

Social Media Misuse in Ghana: Ethical Implications and Its Influence on National Values

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9020308>

Received: 08 February 2025; Accepted: 14 February 2025; Published: 20 March 2025

ABSTRACT

The study explored the ethical implications of social media misuse and its negative repercussions on national values, aiming at sanitizing and identifying pathways to reclaim digital spaces for constructive, educative, and culturally enriching purposes. A survey research design under a quantitative approach was employed for the study. Questionnaires were created using google forms, and distributed to participants through platforms such as whatsapp, telegram, and emails, ensuring broad reach across Ghana. The targeted participants were active social media users who have monetized and/or explored platforms like Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and Telegram for education, news, entertainment, and businesses. However, anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were assured to encourage transparent and honest feedback. Convenient sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 300 participants from a total of 1400 respondents with the help of Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) Sample Size Determination Table. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data with the help of IBM's Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS version, 26). The study's findings revealed that social media use in Ghana often focuses on negative news, the spread of misinformation and disinformation, abusive language, and the promotion of sexual immorality ('hookup culture,' a form of commercial sex trading on social media). Moreover, discussions on family issues, secrets, and sensitive information are prevalent. Some bloggers, content creators, and journalists prioritise sensationalism over accuracy and factual reporting. The study also identified concerns about fake prophecies, fraudulent activities, unverified religious claims, and unethical behaviours driven by the pursuit of trends and fame. It was found that social media misuse has a negative influence on national values, which in turn hinders quality education, social cohesion, ethical standards, national identity, and national progress. Again, the findings revealed that strict measures should be introduced to automatically detect and block the circulation of unethical content, including sexually explicit materials, abusive messages, and destructive and non-educative content. It is therefore recommended that robust regulatory measures be implemented to promote ethical media practices and digital responsibility in Ghana. Furthermore, collaborative efforts among key institutions such as policymakers, National Media Commission, Data Protection Commission, Cybersecurity Authority, Ghana Police Service, telecommunications companies, and other relevant stakeholders should be reinforced to combat online abuse, misinformation, sexually explicit content, cyber fraud, and other forms of exploitation. Likewise, platforms like TikTok, Snapchat, and others, which are often exploited for the spread of inappropriate and destructive content, should either be strictly regulated or restricted if necessary. Nonetheless, digital literacy and public education programs should play a significant role in promoting responsible citizenship and fostering the effective and ethical use of social media.

Keywords: social media misuse, ethical implications, national values, digital literacy, cyber ethics

INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms worldwide has transformed societies by facilitating academic discussions and communication while offering unprecedented opportunities for self-expression, creativity, connectivity, and information sharing. It also fosters digital entrepreneurship, enabling young individuals to market their businesses, access global opportunities, and drive economic growth. Over the decades, concerns about unethical behaviour in Ghanaian society have reignited discussions about the necessity and ways to

strengthen national values and ethics in professional practices (Tetteh & Appiah, 2023). National values such as respect for elders, hospitality, integrity, unity in diversity, commitment to quality education, patriotism, religious tolerance, and accountability are significant for a nation's development and resilience during a crisis (Komariah et al., 2020; Suryani & Muslim, 2024). Valijonovna and Kizi (2022) describe national values as philosophical concepts that embody the unique traits and characteristics of a nation, contributing to its cultural heritage through social development. These values reflect a nation's identity through its culture, language, religion, historical memory, customs, art, literature, and way of life. However, the misuse of these digital platforms has emerged as an ethical concern, menacing the moral fabric of the nation and undermining national values.

Social media symbolizes computer-based interactive platforms that enable users to create and share information in various forms, including texts, pictures, videos, audio recordings, live streams, infographics, memes, animations, polls, and stories (Cetinkaya & Rashid, 2018; Khanom, 2023; Purvis & Beckingham, 2024). These platforms facilitate diverse interactions, allowing users to exchange ideas, collaborate, and engage in discussions globally. Demircioglu (2018) suggests that social media use can boost job satisfaction and morale among public employees. In their research, Fusi and Feeney (2018) contend that social media usage might negatively impact work performance, creating a contradiction between its potential benefits for drive and its possible drawbacks for productivity. Ahorsu (2024) also asserts that Ghanaians spend an average of three hours daily on social media platforms. This is not surprising because the majority of bloggers and other content creators currently spend virtually twenty-four hours on social media due to the monetization of their platforms. Most Ghanaians, predominantly the youth, now rely on social media for livelihoods, news, and entertainment as traditional media like radio, television, and newspapers are gradually fading out of the system. Though, traditional media have also adapted to the digital age, with online platforms emerging as significant sources of news, entertainment, education, and business. This digital shift has democratised content creation, enabling individuals, communities, and small organisations to reach global audiences.

Social media misuse manifests in various forms, including cyberbullying, the spread of misinformation and disinformation (Robinson, 2024), inappropriate language and invectives (Al-Billeh, 2023), fake religious prophecies and intolerance (Ahammad et al. 2021), nudity and sexual immorality (McCormack & Wignall, 2024), unethical content for trends and monetization (Dastakeer, 2024; Forest, 2024), all of which intensify societal divisions, hinder youth development and quality education and erode public trust. This phenomenon endangers individual reputations and mental well-being, which raises reflective ethical questions about accountability, digital literacy, and the responsibility of both users and policymakers. The advent of social media has fundamentally reshaped how individuals, communities, and nations communicate and interact via platforms. These platforms have now become a breeding ground for individuals engaging in unthinkable acts to garner likes, shares, and followers, with little regard for ethical or societal values. Family issues, hidden truths, and confidential matters are increasingly being shamelessly exposed on social media and normalised as acceptable behaviour.

In Ghana, the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and YouTube marked the beginning of a new era of connectivity and information exchange. Initially, social media was embraced as a tool for fostering personal relationships, disseminating news, and telescopic marginalised voices (Segun, 2024). The increasing accessibility of affordable smartphones and mobile internet services further catalysed its rapid adoption. These digital platforms have since evolved into indispensable tools for business, education, and governance. Nonetheless, while social media has democratised access to information and provided opportunities for socioeconomic development, its misuse has engendered ethical dilemmas, mainly in societies in Ghana rooted in traditional values and communal principles.

