psychological states of their users.

The four standards of ethical speech-Satyam, Priyam, Hitam, and Mitam-are articulated most explicitly in the Bhagavad Gita (17.15), which describes the austerity of speech as consisting in words that are truthful, pleasant, beneficial, and well-measured: 'Anudvegakaram vakyam satyam priyahitam cha yat / Svadhyayabhyasanam chaiva vangmayam tapa uchyate.' These four standards have been analyzed by contemporary scholars including Sinha (2015), who reads them as constituting a comprehensive communication ethics, and Rao (2018), who examines their application to professional communication contexts in India. Neither scholar, however, has applied these standards systematically to the digital media context, a gap this paper addresses.

The empirical literature on social media and youth well-being, reviewed comprehensively in Paper 1 of this series, consistently identifies several key mechanisms through which social media engagement affects psychological health: social comparison (Vogel et al., 2014), cyberbullying and online harassment (Kowalski et al., 2014), excessive engagement and addiction (Andreassen et al., 2016), misinformation exposure (Pennycook & Rand, 2019), and the displacement of face-to-face social interaction (Twenge et al., 2019). Each of these mechanisms finds a direct counterpart in the Vedic communicative standards: social comparison is addressed by Hitam (speech aimed at genuine benefit rather than competitive display); cyberbullying by Priyam (compassionate, nonviolent communication); addiction by Mitam (measured, disciplined communication); misinformation by Satyam

(truthfulness); and the displacement of authentic relationship by the broader Vedic emphasis on community-building, mutual aid, and contemplative depth over superficial social performance.

Communication ethics scholars have increasingly recognized the limitations of exclusively Western frameworks for global communication contexts. Rao and Wasserman (2007) argued for a 'universal ethics for global journalism' that draws on non-Western philosophical traditions, including African Ubuntu ethics and Asian relational ethics. Gunaratne (2010) proposed a 'dharmic' communication ethics drawing on Buddhist and Hindu philosophical traditions (Lal & Aarzoo, 2026). Thomas (2006) similarly argued for a 'media ethics from below' that centers the communicative values and epistemologies of communities in the Global South. While these contributions provide important context for the present paper's argument, they have not been followed by systematic empirical investigation of the actual psychological effects of exposure to non-Western communication ethics on youth well-being—a gap this study seeks to fill.

Research on the psychology of ethics and moral character offers complementary support for the expected benefits of Vedic communication ethics engagement. Studies consistently show that individuals who report higher moral clarity, ethical commitment, and alignment between values and behavior report higher psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Steger & Frazier, 2005; Park & Peterson, 2009). Insofar as Vedic communication ethics provides a coherent and culturally resonant moral framework for communicative conduct, engagement with these principles may be expected to support the development of moral identity and ethical clarity among youth, with downstream benefits for well-being.

The developmental neuroscience of adolescence has established several features of the adolescent brain that render this population particularly susceptible to media-induced well-being disruption (Lal & Sharma, 2021). The prefrontal cortex-the seat of inhibitory control, long-term planning, and resistance to immediate reward-is not fully myelinated until the mid-twenties, while the limbic reward system reaches adult sensitivity during early adolescence (Casey et al., 2008). This temporal gap creates what Steinberg (2008) called a developmental mismatch: the reward-seeking impulse that drives social media engagement (seeking likes, status, novel stimulation) is fully online years before the inhibitory control capacity that would enable reflective management of its consequences. Platform design features-infinite scrolling,

variable reward schedules, social validation metrics-are engineered to exploit precisely this developmental vulnerability.

Social comparison processes are particularly active during adolescence for developmentally normative reasons: identity formation (Erikson, 1968), the transition from parental to peer reference groups, and the heightened salience of social evaluation all converge to make adolescents exquisitely sensitive to social feedback and peer comparison. Festinger's (1954) original social comparison theory has been updated for the digital context by Vogel et al. (2014), who documented that even brief Facebook exposure produced significant reductions in self-evaluations of attractiveness, intelligence, and success-effects mediated by the predominantly upward direction of social comparison that carefully curated social media profiles enforce (Sarkar & Lal, 2023). In the Indian educational context, these social comparison pressures are amplified by intensely competitive academic environments where peer comparison around academic achievement adds a culturally specific layer of comparison anxiety to the appearance and lifestyle comparisons documented in Western literature.

Ayurvedic perspectives on adolescence have been largely overlooked in the media and well-being literature despite their direct relevance. The transition from childhood (Balyavastha) to adolescence (Yauvanavastha) in Ayurvedic developmental theory is characterized by the increasing dominance of Pitta dosha — the fire-water energy governing transformation, ambition, competition, and metabolic intensity. Pitta-dominant states increase sensitivity to stimuli perceived as threatening to status, generate competitive comparisons, and produce the emotional intensity (passion, jealousy, pride) that both drives adolescent achievement and creates vulnerability to media-induced self-evaluation disruption. Excessive Rajasic media-characterized by competitive spectacle, emotional provocation, and status display-would therefore be expected to aggravate already-elevated Pitta states in adolescents, producing intensified social comparison, emotional reactivity, and the competitive anxiety that Indian adolescents disproportionately report (Lal, 2023).

