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ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON YOUTH IN MAKURDI DIOCESE

Terfa Kahaga Anjov [1] & **Rita Onyimowo Adejo** [2]
Department of Philosophy, Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi [1]
Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi [2]
Corresponding Email: anjovterfa@gmail.com [1]

Abstract
This study examined the role and impact of social media on youths in the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, Nigeria, within the broader context of moral, spiritual, familial, educational, and ecclesial formation. Data was obtained from books, scholarly journals, Church documents, and credible online sources. The study adopted the analytical, evaluative, and expository methods in investigating the phenomenon. The analytical method deconstructed social media use among youths across key contexts such as the family, schools, Church, and peer relationships; the evaluative method assessed both the positive contributions and negative consequences of digital engagement on moral and spiritual development; while the expository method clarified key concepts, theological principles, and ecclesial teachings that framed the discussion. Findings revealed that social media serves as both a constructive and disruptive force in youth formation. On the positive side, it enhances communication, learning, evangelization, and social participation, particularly when guided by ecclesial and institutional structures. However, it simultaneously exposes youths to risks such as moral relativism, cyberbullying, misinformation, addiction, academic distraction, and weakened spiritual discipline. These challenges often shift attention away from core Christian practices such as prayer, sacramental life, and virtuous living. The study recommends a coordinated response involving the Church, families, and schools, alongside robust digital literacy education, to ensure that youths engage social media responsibly. Properly guided, social media could become a tool that supports rather than undermines the moral and spiritual development of youths in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Makurdi. The study concludes that

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social media while an unavoidable feature of contemporary life, requires structured moral guidance and intentional formation.

Keywords: Roman Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, Social Media Use, Christian Practices, Youth.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped communication, identity formation, and social behaviour, particularly among young people. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube now occupy a central place in daily life, exposing youths to value systems and cultural influences that do not always align with Catholic moral teaching or the communal ethos of the church. Within the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, where the Church remains actively committed to the spiritual and moral formation of young people, this digital reality presents both opportunities and serious challenges. On one hand, social media has enabled Catholic youths to access religious content, participate in online prayer, and engage with their faith communities beyond physical boundaries. The Church itself has increasingly embraced digital platforms for evangelisation and pastoral outreach. On the other hand, regular exposure to indecent content, materialism, online hostility, and distorted standards of success can gradually erode moral consciousness. The desire for online validation often displaces personal integrity and genuine moral responsibility. Compounding these concerns is the limited supervisory capacity of parents, educators, and pastoral leaders in digital spaces. This study therefore examines the implications of social media on youth moral formation within the Diocese of Makurdi, exploring both its constructive potential and its harmful dimensions.

The Church as a Moral Teacher in the Digital Age

The Catholic Church regards itself as the moral teacher of the faithful in all cultural contexts, including the digital age. According to the Decree on the Means of Social Communication, the Church emphasizes that communication is a moral activity, and that Christians must evaluate media content in light of moral principles (*Pontifical Council for Social Communications,* 12). Social media, in particular, plays a central role in shaping youth values, attitudes, and behavior, which makes the Church's guidance crucial in forming a morally responsible digital culture. The Church's role is therefore proactive: it teaches ethical discernment, models moral communication, and fosters the cultivation of virtues among youths, helping them navigate the moral complexities of digital interactions (Mirus 45). By offering moral guidance, the Church does not merely condemn harmful media practices but provides a framework for integrating digital technology into ethical and spiritually edifying experiences. According to the *Pontifical Council for Social Communications,* the Church's mission includes equipping youths to use media to build community, pursue truth, and foster charity, emphasising the need for moral reflection in online behavior (18). In Makurdi Diocese, where youths are avid social media users, the Church must combine doctrinal instruction with media literacy programs, helping young people evaluate digital content critically while forming them in the values of honesty, respect, and human dignity (Obogo Michael, Oral interview).

Catholic Teaching on Communication and Moral Life

Catholic social doctrine frames communication as a central aspect of human development and moral life. The Church teaches that communication should promote truth, human dignity, and the common good. Ethics in Communications notes that media should contribute to the spiritual, moral, and social formation of individuals, emphasising

responsible engagement and ethical discernment (*Pontifical Council for Social Communications,* 15). The moral principles of the Church guide not only what is communicated but also the manner in which communication occurs, fostering respect for persons and fostering virtuous behavior in public discourse. The Church also recognizes the potential of social media to both harm and benefit youth moral development. For instance, misinformation, cyberbullying, and morally questionable content can negatively shape youth values, while platforms can also foster learning, solidarity, and evangelization (*Pontifical Council for Social Communications,* 20). This dual nature underscores the importance of the Church's moral guidance: it must educate youth to discern content ethically, avoid harmful interactions, and engage positively in online spaces (Mirus 55).