In his study, Robinson (2024) asserts that the misuse of social media in Ghana has grown into a pressing concern, characterised by the creation of cyberbullying, the dissemination of misinformation, and the obliteration of privacy. Platforms once celebrated for their potential to unite people are now frequently weaponised to sow division and discord (Massanari, 2024). The unchecked spread of fake news has dented public trust in media and institutions, while harmful practices such as online scams and identity theft have tainted the integrity of digital interactions (Markwei & Appiah, 2016). Moreover, the normalisation of cyberbullying and hate speech threatens Ghana's venerable values of respect and communal synchronicity (Al-Billeh, 2023). This growing digital

toxicity raises thoughtful ethical questions regarding accountability, the limits of free speech, and the responsibilities of users, platform providers, and regulators. Social media misuse also poses a direct challenge to the preservation of Ghana's national values, such as respect for human dignity, honesty, and social harmony. The digital space, which often augments sensationalism over truth, risks promoting individualism and instant gratification at the expense of collective progress. For a nation striving to balance its cultural heritage with modernisation, the ethical implications of social media misuse cannot be ignored.

Accountability in media governance and internet regulation by the government, policymakers, and stakeholders is imperative for preserving democratic principles in Ghana (Markwei & Appiah, 2016). An effective governance system requires ethical media ownership and regulations, an informed and media-literate audience, and a framework that safeguards internet rights. In this sense, promoting adherence to professional standards among media practitioners through communities of knowledge practice further supports these efforts. These measures foster the growth of democracy by enhancing public understanding of the media's roles and functions. Therefore, digital literacy and governance are interconnected, as an informed and media-savvy population is essential for building a participatory democracy that aligns with the people's aspirations in the digital age.

Statement of the Problem

Millions of people share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences daily through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and YouTube. However, these online spaces have amplified the spread of misinformation, political polarisation, and threats to democracy (Robinson, 2024). Collectively, there is a growing desire for individuals to gain attention and recognition through media platforms. Individuals who are not involved in trending topics may appear irrelevant or disconnected. The pursuit of sensationalism and virality drives some bloggers, journalists, influencers, and content creators to engage in the spread of misinformation and disinformation, further extinguishing public trust in credible sources of information. Media users often strive to be the first to report trending news, capitalise on monetisation opportunities, and share videos, pictures, and text across various platforms all in pursuit of fame and popularity. The drive for sensationalism and the urgency to deliver news quickly often result in inadequate fact-checking and compromising journalistic quality (Mumuni & Mensah, 2023).

Research has examined the influence of social media across various sectors, including logistics (Orji et al., 2020), fashion (Aral et al., 2013), education (Amin et al., 2016), agriculture (Gyamfi, 2018; Munthali et al. 2021), youth social media usage (Markwei & Appiah, 2016), social media and influence on public relation (Dziewornu-Norvor, 2022), governance of media and the internet (Mumuni and Mensah, 2023), and social media and youth interactions (Tetteh and Kankam (2024). It appears that no study has thoroughly examined the ethical implications of social media misuse and its destructive influence on national values within the Ghanaian context. The widespread use of abusive language and insults by both the youth and the elderly in the media space has created a hostile environment where respect and civility are increasingly deteriorating. Also, some religious leaders and self-proclaimed prophets exploit these platforms to disseminate unverified or false prophecies, preying on the fears and vulnerabilities of the populace. This misapplication is due to monetisation which dents the principles of accountability and truth, which are necessary for developing informed and cohesive societies.

This pursuit of monetisation frequently leads to the promotion of unethical content, including fake news, provocative imagery, and controversial statements, as these generate higher engagement rates and, subsequently, generate revenue for the users. What motivates individuals to record or photograph themselves during sexual intercourse, and what factors contribute to the intentional or accidental leaking of such content on social media platforms? Similarly, young people engaging in sexualised or unethical sexual acts such as "hookups" sending nude pictures and videos to clients, and trading sex for money further perpetuate the culture of moral decay in the digital space. The propagation of "hookup culture" by Gen Z facilitated on social media has promoted prostitution as a regular act imperilling decorous and responsible young people in society. Markwei and Appiah (2016) assert that the risks of social media encompass cyberbullying and inappropriate content. The challenges of misinformation, cyberbullying, increasing sexually explicit content, and ethically questionable behaviours among individuals, driven by the desire for recognition and trending are a menace to society. However, the lack of educative and value-driven content, combined with the glorification of negative and sensational news,

promotes a culture of irresponsibility and hinders national values and development.

Research Questions

1. What is the prevalence of social media misuse in Ghana?
2. What are the ethical implications of social media misuse in Ghana?
3. How does social media misuse influence Ghana's national values?
4. What are the measures for addressing social media misuse in Ghana?

Research Methods

A survey research design under a quantitative approach was employed for the study, as it is well-suited for gathering data from a large population to identify patterns, perceptions, and behaviours related to social media platforms. Questionnaires were created using Google Forms, and the links were distributed to participants through WhatsApp platforms, telegram, and emails, ensuring broad reach across Ghana while minimizing costs associated with printing and travel. The targeted participants were active social media users who have monetized and/or explored platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, and Telegram for education, news, and entertainment. Participants completed the surveys at their convenience. They are required to voluntarily consent by agreeing to a digital form before completing the questionnaire. However, anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were assured to encourage transparent and honest feedback. The survey included structured questions with a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Agree = 3, Strongly Agree = 4) to capture respondents' attitudes quantitatively. Convenient sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 300 participants from a total of 1400 respondents with the help of Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) Sample Size Determination Table. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data with the help of IBM's Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS version, 26).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