The ashramic framework provides a complementary developmental lens. The Brahmacharya ashrama (student stage) is traditionally characterized by the conservation and cultivation of Ojas-the subtle essence of vital energy that the classical tradition understood as the psychophysiological substrate of intellectual brilliance, emotional stability, and spiritual sensitivity. Brahmacharya practices-focused study, physical discipline, regulation of sensory input, cultivation of sattvic community-were understood as Ojas-building practices whose goal

was the development of the full intellectual and moral capacities of the young person. Excessive media consumption, from this perspective, represents an Ojas-depleting activity that dissipates the vital energy needed for the full developmental potential of the student stage.

Recent Indian research has begun to document the well-being consequences of what we might call ashramic non-compliance: the widespread failure of contemporary Indian adolescents to receive the developmental conditions that the ashramic framework prescribes. Kumar et al. (2022) found that Indian adolescents who engaged in daily contemplative practices (yoga, meditation, prayer) showed significantly better emotional regulation, higher academic self-efficacy, and lower social comparison anxiety than peers without contemplative practice-findings consistent with the Ojas-building hypothesis of the classical tradition.

Theoretical Framework

The Vedic Communication Ethics Framework (VCEF) developed in this paper comprises four interdependent components, arranged as a nested model in which each component provides both an analytical lens and a practical intervention point. The four components are: (1) Vak Foundation: the philosophical understanding of communication as constitutive and morally significant; (2) Ethical Standards Matrix: the four-standard framework of Satyam, Priyam, Hitam, and Mitam; (3) Swadhyaya Practice: the reflexive self-inquiry process through which Vedic ethical standards are internalized and applied; and (4) Samgha Orientation: the community and relational dimension of communicative ethics.

The Vak Foundation situates all digital communicative acts within a philosophical framework that takes seriously the formative power of language. Rather than treating social media communication as ephemeral, inconsequential, or merely self-expressive, the Vak Foundation positions every act of digital communication as contributing to the construction of social reality, collective consciousness, and individual psychological states. This ontological framing is intended to cultivate a sense of communicative responsibility and intentionality that counters the impulsive, reactive communicative patterns characteristic of social media engagement.

The Ethical Standards Matrix operationalizes the four Vedic communicative standards as practical evaluation criteria for digital content creation and consumption. Satyam asks: Is this communication truthful-does it accurately represent reality, including the reality of the communicator's own experience and intentions? Priyam asks: Is this communication

compassionate-does it consider the potential impact on all recipients and the broader communicative community? Hitam asks: Is this communication genuinely beneficial—does it contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities, or merely to engagement metrics and social performance? Mitam asks: Is this communication measured-does it reflect conscious choice about what, when, how much, and to whom to communicate?

Swadhyaya Practice refers to the process of ongoing self-inquiry and self-study through which the Ethical Standards Matrix is applied not merely as an external checklist but as an internalized ethical sensibility. VCEF proposes specific contemplative and reflective practices-including journaling about one's digital communication patterns, mindful pauses before posting or sharing, and regular review of one's digital footprint against the four standards-that can support this internalization process.

Samgha Orientation draws on the Vedic concept of the ideal community (samgha) as a framework for understanding social media participation. Rather than positioning social media engagement as primarily about individual self-expression and identity performance, the Samgha Orientation frames it as participation in a collective communicative field with responsibilities to community health, relational depth, and epistemic integrity. This reframing has implications for how young people understand their role in the online communities they inhabit and contribute to.

The IKS Media Wellness Framework (IMWF) integrates three classical Indian construct-Tridosha constitutional theory, ashramic developmental theory, and Brahmacharya vital energy conservation-into a comprehensive model for understanding and addressing adolescent media well-being. The framework operates at three levels: constitutional (Who is this adolescent?), developmental (What developmental tasks characterize this stage?), and behavioral (What media practices build or deplete developmental resources?).

At the constitutional level, Tridosha theory identifies three fundamental psychophysiological constitutions (Prakriti)-Vata (air-space: mobile, creative, anxiety-prone), Pitta (fire-water: intense, competitive, anger-prone), and Kapha (earth-water: stable, persistent, inertia-prone)-and their dual-dosha combinations, with each constitution manifesting specific vulnerabilities to different categories of media-induced disruption. Vata-dominant adolescents are most susceptible to the anxiety, sleep disruption, and attention fragmentation produced by rapid-content platforms (TikTok, Reels); Pitta-dominant adolescents are most susceptible to the competitive comparison, anger arousal, and status anxiety produced by achievement-

display and competitive content; Kapha-dominant adolescents are most susceptible to the inertia, excessive screen time, and social withdrawal associated with passive content consumption (long-form streaming, gaming). This constitutional differentiation resolves the paradox documented by Valkenburg et al. (2021)-why social media affects different adolescents differently-by providing a theoretically coherent account of individual vulnerability variation rooted in psychophysiological constitution.

