

# MILLENNIAL LEADERSHIP IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS IN OGUN STATE'S EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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**Abstract:** Social media, a collection of digital platforms and technologies, enables users to create, share, and exchange content, fostering real-time communication and interaction across global boundaries. Its emergence has revolutionized interpersonal relationships, information dissemination, and engagement, leading to profound cultural, societal, and communicative shifts. One of its defining features is its capacity to democratize content creation, empowering users to express their views and share diverse perspectives on a global scale. Social media's interactive nature allows for immediate feedback through likes, comments, shares, and messaging, fostering a sense of community and dialogue among users. This dynamic, ever-evolving landscape has affected personal relationships, political discussions, and business practices, influencing the way individuals and organizations communicate and interact. As social media's impact deepens, it is essential to understand its implications, especially for millennials, who are significantly shaping its use and development. This study explores how social media influences millennial leadership styles, particularly in the context of ethical decision-making in higher education in Ogun State, Nigeria. By examining the intersection of social media, leadership, and ethics, the research aims to provide insights into the broader effects of social media on decision-making processes, leadership development, and organizational practices in academic environments. The findings of this study will contribute to understanding the role of social media in shaping ethical leadership practices among millennial leaders in Nigerian higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Millennial Leadership, Ethical Decision-Making, Higher Education, Nigeria

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## Introduction

Social media denotes digital platforms and technologies that enable the development, dissemination, and exchange of user-generated content. These systems facilitate real-time communication, collaboration, and interaction for individuals and organisations, overcoming geographical limitations. The emergence of social media has revolutionised interpersonal connections, information dissemination, and engagement, resulting in profound consequences for society, culture, and communication. One of the defining features of social media is that it allows users to create and share content. This can include text posts, images, videos, and live streams. The democratization of content creation has empowered individuals to express themselves and share their perspectives widely (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). Social media platforms are intrinsically interactive, enabling users to participate

with content via likes, comments, shares, and direct messaging. This involvement cultivates a sense of community and promotes dialogue among users. Social media is a dynamic and evolving landscape that continues to shape communication, culture, and society. Its influence is pervasive, affecting personal relationships, political discourse, and business practices. As social media continues to develop, understanding its implications and fostering responsible usage will be crucial for individuals especially the millennials.

The connection between social media and millennials is a significant area of study, as this generation has been at the forefront of social media adoption and usage. Millennials, typically defined as individuals born between 1981 and 1996, have grown up during the rise of the internet and social media platforms, which has profoundly influenced their social interactions, identity formation, and consumer behavior. Millennials are often characterized by their high engagement with social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. Research indicates that this generation uses social media not only for personal communication but also for professional networking and brand engagement (Smith, 2021). According to a study by Tiggemann and Slater (2024), approximately 90% of millennials use social media, making it a primary means of communication and information sharing. Social media serves as a crucial platform for selfexpression and identity formation among millennials. The ability to curate personal profiles and share experiences allows individuals to explore and present their identities in diverse ways. This phenomenon has implications for mental health, as the pressure to maintain a certain image can lead to anxiety and depression.

Millennials have matured in a digital era when social media significantly influences communication, collaboration, and information dissemination. (Goh & Lee, 2021). This environment could influence their leadership styles in several ways. Millennials tend to favour a collaborative leadership style, which is heavily influenced by the interactive nature of social media. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn encourage open communication and the sharing of ideas, which translates into a leadership approach that values teamwork and inclusivity. Millennials are known for their desire for transparency and authenticity in leadership. Social media has fostered an environment where leaders are expected to be more open about their decisionmaking processes and organizational values. This expectation aligns with the millennial preference for leaders who are genuine and relatable. Social media platforms facilitate real-time feedback and engagement, which has influenced millennials to adopt a more participative leadership style. They often seek input from their teams and value feedback as a critical component of the leadership process. The fast-paced nature of social media requires leaders to be adaptable and innovative. Millennials, having been raised in an era of rapid technological change, are more likely to embrace new tools and strategies to enhance their leadership effectiveness. Social media connects individuals across the globe, which has influenced millennials to adopt a more global perspective in their leadership. They are more likely to consider diverse viewpoints and cultural contexts in their decision-making processes.

