GLOBALISATION, SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE DECLINE OF MORAL VALUES AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS: THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND FAMILY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract
Globalisation and social media have transformed the ways Nigerian youths acquire information, form identities, relate with peers and interpret moral standards. While digital platforms expand educational opportunity, civic participation and religious expression, they also expose young people to materialism, sexualised content, cybercrime, cyberbullying, peer pressure and culturally detached lifestyles. This paper examines the relationship among globalisation, social media use and the perceived decline of moral values among Nigerian youths. It argues that moral decline should not be reduced to technology alone; rather, it emerges from the interaction of digital globalisation, weak socialisation, economic hardship, peer influence and declining parental authority. Using social learning theory, ecological systems theory and moral development perspectives, the paper shows that religious education and family institutions remain decisive counterweights to negative digital influences. Religious education can cultivate conscience, self-discipline, empathy, honesty and responsibility, while families can provide supervision, modelling, communication and value reinforcement. The paper recommends digital literacy, collaborative home–school–religious institution partnerships, culturally grounded moral instruction, responsible content regulation and youth-centred mentoring. It concludes that Nigerian society should not merely condemn social media; it should deliberately equip young people to use it ethically.
Keywords: Globalisation, social media, moral values, Nigerian youths, moral development

Introduction

Nigeria's youth population is growing in a society that is simultaneously deeply religious, culturally diverse and digitally connected. Young Nigerians increasingly learn about fashion, relationships, religion, politics, business and sexuality through platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, YouTube and Telegram. These platforms connect them to global cultures, but they also expose them to values and behaviours that may conflict with indigenous Nigerian norms, religious teachings and family expectations.

Globalisation refers to the intensification of worldwide social, economic, cultural and political connections. Giddens (1990, p. 64) defines it as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa." In contemporary Nigeria, this process is strongly mediated by digital technology. Social media has therefore become one of the most powerful agents of socialisation, competing with parents, teachers and religious leaders in shaping youth conduct.

Concerns about moral decline among Nigerian youths are not new. However, the scale and speed of digital communication have intensified debates about whether young people are becoming less respectful, less honest, more materialistic, more sexually permissive and more vulnerable to deviant behaviour. Some scholars argue that "social media has contributed to moral decadence by normalising questionable lifestyles and weakening traditional values" (Ofoegbu, 2023, p. 251). Others caution that "social media is not inherently immoral; its effects depend on content, usage patterns, parental guidance, peer networks and institutional support" (Dango, 2021, p. 45).

This paper therefore examines the following questions:

1. How does globalisation influence the moral values of Nigerian youths?
2. In what ways does social media contribute to, or challenge, moral decline among Nigerian youths?
3. What roles can religious education and family institutions play in promoting moral values?
4. What strategies can strengthen youth moral formation in a digital society?

The central argument is that social media is a powerful amplifier of values rather than the sole cause of moral decline. Its effects depend on the quality of socialisation available to young people. Religious education and family institutions must therefore move from condemnation to active digital moral formation.

Conceptual Clarification

Globalisation

Globalisation describes the growing interconnectedness of societies through trade, migration, communication, technology, culture and ideas. Appadurai (1996, p. 33) explains that:

Global cultural flows are organised through "ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes," meaning that people, images, technologies, money and ideas move across borders in complex ways. For Nigerian youths, globalisation is experienced through foreign films, music, fashion, online trends, educational opportunities, religious content and digital activism.

Globalisation has positive dimensions. It expands access to knowledge, encourages entrepreneurship, supports intercultural understanding and creates opportunities for youth expression. Nevertheless, it can also produce cultural imperialism, where foreign values are presented as more modern, prestigious or desirable than local values. Asemah et al. (2013, p. 58) observe that "Nigeria's core values are being redefined in the context of new media and cultural globalisation, with young people increasingly valuing foreign culture over indigenous culture."