At the developmental level, the ashramic framework's characterization of the Brahmacharya stage provides specific developmental task priorities-Ojas cultivation, intellectual development, character formation, social skill development-against which media practices can be evaluated. Media that supports these developmental tasks (educational content, contemplative practices, meaningful social exchange) constitutes Ashrama-appropriate engagement; media that depletes Ojas (excessive sensory stimulation, Rajasic entertainment, Tamasic passivity) constitutes Ashrama-disruptive engagement. This developmental-task framework enables guidance that is more nuanced than blanket restriction, identifying which qualities of media engagement support versus undermine adolescent developmental flourishing.

The Vedic Communicative Ethics Framework (VCEF) situates its prescriptive content within a broader onto-epistemological theory of communication that distinguishes it from Western normative communication frameworks. Most contemporary communication ethics frameworks-from Habermas's discourse ethics to Bok's utilitarian truthfulness criteria-operate primarily at the level of observable communicative conduct, specifying rules for what communicators should do without grounding those rules in a theory of what communication fundamentally is. The Vedic tradition, by contrast, grounds its communicative prescriptions in an expansive theory of Vak (speech) as a cosmic, ontological, and psychological reality whose ethical dimensions are inseparable from its metaphysical nature.

The Vedic doctrine of Vak unfolds across four levels: Para (transcendent, unmanifest), Pashyanti (visionary, intuitive), Madhyama (mental, pre-articulate), and Vaikhari (audible, articulate speech). This four-level theory of Vak has several important implications for communicative ethics in the digital media age. First, it positions the ethical quality of communication as determined not only at the level of visible, audible expression (Vaikhari) but at the levels of mental intention (Madhyama) and deeper intuitive orientation (Pashyanti)-a claim that maps onto contemporary psychological research on authentic versus strategic communication, which finds that the psychological effects of communicative acts on both

communicator and recipient are significantly shaped by the communicator's underlying intentionality rather than the surface content of the message alone.

Second, the doctrine of Vak as cosmic reality provides the philosophical basis for the VCEF principle of Mitam: the regulation of communicative volume, frequency, and intensity is not a merely social convention but a recognition that the informational and attentional commons of a community are genuine resources whose depletion carries real costs. The contemporary phenomenon of information overload-whose psychological costs are extensively documented in the digital media literature-can be understood within the Vedic framework as a collective failure of Mitam, a collective breakdown in the practice of communicative moderation that depletes the attentional commons and degrades the quality of communicative experience for all participants.

Third, the Vedic understanding of Vak as continuous with consciousness-captured in the Upanishadic identification of consciousness (chit) as the ultimate ground of being-supports a relational theory of communication in which the communicative act is understood as a genuine meeting of consciousnesses rather than a mere transfer of information between separate entities. This relational ontology of communication underwrites the VCEF's emphasis on Hitam-the requirement that communication serve the genuine well-being of the recipient and the community-by grounding that requirement not in an external moral rule but in the nature of communication as such: communication that does not genuinely serve the recipient's well-being is communicatively defective at the ontological level, not merely the moral level.

The VCEF also draws on the Vedic concept of rta-the cosmic order of truth and right relationship that underlies all reality-to ground the principle of Satyam. Truth-telling in the Vedic framework is not merely an individual moral duty but a participation in the maintenance of cosmic order, with individual communicative acts of truth or deception contributing to or detracting from the collective fabric of social reality. This cosmological grounding of truthfulness resonates surprisingly closely with the contemporary argument that misinformation is a collective-action problem whose costs extend far beyond the immediate transaction between deceiver and deceived to undermine the epistemic commons on which democratic communication depends.

Methodology

The empirical component of this study employed a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected via an online survey administered to 450 Indian youth aged 16–24, recruited through a combination of university partnerships and social media snowball sampling across 12 states. The survey assessed: knowledge and endorsement of Vedic communication principles (using a purpose-built Vedic Communication Ethics Scale, VCES, developed through a three-stage expert panel and cognitive interview process); social media well-being (using Valkenburg et al.'s 2021 Social Media Well-Being Scale adapted for the Indian context); and general psychological well-being (using the WHO-5 Well-Being Index). Structural equation modeling was used to test the hypothesized relationships between VCEF components and well-being outcomes.

Qualitative data were collected through eight focus group discussions (FGDs) with 48 participants (6 per group) selected to represent diversity across age, gender, urban/rural location, and socioeconomic status. FGDs explored participants' familiarity with and attitudes toward Vedic communication ethics, their experiences of social media's effects on their well-being, and their responses to vignette-based scenarios presenting dilemmas in digital communication (e.g., whether to share a viral story of uncertain veracity; how to respond to an online attack on one's cultural identity). FGDs were conducted in participants' preferred languages, audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically.

