



**Digital ethics from a gender perspective: Media literacy and the
representation of deviant behaviour on social media**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse digital literacy among social media users from a gender perspective. The rapid development of communication technology, particularly the emergence of social media, has transformed human interaction from limited offline spaces into boundless online environments. On the one hand, this transformation enables individuals to connect with a wider audience and access vast amounts of information. On the other hand, it has also given rise to various issues, including violations of digital ethics, the spread of misinformation, and the presence of deviant behaviours on social media platforms. Strong digital literacy is essential to prevent the normalization of such deviations, particularly those related to gender issues in digital spaces, in order to foster a healthier online environment. Users are expected to critically evaluate misinformation, reject gender bias, and contribute to creating safe and ethical social media spaces. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method, examining social media phenomena and conducting interviews with 32 participants. The findings indicate that participants actively reject gender-

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related deviant content by reporting inappropriate accounts, maintaining their privacy, and critically assessing circulating content. Furthermore, this study recommends strengthening digital literacy through ethical awareness, mental health considerations, and balanced social media usage. Users are encouraged to engage with social media according to their needs, avoid excessive use, and report content containing elements of deviance, including gender-related deviations.

Keywords: Digital Literacy; Gender; Representation of Deviant Behavior; Social Media; Digital Ethics.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis literasi digital pada pengguna sosial media dalam perspektif gender. Perkembangan teknologi komunikasi, terutama kehadiran sosial media, mengubah cara kita berinteraksi dari ruang luring yang terbatas menjadi ruang daring yang tidak ada batasan. Pada satu sisi perkembangan ini membuat kita dapat terhubung dengan banyak orang serta mendapatkan informasi yang lebih banyak. Di sisi yang lain memunculkan persoalan seperti pelanggaran etis digital, penyebaran berita palsu, serta adanya perilaku-perilaku menyimpang di sosial media. Dibutuhkan literasi digital yang baik untuk mencegah normalisasi penyimpangan, terutama dalam isu gender di ruang digital dalam menciptakan sosial media yang sehat. Diharapkan dapat bersikap kritis terhadap informasi yang salah dan menolak bias gender, sehingga menimbulkan sosial media yang aman dan beretika. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dengan melihat fenomena di sosial media dan juga melakukan beberapa tanya jawab dengan 32 informan penelitian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa informan penelitian menunjukkan penolakan terhadap penyimpangan gender dengan melakukan pelaporan akun. Mampu menjaga privasi, serta bersikap kritis terhadap konten yang beredar. Selain itu, penelitian ini memberikan rekomendasi untuk penguatan literasi digital berbasis etika, kesehatan mental, serta perlunya keseimbangan dalam penggunaan media sosial. Terutama menggunakan sosial media sesuai dengan kebutuhan, tidak berlebihan, serta melaporkan konten-konten yang memuat adanya unsur penyimpangan, termasuk penyimpangan gender.

Kata Kunci: Literasi Digital; Gender; Representasi Perilaku Menyimpang; Media Sosial; Etika Digital.

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital technology has enabled individuals to interact without boundaries through new media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and similar platforms. These media facilitate cross-cultural, cross-religious, and transnational communication, allowing users to build relationships, develop themselves, and participate in digital economic activities (Rozi, 2023). Digital transformation has not only changed the way people communicate but has also influenced how individuals learn, work, and construct their social identities within digital public spaces. While this development expands access to information, it also introduces various challenges, including the spread of

misinformation, cyberbullying, privacy violations, and ethical concerns in digital media usage (Sulianta, 2024).

Reports indicate that adolescents are among the most vulnerable groups affected by the negative impacts of digital spaces. For example, UNICEF reports that approximately 41–50% of children and adolescents in Indonesia have experienced bullying, including cyberbullying. Additionally, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) has reported a rise in cases of sexual violence and pornography involving minors, with 407 cases recorded among individuals aged 15–18 (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (KPAI), 2025). These findings suggest that digital spaces are not only platforms for interaction and expression but also environments where deviant behaviours may emerge, potentially affecting adolescents' psychological and social development.

From a gender perspective, digital deviance is often associated with unequal representation on social media. Women are frequently objectified in online content, while men who display feminine traits are often subjected to stigma and harassment. This highlights that digital ethics cannot be separated from how gender identities are represented, perceived, and contested in digital public spaces.

