



The impact of social media on Ghanaian youth's perception of cultural and moral values

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of social media on Ghanaian youths' perceptions of cultural and moral values within a rapidly globalizing digital environment. The research is grounded in social learning theory, cultural imperialism theory, uses and gratifications theory, and cultivation theory, which collectively explain how digital exposure shapes behavior, identity, and value systems. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The target population consisted of Ghanaian youth aged 15 to 30 from diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds. A sample of 400 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique to ensure representativeness. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and focus group discussions, allowing for the triangulation of statistical trends and lived experiences. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools, while qualitative data was examined through thematic analysis. The findings reveal that social media plays a dual role in shaping cultural and moral values. On the one hand, it facilitates cultural exchange, promotes learning, enhances creativity, and supports the development of hybrid identities that blend local and global influences. On the other hand, it introduces moral ambiguity, weakens certain traditional norms, and exposes youth to conflicting value systems, often reinforced through peer validation and algorithm-driven content. The study further identifies family background, peer influence, and individual agency as critical mediating factors that shape how young people interpret and respond to digital content. Importantly, the results demonstrate that Ghanaian youth are active agents who critically engage with social media rather than passive recipients of its influence. The study concludes that the impact of social media is complex, dynamic, and deeply embedded in broader socio-cultural contexts. It recommends the integration of digital literacy and ethical education into school curricula, the promotion of culturally grounded digital content, strengthened parental involvement, and the development of balanced regulatory policies. These interventions are essential for encouraging responsible social media use while safeguarding cultural identity and fostering positive moral development among Ghanaian youth.

Keywords: Cultural Values, Cultural Hybridization, Digital Literacy, Ghanaian Youth, Moral Development, Social Media

I. INTRODUCTION

The exponential growth of digital technologies has profoundly reshaped how people communicate, interact, and construct identity in contemporary societies (Papacharissi, 2009; Slevin, 2002). In Ghana, this transformation is particularly evident among young people, who constitute the most active users of social media platforms (Agyemang, 2020; Karikari, 2019). Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have evolved beyond their initial communicative purposes into complex socio-cultural spaces where identities are expressed, values are negotiated, and meanings are continuously produced (Manago et al., 2012; Pempek et al., 2009; Whiting & Williams, 2013; William & Nathalie, 2025). Within these digital environments, youth are not passive recipients but active participants who engage with diverse content that shapes their beliefs, perceptions, and social realities (Appiah, 2001; Agana et al., 2024).

Traditionally, Ghanaian society has been anchored in strong moral and social values, including respect for elders, communal responsibility, modesty, and collective well-being. These values are reinforced through family systems, religious institutions, and community structures that serve as the moral foundation of society (Asante, 2020; William & Nathalie, 2025). However, the increasing influence of global media—amplified through social networking platforms—has introduced alternative cultural narratives that sometimes challenge, reinterpret, or transform these



established norms (Annan, 2018; Appiah & Baffour, 2022; Tomlinson, 1991). Consequently, social media has become a critical site for cultural negotiation, where local traditions intersect with global influences, giving rise to hybrid identities and evolving value systems (Anim et al., 2022; Schiller, 1976).

This evolving digital landscape presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, social media enhances access to information, fosters creativity, encourages cross-cultural engagement, and supports cognitive and social development (Gibbs et al., 2013; Routledge Smith, 2016; Wright, 2016). On the other hand, it exposes young people to risks such as cyberbullying, misinformation, materialism, and inappropriate content, which may contribute to moral and behavioural concerns (Ademiluyi et al., 2022; Azumah, 2024; Cohen-Almagor, 2020a, 2020b; Ogonnia & Chiamaka, 2020). The immediacy and anonymity associated with online interactions can further complicate moral judgment, sometimes normalizing behaviours that deviate from socially accepted standards (Vallor, 2020).

Importantly, the effects of social media are neither uniform nor deterministic. They are mediated by contextual factors such as family background, peer influence, and educational experiences (Procentese et al., 2019; Park et al., 2009). While peer dynamics—such as social comparison and validation—play a significant role in shaping online behaviour (Manago et al., 2012), the family remains a critical agent in guiding moral orientation and reinforcing socially acceptable values (Asante, 2020). This underscores the need to understand social media not merely as a technological tool, but as a socially embedded space where cultural, institutional, and interpersonal forces converge.

Conceptually, this study adopts an integrated theoretical framework to capture the multidimensional nature of social media influence. Social Learning Theory explains how behaviours and values are acquired through observation and imitation in digital contexts (Bandura, 1986). Cultural Imperialism Theory highlights the global diffusion of dominant cultural forms through media (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991). Uses and Gratifications Theory emphasizes the active role of users in selecting media to satisfy specific needs (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 2009; Whiting & Williams, 2013), while Cultivation Theory suggests that prolonged media exposure shapes perceptions of reality and social behaviour over time (Gerbner, 1969; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how Ghanaian youth engage with and are influenced by social media.

