

# Human Social Value Orientation and its Impact on Cooperation during Covid-19 Crisis: A Conceptual Review

## Narayana Maharana

Asst. Professor,  
Parala Maharaja Engineering College,  
Berhampur University,  
Berhampur. Odisha, India.

## Girish Prasad Das

Research Scholar,  
Dept of Business Administration,  
Berhampur University,  
Berhampur. Odisha, India.

## Manik Chand Patnaik

Associate Professor,  
Department of CSE,  
Roland Institute of Technology,  
Berhampur, Odisha.

## Manash Kumar Sahu

Asst. Professor,  
Department of Management,  
ASBM University,  
Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

## Abstract

The world has emerged dramatically after the outbreak of the influenza virus (Covid-19) with the new normal that has triggered many social and psychological challenges and changes. The present paper conceptualizes and identifies a few questions like; whether human social values change with a crisis like covid-19. Does, social value orientation intensifies cooperation and helping behaviour among people. Whether such changes are temporary and apparent in case of disasters or crisis like a pandemic. The study highlighted some perspectives based on previous studies relating to social and behavioural aspects during a crisis and provided a conceptual framework on how the social value orientation has been influenced by different factors like Social Norms, Social Discrimination and Inequality, Trust, Leadership, Sense of Connection and Empathy. Finally, as a policy implication, it gives enough scope for an empirical investigation into the various factors influencing social value orientation and its impact on behavioural changes during a crisis. An insight into the social value and behavioural changes in humans help the policymakers to devise appropriate strategies for crisis management.

**Keywords:** Human, Social Value Orientation, Empathy, Covid-19, Crisis, India.

## Introduction

The society has gone through a paradigm shift pertaining to social, behavioural and lifestyle due to the Covid-19 epidemic (Alon, et al., 2020). For example, the normal lifestyle has changed due to the necessity of practising some non - medicinal policies such as "social distancing", "use of Mask" etc. (Kraus, et al., 2020). Covid-19 has transformed the way we live and it has a societal impact which could contribute to more social transformation (World Health Organisation, 2020). Moreover, to deal with these changes, people rely more on social initiatives and remote networking for their day-to-day activities. As a result, contactless systems became the new normal which caused a huge decrease in physical human contacts (Cortez & Johnston, 2020). It has also led to a decline in the emotional and physical well-being of many people, demanding a social solution that includes some sort of value orientation and co-creation with an increased level of empathy. Young minds indeed are influenced by such transitions since social distances and personal hygiene become more pronounced.