In this context, media literacy plays a crucial role in helping individuals—particularly young people—understand the risks associated with social media and critically evaluate digital content. Media literacy enables users to recognise gender bias, understand ethical boundaries in online interactions, and reject harmful or deviant behaviours. Therefore, strengthening media literacy is not only a filtering mechanism but also a foundation for creating a healthier, more equitable, and ethical digital environment.

This study differs from previous research through its integration of digital ethics and gender perspectives. Earlier studies have tended to examine media literacy, digital ethics, or gender issues separately. In contrast, this study offers a novel contribution by integrating these three aspects simultaneously, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how digital ethics is understood and practiced within the context of gender relations on social media. Moreover, prior research has generally focused on the representation of deviant behaviour on social media in broader terms, such as cyberbullying, hate speech, or the spread of misinformation. This study, however, specifically examines how deviant behaviour is represented within social media interactions related to gender, thereby providing a more focused and nuanced analytical perspective.

This research is expected to offer recommendations for strengthening gender-based digital ethical literacy that are not only conceptual but also applicable in media literacy education, media policy development, and the promotion of ethical media practices. Ultimately, it aims to foster gender-friendly social media environments in which users demonstrate greater gender sensitivity and responsiveness in their digital interactions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Previous Studies

Several previous studies have examined issues related to digital literacy and social media. One study by Chandra Zonyfar, Maharina, Sihabudin, and Ahmad Khusaeri found that many students lack an understanding of digital behaviour and literacy. As a result, they are often vulnerable to harmful situations and may not realise when they are exposed to risks such

as violence or fraud. To prevent such issues, the study emphasises the importance of strengthening digital literacy across all student groups, regardless of gender (Zonyfar et al., 2022). Another study by Vika Maharani, Desi Safitri, and Sujarwo explain that digital transformation has significantly changed patterns of communication and social interaction. This shift influences how individuals understand social issues and may contribute to involvement in deviant behaviours, including those related to LGBT topics. Therefore, acquiring adequate digital literacy is crucial for individuals using social media. This is particularly important because many users perceive social media as a safe space for self-expression, especially due to anonymity, which can encourage more aggressive behaviour (Maharani & Safitri, 2025).

A study by Popy Andiyansari and Andi Prasetyo Juwono state that as digital literacy levels in Indonesia increase, the incidence of online gender-based violence has also risen. The findings reveal that participants have not yet achieved adequate competencies in evaluating digital platforms. They often struggle to identify credible content, tend to follow others without critical assessment, and lack the ability to apply critical reasoning in evaluating information. Furthermore, they have not been able to initiate or engage in online communities effectively to address issues related to online gender-based violence (Andiyansari & Juwono, 2024). The previous studies discussed above clearly identify a research gap. Existing research tends to address digital literacy, digital ethics, or gender issues in general terms, without specifically examining the intersection of gender and deviant behaviour on social media. While the study by Maharani et al. addresses deviant behaviour, this research extends the discussion by analysing how such behaviours are constructed, accepted, or rejected within a framework of digital ethics shaped by gender perspectives. Meanwhile, the study by Andiyansari and Juwono does not explicitly integrate digital literacy, digital ethics, and the representation of deviant behaviour on social media within a gender-based analytical framework. Therefore, this study is important as it seeks to fill this gap by providing a more integrated and nuanced analysis of digital ethics, media literacy, and gender in the context of deviant behaviour on social media.

2.2. Digital Ethics

Digital ethics refers to a set of norms, values, principles, and rules that govern human behaviour and interactions in the digital environment. It encompasses how individuals use technology, communicate online, share information, and maintain privacy and data security (Rianto, 2019). In this context, digital ethics applies not only to individuals but also to groups and communities operating within digital spaces.

Social media has emerged as a viable strategic medium for contemporary religious education. While reflecting on institutional adaptation to the digital era, this study notes that the full impact and effectiveness of such initiatives require further evaluation in the future (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2026). Digital ethics is therefore essential to ensure that interactions within digital environments are conducted in a healthy and responsible manner. From a gender perspective, digital ethics is closely related to how women and men are represented, treated, and shaped through social media practices. Gender inequality, stereotypes, and deviant behaviours such as harassment and discrimination frequently occur and are widely disseminated through digital media. Although young people are spending increasing amounts of time online, there remain significant gaps in the literature regarding the development of digital skills and competencies (De Coninck et al., 2024). In addition, social media engagement is often driven

by the fear of missing out (FoMO), which can influence users' behaviour. This phenomenon may encourage individuals to prioritise frequent posting over meaningful or valuable content (Akeren et al., 2026).