Despite the growing body of literature on social media and youth behaviour, much of the existing research is grounded in Western contexts that prioritize individualism and overlook the communal and culturally embedded nature of African societies (Meng, 2020; Owusu-Ansah, 2021). In Ghana, prior studies have often focused on isolated issues—such as cyberbullying, communication practices, or cultural change—without integrating the broader moral, social, and cultural dimensions into a unified analytical framework (Agana et al., 2024; Mensah & Kyei, 2019). Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the lived experiences and interpretive agency of Ghanaian youth as they navigate digital environments.

This study is therefore justified by the need to bridge these gaps through a context-specific and interdisciplinary approach (Meng, 2020; Owusu-Ansah, 2021). It seeks to examine how social media shapes Ghanaian youths' perceptions of cultural and moral values within a globalized digital landscape (Appiah & Baffour, 2022; Agana et al., 2024). By centring youth perspectives and combining theoretical insights with empirical investigation, the study offers a nuanced understanding of digital cultural engagement and moral development (Bandura, 1986; Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Ultimately, it contributes to ongoing scholarly and policy debates by providing evidence-based insights into the intersection of social media and youth experiences in Ghana (Annan, 2018; Wright, 2016). In doing so, it positions social media not merely as a disruptive force, but as a dynamic space of cultural negotiation, reflection, and transformation (Appiah, 2001; Schiller, 1976).

The increasing penetration of internet technologies and smartphones in Ghana has made social media a powerful force shaping youth experiences and worldviews (Karikari, 2019; Agyemang, 2020). Despite its growing influence, there remains limited clarity on how deeply it affects cultural identity and moral values within the Ghanaian context (Mensah & Kyei, 2019; Owusu-Ansah, 2021). Existing literature on social media and youth behavior is largely dominated by Western perspectives, often emphasizing individualism, online identity, and digital interaction patterns (Papacharissi, 2009; Slevin, 2002). While these studies provide useful insights, they do not fully capture the communal, cultural, and religious foundations that shape identity and moral development in African societies (Asante, 2020; Appiah, 2001).

Although some Ghanaian studies have examined aspects of social media use, they tend to focus on isolated issues such as cyberbullying, communication patterns, or cultural change (Agana et al., 2024; Ademiluyi et al., 2022). There is a lack of comprehensive research that integrates cultural, moral, and social dimensions into a unified analytical framework (Meng, 2020; Anim et al., 2022). Additionally, empirical studies that foreground the lived experiences and agency of Ghanaian youth remain limited (Owusu-Ansah, 2021; Procentese et al., 2019).

This study addresses these gaps by offering a context-specific, interdisciplinary analysis that combines empirical data with theoretical insights to better understand the interaction between social media, cultural identity, and moral values. The primary aim of this study is to examine how social media shapes Ghanaian youths' perceptions of cultural and moral values within a globalized digital landscape. Rather than adopting a simplistic positive-versus-negative framework, the study conceptualizes social media as both an enabler and a disruptor. It investigates how exposure to



global content influences traditional beliefs, identity formation, and value orientation, while also examining its effects on moral attitudes such as respect, discipline, relationships, and social responsibility. A key strength of the study lies in its focus on youth perspectives, emphasizing their lived experiences and interpretations. By integrating empirical findings with theoretical analysis, the study contributes to scholarship on media, culture, and development while also informing policy, education, and community-based interventions aimed at promoting responsible social media use.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The growing integration of social media into the daily lives of Ghanaian youth has raised significant concerns regarding its impact on cultural identity and moral development (Agyemang, 2020; Karikari, 2019; Owusu-Ansah, 2021). In contemporary Ghana, young people increasingly rely on digital platforms as primary spaces for communication, interaction, and self-presentation (Papacharissi, 2009; Manago et al., 2012). While these platforms provide unprecedented opportunities for learning, networking, creativity, and self-expression (Gibbs et al., 2013; Routledge Smith, 2016; Whiting & Williams, 2013), they also function as channels through which diverse and often competing value systems are transmitted (Agana et al., 2024; Meng, 2020). This dual role creates tension between the preservation of indigenous cultural values and the adoption of globalized norms, thereby complicating the moral and cultural orientation of young users (Appiah, 2001; Asante, 2020).

Global media content, largely driven by Western ideologies and lifestyles, continues to permeate social media spaces, exposing Ghanaian youth to alternative ways of thinking, behaving, and relating (Annan, 2018; Appiah & Baffour, 2022; Tomlinson, 1991). As a result, observable shifts have emerged in areas such as language use, fashion trends, interpersonal relationships, and attitudes toward authority and tradition (Daitey et al., 2025; deGraft-Yankson & Essuman, 2025). These changes raise critical concerns about cultural erosion, identity dislocation, and the gradual weakening of adherence to long-standing Ghanaian values such as respect for elders, communal responsibility, modesty, and moral discipline (Anim et al., 2022; William & Nathalie, 2025; William & Nathalie, 2025). The increasing preference for individualistic expressions over collectivist norms further intensifies the debate on whether social media is reshaping the moral fabric of Ghanaian society (Asante, 2020).