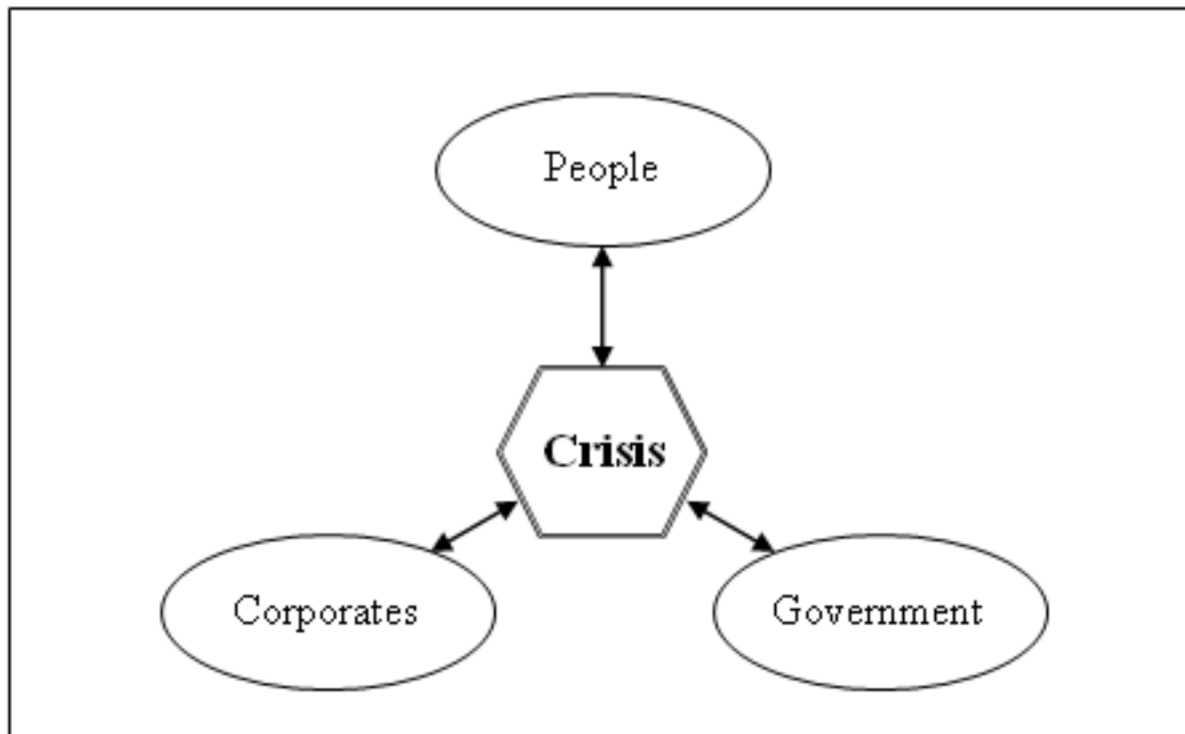
Besides, social activities that emphasize on keeping physical distance among people in the society are prone to increase mental and behavioural consequences (Maharana, et al., 2020). Although social distancing has been successful as a non - medicinal technique and increased reliance on the internet, people largely communicate through social media. A sharp decrease in the physical modes of communication and interaction has resulted in psychosocial consequences like anxiety and depression. In particular, the continuing existence of covid-19 and without any existing treatment or the availability of a vaccine which is not giving any clear picture of mitigating the virus effectively; creates additional stress among people. Let us hope that, considering the exhilarating experience of the epidemic, the experiences gained from the Covid-19 pandemic could be used in a constructive way to cultivate empathy and social value. To cope with unexpected social change, greater creative thinking is needed. In this backdrop, the present paper conceptualizes and focuses on a few questions like; whether there is a change in social value due to the covid-19 crisis. Does, changed social value intensifies cooperation and helping behaviour among people. Whether such changes are temporary or only happen in case of disasters or crisis like a pandemic.

### **Crisis and Social Values:**

Crises can be any emergency with a disastrous impact that typically arise unusually. A crisis may be simply described as an incident which entails an uncertain degree of danger (Moerschell & Novak, 2020). Sometimes a particular incident or perhaps an on-going incident if persists for a prolonged period could cause tension and anxiety in people. Doern, et al., (2019) argued that a continuous flow of knowledge and information which shares new evidence is required to control or mitigate any crisis. These communications allow individuals to understand the situation in terms of how it has originated and advancing. However, to alleviate the situation, there must be anticipatory communications allowing guidance on the social behaviours required to be followed in a straightforward manner (Liu, et al., 2017). Since crises often seem to emerge without warning, such unprecedented and sudden occurrences are most critical to control (Parker & Ameen, 2019). According to Shrivastava, (1993), a coordinated effort of people, government and the industries are necessary to handle any crisis effectively by co-creating social value (ref Figure-1). Therefore, the importance of people who are involved in the fight against a crisis, those who are affected and suffering from the crisis, and overall, the community, their social values, responsibilities, obligations have certainly

expanded.