2.3. Gender

Gender is a concept that refers to the differences in roles, status, and responsibilities, as well as traits and behaviours attributed to men and women, which are socially and culturally constructed rather than biologically determined (Ratu & Latifah, Nur; Moerdisuroso, 1990). In other words, gender is a social construct that shapes how society expects individuals to act, dress, and behave according to their identities as men or women. Digital ethics concerns appropriate, respectful, and responsible behaviour in the use of digital technologies and social media. Within digital media, women are often portrayed in a sexualised manner, while men who display feminine traits are sometimes perceived as deviant.

Violence based on online media occurs a lot, such as cyberbullying, body shaming, doxing, digital sexual harassment, many of which are experienced by women. Some of the principles of digital ethics related to gender are equality, equity, responsibility, and empathy (Octaviani, 2021). The platform is an important space for gender and sexual minorities to develop identities and build connections. However, although social media activism itself has become a recurring unit of analysis, little is known about how the daily use of social media facilitates political agency as a form of subjectivity (Hokkanen, 2025).

2.4. Gender in Social Media

Gender is a social construct associated with roles, identities, and societal expectations of men and women. In communication and media studies, gender is understood not merely as a biological difference but as a socially constructed phenomenon shaped through cultural processes, language, and media representation. Media is an important factor that influences public perceptions of gender roles, both through the reproduction of stereotypes and through efforts toward gender empowerment (Akhtar, 2025). With the advancement of digital technology, social media has become a new space for the production and reproduction of meanings about gender. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter enable individuals to express their gender identities while simultaneously interacting within broader digital public spaces. Moreover, social media can be mobilised as a tool for collective action and can even function as a platform for digital activism and protest (Mulyana & Wahyuningroem, 2025).

Various studies indicate that social media has become a significant arena for the construction of gender representation. Visual and narrative content circulating on digital platforms often portrays women and men within specific stereotypical frameworks. For example, women are frequently depicted in relation to aesthetics, physical appearance, and emotional expression, while men are commonly associated with strength, rationality, and dominance (Gowda, 2024). However, social media also creates opportunities for the reinterpretation of gender identities. Content that emphasises women's empowerment, self-love, and positive femininity demonstrates that digital platforms not only reproduce stereotypes but also function as spaces of resistance against traditional gender norms (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In some cases, gender constructions on social media can be analysed through a semiotic approach, which examines the symbolic meanings embedded in images, language, and user-

generated narratives. Research findings suggest that visual content on social media can reinforce particular gender constructions through the use of symbols, poses, and narrative framing within posts (Nurrohman & Wirawanda, 2018).

Social media functions not only as a means of communication but also as a space for identity formation. Adolescents, as primary users of social media, often construct their gender identities through digital interactions, content consumption, and participation in online communities. This process enables individuals to explore their gender identities more openly compared to conventional social settings. In this context, gender discourse on social media also emerges through language, hashtags, and online conversations. Analyses of social media interactions indicate that discourses such as feminism, women's empowerment, and masculinity are frequently debated within digital spaces (Sonni et al., 2025). Furthermore, social media plays a role in shaping new representations of masculinity and femininity. Digital platforms often present forms of masculinity that are more emotional and creative compared to the dominant representations of masculinity found in conventional media (Yuzar et al., 2023).

Although social media provides opportunities for more diverse expressions of gender identity, digital spaces also present new challenges. Several studies indicate that gender stereotypes, the objectification of women, and gender bias continue to frequently appear in digital content. This highlights the ambivalent nature of social media: on the one hand, it creates opportunities for empowerment, while on the other hand, it can reinforce existing gender inequalities within society. Therefore, digital literacy and gender literacy are essential in helping users—particularly adolescents—understand and critically evaluate gender representations on social media. Such literacy enables users not only to act as content consumers but also as active agents capable of creating more equitable and inclusive digital spaces.

2.5. Digital Ethics Violations

Digital ethics violations refer to any behaviour, actions, or use of information technology and digital media that do not align with moral values, social norms, and ethical principles in digital environments. In other words, they represent deviations from the unwritten rules governing how individuals are expected to behave responsibly, ethically, and respectfully when using digital technologies and the internet. Professional ethics in cybersecurity constitute a set of moral principles that regulate conduct in the field of digital security, including data confidentiality, honesty, responsibility, and transparency. In Indonesia, strengthening these ethical standards has become increasingly important due to the growing number of data breach incidents that undermine public trust. This is reflected in Law (UU) No. 1 of 2024, which amends Law No. 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions.