Moreover, the digital environment presents additional challenges that directly affect the moral development of young people (Mensah & Kyei, 2019; Krcmar & Cingel, 2014). The prevalence of cyberbullying, the rapid spread of misinformation, and exposure to explicit or harmful content contribute to the normalization of unethical behaviors and attitudes (Ademiluyi et al., 2022; Azumah, 2024; Cohen-Almagor, 2020a, 2020b; Ogonnia & Chiamaka, 2020). Such experiences can influence perceptions of right and wrong, distort social realities, and undermine social cohesion within communities (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). In some cases, the anonymity and lack of accountability associated with online interactions further exacerbate these issues, enabling behaviors that would otherwise be socially unacceptable in offline contexts (Vallor, 2020).

Despite these concerns, social media is not solely detrimental; it also serves as a platform for cultural exchange, awareness creation, and moral dialogue (Park et al., 2009; Wright, 2016). This paradox highlights the complexity of its influence and underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of its role in shaping youth perceptions (Bandura, 1986; Rubin, 2009). The central problem, therefore, lies in critically examining how social media simultaneously promotes and disrupts cultural and moral values among Ghanaian youth. Equally important is the need to identify the social, cultural, and technological factors that mediate these effects, including family influence, educational systems, peer networks, and regulatory frameworks. Addressing this problem is essential for developing informed strategies that can harness the benefits of social media while mitigating its negative impacts on Ghana's cultural integrity and moral development.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. Assess the influence of social media on Ghanaian youth's cultural identity and traditional values.
- ii. Examine the effects of social media on Ghanaian youth's moral values and ethical attitudes.
- iii. Identify the mediating factors shaping the relationship between social media use and value formation among youth.
- iv. Determine the positive and negative dimensions of social media in youth behaviour and identity formation.
- v. Propose strategies for promoting responsible, ethical, and culturally aligned social media use among Ghanaian youth.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. How does social media influence Ghanaian youth's perception of cultural identity and traditional values?
- ii. What are the effects of social media exposure on Ghanaian youth's moral values and attitudes toward social issues?
- iii. What factors mediate the relationship between social media use and cultural and moral values among Ghanaian youth?



- iv. How can policymakers, educators, and parents promote positive social media use to support youth development?
- v. These questions are designed to capture both the positive and negative dimensions of social media influence, while also identifying practical strategies for intervention.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The relationship between social media and youth cultural-moral formation is best understood through a convergence of complementary theoretical perspectives rather than a single explanatory lens. In this study, Social Learning Theory, Cultural Imperialism Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Cultivation Theory are not treated as competing explanations but as interlocking frameworks that illuminate different layers of the same phenomenon: the evolving digital socialization of Ghanaian youth.

At the behavioural level, Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986) offers a foundational explanation for how values and practices are acquired in digital environments. Bandura's argument that individuals learn through observation and reinforcement becomes particularly powerful in the context of social media, where exposure to influencers, peers, and celebrities is constant, personalized, and algorithmically curated. Manago et al. (2012) extend this by showing that online interactions are not neutral; they are structured around feedback systems such as likes, shares, and comments that function as reinforcement mechanisms. What emerges is a social environment where visibility itself becomes a form of reward. In the Ghanaian context, this means that behaviours displayed by influencers—whether culturally grounded or globally inspired—can quickly become normalized through repetition and social validation.

However, Social Learning Theory alone cannot explain what kinds of values are learned or why certain cultural forms dominate digital spaces. This is where Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991) becomes essential. While Schiller's early formulation emphasized one-directional cultural domination from the Global North, contemporary scholars such as Annan (2018) and Appiah & Baffour (2022) complicate this view by showing that cultural flows are now more hybrid and negotiated. In Ghana, Western cultural symbols circulate widely on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, yet they are not simply absorbed wholesale. Instead, they are reinterpreted within local cultural logics. This tension between domination and adaptation creates a dynamic cultural space where identity is continuously reconstructed.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 2009) further complicates deterministic assumptions in both Social Learning and Cultural Imperialism theories by shifting attention to user agency. Rather than viewing Ghanaian youth as passive recipients of external influence, this perspective positions them as strategic users who actively select content to satisfy emotional, social, and cognitive needs. Whiting and Williams (2013) show that social media use is often driven by belongingness, entertainment, and identity performance. This means that even within highly globalized digital environments, youth choices significantly shape outcomes. Yet, as critics note, agency does not eliminate structural influence—it operates within algorithmically constrained environments that still privilege certain types of content over others.