Youth Formation and Evangelization through Social Media

The Church advocates using social media as a tool for evangelisation and youth formation. Vatican documents encourage Catholics to adopt digital media as instruments for spreading the Gospel while upholding moral principles (*Pontifical Council for Social Communications,* 22). The pastoral letter Towards Full Presence emphasizes that social media is integral to youth identity and interaction, highlighting the need for intentional engagement that reflects Christian values (*Holy See Press,* Office 3). According to Clementina Phillip, in Makurdi Diocese, this approach implies creating content that educates and inspires youth, including faith-based discussion groups, online catechesis, live-streamed liturgies, and social media campaigns promoting virtues such as honesty, solidarity, and charity (Oral interview). Zoho Msughter also aligns with the view that such programs ensure that social media becomes a platform for evangelization, moral reflection, and community engagement, rather than solely a space for entertainment or potentially harmful interactions (Oral Interview).

The Duty of the Diocese in Guiding Responsible Media Use

The Diocese has a pastoral responsibility to form young Catholics in ethical social media use. This includes teaching digital literacy, critical thinking, and discernment skills, ensuring that youths understand both the benefits and potential dangers of online interactions (Pontifical Council for Social Communications 28). Catechists, priests, and parents must actively accompany youth, providing moral guidance and mentorship in navigating social media spaces. The pastoral instruction Aetatis Novae (New Age – often used to mark the start of a new era or period) emphasises that moral formation in communication should be integrated into catechesis and youth ministry programs, ensuring that media engagement aligns with Christian virtues (*Pontifical Council for Social Communications,* 33). Omlenyi Douglas insists that implementing these strategies, Makurdi Diocese can guide youth to use social media responsibly, fostering digital communities that promote human dignity, moral integrity, and Christian witness in the online world (Oral interview).

Pastoral Counselling of the Youth in the Digital Era

Ashine David opined that the digital age has simultaneously expanded communicative possibilities and generated profound moral and psychological challenges for young people (Oral Interview). Within the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, pastoral counselling emerges as an indispensable ecclesial response, enabling youths to navigate digital culture in ways that consolidate rather than compromise their moral formation (Ortese Joseph, Oral interview). Grounded in Scripture, Church teaching, and the lived experience of the faithful, pastoral counselling in the Catholic tradition offers an integrated framework of spiritual, moral, and psychological support (Anthony Agbo Ekwote, Oral interview). As the United States

Conference of Catholic Bishops affirms, pastoral counselling "draws upon theological insights, spiritual practices, and clinical skills to address human needs in a holistic manner" (USCCB 2), rendering it particularly suited to youths whose moral consciousness is simultaneously shaped by online and offline environments. In the Makurdi diocesan context, where many young people report experiences of moral confusion, digital overwhelm, and identity instability, pastoral counselling provides a structured space for developing coherent moral selfhood anchored in Christian virtue (Ashwe Emmanuel, Oral interview). The formation of conscience, which the Church's Catechism identifies as "the most sacred core and sanctuary of a person" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1778), demands attentive and sustained guidance, especially where secular digital values conflict with Catholic moral teaching. Empirical research further substantiates these concerns, as studies demonstrate that excessive social media engagement correlates significantly with anxiety, compulsive comparison, and a diminished capacity for moral reflection (Odgers and Jensen 1025). Pastoral counselling addresses these vulnerabilities holistically, assisting youths in cultivating self-discipline, clarifying purpose, and redirecting digital behaviour toward morally constructive ends.