Ethical violations, such as data theft, often occur due to the weak implementation of ethical standards in the management of digital systems, which can lead to significant consequences for both individuals and organizations affected by such breaches. Cybersecurity professionals, including ethical hackers, have a responsibility to identify and report security vulnerabilities without causing harm. Professional ethical practices must be integrated across all stages of work, from planning to threat mitigation, while ensuring respect for privacy rights, compliance with legal regulations, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest. Emerging challenges, such as the development of artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain technologies,

require continuous adaptation; however, these advancements must remain grounded in established ethical norms (Tanjung et al., 2024).

2.6. *Media Literacy*

Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and produce messages across various forms of media, including print, electronic, and digital platforms. It is not merely the ability to use media but also encompasses critical thinking skills that enable individuals to avoid being easily influenced, deceived, or misled by inaccurate or manipulative information. There is a strong need for media literacy initiatives that go beyond basic awareness, such as training adolescents in critical content evaluation and responsible media use (Sebsbie & Tsegaye, 2025). According to UNESCO, media literacy includes several key competencies: access—the ability to locate, operate, and use media; understanding—the ability to interpret both explicit and implicit messages; evaluation—the ability to assess the accuracy, credibility, and ethical aspects of information and content production; and creation—the ability to produce and disseminate informative, creative, and ethically appropriate content (Amroshy & Imron, 2014).

In the contemporary digital era, media literacy and digital ethics are two interrelated aspects that cannot be separated. Media literacy functions as a critical skill that enables individuals to understand, analyse, and evaluate various forms of media content. Through media literacy, individuals are able to distinguish between accurate and manipulative information, as well as produce creative and meaningful content. However, media literacy alone is insufficient without being complemented by digital ethics. Digital ethics provides moral and social guidelines on how individuals should behave in digital environments. Values such as honesty, responsibility, respect for privacy, and adherence to legal norms serve as guiding principles to ensure that media use does not result in negative consequences. These two aspects are mutually reinforcing. Media literacy helps individuals avoid falling into misinformation, hate speech, or manipulation, while digital ethics ensures that these skills are applied for constructive purposes rather than for spreading harmful content. Furthermore, effective digital literacy empowerment programs can enhance cyber resilience, improve family well-being, and support the development of cybersecurity systems in densely populated communities (Rosdiana et al., 2025).

2.7. *The Uses and Gratification Theory*

The Uses and Gratifications Theory emphasises that social media users are active agents who selectively choose, utilise, and interpret content to satisfy their needs, including informational, entertainment, identity-related, and social interaction needs (Fahrimal, 2018). In this context, users both consume and produce content related to gender representation and deviant behaviour. For some individuals, such content is consumed for entertainment purposes (affective needs), to reinforce self-identity within digital spaces (personal integrative needs), or to facilitate social interaction (social integrative needs). However, without adequate digital literacy, the consumption and dissemination of such content may lead to violations of digital ethics. These may include degrading particular genders, engaging in body shaming, or reinforcing negative stereotypes.

2.8. Stuart Hall Theory of Representation

Stuart Hall argues that media is not a neutral reflection of reality but rather a medium that shapes and reconstructs social reality through practices of representation. According to Hall, representation is a meaning-making process in which signs, symbols, language, and images are used to convey particular ideas about the world (Hall, 2009). In the context of this study, gender representation on social media often portrays behaviours that are perceived as deviating from dominant social and cultural norms, such as men expressing femininity or women expressing themselves freely. From Hall's perspective, social media functions as a space where gender identities are not only displayed but also reinterpreted by audiences. This process generates multiple meanings: some interpret such representations as expressions of freedom and diversity, while others perceive them as violations of ethical and moral standards.

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research design (Widiawati, 2020; Yusuf, 2017). This approach was chosen because the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of digital ethics, media literacy, and the representation of deviant behaviour on social media from a gender perspective. The study involved 32 informants who are social media users. These informants were selected because they are active users of social media and have encountered content related to gender-based deviance. They were able to identify and describe various forms of deviant behaviour observed on social media. The participants were aged between 18 and 23 years, a group considered to be among the most active users of social media.