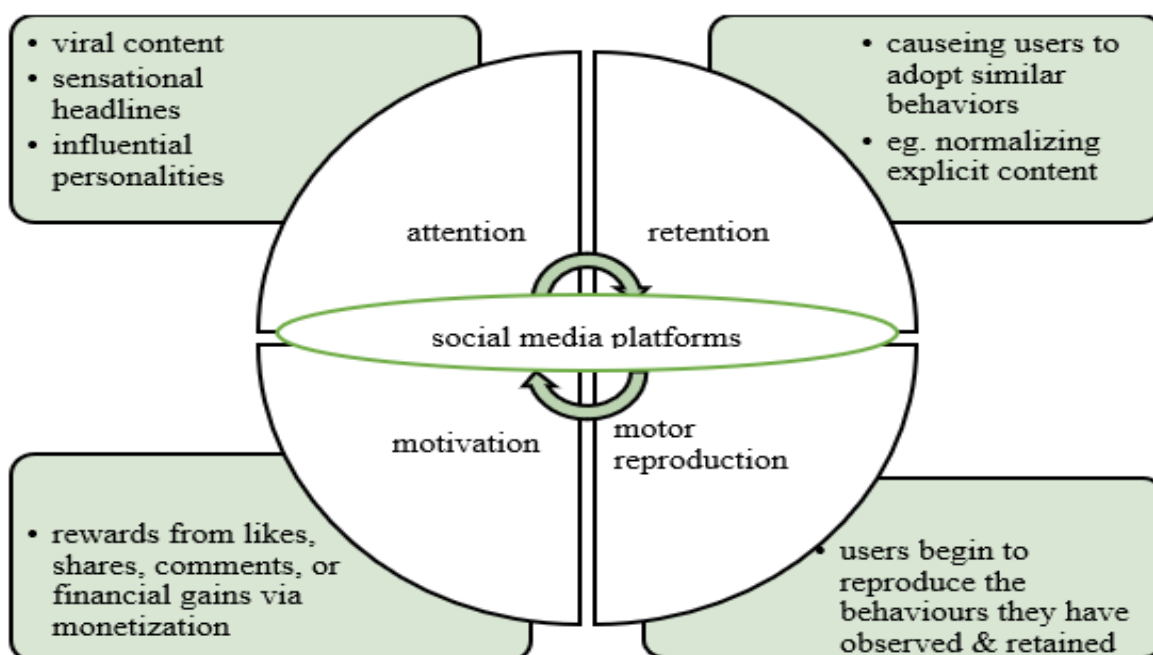


Figure 1: Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977)

Source: Researcher's construct, (2025)

Albert Bandura's social learning theory mirrors the role of observational learning in the acquisition of behaviours, attitudes, values, and skills, indicating how individuals, particularly adolescents, and youth, learn by observing and imitating role models in their social environments (Bandura, 1977). In the context of social media, this theory suggests that users, especially younger individuals, are influenced by the actions and behaviours of celebrities, influencers, or peers whom they follow. Social media platforms increase this process by using attention-grabbing techniques like viral content, sensational headlines, and the allure of influential figures, which capture users' focus. Once individuals are exposed to certain behaviours, they internalise and retain these actions, leading to the normalisation of these behaviours, even if they are explicit or harmful. The next step is motor reproduction, where users mimic the observed behaviours in their online actions, whether it be through posting, commenting, or sharing. However, motivation to engage in these behaviours is reinforced by the rewards provided by social media platforms, such as likes, shares, comments, or even financial rewards through monetisation. This cycle of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation results in the continued reinforcement of learned behaviours, shaping users' actions in a dynamic social media ecosystem.

Conceptual Framework

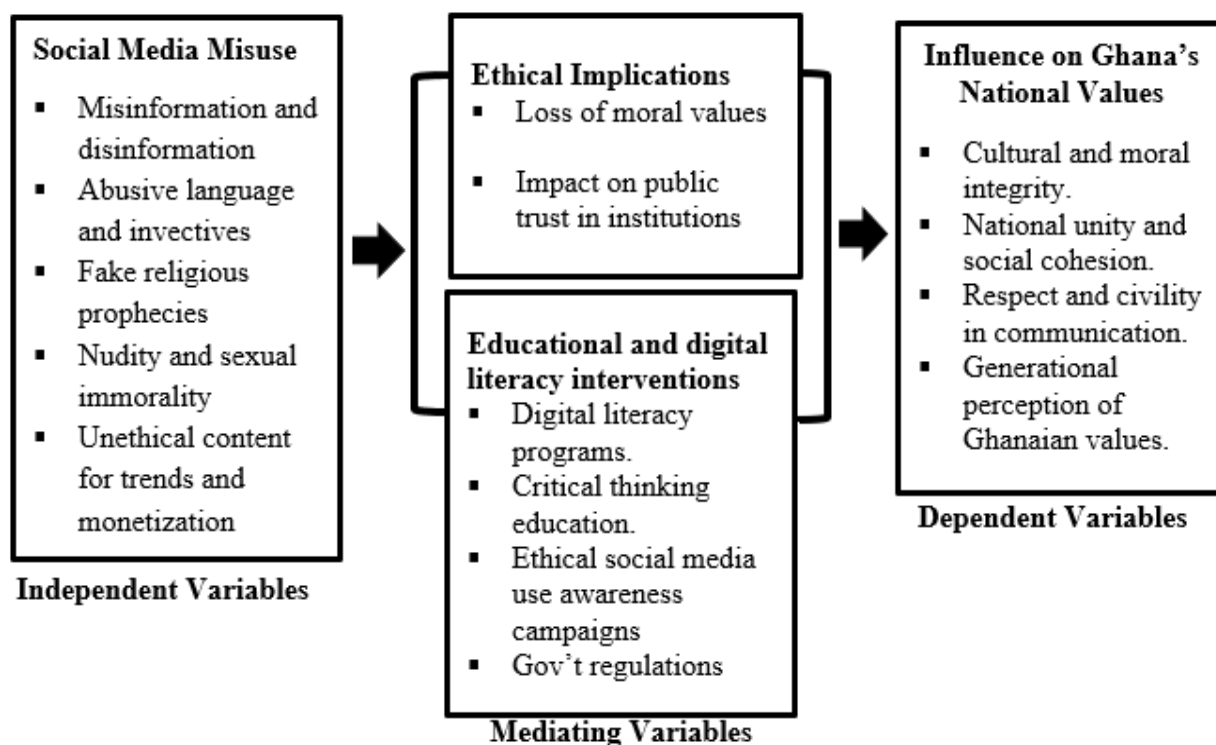


Fig.2: The impact of social media misuse on ethical standards and national values in Ghana: a framework for mitigation through education and digital literacy