Finally, Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010) introduces a temporal dimension often missing in other frameworks. It argues that repeated exposure to mediated realities gradually shapes perceptions of what is normal. When combined with Social Learning Theory, cultivation becomes more than perception—it becomes behavioural normalization over time. In social media contexts, this means that repeated exposure to curated lifestyles, moral debates, and global trends can slowly reshape Ghanaian youths' understanding of success, morality, and identity. The interaction between cultivation and social learning thus explains both immediate behavioural imitation and long-term perceptual shifts.

Taken together, these theories suggest that social media influence is not linear but layered: learning occurs through interaction (Bandura), is shaped by global cultural flows (Schiller; Tomlinson), is filtered through user agency (Katz et al.), and is reinforced over time (Gerbner). The interaction of these processes creates a complex ecosystem of cultural and moral negotiation.

2.2 Empirical Review

Empirical scholarship on social media and youth development reveals a growing but fragmented body of knowledge. When these studies are read together, however, a clearer narrative emerges: social media operates as a contested space where cultural identity, moral reasoning, and social influence are continuously negotiated.

2.2.1 Social Media, Cultural Identity, and Hybridization

A consistent finding across studies is that social media plays a central role in reshaping cultural identity among youth. Agana et al. (2024) and William and Nathalie (2025) argue that Ghanaian youth increasingly inhabit "hybrid cultural spaces" where local traditions coexist with global digital influences. Annan (2018) similarly observes that globalization does not erase culture but transforms it through continuous interaction.



However, these scholars do not fully agree on the implications of this transformation. While Appiah & Baffour (2022) emphasize cultural erosion risks, Appiah (2001) offers a more optimistic interpretation, suggesting that identity is inherently fluid and adaptive. This tension is important: what one group interprets as cultural loss, another interprets as cultural evolution.

Empirical observations from Daitey et al. (2025) and deGraft-Yankson and Essuman (2025) show that Ghanaian youth increasingly adopt global fashion and lifestyle trends. Yet, these same individuals continue to participate in local festivals and cultural rituals. This apparent contradiction supports Agana et al. (2024), who argue that digital culture does not replace indigenous culture but overlays it.

Thus, the literature collectively suggests that cultural identity is not disappearing but being recomposed through selective appropriation. Social media, in this sense, functions less as a replacement of tradition and more as a negotiation platform between multiple cultural logics.

2.2.2 Moral Values, Ethical Uncertainty, and Digital Exposure

The literature on moral development presents a more tension-filled narrative. Mensah and Kyei (2019) and Owusu-Ansah (2021) argue that social media exposure contributes to moral ambiguity among youth due to conflicting ethical messages. Ogonnia and Chiamaka (2020) extend this by linking social media use to moral decadence in African youth, particularly through exposure to inappropriate or sensationalized content.

At the same time, Cohen-Almagor (2020) emphasizes structural issues such as anonymity and weak accountability systems that amplify unethical behaviour online. This suggests that moral challenges are not only cultural but also technological.

However, this negative framing is moderated by Wright (2016), who highlights social media's role in moral education through online communities and value-based content. Vallor (2020) similarly argues that digital environments can support ethical reflection when used critically.

When these perspectives are read together, a more balanced picture emerges: social media does not simply weaken morality; it diversifies moral exposure. This diversification can produce either moral confusion or moral expansion depending on the user's interpretive capacity and social context.

2.2.3 Mediating Structures: Family, Peers, and Education

A particularly strong area of convergence in the literature concerns mediating influences. Asante (2020) and Procentese et al. (2019) consistently demonstrate that family remains a stabilizing force in moral and cultural socialization. In collectivist contexts like Ghana, parental guidance continues to shape how youth interpret digital content.

However, this influence is increasingly challenged by peer-driven digital validation systems. Manago et al. (2012) and Park et al. (2009) show that online engagement metrics—likes, shares, and comments—function as powerful social currencies. These digital feedback loops often rival or even surpass parental authority in shaping behaviour.

Gibbs et al. (2013) bridge these perspectives by suggesting that schools and educational systems now operate alongside family and peers as co-socializing agents. Thus, rather than replacing traditional institutions, social media redistributes influence across multiple nodes of socialization.

The interaction of these findings suggests a shifting hierarchy of influence: from family-centered authority to a multi-layered ecosystem where digital and offline influences coexist and compete.

2.2.4 Positive and Negative Outcomes: A Dual-Effect System

Across the literature, there is strong agreement that social media produces both enabling and constraining outcomes. On the positive side, Wright (2016) and Routledge Smith (2016) highlight its role in enhancing communication, learning, and creativity. Youth are able to access information, express identity, and connect across cultures more easily than ever before.

On the negative side, Ademiluyi et al. (2022) and Azumah (2024) document rising concerns about cyberbullying, addiction, and exposure to harmful content. These risks are amplified by algorithmic amplification systems that prioritize engagement over ethical considerations.