Social Media

Social media refers to internet-based platforms that allow users to create, share and interact with content. Examples include WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, X, Snapchat and Telegram. Social media differs from traditional media because it is interactive, participatory and user-generated. Young people are not merely consumers of information; they are also producers of content, influencers, commentators and members of digital communities.

Social media has become central to youth culture. Pew Research Center (2022a, p. 1) reports that:

YouTube was used by 95% of American teenagers surveyed, while 67% used TikTok, with 16% reporting almost constant use. Although these figures are from the United States, they illustrate the global popularity of digital platforms among adolescents. Nigerian youths, especially those in urban and semi-urban areas, similarly use social media for education, entertainment, business, religious activities, relationships and social identity.

Moral Values

Moral values are principles that guide human conduct and help individuals distinguish right from wrong. They include honesty, respect, humility, responsibility, self-control, compassion, justice, chastity, hard work, patriotism and respect for elders. In Nigerian societies, moral values are often rooted in communal living, religious belief, respect for elders and the African understanding of personhood.

Moral decline does not simply mean that young people behave differently from older generations. It refers to a perceived weakening of socially approved ethical standards, especially where such weakening produces dishonesty, disrespect, violence, sexual immorality, fraud, drug abuse, indiscipline or indifference to communal responsibility. However, moral judgement must be made carefully, because every generation tends to interpret the conduct of younger people through its own cultural assumptions.

Religious Education

Religious education is the deliberate teaching of religious beliefs, moral principles, spiritual practices and ethical conduct. In Nigeria, it occurs through homes, churches, mosques, schools, Sunday schools, Islamic schools, catechism classes, youth fellowships and religious media. Its purpose is not only to transmit doctrine but also to form character.

Religious education can help young people develop conscience, self-restraint, compassion, accountability and hope. It can also provide a moral framework for evaluating digital content. However, religious education becomes ineffective when it is reduced to condemnation, fear, hypocrisy or commercialisation without practical moral modelling.

Family Institutions

The family is the first and most enduring agent of socialisation. It includes parents, guardians, siblings, extended relatives and other caregivers who shape a child's earliest understanding of love, authority, responsibility and morality. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 22) describes the family as "a microsystem, meaning the immediate setting in which a child directly experiences relationships, rules and role models."

In the digital age, the family's role has become more complex. Parents may not fully understand the platforms their children use, while children may possess greater technical skills than their parents. This creates a digital generation gap. Nevertheless, families remain essential because they can provide affection, supervision, communication, discipline and moral example.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's social learning theory explains that people learn behaviour through observation, imitation and reinforcement. Bandura (1977, p. 22) states that "learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do." This insight is especially relevant to social media, where young people observe influencers, celebrities, peers and anonymous users.

When youths repeatedly see online content that rewards materialism, sexual display, fraud, violence or disrespect, they may begin to view such behaviour as normal or admirable. Conversely, when they observe credible role models demonstrating integrity, discipline, service and empathy, they may imitate those values. Social media therefore functions as a vast observational learning environment.

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explains that child development occurs within nested systems: the family, school, peer group, community, media and wider society. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 3) argues that "development is shaped by the progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human being and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment."

This theory is useful because it prevents simplistic blaming of social media. A young person's morality is shaped not only by TikTok or Instagram but also by parenting quality, school discipline, religious participation, poverty, unemployment, peer pressure and national leadership. A child may use social media responsibly in a supportive home but become vulnerable in an environment where parents are absent, religious institutions are inconsistent and peers reward deviance.

Moral Development Theory

Kohlberg's theory of moral development suggests that moral reasoning progresses from obedience and self-interest toward principled judgement. Kohlberg (1981, p. 17) explains that "moral development involves the development of structures of moral reasoning, rather than mere memorisation of rules. This perspective implies that youths should not only be told what is wrong; they should be helped to understand why ethical behaviour matters."

Religious education and family discipline can support moral reasoning by encouraging reflection, dialogue and accountability. For example, rather than merely saying online fraud is bad, parents and religious teachers can help youths examine the harm fraud causes to victims, families, national reputation and the offender's conscience.