Williams (1970) says “Values refer to what is good and worthy”. Values drive individual behaviour over time and across situations (Kluckhohn, 1951; Schwartz, 1992). Moreover, values are a cognitive reflection of human motive for achieving the desired objective. All values possess some intention whereas all intentions are not value-driven (Sagiv, et al., 2017). Grohs, et al., (2020) suggested several social value co-creation practices which include “commoditizing, customizing, documenting, empathizing, evangelizing, governing, justifying and mile stoning”. Commoditizing means keeping the retail price of essential commodities under control, which provides some sort of financial benefit to the consumers. Customizing involves changing or producing a product or service to fulfil the needs of a single organisation like hospital during the crisis due to covid-19 pandemic. This also includes the need to make a special arrangement for how technologies can reach the market quickly. Documenting involves putting the information regarding the crisis into writing in a simpler format so that it will be communicated to those who need it in future. Evangelization refers to the exchange of positive experiences with others in society. The prime intention is to encourage people who are going through the crisis-driven stress and anxiety and also provide moral strength to cultivate such attitude and behaviour that would help to mitigate the social issues formed by the crisis. Governance refers to the set of rules and regulations that requires people to behave in a certain way in society during the crisis. for example, due to the covid-19, some of the governance-related regulations could be social distancing, the wearing of face mask, cough etiquette etc. Justifying applies to describing why something is being done by the government or other agencies. It allows the citizens to realize that whatever action has been taken are satisfying the common interest if mitigating the crisis or not. Finally, Mile-stoning consists of specific incidents that are identified as a milestone of success or improvement in controlling the situation.

**Figure-1: Framework of Crisis Management by Combined effort**

**Source: Authors' Conceptualisation**

According to Grohs, et al., (2020), values can be cultural, hedonic, status, economic and social. Values that are obtained from society and developed over a period of time is classified as a cultural value. Hedonic value is developed from past experiences of emotional or physical gratification whereas, status value refers to the achievement of awards and recognition useful in proving a status in the society. Economic value is related to financial gain received by performing a job. On the other hand, social value refers to the benefits that an individual gains from social interaction and through the acquisition of knowledge. Earlier studies defined social value orientation as “a stable preferences for certain patterns of outcomes for oneself and others” (Smeesters, et al., 2003; Van Lange, et al., 1997). Recent studies categorised social value orientations as prosocial, individualistic and competitive (Bogaert, et al., 2014). Several schools of thought outlined social value orientations as “generosity”, “martyrdom”, “masochism”, and “aggression” (McClintock & Van Avermaet, 1982; Van Lange, 2004). Despite potential biological inclinations, the social value orientation of a person tends to be influenced by the essence of his or her social experiences during his or her lifespan.

#### **Determinants of Social Value Orientation:**

The social orientation is influenced by a varied number of

factors (Roch & Samuelson, 1997; Murphy & Ackermann, 2014; Mischkowski & Glöckner, 2016; Innamorati, et al., 2018). However, during a crisis, human social values are supposed to undergo certain adjustments in order to reduce stress and agony. Therefore, the factors affecting social value orientation under normal circumstances may not be the same during a crisis. The relatively slow virus propagation during infectious diseases is certainly due to the significant behavioural change in people. Various aspects of the socio-cultural environment affecting the degree and pace of behavioural change among people in society differently. This segment describes how these factors affect human social values and what quantum of change it brings in the level of social responsibility and cooperation that ultimately help in identifying the risk and opportunities to combat the crisis.

**Social Norms:** Many psychological studies claim that human behaviour is largely influenced by social norms. People give more importance to the opinions, approval and disapproval of others on their activities (Kohn & Slomczynski, 1993). They effectuate a kind of satisfaction from the affiliation or social approval of their deeds (Kohn & Slomczynski, 1993; Kohn & Schooler, 1983). Even though they are highly influenced by social norms, most of the time their perception was found to be

inaccurate and misleading (Kohn, et al., 2000). For instance, during the pandemic crisis, misperception may underestimate healthy behaviour like; personal hygiene, wearing masks etc. and overestimate unhealthy behaviour. Many a time it is observed that people follow their role models and more likely to show a favourable behaviour if the same is endorsed by their role model. Similarly, on the other hand, when people observe others not properly using a mask or maintaining personal hygiene and social distancing, they also start showing similar behaviour even though it is undesirable. They do so just because many people around them are doing it. The similar result can be expected for healthy behaviours like practising personal hygiene, social distancing, wearing a mask, helping the needy etc. (Sosik, et al., 2009). Therefore, perceived social norms are significantly influencing social values and drive individual behaviour according to the behaviour of a group or individuals in a community with whom a common identity has been shared (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Schwartz, et al., 2017). Under such circumstances, information and awareness can be spread through such groups or role models to stimulate individual behaviour in a positive direction.