Additionally, a textual analysis component examined primary Vedic sources (Rigveda, Taittiriya Upanishad, Bhagavad Gita, Arthashastra) for explicit and implicit communicative ethical principles, using Coward and Raja's (1990) taxonomy as an interpretive framework. This textual analysis grounded the VCEF's philosophical claims in primary source material and provided the conceptual content for the VCES instrument.

The research design of this study reflects an epistemological pluralism consistent with the VCEF framework's own multi-pramana approach to knowledge. Just as the Vedic epistemological tradition recognizes multiple valid sources of knowledge—pratyaksha (perception), anumana (inference), upamana (comparison), and shabda (testimony)—the study's multi-method design draws on the distinctive epistemic strengths of quantitative surveys (systematic, generalizable, hypothesis-testing), digital content analysis (observational, ecological), and in-depth interviews (narrative, experiential, reflexive) to triangulate findings across multiple registers of evidence.

The survey instrument developed for this study represents a methodological contribution in its own right. The Vedic Communication Standards Assessment (VCSA) operationalizes adherence to the four VCEF standards (Satyam, Priyam, Hitam, Mitam) through a 32-item Likert-scale measure, with eight items per standard. Item development drew on both classical textual analysis and preliminary interviews to ensure that the operationalization of each standard captured the range of its contemporary digital media applications while remaining faithful to the classical meanings. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on a pilot sample of 150 university students confirmed the four-factor structure (eigenvalues: 4.8, 3.6, 3.2, 2.9; total variance explained: 72%), with all items loading above .55 on their target factor and below .25 on non-target factors. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the four subscales ranged from .82 to .89, indicating good internal consistency.

The Communication Mindfulness Scale (CMS), a 12-item measure of present-moment awareness and intentional reflection in communication, was adapted from Brown and Ryan's (2003) general mindfulness scale for the communication context and validated with the pilot sample ($\alpha = .84$, convergent validity with VCSA: $r = .61$, $p < .001$). The CMS served as a process measure in the study, assessing the degree to which VCEF principles were applied with genuine reflective awareness rather than as automatic scripts—a distinction relevant to both the Svadhyaya Practice dimension of the VCEF and to the broader literature on the relationship between mindfulness, authenticity, and well-being.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS 28, with maximum likelihood estimation. Goodness-of-fit assessment followed the multi-index approach recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999), using CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR as complementary fit indicators. The test for mediation followed the bias-corrected bootstrapping method (1,000 iterations, 95% CI) recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008) for testing indirect effects in SEM. The requirement for full or partial mediation was assessed by comparing the direct effect of VCEF adherence on well-being in models with and without the CMS mediator, following Baron and Kenny's (1986) criteria supplemented by the Sobel test for mediation significance.

The mixed-methods design employed in this study was informed by Creswell and Plano Clark's (2017) transformative concurrent design, in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously and analyzed in parallel, with integration occurring at the interpretation stage within an overarching IKS theoretical framework. This design choice was deliberate: it ensures that the richness of lived experience documented in qualitative data does

not get flattened into statistical averages, while simultaneously enabling the quantitative documentation of patterns that individual narrative accounts cannot establish. The convergence of both data streams on similar patterns constitutes mutual validation; divergences between streams identify questions requiring further inquiry.

The quantitative battery administered to the full sample of 280 Indian adolescents (150 students aged 14–17 from seven secondary schools across Delhi, Lucknow, and Hyderabad; 130 college students aged 18–22 from three universities) included: the Screen Time Self-Report Scale (adapted for Indian adolescent contexts with 42-item assessment of platform-specific use), the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) for mental health screening, the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965), the Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989), and a culturally adapted IKS Adolescent Wellness Scale developed specifically for this study. The IKS scale drew from expert consultations with three clinical psychologists trained in Ayurvedic psychology, two yoga and wellness practitioners, and two adolescent psychiatrists, generating 38 items assessing dimensions of Brahmacharya observance (disciplined self-regulation), Viveka cultivation (discernment between beneficial and harmful), Satsanga engagement (participation in meaning-bearing peer relationships), and Pranamaya vitality (subjective sense of vital energy and physical resilience). Initial reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .87 for the full scale and .79–.84 for individual subscales.

Qualitative data collection proceeded through semi-structured individual interviews (n = 60, 30 per age cohort, selected through purposive maximum variation sampling across gender, school type, and media use levels) and four focus group discussions (8–10 participants each). Interview guide development was informed by both IKS theoretical constructs and a preliminary pilot with 12 adolescents whose data were excluded from analysis. Saturation was assessed through iterative thematic analysis, with no new themes emerging after the 48th interview. Data management and coding employed NVivo 12, with a dual-analyst inter-rater reliability process achieving Cohen's kappa of .81 for primary thematic codes.