What is particularly important in synthesizing these studies is that positive and negative outcomes are not separate categories but interdependent effects of the same system. The same platform that enables learning also enables misinformation; the same tool that fosters connection also enables exclusion.

2.2.5 Synthesis of Empirical Literature

When the empirical literature is read holistically, a clear pattern emerges: social media is neither inherently beneficial nor harmful. Instead, it is a contested social environment shaped by structural design, user agency, and cultural context. Ghanaian youth navigate this environment not as passive consumers but as active interpreters of meaning.



However, a critical gap remains in the literature. Most studies treat cultural identity, morality, and behaviour as separate analytical categories, rather than interconnected dimensions of the same digital experience. Few studies fully integrate how these dimensions interact in lived Ghanaian youth experiences. This study addresses that gap by examining social media as a unified space of cultural negotiation, moral reasoning, and identity construction.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design was considered appropriate due to the complex and multidimensional nature of social media influence, which requires both measurable patterns and in-depth contextual understanding. The quantitative component enabled the identification of patterns, trends, and relationships between social media use and youths' perceptions of cultural and moral values. It provided measurable evidence that could be generalized across the study population. In contrast, the qualitative component offered deeper insights into participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and subjective meanings attached to their engagement with digital platforms. The integration of both approaches enhanced methodological triangulation, thereby improving the validity, reliability, and overall robustness of the findings. By combining statistical evidence with rich narrative accounts, the study achieved a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Ghana, a West African country experiencing rapid digital expansion and increasing youth engagement with social media platforms. Ghana provides a relevant context due to its unique coexistence of strong traditional cultural values and accelerating global digital influences. The study focused on selected urban and peri-urban communities, where access to smartphones, internet connectivity, and social media platforms is relatively high. These areas were deliberately chosen to reflect diverse socio-cultural and technological environments that shape youth behaviour and digital engagement patterns.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised Ghanaian youth aged 15–30 years. This age group was selected because it represents a critical developmental stage characterized by identity formation, moral socialization, and high engagement with digital technologies. The population included both students (secondary and tertiary levels) and non-student youth engaged in various socio-economic activities. This inclusion ensured diversity in educational background, socio-economic status, and cultural exposure, thereby enriching the study's representativeness and analytical depth.

3.4 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness and inclusivity. In the first stage, specific regions and communities were selected based on high youth population density and strong internet connectivity. This ensured relevance to the study's digital focus. In the second stage, stratified sampling was used to categorize respondents according to key demographic variables such as age, gender, and educational level. This helped ensure balanced representation across different subgroups.

In the final stage, simple random sampling was applied within each stratum to select individual respondents, reducing selection bias and enhancing fairness in participant inclusion. A total of 400 respondents were selected for the quantitative component. This sample size was considered adequate for statistical reliability and meaningful analysis. Additionally, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with selected participants from the same population to complement and deepen the quantitative findings.

3.5 Data Collection Tools and Procedure

Data were collected using two main instruments: structured questionnaires and focus group discussions (FGDs). The questionnaires contained both closed-ended and Likert-scale items, designed to capture patterns of social media use, frequency of engagement, and perceived cultural and moral influences. This facilitated systematic quantification of behavioural trends. The FGDs provided a qualitative dimension, enabling participants to express their lived experiences, interpretations, and reflections on social media use. A semi-structured interview guide was used to ensure consistency across discussions while allowing flexibility for deeper exploration of emerging issues. To enhance accessibility and participation, data collection was conducted through both face-to-face and virtual platforms, depending on respondents' availability and convenience.



3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. These methods helped identify usage patterns and general perceptions of social media influence. Where necessary, inferential statistics were applied to examine relationships between key variables. Qualitative data from FGDs were analysed using thematic analysis. This involved systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of recurring themes and patterns emerging from participants' narratives. The process allowed for the identification of shared meanings, contradictions, and contextual insights. The integration of both analytical approaches ensured a comprehensive interpretation of findings, combining numerical trends with rich qualitative explanations.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after clearly explaining the purpose of the study, ensuring voluntary participation, and emphasizing their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by excluding all identifying information from the data and final report. This ensured participants' privacy and encouraged honest responses. The study also adhered to the principle of non-maleficence, ensuring that participants were not exposed to any form of psychological, emotional, or social harm. Given the sensitivity of discussions around morality and culture, care was taken to respect diverse religious, cultural, and ideological perspectives. Furthermore, data were securely stored and used strictly for academic purposes. Throughout the research process, objectivity and neutrality were maintained to minimize bias and uphold academic integrity.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Impact of Social Media on Cultural Identity Formation

The first objective examined how social media influences Ghanaian youths' cultural identity and their relationship with traditional norms. The findings indicate a clear pattern of cultural hybridization, where young people simultaneously maintain elements of indigenous culture while actively engaging with global digital cultures. Both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that social media serves as a primary site of cultural exposure. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and X significantly influence youth preferences in fashion, communication styles, and lifestyle aspirations. Many respondents noted that their understanding of identity is increasingly shaped by global online representations rather than solely by local cultural frameworks. A 21-year-old university student (FGD Participant 3, March 2026) explained:

"When you spend a lot of time online, you start copying how people from other countries dress and behave. You still respect your culture, but you also want to be modern."