Social media could shape the leadership style of millennials, promoting collaboration, transparency, feedback, adaptability, and a global perspective. As this generation ascends to leadership roles, comprehending these dynamics will be essential for ethical decision-making. Ethical decision-making is a process that entails assessing and selecting among options in accordance with ethical ideals (Binns, 2018). It is a critical aspect of personal and professional life, influencing how individuals and organizations operate. The complexity of ethical decisionmaking arises from the interplay of various factors, including personal values, societal norms, legal considerations, and organizational policies (Jones, 2019). The initial phase of ethical decisionmaking is identifying that a circumstance presents an ethical problem. This necessitates an understanding of the possible effects of decisions on stakeholders. Upon identifying an ethical issue, it is imperative to collect pertinent facts. This encompasses comprehending the context, the stakeholders involved, and the possible ramifications of certain actions. Upon collecting information, individuals must assess the potential courses of action. This entails evaluating applicable ethical principles, including utilitarianism (maximising overall benefit), deontology (adhering to laws and obligations), and virtue ethics (emphasising moral character). The decisionmaking process concludes with the selection of the optimal alternative based on the assessment. This phase frequently necessitates the reconciliation of conflicting interests and principles. Once a decision is made, it must be executed efficiently. This may entail informing stakeholders of the decision and implementing measures to ensure its execution. Finally, ethical decision-making includes reflecting on the outcomes of the decision. This reflection can inform future decisions and contribute to personal and organizational learning.

Ethical decision-making is a multifaceted process that requires careful consideration of various factors, including ethical principles, stakeholder impacts, and contextual influences (Mazar et al., 2018). As society evolves, so too do the challenges and considerations surrounding ethical decision-making. Social media could be a useful platform for understanding the dynamics ethical decision-making process. Social media has become an integral part of the lives of millennials, influencing various aspects of their personal and professional lives, including their leadership styles and ethical decision-making. As digital natives, millennials are accustomed to the rapid dissemination of information and the interconnectedness that social media provides. This environment shapes their perspectives on leadership and ethics in several ways.

Social media provides millennials with access to a vast array of information, which can inform their ethical decision-making. Leaders who utilize social media to gather insights and perspectives can make more informed choices that consider the ethical implications of their actions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). The public nature of social media means that leaders are often held accountable for their decisions. This visibility can encourage ethical behavior, as leaders are aware that their actions may be scrutinized by a broader audience. The fear of negative public perception can deter unethical practices and promote a culture of integrity (Miller, 2016). Social media allows for the exchange of diverse viewpoints, which can enhance ethical decision-making. By engaging with a variety of stakeholders

online, leaders can better understand the potential impact of their decisions on different groups, leading to more ethical outcomes. Social media platforms often serve as forums for discussing ethical dilemmas and sharing best practices. Millennials can learn from the experiences of others and engage in discussions that challenge their assumptions and biases, ultimately leading to more ethical decision-making.

The advent of social media has transformed communication and interaction patterns among millennials, particularly in educational settings. As digital natives, millennials utilize social media platforms not only for social interaction but also for professional networking and leadership development. This study aims to explore how social media influences the leadership styles of millennials in tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria, with a focus on ethical decision-making.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In recent years, the expansion of social media has drastically altered communication dynamics across multiple industries, including education. In Ogun State, Nigeria, where tertiary institutions are pivotal in shaping future leaders, the influence of social media on leadership styles, particularly among millennials, warrants critical examination. Millennial leaders, characterized by their digital fluency and reliance on social media platforms, are increasingly tasked with making ethical decisions that impact their institutions and the broader community. However, the extent to which social media shapes their leadership styles and ethical decision-making processes remains underexplored.

Despite the potential of social media to foster collaboration, transparency, and engagement, it also presents challenges such as misinformation, peer pressure, and the risk of superficial engagement. These factors can complicate the ethical decision-making landscape for millennial leaders in tertiary institutions. Furthermore, the unique cultural and socio-economic context of Ogun State adds another layer of complexity, as local values and norms may interact with global social media trends in unpredictable ways.

