World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews
eISSN: 2581-9615 CODEN (USA): WJARAI
Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/wjarr
Journal homepage: https://wjarr.com/

(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

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PERSONAL VALUE AND SOCIAL NORMS IN SHAPING AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO PURSUE A CAREER IN AGRICULTURE

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2026, 32(02), 686–692

Publication history: Received on 02 October 2026; revised on 07 November 2026; accepted on 09 November 2026

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2026.32.2.2870

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ABSTRACT

Encouraging young generations to pursue careers in agriculture is essential for addressing the challenge of agricultural workforce regeneration. However, students' willingness to enter the agricultural sector may be influenced by their personal evaluations and the social environment. This study examines the effects of Value and Social Norms on students' willingness to pursue a career in agriculture. A quantitative approach was employed, using an online questionnaire distributed to students currently enrolled in agricultural-related study programmes. The collected data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The structural model revealed that Social Norms had a positive and statistically significant effect on students' willingness to pursue an agricultural career ($\beta = 0.649$; $T = 18.539$; $p < 0.001$). In contrast, Value showed a positive but statistically insignificant relationship with willingness ($\beta = 0.076$; $T = 1.624$; $p = 0.104$). This study emphasizes the need to create supportive social environments and strengthen the recognition of agricultural occupations to encourage greater youth participation in the agricultural sector.

Keywords: Willingness; Value; PLS-SEM; Social Norm; Student

1 INTRODUCTION

Research shows that people are generally more inclined to choose jobs whose values align with their own (1). This relates to the identity they wish to possess or cultivate within their careers. An individual's personal values will drive them to seek ways to bring those values to life, rather than simply pursuing a specific position or a particular line of work. Young people, who have more time to determine their career paths, are able to identify their personal values; this can lead them to feel more confident in the decisions they make and more satisfied with the choices they have chosen.

A study of university students found that career values have a positive relationship with career decisions, a connection mediated, in part, by increased confidence in making career decisions and the development of clearer career goals (2). An individual's willingness to act is often triggered by how they perceive a given value in relation to their personal needs, emotions, and environment. Consequently, values serve as a variable that can shape the willingness of young students to pursue their careers.

However, value is not the only factor that influences an individual's aspirations in shaping their future career. The way they were raised within their family, the social circles they belong to, and even the culture that surrounds them can also influence their career choices. For example, research suggests that cultural factors such as collectivism, gender egalitarianism, and performance orientation can shape the relationship between individual values and career decisions (3). In some societies, career decisions are often influenced by family expectations and the desire to contribute to the household's well-being; in other societies, personal interests and individual achievements may be given greater priority. Consequently, social values and norms may sometimes conflict when it comes to career choices, though at other times, they may prove to be mutually supportive.

Interest in agricultural careers is declining among young people in many countries (4; 5). Studies on students in the field of agriculture indicate that values related to sustainability, personal interests, and a desire to contribute to society are linked to a stronger motivation to pursue a career in the agricultural sector (6; 7). The declining interest in agricultural careers among young people is partly related to the conventional image of farming as a physically demanding, low-paying, and less prestigious occupation, often associated with a rural lifestyle and limited career advancement. These perceptions may be particularly influential among university graduates in agriculture who increasingly aspire to pursue careers offering financial stability, professional recognition, and opportunities for personal development.

Agricultural graduates' career aspirations are not necessarily limited to becoming farmers or working directly in agricultural production. Instead, they may consider alternative career pathways in government institutions, agribusiness companies, agricultural research, financial services, international organizations, and entrepreneurship. However, the transition from agricultural education to professional employment is influenced by individual expectations as well as family backgrounds, social networks, and available employment opportunities. A recent study (8), examining agricultural graduates working as early-career agricultural extensionists in Northwest Cambodia, found that career aspirations were shaped by university networks, family expectations, and gender dynamics. This suggests that the decision to pursue an agricultural career is not solely determined by individual interests or educational backgrounds but is also influenced by the social environment and the opportunities graduates encounter when entering the labor market.