Source: Researcher's construct, (2025)

Social Media Misuse

Social media misuse to the unethical, irresponsible, or harmful use of digital networking platforms, leading to social, emotional, and cultural repercussions. This phenomenon manifests in various ways, including the rampant spread of misinformation, where false narratives or misleading content distort public perception, incite fear, or manipulate political opinions such as the widespread dissemination of fake news during elections to sway voters. Also, cyberbullying, where individuals, particularly adolescents and youth are subjected to online harassment, insults, threats, or public shaming, leading to severe emotional distress, anxiety, and even tragic cases of self-harm (Tetteh & Kankam, 2024). Moreover, the unchecked sharing of explicit or inappropriate content normalizes harmful behaviours, exposing young audiences to unethical standards and potentially violating privacy rights, as seen in cases where personal images or videos are distributed without consent (McCormack & Wignall, 2024). Furthermore, self-promotion on these platforms often fosters unrealistic beauty standards and materialistic values, compelling individuals to chase validation through likes and comments, which can fuel insecurity and

depression. Exploitation is another critical concern, as some users engage in deceptive practices such as financial fraud, phishing scams, or emotional manipulation, preying on vulnerable individuals for monetary gain. At the core of these issues lies a fundamental lack of digital literacy and ethical awareness, as many users fail to recognize the lasting repercussions of their online behaviours highlighting the urgent need for education on responsible social media use.

The Prevalence of Social Media Misuse in Ghana

The advent of social media in Ghana has altered communication, information sharing, and entertainment, but it has also paved the way for pervasive misuse. One of the issues is the spread of misinformation and disinformation (Friman & Äikäs, 2024; Fombad, 2022; Olaniran, 2022). This involves the deliberate or accidental dissemination of false information, often aimed at influencing public opinion, tarnishing reputations, or creating unnecessary panic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media platforms were rife with misleading posts about unverified cures and conspiracy theories, which undermined public health efforts and led to widespread confusion (Nayyar, 2023). In Ghana, the influence of religious figures such as mallams, traditional herbalists, and pastors has permeated many facets of society. These individuals often claim spiritual supremacy, asserting that they possess supernatural powers to solve problems, protect individuals from harm, or provide solutions to life's challenges (Owusu, 2022). Their activities are convincing and widespread, as they use media platforms like television, radio, and the internet to advertise their services, promising to conjure blessings, break curses, or even double money. Some even advertise their ability to solve financial problems by “doubling” money through spiritual means (Appau & Bonsu, 2020). These claims often attract individuals facing economic hardship, mostly unemployed youth or low-income earners, who see these promises as a quick fix to their financial woes. Similarly, traditional herbalists promote remedies for ailments such as infertility, chronic diseases, or spiritual attacks, claiming that their concoctions and rituals are more effective than conventional medical treatments (Owusu 2019). These advertisements often exploit the trust that many Ghanaians place in traditional medicine, especially in rural areas where access to formal healthcare is limited.

Pastors contribute to this trend on social media by offering “miracle” services, including the promise of instant wealth, success in business, or protection against witchcraft and evil forces (Boateng, 2024). An example is the practice of organizing all-night prayer sessions or “prophetic crusades,” where individuals pay hefty sums for special prayers or spiritual consultations. These practices often spark controversies, as critics argue that they exploit the vulnerable and perpetuate a culture of dependency on spiritual interventions rather than promoting hard work or practical solutions. These practices raise concerns about ethical implications and societal impacts (Simion, 2024). The reliance on spiritual figures for solutions to personal and societal problems can undermine critical thinking, perpetuate fraud, and weaken trust in legitimate institutions. There is a need for regulatory measures to curb exploitative practices while promoting public education on the importance of rational decision-making and the limitations of spiritual interventions because such practices corrode trust in credible information sources and pose a threat to societal stability.

There is also the sharing of explicit or offensive content on social media, which often includes nude pictures, provocative dance videos, and other sexually suggestive material (Strossen, 2024). This behaviour is particularly concerning among the youth, who are drawn to such content to gain social media clout or financial rewards. However, the rising trend of digital prostitution, or “hookup culture,” involves individuals advertising sexual services through social media platforms such as Telegram and WhatsApp (Rueffer, 2024; Bankov, 2019). Moreover, the leaking of private sex tapes has become alarmingly common, leading to public humiliation and psychological trauma for victims (Newman, 2024). These acts reflect a worrying decline in moral standards and expose the dangers of unchecked online behaviour. Moreover, social media has become a platform for fake prophecies and religious manipulation. Certain self-proclaimed prophets exploit the digital space to broadcast sensational predictions about national events, natural disasters, or personal misfortunes, often to gain followers or financial contributions (Morris, 2021; Pivec & Geivett, 2022). A notable example includes widely shared videos of prophets forecasting doom, which create fear and anxiety among the population. This trend tarnishes the reputation of genuine religious leaders and fosters public distrust in spiritual guidance, further fragmenting the moral fabric of Ghanaian society.

Cyberbullying and bad communication practices, such as verbal abuse, public shaming, and the open discussion

of private family matters (Hua et al. 2019). In many cases, individuals use social media to hurl insults at others, often without considering the emotional and psychological harm inflicted (Naga et al., 2024). The practice of posting sensitive or traumatic content, such as pictures of deceased individuals or graphic accident scenes, further exacerbates this issue. These acts not only desensitize the public but also disrespect the dignity of victims and their families. The constant exposure to such harmful content contributes to a toxic digital environment that harms individuals and erodes societal cohesion.