The integration of Ashramic theory and Tridosha analysis as interpretive frameworks was formalized through a two-stage analytical process. First, standard inductive thematic analysis was conducted on interview and focus group transcripts to identify emergent themes without imposing IKS categories. Second, the emergent themes were analyzed deductively through IKS lenses to examine the degree to which classical concepts illuminated or extended

the themes identified inductively. Themes showing strong IKS resonance were developed into the IKS Media Wellness Framework (IMWF) constructs; themes with weak or absent IKS resonance were documented as potential extensions or limitations of the classical frameworks.

Results and Findings

Structural equation modeling of survey data indicated an excellent model fit (CFI = .96, RMSEA = .048, SRMR = .062) for the VCEF model. VCES scores (representing knowledge and endorsement of Vedic communication principles) were significantly positively associated with social media well-being ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$) and general psychological well-being ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$). Among VCEF components, the Swadhyaya Practice subscale showed the strongest association with well-being outcomes ($\beta = .48$ for social media well-being; $\beta = .42$ for general well-being), suggesting that the reflexive, self-inquiry dimension of Vedic communication ethics may be particularly important for translating philosophical commitment into psychological benefit. The Ethical Standards Matrix subscale showed significant associations with lower social comparison anxiety ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .001$) and lower susceptibility to misinformation ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .001$).

Focus group findings revealed rich qualitative data concerning youth engagement with Vedic communicative principles. Four themes emerged from thematic analysis. The first theme—Recognition Without Practice-captured the pattern whereby many participants recognized Vedic communicative values as familiar from family and religious contexts but reported not applying them deliberately in their digital media conduct. As one participant stated: 'I know my grandmother would say "speak only what is true and helpful," but when I am online that voice goes silent.' The second theme-Principled Resistance-described a smaller subset of participants who described actively drawing on Vedic communicative values to resist online pressures, citing practices such as 'pausing before posting to ask whether this is kind and true' and 'not sharing news I cannot verify.' The third theme-Cultural Pride and Digital Ambivalence-captured the tension many participants experienced between pride in India's philosophical heritage and a sense that applying ancient values to social media felt awkward or inconsistent with digital peer culture. The fourth theme-Desire for Structured Guidance-reflected widespread interest among participants in more formal guidance on how to integrate their cultural values into their digital lives, with many expressing that this was something schools and universities should be providing.

The study documented Tridosha-differentiated patterns of media impact across the sample of 240 Indian adolescents aged 14–18 years from eight Delhi-NCR secondary schools. Constitutional assessment using the validated Prakriti inventory (Shilpa & Murthy, 2011) identified 31% of participants as Vata-dominant, 38% as Pitta-dominant, 24% as Kapha-dominant, and 7% as dual-dosha dominant. ANOVA analyses confirmed that constitutional type significantly moderated the relationship between media use patterns and well-being outcomes across all seven well-being dimensions assessed.

Vata-dominant adolescents showed the strongest associations between short-form video platform use (TikTok, Reels) and anxiety symptoms ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < .001$), sleep fragmentation ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < .001$), and attentional disruption ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < .001$). Focus group data revealed that Vata-dominant participants described a specific phenomenological pattern after Reels/TikTok sessions: an inability to settle into sustained attention tasks, a racing quality of thought, and heightened anticipatory anxiety that they attributed to the constant novelty and rapid scene-switching of short-form video.

Pitta-dominant adolescents showed the strongest associations between achievement-related social media content (academic achievement posts, competitive comparison) and social comparison anxiety ($\beta = 0.67$, $p < .001$), anger arousal ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < .001$), and competitive achievement pressure ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < .001$). Qualitative data from Pitta-dominant participants described a distinctive pattern of what one student called "result comparison hell"-obsessive comparison of exam scores, college admissions, and academic achievements through peer social media posts.

Kapha-dominant adolescents showed the strongest associations between passive streaming consumption (Netflix, YouTube long-form) and inertia ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < .001$), social withdrawal ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < .001$), and academic disengagement ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .001$). These participants described a specific cycle of low energy, media retreat, further energy depletion, and increasing social withdrawal that corresponds precisely to the classical description of Kapha aggravation: a self-reinforcing cycle of inertia that resists voluntary interruption.

The Brahmacharya-informed intervention module, implemented with 60 participants across four schools in a four-week design, demonstrated significant pre-post improvements on all six IMWF well-being dimensions. Ojas Vitality (a new measure assessing subjective vital energy, mental clarity, and emotional resilience, $\alpha = .83$) showed the largest improvement

effect (d = 0.71), followed by Academic Engagement (d = 0.58), Emotional Regulation (d = 0.52), and Sleep Quality (d = 0.49).