The changing landscape of agriculture may offer new opportunities to reshape how young graduates perceive agricultural careers. The emergence of digital agriculture, sustainable food systems, agricultural technology, and agribusiness innovation has expanded the potential career pathways beyond conventional farming activities. Therefore, understanding agricultural graduates' career aspirations requires considering not only their personal values but also how they perceive the compatibility between their individual career goals and the evolving opportunities within the agricultural sector. In this regard, examining the interaction between personal values and social norms becomes important in understanding young students' willingness to pursue a career in agriculture.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Personal Value

Personal value refers to an individual’s belief that agriculture is meaningful, useful, and consistent with their personal goals, interests, and desired identity (9). In the context of agricultural careers, students are more likely to consider this pathway when they perceive agriculture as offering opportunities for self-realization, innovation, financial progress, environmental stewardship, or contribution to food security and community development. Research among adolescents found that perceived value of agriculture can strengthen career intention indirectly by fostering emotional attachment to agriculture, while studies of agriculture show that values may also influence career-oriented intentions through attitudes and perceived capability (9; 10). Thus, agricultural education should emphasize the sector’s social importance, technological development, entrepreneurship potential, and diverse professional opportunities to help students see a clear personal value in pursuing an agricultural career.

2.2 Social Norm

Social norms refer to an individual’s perception of whether important people, such as parents, relatives, friends, teachers, and community members, approve of and support a career in agriculture (11). Positive social norms can make agriculture appear respectable, desirable, and socially accepted, whereas negative stereotypes about farming as low-

status, physically demanding, or financially insecure may discourage career interest (12). Studies among young people and agricultural students indicate that perceived social support and the belief that agribusiness is valued by others are associated with stronger intentions to enter agriculture-related work (10; 11). Family occupational background, parental encouragement, mentors, and practical exposure to successful agricultural professionals can therefore shape whether students view agriculture as a legitimate and rewarding career option.

2.3 Willingness to Pursue a Career

Willingness to pursue an agricultural career reflects a student's readiness and intention to work, establish a business, or continue professional development in agriculture after graduation (13). It is influenced not only by favorable attitudes but also by confidence in one's skills, awareness of career opportunities, access to land and resources, agricultural training, and perceptions of the sector's economic viability. Evidence from university students indicates that willingness is strengthened when agriculture is seen as useful for achieving career goals and when students believe they can successfully perform agricultural tasks (13). Career guidance, internships, entrepreneurship training, exposure to modern agricultural technologies, and visible employment pathways may therefore help translate positive perceptions into a concrete willingness to pursue agriculture as a long-term profession.

2.4 Research Methodology

2.4.1 Sampling and Data Collection

The study drew on primary data obtained from undergraduate students enrolled in agricultural-related programmes. Data was gathered through an online survey distributed to students who were still pursuing their degrees. This target group was selected to capture their career aspirations before completing their studies and entering the labour market, particularly their interest in working in the agricultural sector. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), with a neutral response assigned a score of 3.

2.4.2 Hypothesis

Drawing on the conceptual framework and the theoretical arguments presented in this study, two hypotheses were developed to examine the role of personal value and social norms in shaping students' career intentions in the agricultural sector. The proposed relationships are expressed as follows:

- H1: Personal value has a significant effect on students' willingness to pursue a career in agriculture
- H2: Social norms have a significant effect on students' willingness to pursue a career in agriculture

2.4.3 Data Analysis and Path Model

A quantitative approach was employed to investigate the relationships among the constructs in the proposed research model. Personal value and social norms were specified as the predictor variables, while students' willingess to pursue a career in agriculture served as the outcome variable. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was applied to assess both the measurement and structural models. The assessment of the measurement model involved examining indicator loadings, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Indicator loadings were expected to reach a minimum value of 0.60. Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with values exceeding 0.50 indicating an adequate level of variance captured by each construct. Discriminant validity was examined through the Fornell–Larcker criterion, which requires the square root of a construct's AVE to be greater than its correlations with the other constructs in the model. Furthermore, composite reliability values above 0.70 were considered evidence of satisfactory internal consistency. Following the evaluation of the measurement model, the structural model was examined to test the proposed hypotheses. The significance of each hypothesised relationship was determined based on the bootstrapping results. Relationships were considered statistically significant at the 5% significance level when the T-statistic was greater than 1.96 and the corresponding p-value was below 0.05. Figure 1 shows the path model of the research.