Globalisation and the Transformation of Youth Values

Globalisation has altered the moral environment of Nigerian youths by increasing exposure to foreign lifestyles, consumer culture and digital identities. Traditional socialisation once occurred mainly within the family, village, school and religious community. Today, a teenager in Lagos, Abuja, Enugu, Kano or Port Harcourt can access global content within seconds.

This exposure can weaken cultural continuity. Asemah et al. (2013, p. 67) conclude that:

Globalisation and global culture is gradually eroding Nigeria's core values as people no longer have regards for their local culture; rather they value the foreign culture." This does not mean that all foreign influence is harmful. Globalisation has also brought positive values such as human rights awareness, gender equality debates, environmental consciousness, innovation and civic accountability.

The problem arises when foreign values are adopted uncritically. Some young people may associate Western dress, speech, sexual freedom, luxury consumption or online celebrity culture with success and modernity. In doing so, they may neglect values such as respect for elders, modesty, communal responsibility, patience and contentment.

Globalisation also promotes consumerism. Advertising, influencer marketing and celebrity culture often present wealth as the primary measure of personal worth. Youths who lack economic opportunities may become vulnerable to "get-rich-quick" mentalities, internet fraud, gambling, transactional relationships and materialistic competition. The moral danger is not poverty itself but the belief that wealth justifies dishonesty.

Furthermore, globalisation can weaken the authority of local institutions. When young people receive conflicting messages from parents, religious leaders, schools and online influencers, they may choose the message that offers immediate pleasure, status or financial reward. This makes moral formation more difficult for families and religious institutions.

Social Media as an Agent of Socialisation

Social media has become a major agent of socialisation because it shapes what youths see, admire, discuss and imitate. Unlike television or radio, social media is personalised. Algorithms recommend content based on previous engagement, meaning that a young person who watches materialistic, sexual or violent content may receive more of it.

Social media provides several benefits. It enables learning, creativity, entrepreneurship, religious outreach, political awareness and social connection. Pew Research Center (2022b, p. 1) found that 80% of teenagers said social media made them feel more connected to their friends' lives, while 71% said it gave them a place to show their creative side. These benefits also apply to Nigerian youths who use digital platforms for online learning, small businesses, ministry, activism and creative expression.

However, the same platforms can expose young people to harmful content. Ofoegbu (2023, p. 251) argues that "social media plays a role in eroding the value system of Nigerian youths by promoting content that conflicts with generally acceptable cultural values. The concern is not merely access to information but the normalisation of behaviours that were previously considered socially unacceptable."

Materialism and Status Competition

Social media often rewards visibility, luxury and performance. Young people may feel pressure to display expensive phones, clothes, travel, parties and relationships. This can create envy, low self-esteem, debt, fraud and unhealthy comparison.

The moral problem is that worth becomes measured by appearance rather than character. A youth may conclude that being respected requires looking rich, even when the means of appearing rich are dishonest. Religious education can counter this by teaching contentment, stewardship and the dignity of honest work.

Sexualisation and Relationship Norms

Sexualised content, explicit conversations, online dating culture and viral relationship trends can influence youths' understanding of love, intimacy and marriage. Some online content presents casual sex, transactional relationships and public display of private matters as normal.

This does not mean that every young person who uses social media becomes morally loose. Many youths use digital platforms responsibly. However, unsupervised exposure can weaken sexual restraint, especially where parents avoid discussing sexuality and religious institutions focus only on condemnation rather than guidance.

Cyberbullying and Online Aggression

Social media can encourage insults, mockery, blackmail, sexual harassment and public shaming. The anonymity and distance of online communication may reduce empathy. Pew Research Center (2022c, p. 1) reports that "46% of American teenagers had experienced at least one form of cyberbullying, while 53% described online harassment as a major problem for people their age."

In Nigeria, online aggression may take the form of ethnic insults, religious intolerance, body shaming, sextortion, impersonation and character assassination. These behaviours contradict values of respect, dignity and compassion.