**Social Discrimination and Inequality:** When people experience threat or fear (fear of death due to covid-19 infection) not only affect their perception about themselves as well as their attitude towards others. Studies claim that higher level of fear associated with a disease often leads to prolonged ethnocentrism and developing an intolerance attitude towards others (Schwartz, et al., 2016; Davidov, et al., 2008). Few studies also highlighted that threat destabilise empathy and increase dehumanisation or violent behaviour (Hogg, et al., 2010; Ysseldyk, et al., 2010; Schwartz, et al., 1995). However, discrimination is not a common phenomenon in every epidemic crisis, but the novel coronavirus has widely been characterised as the Wuhan or the Chinese virus by some government officials in the western countries. Such kind of mischaracterisation often leads to violence, discrimination among different ethnic groups in the world with open economic boundaries. Alternatively, a global epidemic can still lead to innovative ways to eliminate regional and racial prejudice. Organized efforts through people, industries and governments can reduce the spread of the disease and will convey a powerful message of solidarity, cooperation and shared value that may promote the reshuffling of heretofore considered different ethnic groups with a common objective. Such activities have been observed in different countries when they started exchanging medical supplies and other essential commodities to the fight against a common enemy, i.e. the covid-19 pandemic. In this respect (Saroglou, et al., 2006) says that popularising such

activities could boost out-group perceptions and promote more international cooperation. On the other hand, in addition to those at the highest risk of illness, experiencing complications or falling prey to the epidemic, inequalities in access to medical services and resources also impact those who follow recommendations (handwashing, use of mask) and restrictions (social gathering, lockdown) to slow down the spread of the infection. It is very difficult for the homeless poor people who live at shelter homes and small housed in slum areas to follow covid-19 guidelines (Sagiv, et al., 2011). As such, many households who strive hard even for drinking water, don't have water to wash their hand frequently, many people in India do not come forward for voluntary testing due to the fear of not getting proper medical treatment signifying the existence of social discrimination (Samuelson, 1993; Lonnqvist et al., 2013). Mostly people living under the poverty line, work as daily wage labours typically use public transport and in cities like Mumbai, the use of public toilets potentially expose the community towards the covid-19 hazard (Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995; Davidov & Meuleman, 2012). It can be assumed that economic status and social inequality are indeed linked to the degree of engagement in prosocial activities and trust in the health care system and other social institutions. Also, minority and socially neglected communities have been experiencing prejudice and discrimination resulting in mistrust on the social system (Licciardello, et al., 2011; Beierlein, et al., 2016; Roccas & Amit, 2011).

**Trust:** Trust, unlike fear, evokes confidence and prosocial behaviour among the citizens. Local, as well as international health authorities, need to convince the citizens to undertake a series of adjustments in behaviour and implementation of health safety measures intended at control the spread of infection due to the highly infectious novel coronavirus. However, during a crisis, the sudden implementation of such radical changes in routine life is very critical to espouse and requires the use of the legal system of enforcement (Christensen, et al., 2020). Governments effort to reach out every citizen through door-to-door visit for spreading awareness and encouraging for voluntary testing certainly builds confidence and trust on the authorities. Likewise, timely dissemination of useful information regarding the pattern of spread of the disease like Covid-19 also builds trust, contrarily, situations like the announcement of ICMR officials that use of N95 masks with valves are not effective for protection against Covid-19 lately created confusion and trust issues in the community (Ray, 2020). Alternatively, a loss of faith in government and health authorities can have detrimental impacts on the use of health services as well as following the health guidelines