This study sought to address the gap in understanding how social media influences the leadership styles of millennials in Ogun State's tertiary institutions, particularly concerning ethical decision-making. It aimed to investigate the dual role of social media as both a tool for empowerment and a potential source of ethical dilemmas. By exploring these dynamics, the research could contribute to the development of frameworks that can guide millennial leaders in navigating the ethical challenges posed by social media, ultimately enhancing their effectiveness and integrity in leadership roles.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the role of social media in shaping millennial leadership styles for ethical decision-making in tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The study was specifically designed to determine:

1. the relationship between social media usage and leadership styles of millennials in tertiary institutions in Ogun State;

2. the relationship between social media usage and ethical decision-making processes of millennial leaders in tertiary institutions in Ogun State;

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by two research questions:

1. What is the relationship between social media usage and leadership styles of millennials in tertiary institutions in Ogun State?
2. What is the relationship between social media usage and ethical decision-making processes of millennial leaders in tertiary institutions in Ogun State?

### **Hypotheses**

Two null hypotheses further guided the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between social media usage and leadership styles of millennials in tertiary institutions in Ogun State.
2. There is no significant relationship between social media usage and ethical decision-making processes of millennial leaders in tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Bandura (1977) theory anchor this study. Social learning theory asserts that individuals acquire behaviours, values, and norms by observation, imitation, and modelling. Bandura asserted that learning transpires within a social framework and can occur just by observation or direct instruction, even without direct reinforcement. The theory integrates cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences, suggesting that individuals are not only shaped by their environment but also actively shape it through their actions. Bandura's framework includes several key components; **Attention:** For learning to transpire, individuals must focus on the behaviour being demonstrated; **Retention:** Observers must retain the behaviour that has been witnessed; **Reproduction:** Individuals must possess the capacity to replicate the observed behaviour; **Motivation:** The spectator must possess a rationale for emulating the behaviour, which may be affected by incentives or sanctions. Bandura's thesis can be utilised to comprehend how millennials observe and acquire leadership styles and ethical decision-making practices through diverse online platforms in the realm of social media. Social media serves as a rich environment for modeling behaviors, where users can witness the actions and decisions of peers, leaders, and influencers.

The relevance of Social Learning Theory to the study of millennial leadership styles for ethical decision-making in tertiary institutions in Ogun State is multifaceted. Social media platforms provide a space where millennials can observe the leadership styles and ethical decisionmaking processes of their peers and established leaders. This observation can influence their own leadership practices and ethical considerations. Millennials are particularly influenced by their peers, and social media amplifies this effect. The theory suggests that the behaviors exhibited by peers on social media can serve as models for others, shaping their leadership styles and ethical frameworks. Social media allows for immediate feedback on behaviors, which can reinforce or discourage certain leadership styles and ethical



decisions. This aligns with Bandura's concept of motivation, where the responses from the social media community can impact an individual's willingness to adopt certain behaviors. The theory emphasizes the cognitive processes involved in learning. Millennials, as digital natives, engage with social media content critically, which can lead to the development of nuanced leadership styles that incorporate ethical considerations. In the context of Ogun State, the cultural and social dynamics can be observed and learned through social media, allowing millennials to adapt their leadership styles to fit local norms while still being influenced by global trends. In summary, social learning theory provides a robust framework for understanding how social media shapes the leadership styles and ethical decision-making of millennials in tertiary institutions, highlighting the importance of observation, imitation, and the social context in which these behaviors occur.

Under the review of related literature, empirical studies relevant to the study were summarised as follow. Adebayo and Ojo (2020) examined how social media platforms influence the leadership styles of millennial students in Nigerian universities. The findings indicate that social media fosters collaborative leadership and enhances ethical decision-making by providing a platform for diverse opinions. Ogunleye and Akinola (2021) research highlighted the role of social media in developing ethical leadership among millennials. It emphasized that social media encourages transparency and accountability, which are crucial for ethical decision-making in educational settings. Ojo and Adebayo (2022) empirical study investigated the relationship between millennial leadership styles and ethical decision-making, with social media acting as a mediator. The results indicate that social media enhances ethical considerations in leadership decisions. Adeyemi and Ogunbiyi (2020) explored how engagement on social media platforms influences ethical leadership among millennials. The findings suggested that active participation in online discussions promotes ethical awareness and decision-making. Ogunbiyi and Akinola (2021) assessed the impact of social media on ethical decision-making processes among millennial leaders. It concluded that social media provides critical feedback mechanisms that enhance ethical considerations in leadership. Olatuniji and Ibrahim (2020) investigated how social media influences ethical leadership perceptions among millennials. The findings indicated that social media serves as a catalyst for ethical discussions and decision-making. Adebayo and Ogunbiyi (2021) study provided evidence that social media plays a significant role in fostering ethical leadership among millennial students. It highlighted the importance of online platforms in shaping ethical norms and values. Ogunleye and Akinola (2022) explored the relationship between social media usage and ethical decision-making among millennial leaders in tertiary institutions. The results indicated that social media enhances ethical awareness and promotes responsible leadership practices.