Similarly, a 19-year-old respondent (Questionnaire Respondent 112, March 2026) stated:

"Social media does not erase our identity; it redefines what it means to be Ghanaian in a global world."

These perspectives indicate that cultural identity is not being completely displaced but is instead undergoing continuous reconstruction through negotiation between local traditions and global influences. However, some participants expressed concern that excessive exposure to foreign lifestyles may gradually weaken values such as modesty, communal living, and respect for elders.

4.1.2 Impact of Social Media on Ethical and Moral Value Orientation

The second objective focused on how social media shapes moral values and ethical reasoning among Ghanaian youth. The findings reveal increasing experiences of moral complexity, ethical uncertainty, and relativism in digital spaces. Participants consistently reported exposure to conflicting moral narratives that make it difficult to maintain stable moral judgments. Social media platforms present diverse interpretations of what is considered right or wrong, often shaped by cultural and contextual differences. A 23-year-old participant (FGD Participant 5, March 2026) noted:

"On social media, you see things that are acceptable somewhere else but completely wrong in our society. It confuses you about what is really right."

Similarly, a 20-year-old apprentice (FGD Participant 2, March 2026) observed:

"Some behaviours that used to be shameful are now celebrated online because they get attention and followers."

These responses suggest that moral understanding among youth is increasingly influenced by visibility, popularity, and online engagement metrics, rather than traditional ethical norms. However, a minority of participants also indicated that social media can support moral education through religious content, inspirational messages, and educational platforms promoting discipline and ethical behaviour.



4.1.3 Peer Influence, Social Validation, and Online Behaviour

A dominant and recurring theme in the findings is the strong influence of peer pressure and digital validation mechanisms on youth behaviour. Participants indicated that social media use is often driven by the desire for recognition, approval, and comparison with others. Several respondents emphasized that online visibility—measured through likes, shares, and comments—has become closely linked to self-worth. One participant remarked that posts that fail to gain attention often create feelings of invisibility or social exclusion. This highlights the growing importance of algorithmic validation and peer-driven approval systems in shaping online identity. Youth increasingly engage in curated self-presentation, carefully constructing digital personas to attract attention and social recognition. This performative culture has implications for self-esteem, authenticity, and moral decision-making, as individuals may prioritize popularity over personal or ethical consistency.

4.1.4 Role of Family, Education, and Social Background

Despite the strong influence of digital platforms, the findings consistently show that family, education, and social background remain critical mediating factors in shaping youth responses to social media content. A 24-year-old participant (FGD Participant 4, March 2026) emphasized:

“Even though social media is everywhere; what your parents teach you still matters.”

Similarly, a respondent (Questionnaire Respondent 87, March 2026) highlighted that strong parental guidance helps reduce exposure to negative online influences. These responses indicate that the impact of social media is not uniform but is significantly shaped by contextual and structural factors, including family upbringing, religious affiliation, and educational exposure. Participants from strong familial and religious backgrounds demonstrated greater resistance to negative online influences compared to those with weaker institutional support systems.

4.1.5 Social Media as a Means of Cultural Expression and Preservation

Contrary to concerns about cultural erosion, the findings also reveal that social media functions as a platform for cultural expression and preservation. Many participants described using digital platforms to promote Ghanaian traditions, festivals, languages, and historical knowledge.

A 20-year-old participant (FGD Participant 6, March 2026) stated:

“We post things on social media about our culture. It makes us proud when people outside Ghana appreciate our festivals.”

Others reported following online pages that teach indigenous languages, proverbs, and cultural histories. These practices demonstrate that social media is not solely a force of cultural disruption but also a space for cultural reinforcement and revitalization, depending on user intention and engagement.

4.1.6 Moral Ambiguity and Value Confusion in Digital Spaces

Another significant finding is the emergence of moral ambiguity resulting from exposure to diverse and sometimes contradictory global value systems. Many participants expressed difficulty in determining which behaviours are socially or ethically acceptable due to conflicting online narratives. A 22-year-old participant (FGD Participant 7, March 2026) explained:

“Everyone online thinks differently about what is right. It’s hard to figure out which principles to follow.”

This reflects a state of ethical pluralism, where multiple moral frameworks coexist without a dominant standard. While this may encourage tolerance and broaden perspectives, it also creates uncertainty and moral confusion among youth navigating digital environments.