Magisterial teaching reinforces this pastoral imperative. Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation Christus Vivit, cautions that the digital communications environment "can deepen the beauty of fraternity and mutual assistance, or it can disintegrate relationships" (Francis 45). This insight becomes operative in counselling practice, as pastoral guides assist youths in critically discerning which digital interactions cultivate virtue and which occasion vice. Practical interventions such as structured prayer, and reflective examination of conscience — disciplines with deep biblical resonance (cf. Isa. 58:6) — serve as concrete instruments for restoring moral equilibrium and resisting compulsive digital engagement. Responsibility for pastoral counselling within the Diocese extends beyond ordained ministers to encompass catechists, youth workers, and trained lay pastoral agents. The Directory for Catechesis mandates that catechesis be "inculturated, dialogical and capable of guiding believers to make moral decisions … even in new spheres such as social communications" (*Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization* 128). Correspondingly, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications has called for the systematic formation of pastoral agents in media literacy and ethical guidance (*Pontifical Council for Social Communications* 30), ensuring that counsellors adopt a proactive rather than merely reactive posture toward digital moral challenges. Pastoral counselling frequently takes the form of spiritual direction, a ministry that, as the Directory on Spirituality notes, "promotes moral growth by helping persons respond to God's call in the depths of their hearts" (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 112). When addressing experiences of cyberbullying, online harassment, or the corrosive pursuit of digital validation, pastoral counsellors ground their intervention in the theological affirmation that authentic self-worth derives from one's dignity as a child of God rather than from social media metrics. Church teaching, moreover, does not exclude psychological insight but integrates it within a holistic anthropology (USCCB 5), enabling pastoral counsellors to collaborate with mental health professionals where clinical need arises. Through this integration of spiritual, moral, and psychological formation, pastoral counselling remains an urgent and foundational ministry of the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi in the digital age.

Social Media Impact on Youth in the Family

The family has been recognized universally and across traditions as the foundational context for moral formation. In Catholic theology, the family is described as the "domestic church"

(Ecclesia Domestica), wherein parents are the first educators of their children not only in faith but also in moral reasoning and virtuous living (Familiaris Consortio 36). This role persists in the digital age, but the context in which moral formation occurs has changed dramatically with the advent of social media. Social media introduces a parallel moral ecology that interacts with family dynamics. Whereas traditional moral formation involved direct parental modeling, communal sanctions, and embedded cultural norms, young people now receive continuous input from online environments, peer networks, and influencers whose values may contradict those of the family. According to Partridge et al., digital spaces often serve as moral reference points for adolescents, influencing their perceptions of identity, relationships, and ethical conduct (Partridge et al. 275). Therefore, the family's role becomes more complex: it must now not only transmit moral values but also help youth critically engage with digital inputs in light of these values.

Effect of Social Media on Family Relationships

Social media has fundamentally restructured patterns of family interaction, frequently undermining the relational conditions essential to moral formation. Where shared conversation, communal rituals, and collective activity once constituted the primary medium of moral instruction within the household, digital absorption now threatens to sever these formative connections. Turkle captures this paradox precisely, observing that digital devices render individuals "alone together" — physically proximate yet emotionally and morally disengaged (Turkle 62). This condition erodes the interpersonal environment within which virtuous habits are traditionally cultivated and transmitted across generations. The intrusion of social media into domestic life further destabilises familial authority and trust. Digital conflicts surrounding screen time, online relationships, and content consumption have supplanted older disciplinary tensions, generating new fault lines within parent-child relationships (Ashine David, Oral interview). Valkenburg and Peter demonstrate that online communication systematically increases opportunities for secrecy and unsupervised exploration, progressively undermining familial norms and mutual accountability (Valkenburg and Peter 502-03). When moral instruction is consistently displaced by unmediated digital engagement, the family's capacity to nurture coherent ethical dispositions is correspondingly diminished.

Catholic teaching responds to this challenge by affirming that parents bear both the right and the solemn duty to form their children in moral discernment, including responsible navigation of contemporary cultural influences (*Gravissimum Educationis* 3). In the digital age, this obligation necessarily encompasses deliberate guidance on social media use. Ortese Joseph, discussing on family media regulation distinguishes between restrictive mediation, which limits access and duration, and active mediation, which engages youth through dialogue and collaborative content evaluation (Oral interview). This collaborates the thoughts of Nathanson who says active mediation has demonstrated significantly greater efficacy in fostering moral reasoning and critical awareness among adolescents (231), and aligns naturally with Catholic moral pedagogy's emphasis on reflective dialogue and the integration of faith with lived experience. In Makurdi Diocese, parental responsibility extends to modelling responsible technology use, addressing ethical dilemmas encountered online, including misinformation, cyberbullying, and sexting and establishing collaborative household norms for digital conduct (Egemba Gabriel, Oral interview). Such intentional engagement reinforces familial moral authority and assists youths in internalising values rather than merely complying with external regulation. A deeper structural tension emerges, however, from digital culture's function as a rival value system. Where family and Christian