Ethical Implications of Social Media Misuse in Ghana

The misuse of social media in Ghana presents a profound challenge to ethical standards, with far-reaching implications for individuals, institutions, and society at large. One primary ethical concern is the rampant spread of misinformation and disinformation. False narratives, fabricated stories, and misleading headlines are often propagated to gain attention or manipulate public opinion, particularly during political campaigns or national crises. Maweu (2019) observes that while propaganda, disinformation, and misinformation have existed since ancient times, the rise of digital media has significantly amplified their scale, making them almost uncontrollable (p.63). For instance, during Ghana's general elections, social media platforms were flooded with unverified election results and defamatory posts targeting political opponents, thereby undermining public trust in democratic processes (Sikanku, 2021). Such acts not only distort reality but also erode the credibility of institutions tasked with disseminating accurate information, such as the Electoral Commission and mainstream media outlets.

Likewise, another ethical issue is the normalization of abusive language and insults on social media platforms. Users frequently engage in cyberbullying, name-calling, and vitriolic exchanges, often under the guise of anonymity (Cabbug & Abidin, 2024). This trend has contributed to a toxic online environment that discourages constructive dialogue and mutual respect. Nonetheless, other public figures and journalists in Ghana are routinely subjected to online harassment and character assassination, which can lead to psychological distress and even deter them from engaging in public discourse. Thereby, the destruction of civility and respect in both cybernetic and physical spaces weakens the moral fabric of society.

Furthermore, the dissemination of fake religious prophecies and the rise of spiritual sensationalism on social media platforms pose ethical challenges, particularly for Ghana's religiously inclined population. As said, the self-proclaimed prophets often exploit the vulnerabilities of their followers by sharing unfounded predictions about national disasters, personal tragedies, and the dead of individuals only known and celebrated in the country, all in a bid to gain fame or financial rewards. These actions manipulate the faith of individuals and also tarnish the image of religious institutions, creating widespread skepticism about the authenticity of spiritual leadership. For instance, viral videos of so-called prophets performing staged miracles have led to public outrage, highlighting the ethical dilemma between faith and deceit. In crux, the promotion of nudity, sexual immorality, and unethical content for trends and monetization by the youth promotes the moral degradation perpetuated by social media misuse (Davis, 2023). Many young Ghanaians, driven by the desire for likes, followers, and financial gains, engage in and share content that undermines traditional cultural values (Dzogbenuku, 2021). This includes viral dance challenges with explicit undertones or the use of provocative images to gain attention. Such behaviour compromises personal integrity and perpetuates a culture of materialism and vanity. The ethical implication is the gradual disintegration of Ghanaian societal values such as modesty, self-respect, and community-centred living.

Social Media Misuse on Ghana's National Values

Social media misuse poses significant threats to Ghana's cherished national values, such as unity, integrity, respect, and communal responsibility (Adam, 2020). The platforms, while providing avenues for communication and self-expression, have increasingly become channels for the spread of fake news, hate speech, and tribalistic sentiments, which threaten national cohesion. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) indicated that politically motivated false information shared during election periods has led to heightened tensions and mistrust among natives. According to these researchers' study on referral data, during the election, fake news stories heavily depended on social media platforms to generate traffic. Similarly, the glamorization of materialism and quick success by influencers on social media erodes the values of hard work and honesty, promoting a culture of shortcuts and

unethical behaviour, particularly among the youth (Hinson, Twum & Arhin, 2022).

Furthermore, the proliferation of explicit and morally questionable content undermines the cultural and moral foundations of Ghanaian society (Kumasey, 2017). Traditional values that emphasize modesty, respect for elders, and communal harmony are being replaced by individualistic and superficial ideals propagated online (Agbaglo, 2024). The rise of social media challenges like “trending at all costs” has encouraged young people to engage in inappropriate behaviours, such as sharing sexually explicit videos, in exchange for likes and attention (Markwei & Appiah, 2016; McCormack & Wignall, 2024). These behaviours not only compromise personal dignity but also bring dishonour to families and communities, thereby weakening the collective moral fabric of the nation. In this way, the misuse of social media continues to challenge and dilute the core principles that hold Ghanaian society together.

Addressing Social Media Misuse in Ghana

To combat social media misuse in Ghana, a robust and targeted regulatory framework is indispensable. Existing institutions, such as the National Media Commission, should be empowered to enforce ethical media practices and ensure responsible content production (Mutu, 2024). This framework must include guidelines for content moderation, data privacy, online harassment, and misinformation while safeguarding the constitutional right to free speech. Regulations should aim to curtail harmful and illegal content, holding individuals and platforms accountable. Moreover, the government should link a comprehensive social media policy to media and broadcasting laws to promote optimal and responsible digital platform use (Stohl et al. 2017). This policy would address issues such as cyberbullying, online violence, and trolling, thereby protecting users and reducing the risks associated with social media misuse (McCormack & Wignall, 2024). In Kenya, the rise of fake news and political propaganda on social media, particularly during election periods, has prompted the government to implement cybercrime laws and fact-checking initiatives (Sugow, 2019; Baraza, 2021; Abdirahman, 2023; Miyandazi & Thuo, 2025). Learning from this, Ghana can explore legal frameworks and digital literacy campaigns to curb misinformation while maintaining freedom of expression. Similarly, Nigeria has faced issues with cyber fraud, online harassment, and hate speech, leading to the introduction of stricter social media regulations and digital awareness programs (Iorliam, 2019; Abdullateef, 2021; Okibe, 2024; Stephen et al. 2024). However, concerns about censorship and abuse of power highlight the need for Ghana to adopt a balanced approach to ensuring ethical regulation without infringing on digital rights. On the other hand, the United Kingdom has implemented stronger data protection laws and online safety policies to combat harmful online content while promoting responsible social media use (Abrusci, 2024; Brown & Marsden, 2023). By analysing these strategies, Ghana can develop context-specific policies that address social media misuse while leveraging its benefits for national development.