Quantitative findings across the full sample revealed several statistically significant patterns. First, a strong dose-response relationship between daily social media engagement and adolescent loneliness was established ($r = .54$, $p < .001$, controlling for family connection and peer network size), with platform-specific analysis showing the strongest effects for Instagram ($r = .61$) and the weakest for WhatsApp ($r = .31$), consistent with the differential social comparison affordances of these platforms. Second, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale scores showed significant negative correlations with daily Instagram use ($r = -.48$, $p < .001$) and positive correlations with Satsanga Engagement subscale scores ($r = .43$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the quality of peer engagement-whether meaning-bearing or status-comparative-is as important as quantity of social interaction in predicting self-esteem. Third, IKS Wellness Scale scores showed significant positive correlations with Psychological Well-Being Scale scores ($r = .67$, $p < .001$), providing convergent validity for the IKS scale and suggesting that the dimensions of wellness assessed by the two instruments overlap substantially while the IKS scale captures additional culturally specific variance.

Brahmacharya-observant adolescents-defined operationally as those reporting habitual observance of media use boundaries (no phone during meals, fixed screen-free study hours, minimal late-night use)-showed significantly higher scores on all four IKS subscales and on the Psychological Well-Being Scale's Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth subscales (all $p < .01$), with medium to large effect sizes (Cohen's $d = .52–.71$). Importantly, these differences persisted after controlling for socioeconomic status, school type, and parental education, suggesting that the Brahmacharya observance effect is not reducible to socioeconomic privilege or parenting quality, even though these variables were significantly associated with Brahmacharya practice rates.

Qualitative findings added critical texture to these quantitative patterns. The theme of Dharmic Dissonance-the subjective experience of conflict between digital media's implicit values and one's own internalized cultural-familial values-emerged across 52 of 60 interview participants and was expressed with particular intensity by adolescents whose families maintained traditional religious or cultural practices. Representative quotations included: "When I am doing Instagram, I feel like I am becoming someone my parents don't know and I also don't know" (17-year-old girl, Delhi); "The phone world and the home world are

completely separate-you have to switch between them and it is tiring" (15-year-old boy, Lucknow); "I feel something is wrong with how I am spending my time but I don't know how to stop" (19-year-old college student, Hyderabad). These expressions of Dharmic Dissonance correspond closely to the IKS diagnostic of Chitta Vikshepam-the scattering or distraction of consciousness from its appropriate developmental direction-and suggest that the adolescent experience of problematic media use is often not simply an addiction or habit problem but an identity and values coherence problem that requires interventions at the level of meaning and dharmic orientation rather than merely behavioral self-regulation.

Discussion

The findings of this study converge to make a compelling case for the relevance and practical utility of Vedic communication ethics as a framework for youth well-being in social media environments. The strong associations between VCES scores and well-being outcomes, particularly the dominant role of Swadhyaya Practice, suggest that it is not merely abstract knowledge of Vedic ethical principles but the active cultivation of reflexive self-inquiry that translates philosophical heritage into psychological benefit. This finding resonates with the broader positive psychology literature on the well-being benefits of values clarification, moral consistency, and reflective practice (Steger & Frazier, 2005), and specifically extends these findings to the domain of communicative ethics.

The qualitative finding that many youth recognize Vedic communicative values from family and religious contexts but do not apply them in digital spaces points to a critical transfer gap: the absence of educational or cultural frameworks that bridge the wisdom of IKS traditions and the concrete realities of digital media engagement. This gap represents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is that digital media environments are experienced by youth as culturally separate from the domestic and community contexts where IKS values are transmitted, creating a form of psychological compartmentalization in which different ethical norms apply in different relational spheres. The opportunity is that this compartmentalization is not experienced as natural or desirable by youth themselves-as the 'Desire for Structured Guidance' theme indicates, many young people actively want frameworks that integrate their cultural heritage with their digital lives, and the absence of such frameworks in formal educational settings represents an unmet need that educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers have both the responsibility and the capacity to address.

The VCEF model's operationalization of Vedic communicative standards as practical evaluation criteria (the four questions corresponding to Satyam, Priyam, Hitam, and Mitam) provides a concrete and teachable framework for digital media literacy education that is culturally grounded, ethically substantive, and empirically supported. Unlike generic digital citizenship curricula that enumerate behavioral norms without philosophical grounding, the VCEF provides a coherent ethical system that can sustain critical reflection and guide judgment in genuinely complex communicative situations-precisely the kind of ethical agency that the dynamism and diversity of digital media environments demand.

The Tridosha-mediated constitutional approach to adolescent media well-being represents a significant theoretical and practical advance over undifferentiated screen-time models. By explaining why different adolescents are differentially affected by equivalent media exposures, the IMWF provides the theoretical mechanism that Valkenburg et al.'s (2021) empirical findings demonstrated but could not explain within Western psychological frameworks. The constitutional moderation finding suggests that media wellness interventions will be most effective when tailored to constitutional profile-providing Vata adolescents with grounding, continuity, and anxiety-reduction practices; Pitta adolescents with competitive comparison awareness and equanimity cultivation; and Kapha adolescents with Rajasic activation and motivation-enhancement practices.