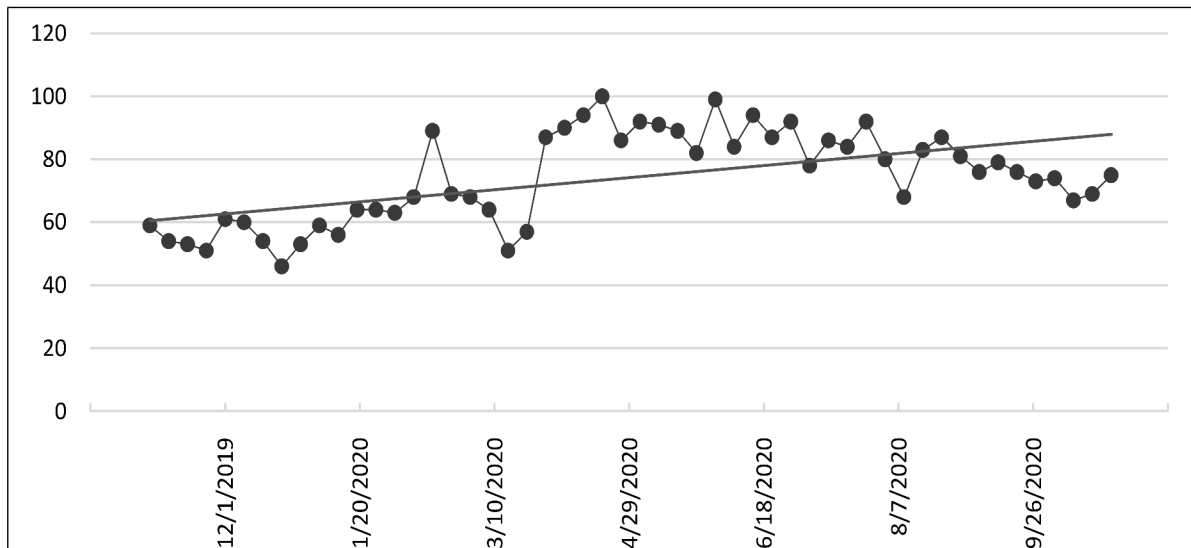
(Alsan & Wanamaker, 2018). The national leaders and central medical authorities should communicate credible information and messages timely through trusted channels. Whilst these initiatives could be reinforced by regional representatives to help establish the confidence which is required to encourage behavioural changes among people.

**Leadership:** Crises like the COVID-19 epidemic provides leadership opportunity at different levels such as in communities, workplaces, states and countries. Leadership includes organising people, prepare them to help others who are in need and prevent activities which are no longer perceived as socially responsible during a crisis. True leadership addresses the act of building trust and execution of guidelines pertaining to the specific crisis to make the society capable to fight against the disaster. At an individual level, leadership quality can be substantiated in several ways like; moral decision making, cooperation with the health and security officials etc. As such, decision making at the individual level which is pro-social is highly desirable. For instance, where social gatherings for cultural or ceremonial function have been restricted by the government, and therefore, each of our decision should be in conformity with these guidelines otherwise, there will be a high risk of contamination due to a wrong decision. Thus, voluntary self-isolation, avoiding social gathering are some of the moral decisions at a personal level. During a crisis, the worst thing would be a harmful action compared to harmful inaction which at least causes less infliction. Therefore, refraining from harmful decisions may be a more desirable pro-social behaviour compared to harmful status-quo decisions or actions (Cushman & Young, 2011; Ritov & Baron, 1990; Ritov & Baron, 1992; Tetlock & Boettger, 1994). Furthermore, community cooperation during any crisis is highly desirable. Cooperation includes the sharing of individual cost and benefits with others (Nowak, 2006). A small step towards voluntary cooperation during an epidemic crisis could be the intention to protect self and family by complying the stipulated guidelines. Because, studies claim that people are more likely to cooperate when they find others doing so (Fischbacher, et al., 2001). This way, one's cooperation not only highlight the pro-social behaviour but also encourage others to follow the same path.