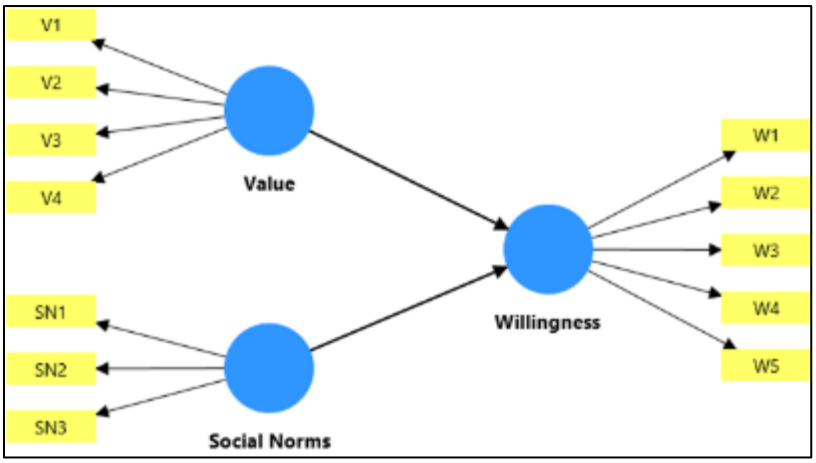


Figure 1: Research Path Model

Source: processed field data

3 RESULTS

3.1 Measurement Model

3.1.1 Loading Factor Evaluation

The evaluation of indicator loadings was conducted to determine how well each observed indicator represents its corresponding construct. The results indicate that all indicators achieved loading values above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.60. This suggests that the indicators adequately capture the characteristics of their respective variables. The final structural and measurement model is illustrated in Figure 2.

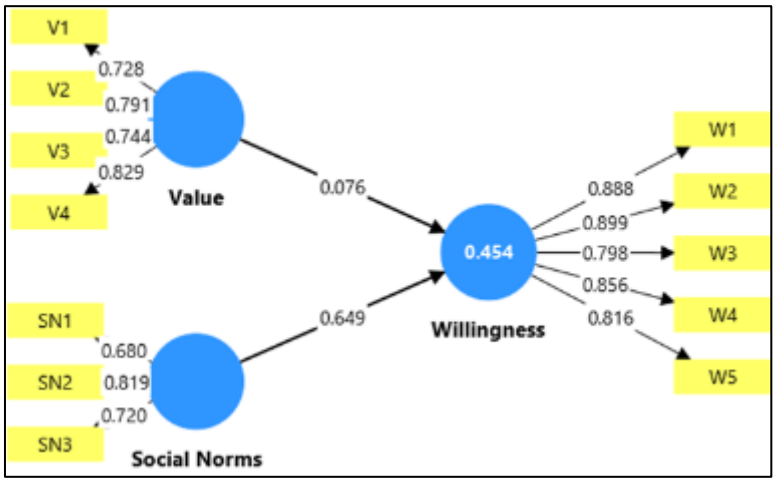


Figure 2: Path Model with Indicator Loadings Factor

Source: processed field data

3.1.2 Convergent Validity

The convergent validity assessment indicates that all constructs have Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above the recommended minimum of 0.50. These results suggest that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its associated indicators, providing sufficient evidence of convergent validity. The AVE results for all constructs are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: AVE Value

Variables	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Social Norms	0.550
Value	0.599
Willingness	0.726

Source: processed field data

3.1.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion to establish whether each construct represents a distinct concept within the research model. The assessment confirms that the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with the remaining constructs. This finding indicates that Value, Social Norms, and Willingness are empirically distinguishable from one another. The corresponding results are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Square root of AVE (Fornell–Larcker)

	Social Norms	Value	Willingness
Social Norms	0.742		
Value	0.276	0.774	
Willingness	0.670	0.255	0.852

Source: processed field data

3.1.4 Composite Reliability

Internal consistency was assessed through composite reliability to examine the extent to which the indicators within each construct provide consistent measurements. All constructs recorded composite reliability values above the recommended threshold of 0.70. This confirms that the measurement items demonstrate adequate internal consistency and that the constructs meet the reliability requirements. The complete assessment is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Composite Reliability

Variables	Composite Reliability (rho_c)
Social Norms	0.785
Value	0.856
Willingness	0.930