The data sources in this study consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through digital observation (digital ethnography), focusing on posts, comments, and user interactions related to deviant behaviour on social media (Pahleviannur et al., 2022; Sarie et al., 2023). Secondary data were collected from questionnaires, academic literature, journal articles, online news sources, and previous studies relevant to the themes of digital ethics, media literacy, and gender.

Data analysis was conducted through three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Sari et al., 2022; Unaradjan, 2013). In the data reduction stage, the researcher filtered and focused on data that were relevant to the research themes. Subsequently, the data were presented in the form of analytical narratives and thematic categories that illustrate patterns of content representation and social media users' responses. The final stage involved drawing conclusions to formulate the meaning of the findings related to the representation of deviant behaviour, gender relations, and digital ethics.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study employed both source triangulation and theoretical triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from social media observations, informant interviews, and supporting literature. Meanwhile, theoretical triangulation was applied by integrating perspectives from digital ethics, media literacy, and gender studies within the analytical process.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Findings

4.1.1. Representation of Gender-Based Deviant Content on Social Media

This study identified various forms of social media content that exhibit deviant behaviour in relation to gender. Such content typically appears in the form of opinions, memes, short videos, and fragments of conversations that express or portray gender identities. Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are predominantly video-based, where these representations are often conveyed through visual content. Forms of deviance observed include bodily expressions, styles of dress, and humorous narratives related to gender identity, which are often showcased in creative ways that challenge traditional norms and provoke discussions about identity and acceptance. Meanwhile, social media users more frequently express such content on Twitter (now known as X) through discussions, opinions, and debates. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the lack of content moderation on Platform X has contributed to the emergence of more problematic activities, including its use as a space where online prostitution-related transactions can occur.

The analysed posts reveal elements of gender identity exploitation within digital spaces, particularly on social media platforms. In the context of Aceh, where Islamic law (Sharia) is upheld, a critical stance is necessary in responding to such issues. The research informants demonstrated a clear rejection of the exploitation of women on social media and opposed the use of these platforms as tools for exploitation or profit-making. Social media content should ideally provide a safe space for users, free from gender bias and exploitation. Therefore, social media should be utilised as a platform for positive and meaningful self-expression. At the same time, it functions as a symbolic space of representation, illustrating how gender is constructed and negotiated within digital public spheres, which can influence societal perceptions and individual identities.

How well do you understand the concept of digital ethics in the use of social media?

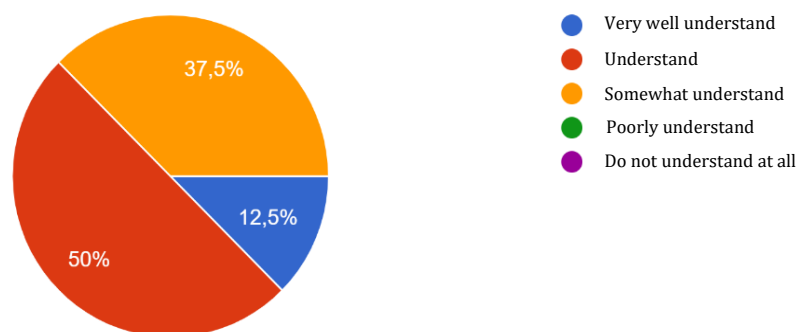


Figure 1. Understanding Digital Ethics in Social Media.

Based on the responses, 50% of participants demonstrated an adequate understanding of digital ethics on social media. A further 37.5% were categorised as having a moderate level of understanding, while only 12.5% showed a high level of understanding. These findings indicate that a proportion of participants still fall within a relatively low level of ethical awareness. While they may be technically proficient in using social media, there remains a need for more targeted guidance to deepen their understanding of digital ethics, particularly in areas such as privacy, consent, and the responsible sharing of information.

Social media is not value-neutral; it is governed by norms and ethical considerations. Due to the ease of access, deviant behaviours can occur readily and may be carried out by anyone. In this context, women may be particularly vulnerable and can become targets of unethical practices by irresponsible users.