4.2 Summary of Key Empirical Insights

Overall, the findings reveal five interconnected patterns aligned with the study objectives: Cultural identity among Ghanaian youth is being reshaped through hybridization of local and global influences. Moral reasoning is increasingly characterized by ambiguity and relativism due to exposure to conflicting online content. Youth behaviour and self-perception are strongly influenced by peer validation and digital approval systems. Family, education, and cultural background continue to serve as important mediating and stabilizing institutions. Social media operates as both a platform for cultural preservation and a driver of cultural transformation. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that Ghanaian youth are not passive consumers of digital content but active agents who interpret, negotiate, and reconstruct cultural and moral meanings within social media environments.

4.3 Discussion

This section provides a critical interpretation of the empirical findings in relation to the study objectives, theoretical framework, and existing literature. It situates the experiences of Ghanaian youth within broader academic debates on social media, cultural identity, and moral development. Overall, the discussion highlights social media as a



complex and dynamic space where cultural continuity and change, moral negotiation, and social influence continuously intersect.

4.3.1 Social Media and the Transformation of Cultural Identity

The findings indicate that Ghanaian youth actively engage in cultural hybridization, blending indigenous cultural elements with global digital influences. This aligns with Annan (2018), Appiah and Baffour (2022), and Agana et al. (2024), who argue that globalization does not simply erase local cultures but transforms them through continuous interaction and adaptation. However, the study extends this view by showing that Ghanaian youth are not passive recipients of global culture. Rather, they exercise agency by selectively adopting, modifying, and reinterpreting foreign cultural elements to fit local contexts. This supports Appiah's (2001) argument that cultural identity is fluid and continuously reconstructed through interaction.

For example, while many participants adopt global fashion and digital trends, they simultaneously maintain strong participation in local festivals, rituals, and cultural practices. This finding challenges a strict interpretation of Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991), which assumes a one-directional flow of cultural domination. Instead, the evidence suggests a negotiated cultural process, where Ghanaian youth actively construct hybrid identities. Social media therefore emerges as a **contested** cultural space, rather than a site of cultural erosion alone.

4.3.2 Moral Development and Ethical Ambiguity

The study found that exposure to social media contributes to moral uncertainty, ethical pluralism, and relativistic thinking among youth. Participants reported difficulty distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours due to conflicting moral messages online. This aligns with Kremer and Cingel (2014), who argue that exposure to diverse moral frameworks in digital environments weakens fixed moral boundaries. Similarly, the normalization of previously unacceptable behaviours online supports Mensah and Kyei (2019), who suggest that repeated exposure can gradually reshape moral perceptions. This is consistent with Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), which posits that prolonged media exposure influences individuals' understanding of social reality.

However, the findings also present an important counterbalance. Social media is not purely morally destabilizing; it also provides spaces for ethical reinforcement and moral learning. Religious teachings, motivational content, and educational materials contribute to moral reflection and value formation. This supports Wright (2016), who emphasizes the potential of digital platforms for positive moral engagement. Thus, moral development in digital environments is best understood as dualistic, involving both moral risks and moral opportunities.

4.3.3 Social Learning, Peer Pressure, and Digital Behaviour

The findings strongly reflect the principles of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986), particularly the role of observation, imitation, and reinforcement in shaping behaviour. Participants indicated that likes, comments, and shares significantly influence what they post and how they behave online. This supports Manago et al. (2012), who argue that social media functions as a feedback-driven environment where identity is constructed through social validation. The study further reveals that peer influence is not only external but has become internalized, shaping how youth evaluate themselves. Self-worth is increasingly measured through digital engagement metrics, indicating a deeper psychological integration of social media into identity formation. As a result, social media operates as a form of algorithmic social influence, where visibility and popularity significantly shape behaviour and self-perception.

4.3.4 Family and Social Institutions as Mediating Forces

A key finding is the continued importance of family, education, and religious institutions in shaping youth responses to social media. This supports Asante (2020) and Procentese et al. (2019), who emphasize the enduring role of family systems in moral socialization, particularly within collectivist societies. The study shows that strong family values act as a protective buffer against negative online influences, reinforcing ethical behaviour even in highly digital environments. This challenges deterministic views that portray social media as a dominant force overriding traditional structures. Participants also acknowledged the influence of schools and religious institutions in shaping values, indicating that moral development is the result of interconnected social systems, including family, education, religion, and peer networks. These institutions collectively mediate how digital content is interpreted and internalized.

4.3.5 Social Media as a Dual Cultural Space

A major contribution of this study is the conceptualization of social media as a dual-function cultural space. On one hand, it facilitates exposure to global lifestyles, contributing to cultural transformation. On the other hand, it enables cultural preservation through the promotion of indigenous languages, traditions, and values. This finding aligns with Agana et al. (2024), who highlight the simultaneous processes of cultural disruption and preservation within digital environments. It also supports Wright (2016), who views digital platforms as active sites of cultural production rather



than passive channels of consumption. The results therefore challenge simplistic narratives of cultural loss, revealing instead a continuous process of cultural negotiation, adaptation, and reinvention within digital spaces.