Fraud, Impersonation and Cybercrime

Internet fraud, commonly called "yahoo yahoo" in Nigerian popular discourse, has become a major moral concern. Some youths rationalise fraud as a response to unemployment, poverty or the display of wealth by successful fraudsters online. Social media can make fraudulent lifestyles appear glamorous through cars, fashion, parties and financial display.

This is a serious challenge for moral education. Youths need to understand that digital skills are morally neutral; they can be used for innovation or exploitation. Religious education should teach that wealth obtained through deception damages both the victim and the offender's soul.

Misinformation and Moral Confusion

Social media spreads rumours, conspiracy theories, fake religious messages and misleading lifestyle content. Youths may lack the skills to verify information. This can promote intolerance, panic, hatred and poor decision-making.

Digital literacy is therefore a moral issue. A morally educated youth should ask: Who posted this? What evidence supports it? Who benefits from it? Does it promote dignity, truth and peace?

Evidence of Moral Decline among Nigerian Youths

Several Nigerian studies suggest a relationship between social media use, peer pressure and moral decline. A study of youths in Osun State found that "excessive social media usage and peer influence were significantly associated with declining moral standards" (Adeoye et al., 2024, p. 8). The authors reported a strong correlation between these variables and concluded that social media and peer pressure contribute to moral decadence among Nigerian youths.

Similarly, Dango (2021, p. 43) found that "social media is popular among Nigerian youths and contributes to moral decadence in Nigerian society. The study recommended that religious and educational institutions should use religious leaders and teachers to guide youths toward righteous conduct."

However, moral decline cannot be attributed to social media alone. Economic hardship, unemployment, corruption, weak law enforcement, family breakdown, poor parenting and negative peer groups also contribute. A young person may spend hours online because of loneliness, lack of supervision or absence of constructive opportunities. In such cases, social media becomes a symptom of wider social problems rather than their only cause.

Ofoegbu (2023, p. 258) recommends "content regulation based on generally acceptable cultural values, but regulation alone cannot replace moral formation. Youths must internalise values; otherwise, they may evade restrictions or seek harmful content elsewhere."

The Decline of Family Authority

The family remains the primary institution for moral formation, but its authority is under pressure. Urbanisation, long working hours, economic stress, separation, divorce, migration and single parenthood can reduce parental supervision. Some parents are physically present but emotionally absent, while others delegate moral training entirely to schools, religious bodies or smartphones.

"A Nigerian study on moral decadence and parental authority notes that the advent of the internet exposed young people to cultures in direct contrast to traditional African values" (Ojo et al., 2023, p. 12). This suggests that parental authority must adapt to digital realities rather than simply rely on old methods of control.

Modern parenting requires digital awareness. Parents should know the platforms their children use, the people they interact with and the content they consume. They should also create safe spaces for conversation. When children fear harsh punishment, they may hide online activities rather than seek guidance.

Family moral formation should include:

- Regular communication about online experiences.
- Clear but reasonable rules on screen time and content.
- Joint use of technology where appropriate.
- Modelling respectful speech, honesty and self-control.
- Affirmation of children's talents and achievements.
- Teaching financial responsibility and contentment.
- Encouraging participation in religious and community activities.

The Role of Religious Education

Religious education can serve as a powerful moral compass in the digital age. Nigeria is highly religious, with Christianity and Islam playing major roles in public and private life. Religious institutions have access to youths through worship services, youth fellowships, Sunday schools, Madrasahs, campus fellowships, retreats and social media ministries.

Religious education should not merely warn youths against sin. It should equip them with positive identity, purpose and practical ethical reasoning. Dango (2021, p. 47) observes that religious and educational institutions can train youths in morally right ways through religious leaders and school teachers who guide and direct them.

Teaching Conscience and Accountability

Religious education can help youths develop conscience: the inner capacity to evaluate actions before performing them. Teachings on honesty, justice, sexual purity, humility, service and respect for human dignity can help young people resist harmful online pressures.