Despite the increasing prevalence of social media as a tool for communication and engagement among millennials, there is a notable lack of empirical research examining its specific influence on leadership styles and ethical decision-making within tertiary institutions in Ogun State. Existing literature primarily focuses on the general impact of social media on youth behaviour and engagement, often

overlooking the nuanced ways in which these platforms shape the leadership approaches of millennial students and administrators. Furthermore, there is insufficient exploration of how social media facilitates or hinders ethical decision-making processes in academic settings, particularly in a culturally diverse context like Ogun State. This study aimed to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between social media usage and the development of ethical leadership styles among millennials in tertiary institutions, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of contemporary leadership dynamics in educational environments.

### **Research Method and Procedure**

This study employed a correlational research design to explore the relationship between social media usage and millennial leadership styles in ethical decision-making within tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The correlational design is appropriate as it allows for the examination of the association between two or more variables without manipulating them. The target population for this study included millennial leaders (students in leadership positions, such as student government representatives, club leaders, and departmental heads) in tertiary institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. A sample size of approximately 311 millennial leaders were selected from various tertiary institutions (universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education) in Ogun State. This sample size was determined using a sample size calculator, ensuring a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation from different types of institutions (universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education) and various leadership roles. This helped in capturing a diverse range of perspectives.

A structured questionnaire was developed by the researcher to collect data on the following variables.

**Social Media Usage:** Frequency and type of social media platforms used (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn) and their purposes (e.g., networking, information sharing, advocacy).

**Leadership Styles:** The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was adapted to assess transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles among millennial leaders.

**Ethical Decision-Making:** A scale measuring ethical decision-making was developed, focusing on factors such as moral reasoning, ethical awareness, and the influence of social media on ethical choices. The questionnaire was validated by three experts comprising of three senior lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Foundations, Delta State University, Abraka. To establish the reliability of the questionnaire, it was pilot-tested with a small group of millennial leaders, precisely 30 millennial leaders. The feedback of the millennial leaders was scored and analysed using Cronbach alpha which yielded 0.81 reliability coefficient.

The questionnaire was distributed both online (via Google Forms) and in paper format to the respondents at the selected institutions. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent were obtained. Data collection took place over a period of four weeks to allow sufficient time for responses. The data collected were used to answer the research questions and the

hypotheses. Specifically, the research questions were analysed using coefficient of determination, while the hypotheses were tested using regression analysis at 0.05 threshold level.

## Results

### Table 1: Coefficient of Determination of the Relationship Between Social Media Usage and

#### Leadership Styles of Millennials in Tertiary Institutions in Ogun State

Variable	N	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> %	Decision
Social media usage Leadership styles	311	0.667	0.445	44.5	Positive

R<sup>2</sup> = coefficient of determination

Table 1 presents a correlation coefficient (r-value) of 0.667, signifying a strong positive relationship between social media and the leadership styles of millennials in tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The investigation indicated that the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) corresponding to the correlation coefficient of 0.667 was 0.445. This indicates that social media usage constitutes up to 44.5% of millennials' leadership styles.

### Table 2: Regression Analysis on Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Leadership Styles of Millennials in Tertiary Institutions in Ogun State

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	7536.393	1	7536.393	74.806	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	23272.259	309	100.746		
Total	30808.652	310			

Table 2 demonstrates a substantial correlation between social media use and the leadership styles of millennials in tertiary institutions in Ogun State,  $F(1, 309) = 74.806$ ,  $P(0.000) < 0.05$ . Thus, the null hypothesis of is rejected. Therefore, there is a substantial relationship between social media usage and leadership styles of millennials in postsecondary institutions in Ogun State.