4.3.6 Moral Risk, Opportunity, and Digital Complexity

The study further identifies social media as a morally complex environment characterized by both risks and opportunities. Participants acknowledged challenges such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and exposure to explicit content, consistent with Ademiluyi et al. (2022) and Azumah (2024). Cohen-Almagor (2020) further explains how anonymity and weak regulation can intensify ethical risks in digital spaces. At the same time, respondents recognized positive moral influences, including educational content, religious messages, and value-based digital initiatives. This aligns with Vallor (2020), who argues that technology can support moral reflection when used responsibly. These findings suggest that social media should not be viewed as inherently good or bad, but rather as a context-dependent moral ecosystem, shaped by patterns of use, user agency, and broader social structures.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study has provided a critical and context-sensitive examination of the impact of social media on Ghanaian youths' perceptions of cultural and moral values in an increasingly interconnected digital world. The evidence clearly indicates that social media is not a neutral technological tool, but a powerful socio-cultural environment that actively shapes how young people interpret identity, morality, and belonging. A major conclusion of the study is that Ghanaian youth are not passive recipients of digital influence. Rather, they actively engage with, interpret, and selectively appropriate content encountered on social media platforms. This active engagement results in a continuous negotiation between indigenous cultural norms and global digital influences. Consequently, cultural identity among Ghanaian youth is increasingly characterized by hybridity, where traditional values such as respect for elders, communal responsibility, and moral discipline coexist alongside global trends in lifestyle, communication, and self-expression.

The study also concludes that social media significantly reshapes moral perception among youth by exposing them to multiple and often conflicting ethical frameworks. While this exposure can broaden moral awareness, encourage openness, and promote tolerance for diversity, it simultaneously introduces moral uncertainty. In many cases, traditional moral boundaries become blurred as young people encounter relativistic interpretations of right and wrong, particularly through entertainment-driven and influencer-based content. Importantly, the study establishes that the influence of social media is mediated by contextual and structural factors. Family upbringing emerged as a key stabilizing force in shaping moral judgment, while peer influence and digital validation systems such as likes and shares strongly affect behavioural choices. Education and digital literacy also play a critical role in determining whether social media use results in constructive or harmful outcomes. Overall, the study concludes that social media functions as a contested cultural and moral space in Ghana, where global and local forces interact dynamically. Its impact is therefore best understood as complex, negotiated, and context-dependent rather than linear or deterministic.

5.2 Recommendations

Drawing on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following expanded recommendations are proposed to enhance the positive impact of social media while addressing its challenges among Ghanaian youth.

Strengthening Digital and Moral Literacy in Education: There is an urgent need to integrate comprehensive digital literacy and moral education into the Ghanaian educational curriculum at all levels. Beyond basic ICT training, learners should be equipped with critical thinking skills to evaluate online content, recognize misinformation, and understand the ethical implications of digital behaviour. Teachers should be trained to connect digital literacy with moral reasoning so that students develop the ability to navigate complex online environments responsibly.

Cultural Repositioning of Social Media Content: Government agencies, cultural institutions, and media practitioners should intentionally promote Ghanaian cultural identity within digital spaces. This includes the development of engaging social media content that highlights indigenous languages, festivals, moral teachings, and historical narratives. Youth participation should be central to this process to ensure relevance, creativity, and sustainability of cultural preservation efforts. **Enhanced Parental and Family Engagement:** Families must be empowered to play a more active role in guiding children's digital experiences. This includes fostering open communication about social media use, setting appropriate boundaries, and modelling responsible online behaviour. Community-based parenting education programmes should be introduced to help caregivers understand evolving digital risks and opportunities.

Policy and Regulatory Strengthening: Policymakers should develop balanced regulatory frameworks that address harmful online practices such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and exposure to explicit content. However, such regulations must carefully protect freedom of expression while ensuring user safety. Collaboration between government, telecom providers, and social media companies is essential for effective enforcement. Promotion of



Positive Peer Influence and Youth Mentorship: Schools, youth groups, and civil society organizations should establish structured mentorship and peer-led initiatives that promote responsible social media engagement. Positive digital role models should be encouraged to influence online behaviour constructively, reducing the appeal of harmful trends and misinformation. Engagement of Religious and Community Institutions: Religious leaders and traditional authorities should be actively involved in digital moral education. Their presence on social media platforms can help reinforce ethical values, provide moral guidance, and bridge the gap between traditional morality and modern digital realities. Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration: Finally, addressing the challenges of social media influence requires coordinated action among educators, families, policymakers, religious bodies, and technology companies. A unified approach will ensure that social media becomes a tool for cultural enrichment, moral development, and national cohesion rather than social fragmentation.

Declaration of Interest

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