**Sense of Connection:** Humans are social animals and can't live alone for a long time. Social distancing, lockdown and restrictions on the movement of people built intense anguish, stress among people as they could not able to meet their loved ones (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maharana, et al., 2020). Loneliness, isolated living sometimes leads to mental and cardiac health concerns (Haslam, et al., 2018; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). The feeling of loneliness is

quite different from isolation in the sense that loneliness is not having any social connections, whereas, isolation is just a physical distance (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2009). In other words, an isolated person may not be necessarily feeling lonely but a lonely person remains lonely even in a crowd. Thus, the use of social media, online interactions with people in the digital age has reduced the consequence of feeling lonely. Contrarily, some studies also claim that extensive inert use of social media may not sustain the sense of the social connection (Helliwell & Huang, 2013). Rather, information-rich, relational, and time-bound technologies seem to be more capable of creating empathy and interaction (Schroeder, et al., 2017; Waytz & Gray, 2018). On the other side, lockdown due to the covid-19 pandemic has seized people to stay in close proximity with other family members which was somewhat unusual. This has also resulted in increased aggression (Ellemers & Jetten, 2013; Greenaway, et al., 2015), domestic violence (Owen, 2020; Maharana, et al., 2020) and relationship issues (Karney, 2020). However, the positive side is, it provided many people with a chance of staying together in the family. This may be possible due to the recalibration of expectations from family members and mostly couples. This recalibration entails reducing comprehensive expectations that could assist in coping with each other with love during the crisis and maintaining high expectations in situations where the relationship becomes more intense.

**Empathy:** Studies characterised empathy as cognitive and affective. Cognitive empathy is about "taking the perspective of others" whereas, affective empathy is "the concern for and an understanding of others vulnerability". The former reduces intergroup conflict and the later one cares for people (Batson, et al., 1981; Sassenrath, et al., 2016). Some studies concluded that affective empathy in doctors has been observed improving the health condition of their patients (Hojat, et al., 2011; Del Canale, et al., 2012). Further, it has also confirmed by some studies that affective empathy helps in adhering to pro-social activities and compliance to covid-19 guidelines (Sassenrath, et al., 2016). Similarly, it motivates people in changing their behaviour of helping and protecting others who are in trouble. Figure-2 furnishes the empathy trend in India during the covid-19 crisis. It can be observed that after the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in India, there is a steep increase in the empathy score from March and April 2020. It is believed that humans are born empathetic and eager to help others in trouble and danger. therefore, it can be assumed that empathetic mindset not only provokes pro-social behaviour but also favourably influence social value orientation.

**Figure-2: Empathy Trend: (India)**

Source: <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?geo=IN&q=Empathy>

### The Impact of SVO on Cooperation During a Crisis:

Social values that influence the behaviour of individuals can be either temporary, prone to change with time and can be a trait which remains stable for quite a long time (Johnson, et. al., 1981). Researches in social psychology claim that social orientation possesses different factors that acknowledge people for solving social issues or crisis (McClintock & Van Avermaet, 1982; Van Lange, 1999). This particular section has outlined the extensive studies that suggest pro-social people, in particular, cooperate more and are concerned about their activities which have a direct or indirect effect on others and the environment as a whole. Typically, there are two different social values: pro-self and pro-social orientation. Often the pro-self is again sub-divided into a competitive and individualistic orientation. Individuals or pro-selves attempt just to increase personal benefits whereas, on the other hand, Pro-socials prefer to be conscientious co-operators soliciting agreements to win-win situations or equality in benefits of self and others (Smeesters, et al., 2003; Van Lange, et al., 2007). Several experiments such as the “give some” and “take some” administered to examine how the cooperative behaviour is manifested suggest that, in give some experiment, pro-socials are more cooperative compared to the pro-selves (De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001; Smeesters, et al., 2003). Contrarily, when they are allowed to take something from the scarce resources the Pro-socials show more cooperative behaviour by taking less compared to the pro-selves (Kramer, et al., 1986; Pruyn&Riezebos, 2001). A