formation emphasise relational integrity, self-restraint, and communal responsibility, digital culture privileges immediacy, individual gratification, and social validation. Adolescents highly engaged with social media demonstrate a measurable tendency to prioritise social acceptance over moral commitment (Rosen et al. 46), generating identity incoherence between online belonging and offline virtue. Pope Francis accordingly affirms that authentic moral formation demands integrating digital engagement with spiritual roots that uphold human dignity and communal love (Christus Vivit 155). The family, strengthened through intentional media literacy and consistent moral witness, remains irreplaceable in equipping youths to navigate digital life with integrity (Zoho Msughter, Oral interview).

Social Media Impact on Youth in Schools

It unarguable that social media has become an inextricable feature of the educational experience for secondary and tertiary students, reshaping not only communicative behaviour but also the moral and attitudinal frameworks within which young people operate. Rosen et al. establish that platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp function as powerful agents of socialisation, exerting measurable influence over students' norms, values, and behavioural expectations (42). For school-going youths, digital media increasingly constitutes the primary environment in which peer values are reinforced and identity formation unfolds. Adolescents demonstrate particular susceptibility to internalising behaviours encountered online, encompassing language patterns, modes of social interaction, and moral attitudes (Partridge et al. 273). Yaakugh Nancy points that in the absence of deliberate countervailing guidance, social media's influence can subtly but persistently reorient student behaviour toward norms that conflict with those upheld by educational institutions and families alike (Oral interview). This influence extends well beyond patterns of communication into the domain of moral reasoning and ethical conduct (Esther Onoja, Oral interview). Digital environments routinely normalise behaviours such as gossip, dehumanising humour, and superficial self-presentation, tendencies that migrate into school culture and erode foundational values of respect, empathy, and integrity (Omlenyi Douglas, Oral interview). Social psychologists have demonstrated that repeated exposure to morally problematic online behaviour, unmediated by critical ethical frameworks, renders such behaviour progressively normalised and less susceptible to moral scrutiny (Odgers and Jensen 1027). While digital media retains the capacity to expand social awareness, it simultaneously threatens to reshape institutional culture in ways inimical to moral and educational formation unless deliberately countered.

Among the most educationally consequential effects of social media is its propensity to generate academic distraction. Empirical studies consistently confirm that frequent engagement with social networking sites is associated with diminished academic performance and impaired capacity for sustained intellectual attention (Junco 89). Students who habitually consult social media during study periods experience fragmented concentration, reduced comprehension, and weakened information retention, a phenomena that cognitive scientists attribute to media multitasking, wherein divided attention produces cognitive overload and significantly reduced learning efficiency (Ophir et al. 521). Rosen et al. further reveal that approximately eighty percent of adolescents report using social media concurrently with homework, resulting in delayed task completion and deteriorating academic quality (44). From a Christian ethical perspective, such patterns reflect a fundamental misalignment between the responsible stewardship of intellectual gifts and the habitual prioritisation of digital gratification over disciplined moral and academic effort. The amplification of peer pressure through digital networks constitutes an equally significant

moral challenge within the school context. Unlike traditional peer influence, which is bounded by physical proximity and temporal limits, digital peer pressure operates continuously and across all social contexts. Adolescent online conduct frequently mirrors prevailing group norms, even when those norms directly contravene school expectations or religious moral teaching (Valkenburg and Peter 1171). The perceived anonymity of online interaction further emboldens behaviours that students would typically suppress in face-to-face settings, including the sharing of inappropriate content and participation in cyberbullying. The latter has emerged as a particularly pervasive institutional concern, producing documented psychological distress, reduced academic engagement, and a deteriorating moral climate within school communities (Hinduja and Patchin 104). The digital amplification of peer influence thus compromises students' capacity for moral discernment, particularly when harmful behaviours attract online affirmation and social reward.