Moreover, a coordinated approach involving key state agencies like the Data Protection Commission, Cybersecurity Authority, and Ghana Police Service is vital to tackling disinformation and online harassment. These agencies must work together to improve fact-checking systems and ensure that media houses uphold high standards. Furthermore, the National Communications Authority (NCA) should revise its authorization policy by limiting the number of frequencies issued to ensure effective regulation. Politically linked entities should be discouraged from monopolizing these frequencies to foster fairness and inclusivity. Social media platforms such as TikTok, which are often misused for sharing inappropriate and harmful content, should be banned outright. Meanwhile, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube should be regulated more strictly, with measures to automatically block sexual content, abusive messages, and fear-inducing false prophecies. Penalties should be imposed on those who share or promote such harmful content to protect Ghanaian values and safeguard the digital space.

However, the government must emphasize digital literacy and ethical social media use through public education campaigns. By engaging schools, community leaders, and media organizations, individuals can be made more aware of the ethical implications of their online actions. Educational programs should focus on cultivating a culture of responsibility and critical thinking, enabling users to discern credible information from misinformation. This multi-faceted approach will not only regulate harmful practices but also foster a healthier online environment that aligns with Ghana’s national values of respect, integrity, and communal harmony.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

| Statement | Mean | SD |
|---|--------|--------|
| The prevalence of social media misuse in Ghana | | |
| Social media is often used to spread misinformation and disinformation | 3.3400 | .47490 |
| The use of abusive language and insults on social media is prevalent | 3.8200 | .38515 |
| Social media is used to promote sexual immorality among youth | 3.7250 | .44763 |
| Some bloggers, content creators, and journalists prioritise sensational news on social media over accuracy and fact. | 3.7150 | .45255 |
| There are fake prophecies, fraudulence, and unverified religious claims | 3.6850 | .45237 |
| Individuals engage in unethical behaviours for trends and fame. | 3.8550 | .35298 |
| The usage of social media in Ghana focuses more on negative news | 3.9350 | .24714 |
| The media lacks sufficient educational content, often focusing on sensationalism | 3.8300 | .37658 |
| Ethical implications of social media misuse in Ghana | | |
| The spreading of false information damages public trust in institutions. | 3.3350 | .32506 |
| Abusive language and insults contribute to a decline in respect and civility. | 3.4050 | .49212 |
| The promotion of sexually explicit content negatively impacts moral values among children and the youth. | 3.2700 | .44507 |
| Fake religious prophecies and fraudulence erode trust in religious leaders. | 3.4500 | .49874 |
| It promotes societal division and reduces chances for constructive dialogue. | 3.4450 | .49821 |
| Lack of sufficient educational content impedes social change, critical thinking, and national progress. | 3.6800 | .46765 |
| The lack of ethical guidelines contributes to the spread of harmful content. | 3.5400 | .39763 |
| Influence of social media misuse on Ghana's national values | | |
| It corrodes national values such as respect, integrity, and accountability | 3.3400 | .47490 |
| The spread of misinformation and disinformation undermines the credibility and unity of institutions | 3.8200 | .38515 |
| Frequent exposure to unethical content negatively influences the moral behaviour of Ghanaian children and youth. | 3.7250 | .44763 |
| The use of abusive language and insults fosters a culture of disrespect | 3.7150 | .45255 |
| Unethical content diminishes Ghana's reputation on the global stage. | 3.6830 | .43241 |
| It contributes to poor educational practices in Ghana. | 3.8350 | .34714 |
| The promotion of sexual immorality weakens Ghanaian cultural and moral standards. | 3.8550 | .35298 |
| Measures in addressing social media misuse in Ghana | | |
| The National Media Commission should be empowered to enforce ethical media practices effectively. | 3.5950 | .52186 |
| The government should create and streamline guidelines for content moderation, data privacy, online harassment, and combating misinformation. | 3.8200 | .38515 |
| A comprehensive social media policy should be developed to encourage responsible and ethical use of digital platforms. | 3.7250 | .44763 |

| | | |
|--|--------|--------|
| Social media policies should be linked to media and broadcasting laws, with penalties for individuals who violate these laws. | 3.6022 | .35231 |
| Collaboration between the Data Protection Commission, Cybersecurity Authority, and Ghana Police Service should be facilitated to address disinformation and online harassment. | 3.7150 | .45255 |
| Platforms like TikTok and Snapchat, which are often misused for sharing inappropriate and harmful content, should be banned. | 2.9350 | .34714 |
| Stricter regulations should be introduced to automatically block sexual content, abusive messages, and unethical videos or pictures on the media | 3.8550 | .35298 |
| Ethical and responsible social media use should be emphasized through public education and awareness programs. | 3.8300 | .37658 |
| Penalties should be imposed on users who promote or share harmful or unethical content on social media. | 3.6050 | .49008 |
| Mean of means / SDs | 3.6350 | .42100 |

Source: Field Data (2025) Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, Disagree (D) = 2, Agree (A) = 3, and Strongly Agree (SA) = 4