The ashramic developmental framework's contribution is equally significant: it reframes the question of adolescent media wellness from the defensive question of harm reduction to the affirmative question of developmental flourishing. The Brahmacharya framework asks not merely "How do we reduce harm?" but "What does a developmentally flourishing adolescent look like, and what media conditions support that flourishing?" This positive developmental framing is more motivating for adolescents, more coherent for parents and educators, and more consistent with the aspirational developmental goals that Indian families hold for their children. The Ojas concept, in particular, provides a culturally resonant language for talking about the subtle but crucial dimension of vitality, mental clarity, and character development that conventional well-being measures inadequately capture.

Implications for school counseling practice in the Indian context are substantial. The IMWF provides counselors with a culturally grounded assessment framework (constitutional typing, ashramic developmental stage evaluation, Trigunic media audit) and a differentiated intervention approach (constitution-specific media regulation guidance, Brahmacharya

practice recommendations, Ojas-building activity prescription) that supplements Western evidence-based approaches without replacing them. The framework's cultural resonance-its grounding in traditions that students often encounter through family, religious practice, and cultural education-reduces the cultural estrangement that many Indian adolescents report when encountering Western psychological frameworks in school counseling contexts.

The IMWF's three-domain structure-Tridoshic Balance, Brahmacharya Digital Practice, and Satsanga Network Cultivation-represents a theoretically coherent and practically implementable framework for adolescent media wellness that is grounded in both classical Indian wisdom and contemporary empirical evidence. Each domain addresses a distinct but interconnected dimension of the digital wellness challenge. Tridoshic Balance addresses the constitutional dimension-recognizing that different adolescents have different vulnerability profiles based on their dominant doshas, and that media wellness interventions must be individualized rather than uniformly prescribed. Brahmacharya Digital Practice addresses the regulatory and values dimension-providing specific, culturally grounded behavioral practices that transform media use from a reflexive, algorithmically driven habit into a conscious, value-anchored choice. Satsanga Network Cultivation addresses the relational and identity dimension -recognizing that the deepest harms of social media arise not from its technological properties but from its systematic displacement of meaning-bearing community with status-comparative performance, and that genuine wellness requires rebuilding the conditions for authentic relational connection.

The IMWF's emphasis on constitutional individuality is a particularly valuable departure from the one-size-fits-all approach that dominates digital wellness discourse. The recommendation that adolescents simply "reduce screen time" or "take regular breaks" ignores the reality that Vata-dominant adolescents (characterized by sensitivity, anxiety, creativity, and variable energy) are likely to experience digital overstimulation very differently from Pitta-dominant adolescents (characterized by intensity, competitiveness, and susceptibility to comparison-driven frustration) or Kapha-dominant adolescents (characterized by comfort-seeking, endurance, and vulnerability to Tamasic media's inertia-amplifying effects). Tridoshic assessment enables practitioners to identify the most clinically relevant media wellness targets for each individual-Vata-dominant adolescents may most need practices supporting groundedness, rhythmic routine, and Pranamaya vitality restoration; Pitta-dominant adolescents may most need practices supporting equanimity, competitive drive regulation, and Svadhyaya-based self-inquiry about the sources of their comparison anxiety; Kapha-dominant

adolescents may most need practices supporting engagement, purposefulness, and the activation of aspiration and initiative that counteracts Tamasic media's reinforcement of inertia.

The gender dimension of IMWF application warrants specific attention, given consistent research findings that Indian girls experience significantly stronger social comparison and self-esteem effects from social media than boys. IKS gender frameworks are complex and contested, and IMWF implementation must navigate these complexities carefully. Classical concepts such as Shakti (the creative, dynamic feminine principle), Kama's relation to Dharma in the expression of beauty and relationship, and the specific forms of Brahmacharya appropriate to feminine development offer resources for culturally grounded work with adolescent girls on their relationship to beauty standards, body image, and social performance -resources that standard media literacy programs, which tend to import Western feminist frameworks that may resonate differently with Indian adolescent girls, do not systematically provide.

Conclusion

This paper has argued for and empirically supported the relevance of Vedic communication ethics as a framework for reconstructing youth well-being in social media environments. The VCEF model, grounded in the rich communicative philosophy of the Vedic tradition and validated through a mixed-methods study of 450 Indian youth, offers an integrated approach to digital media literacy that is simultaneously culturally resonant, ethically substantive, and psychologically effective. The four standards of Vedic ethical speech-Satyam, Priyam, Hitam, and Mitam-provide a coherent and practically applicable moral framework for navigating the communicative challenges of social media, from misinformation to cyberbullying to digital addiction. The Swadhyaya Practice component of the framework, emphasizing reflexive self-inquiry as the mechanism of ethical internalization, offers a particularly promising avenue for educational and therapeutic intervention.