In response to these obviously multidimensional challenges, the formative responsibility of teachers assumes renewed urgency (Ogbaji Catherine, Oral interview). Educators function as indispensable agents of ethical socialisation, charged not only with the transmission of academic knowledge but with the deliberate cultivation of virtues such as honesty, self-discipline, respect, and responsibility that provide moral counterweight to the more corrosive norms circulating in digital culture (Rose Ama, Oral interview). The Second Vatican Council's Gravissimum Educationis affirms the educator's obligation to guide students toward the integral development of the whole person, fostering moral as well as intellectual formation in a manner consonant with human dignity (Gravissimum Educationis 8). Egemba Gabriel insists that teachers can concretely discharge this responsibility by integrating digital literacy into moral education, employing real-world online scenarios as pedagogical case studies that cultivate critical thinking and ethical reasoning, and modelling in their own professional conduct the virtues of fairness, integrity, and compassionate accountability (Oral interview). He adds that teacher-student relationship itself constitutes a living counter-witness to the impersonal and often deceptive relational dynamics that characterise digital platforms (Oral interview). Obogo Michael agrees that when educators embody moral seriousness and intellectual honesty, they provide youths with credible exemplars of the virtuous life that neither the digital environment nor secular culture consistently supplies (Oral interview). In this way, the school, in genuine partnership with the Church and family, remains a foundational institution for equipping young people to engage the digital world with wisdom, discernment, and moral integrity.

Social Media and Youth Life in the Church

Social media has emerged as a transformative force in the religious lives of young people, reshaping the conditions under which faith is encountered, expressed, and sustained. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube now function as digital arenas of spiritual interaction, communal identity, and theological engagement. Research demonstrates that active participation in social media rather than passive digital presence which is meaningfully associated with identity exploration, including how youths situate themselves within spiritual communities and religious value systems (Avci, Baams, and Kretschmer 230). This dynamic has generated new ecclesial possibilities while simultaneously introducing challenges that the Church must engage with pastoral seriousness and theological clarity. Within Christian ecclesial life, social media has expanded the boundaries of religious participation well beyond physical attendance. Digital platforms have become strategic channels through which faith content is disseminated, theological discourse is sustained, and youth connection to church life is reinforced (Bocala-Wiedemann

19-34). Youth ministries increasingly produce devotional videos, livestreamed worship services, and interactive discussion forums, enabling young believers who are geographically or socially distanced from regular church activities to maintain spiritual engagement and a sense of religious belonging. When paired with intentional content and sound pastoral oversight, such digital participation can meaningfully extend the formative reach of the Church into the everyday lives of young people. Nevertheless, this transformation of religious participation raises substantive questions concerning the depth and quality of spiritual experience it sustains. Sociological analysis by Uecker and McClure reveals that increased screen time and social media engagement can compete directly with private religious practices, most notably scripture reading for adolescents' time and attention, with particularly pronounced effects among youth from highly religious households (Uecker and McClure 250-73). While social media may enhance religious accessibility, it can simultaneously erode the disciplined personal devotion that undergirds genuine spiritual formation.

Social media also presents considerable potential as an instrument of evangelisation when deployed with intentionality and cultural awareness. Digital content enables Gospel messaging to reach youths who remain disengaged from formal religious instruction, presenting faith in formats that are relatable, interactive, and attuned to contemporary communicative preferences. Bocala-Wiedemann underscores that when church ministries develop authentic and dialogical content responsive to youth sensibilities, evangelistic engagement becomes substantially more effective (Bocala-Wiedemann 22). By framing spiritual reflection within the relational contexts of everyday digital communication, ministries can integrate faith formation into the social media habits already shaping youth culture. Yet the same environment that enables evangelisation also introduces formidable threats to moral and spiritual integrity. The pervasive emphasis on self-presentation, social comparison, and online validation inherent in digital culture has been linked to identity distress and confusion with direct implications for spiritual development (Avci et al. 225-36). The disciplines of sustained prayer, sacramental participation, and moral repentance are increasingly overshadowed by the pursuit of digital affirmation. Uecker and McClure further demonstrate that social media's erosion of private religious practice, particularly reflective scripture engagement that progressively weakens the contemplative foundations essential to Christian discipleship (250-73). Algorithmic systems compound this challenge by amplifying spiritually shallow content at the expense of substantive theological formation.

In response, the Church must adapt its pastoral strategies with both urgency and coherence. Youth ministry within the Nigerian society shows that without deliberate integration of digital communication strategies, ecclesial institutions risk diminishing relevance among young people whose social worlds are substantially mediated online (Ononogbu and Chiroma 48-54). Effective pastoral response requires training clergy and youth leaders in digital literacy, producing theologically grounded content that addresses genuine youth concerns, and establishing structured online spaces for prayer and moral reflection anchored in Church teaching (Odey Joseph Bisong, Oral interview). Sustained collaboration with families and schools remains equally indispensable, ensuring that critical engagement with social media is consistently reinforced across the formative environments that shape the moral and spiritual lives of young Catholics.