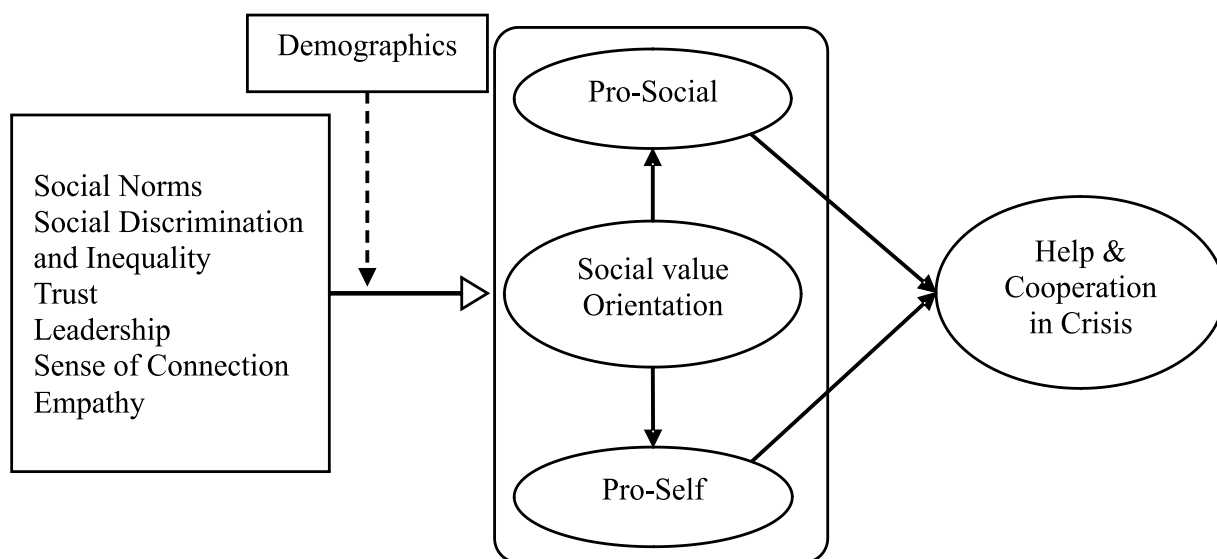
Study by Joireman, et al., (2001) claim that people with a pro-social mindset are more likely to engage in pro-environmental activities which may include more use of public transport, plantation of trees, concern for environmental pollution and public health etc. Cooperative activity is acceptable in pro-socials when the collaborative effect of interdependent cooperation is improved. On the other hand, Non-cooperation is rational for pro-selves, and it contributes to the highest personal benefit. In a situation where a person needs to share his resources or money with or between others who are affected by the crisis. Likewise, a rational decision of a pro-self would be to keep everything and share nothing being self-oriented whereas, a pro-social would be more cooperative and more likely to share resources (Joireman, et al., 2003; Utz, et al., 2004). The innate tendency of the pro-socials to collaborate is indeed noticeable in a more elevated level of social responsibility. De Cremer & Van Lang (2001), for instance, observed that pro-socials are often more worried about people who are in indigence or suffering due to the disaster. The increased sensitivity to social, ecological and environment-related issues of a pro-social is often correlated with the preparation for empathic action, which promotes cooperation and coordination. A study by Bardi & Schwartz, (2003), claim that human values are positively related with their helping and cooperative nature towards sharing resources with neighbours or keeping promises. It is the human value that creates a difference between a cooperative and a competing mindset. Where the

cooperative mind helps others to grow at the expense of his/her own interest, the competing mind would look for personal growth at any cost. This probably leads to the conclusion that pro-social and pro-self behaviour is very much responsible for predicting the social value orientation and supplementing the cooperative behaviour in people.