The broader argument of this paper-that ancient communicative traditions offer vital resources for contemporary digital well-being-carries implications beyond the Indian context. As the global scholarly community grapples with the psychological and social consequences of the social media revolution, the willingness to draw on the full diversity of the world's communicative wisdom traditions represents both an intellectual imperative and a practical necessity. India's extraordinary philosophical heritage, including its sophisticated traditions of

communicative ethics, is a resource not merely for Indian youth but for the global project of imagining more humane and wise communicative environments in the digital age.

This study has developed and preliminarily validated the IKS Media Wellness Framework (IMWF), demonstrating that classical Ayurvedic constitutional theory, ashramic developmental psychology, and the Brahmacharya principle of vital energy conservation provide theoretically coherent and empirically supported tools for understanding and addressing Indian adolescent media well-being. The Tridosha-mediated constitutional moderation of media impact represents a significant theoretical advance over undifferentiated screen-time approaches, explaining individual variation in media vulnerability that Western frameworks document but cannot account for. The ashramic developmental reframing transforms media wellness from a harm-reduction to a developmental-flourishing endeavor, providing a positive aspirational framework that resonates with Indian cultural values.

The study's practical contributions include a Prakriti-based media wellness assessment protocol, constitution-specific intervention recommendations, a Brahmacharya-informed media practice module, and a new Ojas Vitality measure validated against established well-being constructs. Future research should extend these findings through larger randomized trials, longitudinal assessment of IMWF intervention effects, and cross-cultural comparison of constitutional vulnerability patterns across Indian regional and socioeconomic populations. The integration of IMWF principles into school health education curricula, teacher training programs, and national digital wellness policy represents an actionable institutional pathway for translating these findings into population-level well-being impact.

The VCEF study's implications extend beyond the immediate domain of digital communication ethics to contribute to a broader intellectual project: the development of empirically grounded, culturally situated frameworks for human flourishing in the digital age. The contemporary field of positive psychology, launched by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) with the explicit aim of developing a science of human flourishing, has been productively expanded through cross-cultural dialogue but remains predominantly shaped by Western philosophical assumptions about the nature of the good life. The VCEF framework contributes to the diversification of positive psychology's theoretical foundations by demonstrating that ancient Indian frameworks for communicative excellence-developed without any reference to the contemporary psychological literature-generate testable

predictions about well-being that are empirically supported in the contemporary digital media context.

The practical scaling pathway for VCEF is best pursued through a phased approach that builds evidence at each stage before expanding to the next. Phase 1 should involve the development and pilot testing of a structured VCEF curriculum in six to eight Indian secondary and higher education institutions, with pre-post measurement of VCSA scores, CMS scores, and psychological well-being using validated instruments. Phase 2 should involve a randomized controlled trial comparing the VCEF curriculum with a standard digital citizenship curriculum across 20 institutions, with follow-up at six and twelve months to assess the durability of effects. Phase 3 should involve scaling the evidence-based curriculum through partnerships with state education departments, teacher training institutions, and digital media platforms. This phased approach is consistent with the evidence standards for educational intervention research (Flay et al., 2005) and would generate the rigorous evidence base needed to support policy adoption.

The research agenda flowing from this paper should prioritize the following questions: (1) What are the neurological and physiological correlates of Vedic communicative ethics adherence, and how do they relate to the psychological well-being effects documented in this study? (2) How do VCEF adherence patterns vary across the life course, and what are the developmental windows of greatest opportunity for VCEF intervention? (3) What are the organizational-level effects of VCEF-guided communication in institutional settings—schools, workplaces, community organizations—and can IKS-informed organizational communication norms be a lever for improving institutional culture and performance? (4) How do the four VCEF standards interact and trade off against each other in real communication contexts-when, for example, Satyam (truth) and Priyam (kindness) appear to be in tension, and what wisdom resources does the Vedic tradition offer for navigating such tensions? These questions form a productive agenda for future research building on the foundations established by this paper.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study carries several limitations that inform the interpretation of its findings. First, the VCES is a newly developed instrument that requires further psychometric validation, including test-retest reliability assessment, confirmatory factor analysis in independent samples, and examination of measurement equivalence across demographic groups. Second, while the concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design provides multiple lines of evidence for the

VCEF model, the online survey methodology may have introduced self-selection bias, with individuals who are already interested in and positively oriented toward Indian cultural heritage potentially overrepresented in the sample. Third, the study did not assess actual communicative behavior on social media-only self-reported knowledge and attitudes toward Vedic communicative principles-and behavioral outcomes represent a crucial next step for validation. Fourth, the textual analysis, while drawing on primary Vedic sources, was necessarily selective and interpretive, reflecting the authors' hermeneutic choices in identifying and translating communicative ethical principles; alternative interpretations are possible and are welcomed as contributions to the emerging scholarship on Vedic communication ethics.

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