Social Media Influence on Youth Relationships among Themselves

Social media has fundamentally transformed the architecture of peer relationships among young people, extending the reach and intensity of peer influence from physical into virtual

spaces with profound consequences for moral formation, identity development, and relational health (Christiana Shang, Oral interview). In digital environments, peer interactions are characterised by immediacy, broad visibility, and public accountability, generating socialisation dynamics and conformity pressures that decisively shape how youths perceive social norms and regulate their behaviour. Crucially, digital peer influence is not a mere replication of offline dynamics but is systematically amplified by platform mechanisms as likes, shares, and comments that function as quantifiable instruments of social validation. Research confirms that young users, particularly those between thirteen and seventeen years of age, frequently feel compelled to post and conform in ways calculated to attract positive feedback and social reinforcement (Peer Pressure 1-2). This environment accelerates social learning, as youths observe and emulate behaviours deemed desirable within their online networks, whether constructive or morally problematic. Peer comparison on social platforms further intensifies conformist behaviour as adolescents strive to align their self-presentation with perceived norms of acceptance and popularity (Kolotouchkina et al. 240-41). While social media retains the capacity to facilitate collaborative learning, emotional support, and collective advocacy, it simultaneously intensifies social comparison and amplifies anxiety. Young people who measure their worth against curated online personas experience pressure to adopt group norms that compromise authentic selfhood and diminish critical moral reflection. Digital peer influence shapes linguistic norms, attitudes toward relationships, and the interpretation of social conflict and support, with online peer responses becoming significant determinants of youths' interpersonal conduct both online and offline (Ebube and Ma'rof 23-24).

The digital environment also functions simultaneously as a stage and mirror for adolescent identity formation. Research indicates that the quality of social media engagement particularly the posting of idealised content and habitual peer comparison is more closely associated with identity distress and self-concept instability than the sheer quantity of time spent online (Systematic Review 4-5). Authentic self-presentation, wherein users share content genuinely reflective of personal values, is associated with greater self-concept clarity, whereas contrived or idealised self-presentations generate internal conflict and social anxiety (Systematic Review 7-8). For youths whose offline social environments are unsatisfying, digital spaces may offer alternative avenues for connection; however, this pursuit of online belonging can simultaneously reinforce unrealistic social standards, exacerbate social comparison, and intensify fear of missing out, all of which distort personal identity development and undermine authentic self-worth. Cyberbullying represents one of the most acute negative consequences of social media for adolescent relational health. Its capacity for harm exceeds that of conventional bullying by virtue of its pervasive reach, perpetrator anonymity, and continuous accessibility (Cyberbullying 1-3). Research conducted in the Nigerian context documents its significant prevalence and its attendant emotional and psychological consequences for victims, including anxiety, social withdrawal, and disrupted peer relationships (Akeusola 1-2). Beyond cyberbullying, persistent exposure to sexualised imagery, violent content, and hostile online interactions distorts adolescents' perceptions of normative behaviour and impedes healthy relational formation, with documented correlations between such exposure and adverse emotional outcomes (Surgeon General's Advisory 20-22). Regardless, social media retains genuine potential for fostering responsible digital friendships when youths are equipped with adequate digital literacy and ethical engagement frameworks. Responsible online relationships, grounded in mutual respect, empathetic communication, and awareness of digital boundaries, are cultivable through

deliberate formation by parents and educators. Training in digital etiquette, critical content evaluation, and constructive conflict navigation strengthens relational skills and moral discernment, enabling youths to transfer healthy communicative patterns across physical and digital contexts and to forge friendships characterised by authenticity and mutual regard rather than performative validation.

