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**IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON FAMILY VALUES AND MORALS AMONG THE YOUTH**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The rise of digital technologies and the widespread adoption of social media have significantly redefined family interactions, moral development, and the socialization processes among youths across societies. The rapid spread of platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter has influenced behavioural patterns, communication dynamics, and the transmission of intergenerational values. This paper examines the impact of social media on family values and morals among the youth, drawing insights from sociocultural, psychological, and ethical perspectives. Specifically, it interrogates how these platforms shape youths' perceptions of respect, obedience, discipline, communal living, and moral conduct. It also identifies the most prevalent social media platforms used by youths within the clan and discusses how these platforms exert both positive and negative influences on value systems. The study concludes by highlighting the urgent need for value reorientation to preserve the cultural heritage of the youth in a digitally driven age.*

*Keywords: Social Media; Family Values, Morals; Digital Transformation; Youth.*

**Introduction**

The rapid growth of social media has significantly transformed social interaction globally, particularly among young people. The adoption of digital platforms has become increasingly pronounced, reshaping how youths communicate, express themselves, and develop personal values. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), Snapchat, and Instagram have evolved beyond simple communication tools into powerful spheres for identity construction, value exchange, and moral negotiation (Olapegba & Talabi, 2022). As youths become more integrated into virtual communities, their exposure to diverse ideologies, lifestyles, and moral systems intensifies. This has raised concerns about the erosion of traditional family values and moral codes which once served as strong pillars for social cohesion.

Family values represent core beliefs, behavioral norms, and cultural practices passed from one generation to another, shaping moral judgment and guiding daily decisions (Ebiri & Agi, 2021). These values historically included respect for elders, honesty, communal responsibility, modesty, hard work, and obedience to family authority. Moral upbringing was primarily achieved through close interaction with parents, community elders, and traditional institutions. However, as social media increasingly becomes a primary source of information and entertainment, young people often encounter conflicting moral narratives, some of which undermine the traditional hierarchy of values upheld in the clan.

Recent studies show that social media has become a substitute “digital parent,” influencing emotional development, social relationships, and ethical reasoning among adolescents and young adults (Nwankwo & Olatunji, 2023). Social media platforms allow youths to interact with global cultures, adopt foreign behaviours, and redefine identity in ways that challenge local norms. Although these platforms offer opportunities for learning, socialization, and connection, they also expose young people to lifestyles, ideologies, and moral orientations that contradict traditional values. The conflict between traditional African family values and modern digital influences is particularly visible among the youth, who often prioritize virtual interactions over family engagements. This study therefore focuses on two objectives: which are:

- Understanding the impact of social media on family values and morals among the youth and
- Identifying the social media platforms that are most prevalent among the youths.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Social Media and the Transformation of Family Values Among Youth**

Family values in traditional African societies emphasize respect for elders, communal responsibility, modesty, obedience, and moral discipline. These values are transmitted through stories, rituals, family gatherings, and close-knit communal interactions. However, the digital environment introduces a parallel system of moral learning where youth encounter diverse ideologies, lifestyles, and behavioural norms. Social media platforms are saturated with content that promotes individualism, self-expression, and sometimes moral relativism values that directly challenge communal expectations.

According to Eze and Okonkwo (2022), excessive use of social media among Nigerian youths is linked to diminishing respect for authority, reduced adherence to cultural expectations, and a growing disconnect from family traditions. Studies have reported a decline in youth participation in cultural rites, family events, and communal labour because of the time spent online. The moral codes embedded in digital interactions such as online validation, trending challenges, or influencer lifestyles often overshadow the moral lessons traditionally taught at home.

Respect for elders is a cornerstone of African morality. However, social media provides youths with access to global content where authority is frequently questioned, and age hierarchy is less pronounced. Ogbonna and Eze (2024) observe that youths empowered by social media often challenge cultural norms they perceive as restrictive or outdated. As a result, young people increasingly question parental decisions, resist family instructions, and prioritize online peer groups over familial authority. The shift in power dynamics is intensified by the fact that many youths are more digitally literate than their parents. This knowledge gap often reduces parental influence, as youths rely on online sources rather than family guidance for moral interpretation and decision-making.