4.1.2. User Interaction Patterns toward Gender-Based Deviant Content

The study also identified patterns of interaction among users in response to content that displays gender-related deviance. These interactions reveal a general tendency to reject content perceived as gender-biased. User comments indicate that religious values, social norms, and ethical considerations should serve as the foundation for content creation, implying that content should not be produced arbitrarily. In certain cases, social media users expressed moral and religious criticism toward content considered deviant. Some comments even referred to legal frameworks, such as the Pornography Law and the Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) Law, as grounds for identifying such content as violations. However, interactions on social media also reflect a diversity of perspectives. While many users express rejection, a smaller group adopts more permissive or defensive responses toward the expression of gender identity in digital spaces. This condition suggests that social media functions as a discursive arena in which different values and viewpoints interact and are contested. From the perspective of ethical media use, users are encouraged to actively reject content that promotes deviant behaviour, as failure to do so may contribute to the normalisation of such behaviours within social media environments.

On the other hand, interactions on social media also reveal a diversity of perspectives among users. While the majority of comments reflect resistance toward content perceived as deviant, a smaller group of users demonstrates more permissive or even defensive responses toward expressions of gender identity in digital spaces. This group tends to emphasise the importance of freedom of expression and individuals' rights to represent and express their identities on social media.

This diversity of responses indicates that social media functions not only as a platform for content distribution but also as a discursive arena in which various values, norms, and social perspectives interact and are contested. Through comments, replies, and ongoing conversations beneath posts, users actively engage in the negotiation of meaning regarding what is considered acceptable or deviant within the context of gender. Thus, social media can be understood as a digital public sphere that facilitates the formation of social discourse surrounding gender identity, morality, and the regulation of behaviour in contemporary society.

What kind of content most often displays gender-based deviant behavior on social media?

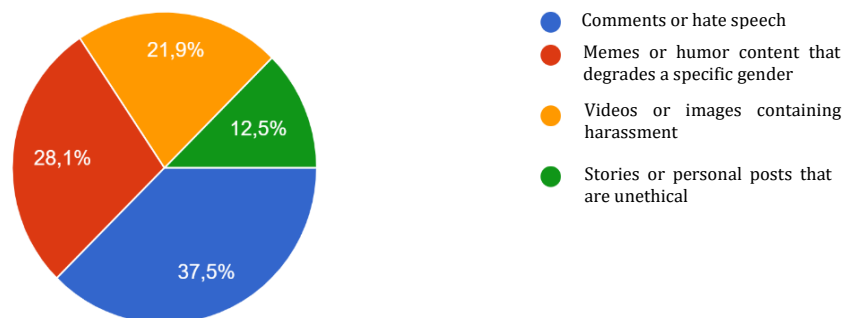


Figure 2. Gender-Based Deviant Behavior Content on Social Media.

The data presented above indicate that 37.5% of the observed content reflects gender-related deviance. In addition, 28.1% consists of memes or humorous content that demean particular genders, 21.9% includes videos or images containing elements of harassment, and 12.5% involves personal stories or posts that are considered unethical.

The absence of strict regulation on social media allows these platforms to function as digital public spaces where meaning is continuously negotiated. This process occurs through comments and discussions, where users do not merely respond to content but also actively participate in shaping social constructions of morality, gender identity, and what is considered acceptable behaviour in contemporary society.

4.1.3. Public Discourse on Gender Deviance in Social Media

Analysis of public conversations on social media indicates that instances of gender-related deviance often evolve into broader discourses concerning morality, cultural identity, and digital regulation. These discourses emerge through comment threads, user replies, and opinion posts that debate the boundaries between freedom of expression and prevailing social norms. In several cases, social media users position religious and cultural values as primary frameworks for evaluating gender-related deviant practices in digital spaces. These values function as moral references that shape collective attitudes toward circulating content. Such responses can be understood as efforts to prevent the normalisation of deviant behaviours within social media environments.

On the other hand, this exchange of ideas also demonstrates how social media functions as a space for identity discourse, where diverse perspectives on gender, morality, and freedom of expression confront one another. In this sense, social media serves not only as a communication medium but also as an arena for the formation of public discourse on gender issues in the digital era. At the same time, the phenomenon of digital addiction among some adolescents is closely linked to the concept of *fear of missing out* (FoMO). The anxiety of missing information, trends, or social interactions drives individuals to remain constantly connected to social media. FoMO thus becomes a key factor reinforcing tendencies toward digital addiction among younger generations. If left unmanaged, this condition may lead to various psychological consequences, including heightened anxiety, reduced concentration in learning, sleep disturbances, and a decline in the quality of face-to-face social interactions.

In your opinion, how often does gender-related deviant behavior appear on social media?