Recommendations

i. The Catholic Diocese of Makurdi should integrate digital literacy and responsible social media use into its existing youth ministry programmes and catechetical instruction. By grounding online engagement in Catholic moral principles particularly the Catechism's insistence that communication uphold truth and human dignity, the Church can equip young people to critically evaluate digital content and align their online behaviour with faith-based values.
ii. Families must assume an active and informed role in supervising the digital lives of young people. Parents should engage in open dialogue with their children about online experiences, establish boundaries around social media use, and interpret digital encounters through the lens of moral accountability. Parental involvement remains one of the most effective safeguards against the harmful influences that unregulated social media exposure can introduce into the lives of developing youths.
iii. Schools within the Diocese should incorporate digital citizenship education into their curricula, teaching youths about ethical online conduct, privacy protection, critical content evaluation, and respectful engagement. When schools reinforce the same moral expectations promoted by the Church and family, consistent cross-institutional messaging is created, significantly strengthening young people's capacity to navigate the digital environment with responsibility and ethical awareness.
iv. A coordinated tripartite partnership among the Church, family, and school should be formally established to develop unified strategies for youth moral formation in the digital age. Community workshops, mentorship programmes, and collaborative advocacy initiatives can channel young people's digital energy toward constructive outcomes such as peacebuilding, civic participation, and faith-based dialogue, transforming social media from a moral hazard into a platform for positive community engagement.

Conclusion

The influence of social media on youths within the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi reflects a complex and contested terrain, simultaneously presenting constructive possibilities and considerable moral liabilities. Digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram have expanded the boundaries of communication, learning, and faith-based participation, enabling young Catholics to engage with their religious and civic communities in ways that transcend geographical constraints. When appropriately mediated by ecclesial and formative institutions, these technologies demonstrably support holistic youth development. Nevertheless, persistent exposure to morally compromising content, cyberbullying, misinformation, and the psychosocial pressures of digital validation constitutes a substantive threat to the spiritual integrity and moral formation of young people, progressively displacing sacramental practice and ethical discipline. Consequently, an integrated and intentional response from the Church, family, and educational institutions is imperative. Prioritising digital literacy alongside doctrinal formation remains essential if social media is

to serve as an instrument of moral and spiritual enrichment rather than an agent of moral erosion.

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LIST OF INFORMANT./RESPONDENTS

S/N	NAME	AGE	SEX	OCCUPATION	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE OF INTERVIEW
1.	Obogo Michael	19	M	Student	St. Mark, Apir	26/3/2026
2.	Odey Joseph Bisong	27	M	Soldier	St. Augustine Cath Church, Nasme Barracks	26/3/2026
3.	Christiana Shang	41	F	Civil Servant	St. Francis Veterinary Layout, North Bank	26/3/2026
4.	Philomena Mba	31	F	Civil Servant	St. Mary Catholic Church, North Bank	26/3/2026
5.	Clementina Phillip	28	F	Civil Servant	St. Augustine Catholic Church, Nasme Barracks	26/3/2026
6.	Rose Ama	45	F	Civil Servant	ST. Mary Catholic Church, North Bank	26/3/2026
7.	Ogbaji Catherine	56	F	Teacher	St. Michael Catholic Church, Yagba, North Bank	29/1/2026
8.	Barr. Esther Onoja	50	F	Lawyer	Catholic Youth Centre Parish, Makurdi	25/3/2026
9.	Omlenyi Douglas	36	M	Civil Servant	St. Michael Catholic Church, Yagba, North Bank	26/3/2026
10.	Yaakugh Nancy	52	F	Civil Servant	St. Michael Catholic Church, Yagba, North Bank	26/3/2026
11.	Zoho Msughter	36	M	Businessman	St. Michael Catholic Church, Yagba, North Bank	26/3/2026
12.	Ashwe Emmanuel	58	M	Farmer	St. Michael Catholic Church, Atoga	26/3/2026
13.	Ashwe Esther	50	F	Farmer	St. Peter & Paul, Tyogbada	26/3/2026
14.	Ashine David	20	M	Student	St. Mary Catholic Church, Achusa	26/3/2026
15.	Ashwe Josephine	26	F	Student	St. Mary Catholic Church, Achusa	26/3/2026
16.	Ekwote Esher	30	F	Businesswoman	St. Joseph, Nyiman	20/3/2026
17.	Anthony Agbo Ekwote	35	M	Businessman	St. Joseph, Nyiman	20/3/2026
18.	Ashwe Joy	18	F	Student	St. Thomas Catholic Church, Anum	20/3/2026
19.	Adibe Joy	25	F	Businesswoman	St. Joseph, Nyiman	20/3/2026
20.	Egemba Gabriel	37	M	Teacher	St. Mary Catholic Church, North Bank	27/3/2026
21.	Ortese Joseph	53	M	Teacher	Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Ise-Ikpam, Federal Housing Estate, North Bank	27/3/2026