Digital technologies have reshaped the nature of communication within families. While social media can facilitate long-distance communication among relatives, it can also weaken in-person interaction within the household. Primack et al. (2017) found that high levels of social media use correlate with reduced availability for face-to-face family engagement. Studies indicate that youths spend significant time on WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram, even during family gatherings, meals, and communal ceremonies. This decline in physical interaction leads to weaker emotional bonds, fewer shared experiences, and a diminished sense of family

togetherness. Family members who once engaged in storytelling, joint work, or cultural rites now retreat into their digital worlds.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory which state that youth learn behaviour by observation, emphasizes that individuals learn behaviours by observing role models. On social media, influencers rather than parents, elders, or community leaders serve as the primary models for youth. These influencers often promote fashion trends, liberal views on sexuality, financial flamboyance, and alternative lifestyles that conflict with traditional family values. Akpan and Udoh (2021) highlight the rise of consumerism and materialism among Nigerian youths as a direct consequence of following social media influencers. This value shift undermines frugality, modesty, and communal responsibility values long upheld among the youths.

Online peer groups exert significant influence on youth behaviour. Trends such as "challenge videos," viral dances, sexualized content, and risk-taking behaviours circulate widely among youth networks. These trends normalize experimentation and boundary-pushing that may contradict family morals. Twenge et al. (2018) note that prolonged exposure to online peer validation systems leads to heightened desire for social approval, prompting youths to mimic online behaviours, even when they conflict with their family's expectations.

The rise of digital fraud ("Yahoo Yahoo"), identity theft, cryptocurrency scams, and other cyber-offences has also influenced youth moral orientations. In some online spaces, fraudulent behaviour is glamorized, with perpetrators flaunting wealth and encouraging others to join. Zuboff (2019) notes that digital anonymity emboldens moral transgressions. Social media frequently exposes young people to sexualized content, pornography, and romantic narratives that challenge traditional norms surrounding chastity, modesty, and courtship. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram promote sexualized dance trends and body-centric content, while dating apps normalize casual relationships. Fardouly et al. (2015) found that exposure to such content influences self-image, relationship expectations, and sexual boundaries.

### **Prevalent Social Media Platforms Among the Youth**

#### **WhatsApp**

WhatsApp stands out as the most widely used due to its affordability, accessibility, and user-friendly interface. Its low data consumption and instant messaging features make it particularly attractive to young people, who rely on it for chatting, exchanging videos, participating in peer-based group interactions, and accessing entertainment content. For families, WhatsApp functions as a space for maintaining cohesion through group chats that allow for the exchange of information, greetings, and communal updates. However, despite its capacity to support familial closeness, the ease of constant connectivity often leads to overuse, reducing the extent of face-to-face interactions within households. This behavioural shift has significant implications for traditional family bonding, as youths frequently prioritize online conversations over physical engagement, thereby weakening core interpersonal values (Aina & Olorunshola, 2023).

#### **Facebook**

Facebook also retains strong relevance among both youths and adults in the community. Its broad range of features spanning from status updates to livestreaming and photo sharing makes it a central platform for lifestyle exhibition, relationship networking, and participation in political or social discussions. Through Facebook, the youth encounter a vast array of cultural expressions and

moral orientations, many of which challenge traditional expectations. These exposures often reshape perceptions of authority, relationships, and social conduct. As observed in recent studies, the platform's algorithm promotes diverse content that may conflict with family moral teachings, creating subtle tensions between online influences and established cultural norms (Okolie & Nwachukwu, 2024). Consequently, youths increasingly negotiate their identities within a digital space that encourages self-expression and autonomy, creating friction with cultural values that emphasize modesty, obedience, and communal accountability.

### **Instagram**

Instagram's highly visual environment further deepens these cultural negotiations. Dominated by images, short videos, and curated aesthetics, Instagram powerfully influences youth perceptions of beauty, fashion, and lifestyle aspirations. The platform fosters a culture of comparison, where influencers and celebrities display idealized versions of their lives, often promoting behaviours and values that differ from those upheld among the youths. As contemporary research has shown, consistent engagement with such content shapes attitudes toward appearance, consumption, and social interaction, encouraging youths to adopt globalized identities that gradually distance them from community expectations (Fardouly et al., 2021). This phenomenon contributes to subtle yet significant changes in moral behaviour, particularly as young people imitate trends that valorize self-promotion, materialism, and liberal social conduct.