For example, a Christian religious education programme may teach that the body deserves respect and that sexual immorality harms spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing. An Islamic programme may emphasise modesty, truthfulness, lawful earnings, prayer and avoidance of suspicion. Both traditions can teach that digital visibility does not remove moral accountability.

Promoting Digital Ethics

Religious education should address online conduct directly. Youths should be taught that cyberbullying, sexting, fraud, fake news, revenge pornography, hate speech and online sexual exploitation are moral and spiritual issues, not merely technological problems.

Religious teachers can use real-life cases, scripture, Hadith, moral storytelling and group discussion. The goal is to help youths apply religious values to digital life. For instance, a lesson on truthfulness can examine fake news; a lesson on modesty can examine sexualised content; a lesson on justice can examine online harassment.

Building Positive Identity

Many youths seek validation through likes, followers and viral attention. Religious education can offer a deeper identity rooted in faith, character and service. When young people understand themselves as morally responsible persons created for purpose, they may become less dependent on online approval.

Religious institutions should also avoid hypocrisy. When religious leaders engage in corruption, sexual misconduct, materialism or online controversy, they weaken their moral authority. Youths are more likely to embrace religious values when they see adults living consistently.

The Complementary Roles of Family and Religious Institutions

Family and religious institutions should not work in isolation. The family provides daily modelling and emotional security, while religious education provides doctrinal grounding and moral community. Schools, meanwhile, can reinforce both through civic education, guidance and counselling.

A collaborative model is necessary. Parents should communicate with religious leaders and teachers about the challenges youths face. Religious institutions should organise digital parenting seminars, youth mentorship programmes and media literacy workshops. Schools should include digital citizenship and moral education in their curriculum.

Such collaboration recognises that moral formation is a shared responsibility. No single institution can counterbalance the influence of global digital culture alone.

Recommendations

- **Strengthen Family-Based Moral Socialisation**
  Parents and guardians should spend quality time with children, discuss online experiences and model the values they expect. Discipline should be firm but loving, and communication should be open rather than fear-based.
- **Integrate Digital Literacy into Religious Education**
  Religious institutions should teach youths how to evaluate online content, protect their privacy, avoid cybercrime and respond to online pressure. Digital ethics should be treated as part of moral education.
- **Promote Culturally Grounded Moral Education**
  Schools and religious bodies should connect moral teaching with Nigerian cultural values such as respect, communal responsibility, honesty, hard work and dignity. Indigenous proverbs, stories and ethical traditions can make moral instruction more relatable.
- **Encourage Responsible Content Creation**
  Youths should be encouraged to create positive content on education, entrepreneurship, mental health, faith, culture and community service. Religious organisations and schools can train young content creators to use digital platforms for social good.
- **Support Youth Employment and Mentorship**
  Moral education must address the material conditions that make fraud and materialism attractive. Government, religious bodies, schools and private organisations should support skills acquisition, entrepreneurship, internships and mentoring.
- **Encourage Ethical Media Regulation**
  Regulators, platforms, parents and educators should promote age-appropriate content protection, reporting mechanisms and digital safety. However, regulation should respect freedom of expression and avoid censorship that prevents constructive youth engagement.
- **Build Home–School–Religious Institution Partnerships**
  Regular dialogue among parents, teachers, counsellors and religious leaders can help identify youths at risk and provide coordinated support.

Conclusion

Globalisation and social media have reshaped the moral world of Nigerian youths. They have created opportunities for learning, creativity, connection and religious expression, but they have also intensified exposure to materialism, sexualisation, cybercrime, cyberbullying and cultural displacement. The decline of moral values among Nigerian youths is therefore not caused by social media alone; it reflects the interaction between digital globalisation, peer influence, economic pressure, weak supervision and changing family structures.

Religious education and family institutions remain indispensable. Families provide the first moral environment, while religious education offers spiritual grounding, conscience formation and ethical community. Together, they can help Nigerian youths navigate digital culture with wisdom, self-control and responsibility. The goal should not be to isolate young people from globalisation but to prepare them to engage with it critically, ethically and confidently.

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