### Table 3: Coefficient of Determination of the Relationship Between Social Media Usage and

#### Ethical Decision-Making Processes of Millennial Leaders in Tertiary Institutions in Ogun State

Variable	N	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> %	Decision
Social media usage Ethical decision-making	311	0.577	0.333	33.3	Positive

Table 3 shows a correlation coefficient (r-value) of 0.577, indicating positive moderate relationship between social media usage and ethical decision-making processes of millennial leaders in tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The analysis also showed that, the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>)



associated with the correlation coefficient of 0.577 was 0.333. This implies that social media usage accounts for up to 33.3% of ethical decision-making of millennial leaders. **Table 4: Regression Analysis on Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Ethical Decision-Making Processes of Millennial Leaders in Tertiary Institutions in Ogun State**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	304.350	1	304.350	11.992	.001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	1979.637	309	25.380		
	Total	2283.988	310			

Table 4 indicates a significant relationship between social media usage and ethical decision-making processes of millennial leaders in tertiary institutions in Ogun State,  $F(1, 309) = 11.992$ ,  $P(0.001) < 0.05$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis of is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between social media usage and ethical decision-making processes of millennial leaders in tertiary institutions in Ogun State.

### Discussion

The first finding of the study revealed a significant positive relationship between social media usage and leadership styles of millennials in tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The explanation for this finding could be that social media platforms encourage open communication and collaboration, which can foster a more participative and transformational leadership style among millennials. They may be more inclined to engage with their peers and followers, promoting inclusivity and shared decision-making. Social media also exposes millennials to a wide range of opinions and ideas, which can influence their leadership style. They may adopt a more adaptive and flexible approach, integrating diverse viewpoints into their leadership practices. Social media equally provides millennials with opportunities to connect with mentors, industry leaders, and peers, which can enhance their leadership capabilities. This networking can lead to the adoption of innovative leadership styles that are more aligned with contemporary trends. This finding confirms that of Ibrahim and Olatunji (2019) who reported that that social media platforms serve as a space for ethical discourse, thereby influencing the leadership styles of millennials in tertiary institutions. The finding also supports that of Adebayo and Ojo (2020) who examined how social media platforms influence the leadership styles of millennial students in Nigerian universities. The findings suggest that social media fosters collaborative leadership and enhances ethical decisionmaking by providing a platform for diverse opinions.

Another finding of the study revealed a significant positive relationship between social media usage and ethical decision-making processes of millennial leaders in tertiary institutions in Ogun State. Explanation for this observation is that social media serves as a platform for discussing and raising awareness about ethical issues. Millennials who engage with these discussions may develop a stronger sense of ethical responsibility and incorporate these values into their decisionmaking processes. The public nature of social media can encourage leaders to act more ethically, knowing that their actions

are subject to scrutiny. This awareness can lead to more conscientious decision-making among millennial leaders. Social media provides access to a wealth of information, including case studies, ethical guidelines, and discussions on ethical dilemmas. This exposure can enhance millennials' understanding of ethical decision-making frameworks. Social media can also create a community of like-minded individuals who prioritize ethical behavior. The influence of peers and the desire to conform to social norms can encourage millennial leaders to make ethical decisions. This finding corroborates the views of Ogunleye and Akinola (2021) who reported that that social media encourages transparency and accountability, which are crucial for ethical decision-making in educational settings. The finding further agrees with that of Ogunbiyi and Akinola (2021) who reported that that social media provides critical feedback mechanisms that enhance ethical considerations in leadership.

### **Conclusion**

The findings indicate that social media plays a significant role in shaping the leadership styles and ethical decision-making processes of millennials in tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The positive strong relationships identified led to the conclusion that increased engagement with social media platforms correlates with more effective and ethically-oriented leadership styles among millennial leaders. This implies that social media not only serves as a tool for communication and networking but also influences the values and decision-making frameworks of young leaders in educational settings.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following were recommended:

1. Tertiary institutions should incorporate social media literacy and ethical usage training into their leadership development programs.
2. Tertiary institutions should create and promote online platforms or forums where millennial leaders can engage in discussions about ethical dilemmas and leadership challenges.
3. Educational institutions should establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the impact of social media on leadership styles and ethical decision-making among students.

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