### **TikTok**

TikTok amplifies these effects due to its rapidly evolving algorithm-driven short videos that are highly engaging and, for many users, addictive. Its emphasis on viral challenges, dance routines, humour skits, and relationship-based content has made it one of the most influential platforms in shaping youth behaviour. TikTok's immersive content ecosystem provides constant stimulation that not only entertains but also reinforces norms that may contradict family teachings on modesty, discipline, and respectful behaviour. Recent scholarship indicates that TikTok's personalized feeds accelerate behavioural imitation, especially among adolescents who are still forming their social identities (Zhang & Chow, 2023).

### **YouTube**

YouTube also plays a major role in shaping moral orientations, though its influence operates differently from other platforms. Youths utilize YouTube for entertainment, music videos, tutorials, religious sermons, and global news, making it a versatile platform for learning and leisure. The platform's vast content library exposes young users to alternative worldviews, liberal ideologies, and modern philosophies that challenge traditional family values. Although YouTube offers positive educational content, the algorithm also steers users toward materials that may undermine cultural teachings, especially when youths lack the critical skills needed to evaluate the information they consume (Valkenburg et al., 2022). As such, YouTube serves as both an educational tool and a source of moral ambiguity, influencing the attitudes and beliefs of young viewers in complex ways.

### **Telegram and Snapchat**

Telegram and Snapchat, though less dominant in usage, have emerged as platforms that youths employ for private communication and discreet group activities. Their enhanced privacy features, including disappearing messages and secret chat options, make them attractive for behaviours young people prefer to conceal from parental oversight. This secrecy raises concerns

about exposure to risky or inappropriate activities, which may include peer pressure, explicit content, and unmonitored interactions with strangers. Recent studies highlight that such platforms foster environments where moral experimentation occurs without the moderating presence of family or community guidance (Mensah & Odoom, 2023). Consequently, Telegram and Snapchat subtly contribute to the erosion of traditional monitoring structures that once kept youth conduct aligned with family expectations.

### **Erosion and Reconstruction of Traditional Values Among Youths**

Social media not only erodes but also reconstructs traditional values among youths. While some aspects of online engagement weaken cultural norms, others modify them in ways that create hybrid moral identities. For instance, respect for elders once central to Ekinigbo's value system is challenged when youths adopt more egalitarian and confrontational online communication styles. Many young people now question decisions or statements from elders, influenced by social media's emphasis on personal opinion and autonomous expression (Ibrahim & Chijioke, 2022). Similarly, modesty in dress, speech, and lifestyle has been significantly influenced by exposure to global fashion trends, celebrity culture, and hyper-visibility. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok normalize bold self-display, altering how youths perceive modesty. Traditional expectations of humility and restraint are often dismissed as outdated, creating moral conflict within households. However, social media also introduces positive moral innovations. Some youths use digital platforms for advocacy, community mobilization, and religious engagement. Moral content such as motivational videos, faith-based teachings, and community development messages strengthens aspects of moral consciousness among digitally active youths (Oladipo & Eze, 2023). This suggests that the impact of social media is not entirely destructive but multifaceted, presenting both risks and opportunities for value reconstruction.

### **Changing Patterns of Behaviour, Discipline, and Ethical Decision-Making**

The behavioral patterns of youths increasingly reflect the moral cues obtained from online platforms. Social media encourages behaviors such as trend imitation, public self-expression, peer comparison, and risk-taking. Youths frequently model behaviors seen in online celebrities, influencers, or viral skits, many of whom display morally ambiguous lifestyles (Adeoye & Fashola, 2021). This form of imitation reshapes identity, affecting academic performance, respect for authority, and interpersonal relationships. Disciplinary challenges have also escalated as youths often perceive parental rules as restrictive compared to the permissive digital environment. Many parents report increased stubbornness, withdrawal, and secretive behavior resulting from digital addiction and exposure to online subcultures (Achor & Alkali, 2022). These dynamics alter the moral atmosphere of the home, weakening the family's role in ethical decision-making. Ethical reasoning among youths is increasingly influenced by online communities rather than traditional cultural guidance. Issues such as honesty, sexual relations, loyalty, and responsibility are now evaluated through digital discourse rather than familial teachings. Youths may justify morally questionable actions by citing online trends, peer behaviors, or global cultural shifts, creating a moral disconnect from their indigenous value system.