The prevalence of social media misuse in Ghana

The table presents an analysis of social media misuse in Ghana, highlighting its prevalence, ethical implications, and impact on national values, and measures in addressing social media misuse in Ghana with a mean means score of 3.6350 and a standard deviation of 0.421. The data revealed a widespread concern regarding the misuse of social media in the country. It was found that Ghanaians focus more on negative news on social media ($M = 3.9350$; $SD = .24714$). It was that users engage in unethical behaviours for trends and fame ($M = 3.8550$; $SD = .35298$). Also, the media lacks sufficient educational content, often focusing instead on promoting actions such as “like,” “share,” and “subscribe” to my channel ($M = 3.8300$; $SD = .37658$). The use of abusive language and insults on social media is prevalent ($M = 3.8200$; $SD = .38515$). Again, the media is used to promote sexual immorality among individuals ($M = 3.7250$; $SD = .44763$). It was revealed that some bloggers, content creators, and journalists prioritise sensational news on social media over accuracy and fact ($M = 3.7150$; $SD = .45255$). There are also some fake prophecies, fraudulence, and unverified religious claims ($M = 3.6850$; $SD = .45237$). The media is often used to spread misinformation and disinformation ($M = 3.3400$; $SD = .47490$). The study’s findings revealed the ethical challenges posed by social media misuse in Ghana, aligning with existing literature on digital ethics and media influence. This confirms the assertion of Maweu (2019) and (Adam, 2020) that the widespread dissemination of misinformation, sensationalism, and unethical content on digital platforms erodes public trust, fosters societal division, and weakens moral values. The high prevalence of negative news, abusive language, sexually immorally promoted content and unethical behaviours for online popularity mirrors global concerns about the “attention economy,” where engagement-driven algorithms rank sensationalism over accuracy (Cabbuag & Abidin, 2024). Moreover, studies on youth digital consumption (Friman & Äikäs, 2024; Fombad, 2022; Olaniran, 2022) indicate that exposure to explicit content and misinformation can significantly impact moral development and civic engagement. These findings emphasize the urgent need for digital literacy education, ethical content moderation, and regulatory policies to mitigate the harmful effects of social media misuse while promoting responsible digital engagement in Ghana.

Ethical implications and influence of social media misuse in Ghana

The study revealed the ethical implications and influence of social media misuse on Ghana’s national values. It revealed lack of sufficient educational content impedes social change, critical thinking, and national progress ($M = 3.6800$; $SD = .46765$). Also, there is a lack of ethical guidelines that contribute to the spread of harmful content ($M = 3.5400$; $SD = .39763$). Again, it was revealed that fake religious prophecies and fraudulence erode trust in religious leaders ($M = 3.4500$; $SD = .49874$). Moreover, misuse of the media promotes societal division and reduces chances for constructive dialogue ($M = 3.4450$; $SD = .49821$). The abusive language and insults

contribute to a decline in respect and civility ($M = 3.4050$; $SD = .49212$). In essence, the spreading of false information damages public trust in institutions ($M = 3.3350$; $SD = .32506$). The promotion of sexually explicit content negatively impacts moral values among the children and the youth ($M = 3.2700$; $SD = .44507$). The promotion of sexual immorality weakens Ghanaian cultural and moral standards ($M = 3.8550$; $SD = .35298$), which contributes to poor educational practices in Ghana ($M = 3.8350$; $SD = .34714$). The spread of misinformation and disinformation undermines the credibility and unity of institutions ($M = 3.8200$; $SD = .38515$). Frequent exposure to unethical content negatively influences the moral behaviour of Ghanaian children and youth ($M = 3.7250$; $SD = .44763$). The use of abusive language and insults fosters a culture of disrespectful youth ($M = 3.7150$; $SD = .45255$). Unethical content diminishes Ghana's reputation on the global stage ($M = 3.6830$; $SD = .43241$). It corrodes national values such as respect, integrity, and accountability ($M = 3.3400$; $SD = .47490$). These findings highlight the ethical responsibility of media users and regulators to ensure that social media is leveraged for positive societal development rather than contributing to division and moral decay. Robinson (2024) argued that misinformation and sensational content on digital platforms destroy institutional conviction and weaken democratic values by distorting public perception. The study revealed excessive exposure to explicit content online that may negatively influence young people's moral development (Dastakeer, 2024; Forest, 2024), reinforcing the study's findings on the loss of ethical values (McCormack & Wignall, 2024). The lack of educational content on social media which revealed the dominance of entertainment-driven digital spaces limits critical thinking and civic engagement.

Measures in addressing social media misuse in Ghana

However, to address social media misuse, various measures have been suggested. The study revealed stricter regulations should be introduced to automatically block sexual content, abusive messages, and unethical videos or pictures on social media ($M = 3.8550$; $SD = .35298$). Also, ethical and responsible social media use should be emphasized through public education and awareness programs ($M = 3.8300$; $SD = .37658$). Furthermore, it was revealed that the government should create and streamline guidelines for content moderation, data privacy, online harassment, and combating misinformation ($M = 3.8200$; $SD = .38515$). It was revealed that Collaboration between the Data Protection Commission, Cybersecurity Authority, and Ghana Police Service should be facilitated to address disinformation and online harassment ($M = 3.7150$; $SD = .45255$). A comprehensive social media policy should be developed to encourage responsible and ethical use of digital platforms ($M = 3.7250$; $SD = .44763$). Social media policies should be linked to media and broadcasting laws, with penalties for individuals who violate these laws ($M = 3.6421$; $SD = .41400$). Penalties should be imposed on users who promote or share harmful or unethical content on social media ($M = 3.6050$; $SD = .49008$). The National Media Commission should be empowered to enforce ethical media practices effectively ($M = 3.5950$; $SD = .52186$). Platforms like TikTok and Snapchat, which are often misused for sharing inappropriate and harmful content, should be banned ($M = 2.9350$; $SD = .34714$). These measures align with the study's overarching goal of reclaiming digital platforms for cultural enrichment, ethical discourse, and national development. The proposed measures to address social media misuse in Ghana align with global best practices and existing literature on digital governance and media ethics. This confirms the assertion of Markwei and Appiah (2016) that the role of regulatory frameworks, content moderation, and digital literacy in mitigating harmful online behaviours. Research by Sarkar and Ghosh (2024) indicates that there should effectiveness of media literacy programs in curbing misinformation and fostering critical engagement with online content. Moreover, empirical studies on cybersecurity and digital ethics (Dziewornu-Norvor, 2022; Weber et al., 2018) highlight the significance of collaborative efforts between government agencies, technology platforms, and civil society in ensuring responsible digital spaces. The emphasis on public education and regulatory enforcement in Ghana reflects a broader need for balanced digital policies that protect freedom of expression while preventing the spread of harmful content, ultimately contributing to a more ethical and informed digital society.