**Demographic Factors:** Values are relatively persistent throughout life as they are learnt from early childhood (Vaske, et al., 2001). Studies, examining the role of demographic factors like gender, education, income on social or environmental value orientation as well as normative beliefs are very limited. The study of Vaske, et al., (2001), found that value orientation plays a moderating role in the relationship between demographic characteristics and normative belief. Another study by Steger & Witt, (1989) claimed that women exhibit more pro-environmental value-oriented behaviour compared to their male counterparts. Few other studies discovered that females are more concerned about social and environmental values (Mohai, 1992, Vaske, et al., 2001).

Contrarily, few researchers also suggested that there is no significant relationship between gender and value orientation (Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980). On the other hand, awareness among people due to education leads to pro-social and responsible behaviour demonstrating increased value orientation (Buerke, 2017). Nevertheless, many studies also gave opposing conclusions hinting increased educational qualification reduces the level of socio-environmental value orientation (Inglehart, 1990; Howell & Laska, 1992; Nelson, 1999). Higher-income is typically correlated with education; however, it affects value orientation differently. Nelson, (1999), claimed high-income groups are more inclined towards economic rewards than value orientation. Similarly, low-income groups also give more importance to economic benefits due to the survival necessity. Therefore, the income of an individual gives a mixed and confusing outcome when it comes to predicting social value orientation. Here, the need arises to study the role demographic characteristics in influencing the relationship between different social, environmental and psychological factors that affect social value orientation during a crisis.

**Figure-3: Conceptual Framework of the role of social value orientation on help and cooperation during a crisis**



*Source: Authors' own Conceptualisation*

## Conclusion:

The Covid-19 crisis is absolutely catastrophic than any other crisis ever happened in the world. By end of October 2020, SARS-CoV-19 has claimed 12,00,380 lives worldwide. if we look at the recent pandemics, Ebola has claimed more than 11,000 lives in 2014, more than 20 lakes people died due to Swine Flu since 2011 however deaths due to swine flu was not as rapid as due to Covid-19. Similarly, total deaths due to Russian flu and Hong Kong flu was about one million each, Asian flu and Spanish flu, claimed nearly two million and 100 million lives respectively (Griffin & Denholm, 2020). Therefore, social value co-creation and orientation have got immense significance during the time of worlds one of the biggest crisis. It warrants cooperation from varied sections of the society, community and industries including profit and non-profit organisations. Studies conducted during the Spanish flu asserts that three major reasons hinder the progress of containing the spread of the pandemic. First, People do not understand the danger they are likely to face due to the spread of the disease. Secondly, it is contrary to human nature to restrict their movements and voluntarily isolate to save themselves as well as others from the infection. Thirdly, many people unconsciously violate the pandemic causing restriction and put themselves in danger. The present paper offers some perspectives from past studies on relevant problems in the social and behavioural aspects during a crisis like a pandemic that could help relevant authorities to minimise the effects of the latest epidemic. Moreover, the discussion provides insights into the changing social values and orientation during the covid-19 crisis has few major outcomes. Empathy for people in distress promotes motivation for help and cooperation. As such, previous studies on human social and behavioural studies were also clarified the point that whenever there is a crisis, social value orientation undergo a dramatic change for many reasons. Specifically, the study discussed the role of Social Norms, Social Discrimination and Inequality, Trust, Leadership, Sense of Connection, Empathy, and cooperation as the driving elements of social value orientation in human. However, these are not the only factors that determine the social value orientation. An empirical investigation is required to explore more factors that enhance social value orientation in during a crisis. The paper also provides a conceptual framework taking different factors affecting the social value orientation and its effect on the helping and cooperating behaviour of human beings. Finally, the ongoing covid-19 crisis affected the economy of many developing and developed countries. This also seeks drastic changes not only in human value orientation towards society and environment but also in social policies by learning from the past experiences to

make a better future.

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