**Theoretical Framework****Technological Determinism Theory**

Technological Determinism posits that technological innovations drive social change and significantly shape human behaviour, communication patterns, and cultural transformation. According to scholars such as Marshall McLuhan, the medium itself not just the content fundamentally alters how people think, relate, and behave. Applied to this context, this theory suggests that the emergence and dominance of social media platforms have restructured youth communication patterns, redefining how they engage with family, peers, and cultural institutions. The constant connectivity, visual culture, and algorithm-driven content of these platforms create a “new social environment” that competes with traditional structures of moral instruction. Consequently, young people may adopt new linguistic styles, fashion, values, and attitudes that are shaped more by digital interactions than by family teachings. Technological Determinism therefore explains why the influence of social media may appear strong and inevitable, and why traditional value transmission systems sometimes struggle to compete with digital influences.

**Social Learning Theory**

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, further explains how youths internalize behaviours and moral orientations by observing, imitating, and modeling the actions of others especially those perceived as influential or admirable. In the digital age, social media provides countless models through influencers, celebrities, peers, and online communities. Youths frequently encounter content that portrays diverse lifestyles, cultural norms, and moral values. Whether positive or negative, these portrayals shape their perceptions of acceptable behaviour, fashion, social interaction, and moral decision-making. The theory highlights that learning is not only a direct product of parental instruction but also occurs vicariously through digital observation. A teenager watching a viral TikTok challenge, a fashion trend on Instagram, a controversial lifestyle on Facebook, or motivational content on YouTube may internalize the behaviour without direct physical interaction. In this way, social media becomes a powerful instructional environment where values are formed, reshaped, or contested through continuous exposure.

**Empirical Studies**

Deezia & Lawrence-Hart (2021) carried out a study on Rethinking African Philosophy and Traditional Value System amidst Modernity. The study focused on the place of African philosophy and value system amidst modernity. It adopts the modernization theory of Max Weber and Talcott Parsons. Using the descriptive method, the study revealed that African philosophy, religion, value system and civilization have all been misinterpreted, misrepresented and completely misunderstood. The study argues that cultural features, worldviews, and belief systems have a significant impact on science and technology, philosophy and values, priorities and ideas, skills and ethics. This implies that all societies, even the modern world, are traditional societies. As such, African worldview and thought pattern constitute their philosophy. The study maintained that African philosophy must transcend abstract reflection.

Oladipo (2020) carried out a study on Social Media Consumption and Moral Orientation among Rural Youths in Southern Nigeria, a mixed-methods design was used involving surveys and focus group interviews with 260 adolescents in three rural communities. The results showed a significant negative correlation between excessive social media use and adherence to traditional moral expectations, particularly respect for elders and modest behavioural conduct. Youths who spent more than five hours daily online demonstrated weaker moral restraint and stronger

attachment to peer-driven digital norms. The study concluded that high exposure to unregulated online content disrupts moral reasoning patterns previously shaped by family instruction. It recommended that parents strengthen digital monitoring practices and communities implement structured moral education programs that address modern online influences.

Eze and Ibrahim (2022) conducted a study on work Family Authority and the Influence of Social Networks on Youth Behaviour adopted a descriptive survey design involving 312 secondary school students. Their data revealed that social media significantly weakened parental authority, as many adolescents relied more on online influencers and peer groups for opinions about relationships, lifestyle choices, and moral decisions. The findings indicated that reduced face-to-face communication within families contributed to declining respect for cultural norms. The authors concluded that social media has become a competing agent of socialization. They recommended the introduction of family digital literacy workshops to help parents understand the online spaces their children occupy.

Achor and Nnaji's (2021) investigated Digital Distraction and Moral Conduct Among Youths in Delta and Rivers Communities, a cross-sectional survey of 400 young people was conducted using validated behavioural and moral reasoning scales. Results indicated that increased digital distraction manifesting in poor listening skills, impatience, and impulsive behaviour was associated with moral lapses such as dishonesty, disobedience, and aggressive online communication. The study concluded that digital engagement reduces reflective thinking, making youths more vulnerable to moral inconsistency. It recommended that schools integrate digital discipline modules into civic and moral education to reinforce responsible technology use.