FINDINGS

The study's findings revealed the reflective ethical implications of social media misuse in Ghana, particularly its impact on trust, civility, and moral values. The spread of misinformation and fake news destroys public trust in institutions, making it difficult for citizens to rely on accurate information for decision-making. Moreover, the use of abusive language and insults is prevalent fostering a culture of disrespect, contributing to societal division, and reducing opportunities for constructive dialogue. Also, the prevalent use of social media in Ghana

focuses more on negative news to garner views, likes, and shares due to monetisation. Again, the media lacks sufficient educational content, often focusing on sensationalism, fake religious prophecies, and fraudulent schemes which have diminished trust in religious leaders, impairing ethical concerns within Ghanaian society. However, promoting sexual immorality (“hookup culture”, a commercial sex trading on the media) has become popular among young people.

Similarly, the study revealed ethical implications and the impact of social media misuse on Ghana’s national values. It revealed that the lack of sufficient educational content hinders social change, critical thinking, and national progress. Moreover, the absence of ethical guidelines contributes to the spread of harmful content, while fake religious prophecies and fraudulent activities erode public trust in religious leaders. The frequent use of abusive language and insults has led to a decline in respect and civility in Ghanaian society. Also, the study revealed the negative influence of sexually explicit content on children and youth, weakening their moral development and further degrading societal ethical standards. However, the encouragement of sexual immorality on the media platforms weakens Ghanaian cultural and moral standards, which, in turn, contributes to poor educational practices. The use of abusive language fosters a culture of disrespect within the Ghanaian communities, and unethical content tarnishes Ghana’s global reputation.

The findings revealed the need for stronger regulatory measures to promote ethical media practices in Ghana. The National Media Commission should be empowered to enforce ethical standards, while the government must establish clear guidelines for content moderation, data privacy, and online harassment. It also revealed that comprehensive social media policy should be developed and integrated into existing media and broadcasting laws, with strict penalties for violations. Again, there should be collaboration among institutions such as the Data Protection Commission, Cybersecurity Authority, and Ghana Police Service in addressing disinformation and online abuse. Furthermore, platforms like TikTok and Snapchat, often misused for inappropriate content, should be banned or strictly regulated. Nonetheless, strict rules should be implemented to block unethical content from uploading, downloading, or sharing while digital literacy and public education programs should help promote responsible social media use. In this sense, punishment should be enforced against individuals who share or promote harmful content, ensuring sanity and a more ethical digital environment in Ghana.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study revealed the reflective ethical challenges posed by social media misuse in Ghana, affecting trust, civility, and moral values. The prevalence of misinformation, fake news, and fraudulent religious activities has waned public certitude in institutions and religious leaders. Also, the widespread use of abusive language and insults has augmented a culture of disrespect, promoted societal division, and limited constructive dialogue. The overemphasis on negative and sensational content, coupled with the lack of sufficient educational content, impedes critical thinking and national progress. Moreover, the exposure of children and youth to sexually explicit content and sex trade “hookup” declines moral values and destroys Ghanaian cultural and ethical standards, which in turn, destroys future generations. If left unaddressed, these issues could further deteriorate national cohesion and educational progress, highlighting the urgent need for ethical guidelines, regulatory measures, and public awareness programs to promote responsible social media use.

The findings revealed the urgent need for robust regulatory frameworks and proactive measures to promote ethical media practices in Ghana. The National Media Commission should be granted greater authority and resources to monitor and enforce ethical standards across digital platforms, while the government must establish clear and enforceable policies on content moderation, data privacy, cyberbullying, and misinformation. Moreover, a comprehensive social media policy should be developed and fully integrated into existing media and broadcasting laws, ensuring strict penalties for violations. There should be collaborative efforts among key institutions such as the Data Protection Commission, Cybersecurity Authority, Ghana Police Service, and telecommunications companies, should be reinforced to combat online abuse, misinformation, propaganda, and cyber fraud. Moreover, platforms like TikTok and Snapchat, which are often exploited for the spread of inappropriate and harmful content, should either be strictly regulated or restricted if necessary. To further enhance digital responsibility, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and media houses should launch nationwide digital literacy campaigns, equipping citizens especially the youth with critical thinking skills to assess online information. Public awareness programs should emphasize responsible social media use and

ethical digital engagement. Furthermore, content creators and influencers should be encouraged to promote positive, educational, and value-driven content to counteract the rise of harmful and misleading information. Strict measures should be introduced to automatically detect and block the circulation of unethical content including sexually explicit material, abusive messages, and violent content. Law enforcement agencies should also actively track and prosecute individuals who engage in cyberbullying, online harassment, and digital fraud.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the ethical challenges posed by social media misuse in Ghana, a multi-faceted approach is necessary, involving strict regulations, enhanced public education, and technological interventions. The government should establish a comprehensive digital ethics policy that integrates content moderation, data privacy, cyberbullying laws, and misinformation control within national regulatory frameworks. The National Media Commission, in collaboration with the Cybersecurity Authority and Data Protection Commission, should be equipped with advanced monitoring tools to detect and remove harmful content promptly. Furthermore, social media platforms must be mandated to implement stricter verification processes to curb the spread of fake accounts that propagate misinformation and fraudulent schemes. Educational institutions should integrate digital literacy and ethical media consumption into curricula to equip students with critical thinking skills, enabling them to discern credible information from misleading content. Nationwide awareness campaigns led by civil society organizations, religious groups, and media houses should promote responsible social media use, emphasizing respect, tolerance, and constructive online engagement. Moreover, there should be strict penalties for individuals and organizations that generate or disseminate harmful content, including hate speech, sexually explicit material, and fraudulent religious activities. Content creators and influencers should be incentivised to promote ethical and educational content that aligns with Ghanaian cultural values and national development goals. Social media platforms should also be encouraged to use artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms to filter and block inappropriate content before it spreads widely. Finally, law enforcement agencies should collaborate with international cybercrime units to track and dismantle networks that exploit digital platforms for fraud and criminal activities, ensuring a safer and more ethical digital space in Ghana.

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