Source: processed field data

3.2 Structural Model

3.2.1 Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was assessed to determine whether Value and Social Norms contribute significantly to students' willingness to pursue a career in agriculture. The hypothesis testing results reveal different levels of influence between the two predictor variables. Social Norms exhibit a positive and statistically significant relationship with Willingness ($\beta = 0.649$; $T = 18.539$; $p = 0.000$). This result provides strong empirical support for the proposed hypothesis, indicating that the social environment and perceived expectations of significant others are associated with students' willingness to consider a career in agriculture. In contrast, the relationship between Value and Willingness is positive but does not reach statistical significance ($\beta = 0.076$; $T = 1.624$; $p = 0.104$). Since the T-statistic falls below 1.96 and the p-value exceeds 0.05, the proposed effect of Value is not statistically supported. The findings therefore suggest that, within the present research model, Social Norms have a more substantial role in explaining students' willingness to pursue an agricultural career than Value. The detailed hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Path Analysis Results

Path Coefficients	Original Sample (O)	T-Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P-values	Conclusion
Social Norms -> Willingness	0.649	18.539	0.000	Significant
Value -> Willingness	0.076	1.624	0.104	Not Significant

Source: processed field data

3.2.2 R-square

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for Willingness is 0.454, indicating that Value and Social Norms jointly explain 45.4% of the variance in students' willingness to pursue a career in agriculture. The remaining 54.6% is attributable to other factors that are not incorporated into the current research model. This result indicates that the proposed predictors provide a meaningful level of explanatory power in understanding students' agricultural career intentions.

Table 5: R-square

	R-square
Willingness	0.454

Source: processed field data

4 DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that Social Norms have a statistically significant positive effect on students' willingness to pursue a career in agriculture, whereas Value does not demonstrate a significant direct relationship with this intention. The significant relationship between Social Norms and Willingness ($\beta = 0.649$; $T = 18.539$; $p < 0.001$) indicates that social influences play an important role in shaping students' willingness to pursue a career in agriculture. The relatively large path coefficient suggests that students' career intentions are positively associated with the perceived expectations and opinions of individuals within their social environment. These influences may originate from family members, lecturers, peers, and other individuals whose opinions are considered relevant when students evaluate their future career options. This finding is consistent with the previous studies (14; 15). Their findings confirmed that social aspects had a significant influence on students' intentions to become agripreneurs. Students may become more willing to consider agriculture when they receive encouragement from their families, positive feedback from lecturers, or recognition from their peers. Such social support may strengthen the perception that pursuing an agricultural career is an acceptable and worthwhile professional choice.

In contrast to Social Norms, Value does not have a statistically significant effect on students' willingness to pursue a career in agriculture ($\beta = 0.076$; $T = 1.624$; $p = 0.104$). Although the path coefficient indicates a positive direction, the relationship is not statistically supported. This finding suggests that students' recognition of the importance, usefulness, or personal meaning of agriculture does not necessarily translate into their willingness to select the sector as a future career. Interestingly, this result differs from the findings of (9), who investigated the relationship between perceived agricultural values and career intentions among 769 adolescents in South Korea. Their study demonstrated that perceived values of agriculture positively influenced agricultural career intentions through the mediating role of agricultural attachment. However, a similar perspective can be found in (15), who examined the relationship between personal values and entrepreneurial career intentions among university students. Their findings showed that certain individual value orientations, particularly openness to change and self-enhancement, were positively associated with entrepreneurial intentions. However, these relationships were partly explained by attitudes, self-efficacy, and social norms. This provides further evidence that the influence of personal values on career intentions may depend on how individuals translate their underlying beliefs into specific career-related evaluations and perceptions.

5 CONCLUSION

The findings further indicate that recognizing agriculture as an important and meaningful sector does not necessarily encourage students to consider it as their future profession. Although personal values may contribute to how students perceive agriculture, their translation into career intentions may involve other psychological and contextual considerations. In contrast, encouragement from family members, positive perceptions among peers, and support from educational environments may strengthen the attractiveness of agricultural occupations as a professional choice. The results have practical implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and agricultural stakeholders seeking to attract younger generations to the sector. Initiatives to promote agricultural careers should extend beyond providing information about the importance of agriculture. Greater attention should also be given to building positive social

perceptions, involving families and educational communities, and introducing students to diverse professional opportunities within modern agriculture. Furthermore, the findings reflect the relationships observed among the students participating in this study and should be interpreted within the scope of the research sample. Future research could incorporate additional constructs, such as agricultural attachment, career identity, attitudes towards agricultural occupations, and perceived behavioural control, to investigate the mechanisms through which personal values and social influences shape career intentions. Such extensions may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors encouraging young people to pursue careers in agriculture.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all individuals and institutions who provided support during the research and preparation of this manuscript.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Each participant gave informed consent to take part in this research.

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