Okeke and Danladi (2023) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study titled Changing Family Moral Structures in the Age of Social Media: Evidence from South-South Nigeria. The researchers followed 30 households over nine months, documenting shifts in parent-child relationships. The results showed that as youths spent more time engaging with TikTok and Instagram, their attachment to family authority figures weakened. Parents reported increased stubbornness, emotional withdrawal, and preference for online friendships. The study concluded that social media fosters a new value system that competes with indigenous expectations. It recommended that cultural and religious leaders collaborate to create value-based digital campaigns targeted at young users.

Adebayo and Omokaro (2019) carried out a study on Youth Moral Identity and Online Peer Influence in Emerging Nigerian Communities, using a correlational design with 287 participants between ages 14 and 24. The results demonstrated that online peer groups had a stronger influence on youths' moral identity than family teachings. Exposure to morally ambiguous online content predicted permissive attitudes toward sexuality, materialism, and disrespectful speech. The authors concluded that moral identity construction has shifted from family and community-based systems to digital ecosystems. They recommended stricter content regulation policies and the involvement of NGOs in youth moral mentorship programs.

Nwosu and Chukwuma (2024) conducted a study titled Social Media Algorithms and the Decline of Traditional Values among Adolescents, employed experimental research to examine how algorithm-curated content affects moral perspectives. Participants were exposed to different categories of social media feeds over a two-week period. Results showed that those exposed to

high-engagement, entertainment-focused algorithmic content displayed increased moral relativism and lower adherence to family-centred values. Conversely, those shown educational or culturally oriented content experienced no significant moral decline. The study concluded that algorithmic systems subtly shape moral viewpoints by prioritizing content that encourages instant gratification and emotional appeal. The authors recommended that families and policymakers advocate for algorithm transparency and promote digital literacy skills to help youths critically evaluate online.

### **Conclusion**

Social media continues to exert profound influence on family values and moral development among youths. By shaping identity, behavioral choices, ethical reasoning, and interpersonal relationships, digital platforms have become a dominant force in youth socialization often competing with or overshadowing the traditional family system. While social media offers opportunities for learning, empowerment, and community engagement, its unregulated influence exposes youths to conflicting moral messages that challenge the values historically upheld within the community. Studies indicate that moral reasoning among youths is becoming increasingly individualized, relativistic, and digitally driven. Traditional values such as respect, modesty, communal belonging, and obedience face erosion as youths embrace online cultures that prioritize autonomy, self-expression, and globalized identity formation. Nonetheless, with proper digital literacy, parental involvement, and value-based community interventions, social media can be harnessed in a way that supports rather than undermines family morals. Strengthening family communication, promoting responsible digital citizenship, and integrating cultural values into online engagement will be vital in safeguarding the moral future of youths.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents should become more intentional and involved in their children's moral upbringing by dedicating time for family bonding, open conversations, and spiritual guidance. Regular family devotion, moral storytelling, and value-based discussions should be revived and prioritized to rebuild trust and impart lasting values.
2. Religious institutions should expand their role beyond weekly worship to include parenting seminars, youth mentorship programs, and moral development workshops. Churches, mosques, and faith-based organizations should partner with families to equip them with tools for navigating digital influence while reinforcing moral teachings rooted in Christian values.
3. Parents and guardians should be trained in digital literacy to enable them monitor, guide, and engage their children meaningfully online. Community-based initiatives, schools, and churches should organize training sessions to educate parents on social media platforms, harmful online trends, and strategies for healthy digital engagement.
4. Schools should incorporate value-based education and character development into their curriculum. Teachers should be trained to work alongside parents to promote discipline, honesty, respect, and other moral virtues while addressing the moral challenges youth face in contemporary society.
5. Community elders and local leaders should revive traditional mentoring systems such as age-grade groups and cultural forums to create communal support for moral instruction. These systems can serve as platforms for intergenerational dialogue and the promotion of indigenous moral principles that complement modern realities.



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