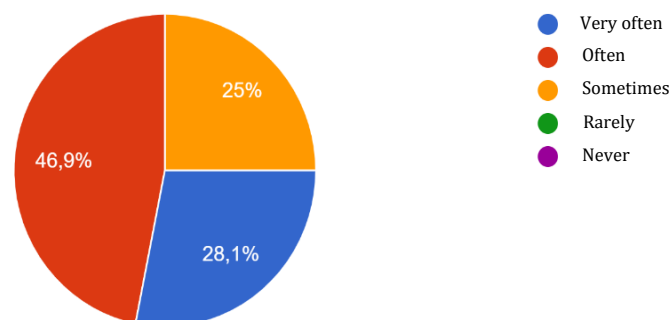


Figure 3. Gender-Related Deviant Behavior That Appears on Social Media.

Based on the available data, the occurrence of gender-related deviant behaviour is reported as very frequent by 49.9% of respondents, frequent by 28.1%, and occasional by 25%.

On the other hand, adolescents who are able to resist the negative influences of social media demonstrate that digital dependency is not universal. These individuals tend to exhibit stronger self-regulation in managing their time spent on social media and are more likely to utilise it for productive purposes, such as business promotion, educational content, sharing success stories, and motivation. This capacity may be influenced by factors such as family environment, level of digital literacy, and the internalisation of cultural and religious values. Accordingly, the findings reveal a dialectical relationship between the positive potential of social media as a source of information and creativity and its negative risks, particularly in the form of digital addiction.

Considering these findings, it is evident that the phenomenon of digital dependency among adolescents aged 18 and above cannot be viewed solely as an individual issue but rather as a broader social concern that requires collective attention. Interventions through strengthening digital literacy should not only emphasise ethical media use but also incorporate aspects of time management, mental health, and emotional regulation. Such literacy programs are essential to enable adolescents to balance their online and offline activities, ensuring that social media functions as a tool for empowerment rather than a source of addiction that diminishes their quality of life. In addition, digital entrepreneurship training can be prioritised as a strategic initiative to develop business skills through digital platforms, leveraging their wide reach and opportunities.

4.2. Discussion

From the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, social media users are not viewed as passive recipients but rather as active agents who consciously select the content they engage with. Users make these choices based on various needs, such as informational needs (e.g., seeking knowledge about gender), entertainment needs (e.g., consuming humorous content or memes), personal identity needs (e.g., expressing views or gender identity), and social integration needs (e.g., interacting with online communities). Within the context of this study, deviant behaviour or violations of digital ethics may arise when users attempt to fulfil these needs without being supported by adequate digital ethical literacy.

Literacy functions as a controlling factor within the framework of Uses and Gratifications Theory, which explains that media choices are influenced by users' knowledge and experiences. In this study, digital literacy plays a crucial role in shaping how users select content, evaluate gender-related information, and respond to deviant behaviour on social media.

Social media provides significant opportunities for users to express their identities and viewpoints. From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, the representation of gender in digital content can be understood as a way for users to fulfil their needs for self-expression and social recognition. However, when such expression is not balanced with adequate digital ethical literacy, it may lead to the emergence of content that contains stereotypes, discrimination, or gender-based deviant behaviour. Furthermore, Uses and Gratifications Theory explains that audiences actively choose how to respond to media, whether by supporting, rejecting, or ignoring particular content.

According to Stuart Hall, representation is the process of producing meaning through language and symbols within media. In the context of social media, content such as photos, videos, memes, comments, and captions functions as a medium through which meanings about

gender and social behaviour are constructed. This study demonstrates how gender-related deviant behaviour is represented in social media content, which may take the form of stereotypes, normalisation, critique, or rejection.

Media often constructs particular representations of social groups, including stereotypes of men and women, the objectification of bodies, stigma toward certain gender identities, and even the normalisation of deviant behaviour. This theoretical perspective helps explain how the way behaviour is portrayed in media can influence how it is understood by society. When deviant behaviour is frequently represented as normal or presented in a humorous manner on social media, it has the potential to blur the boundaries between ethical and unethical behaviour within digital spaces.

4.2.1. Media Literacy and Awareness of Digital Ethics in Adolescents' Social Media Interactions

Digital literacy among adolescents indicates that individuals aged 18 and above demonstrate a reasonably good understanding of media literacy and digital ethics in their social media interactions. This is reflected in the way they respond to various types of content, particularly those related to issues of gender and sexual deviance. Across observed comments and discussions on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter), adolescents do not merely act as passive consumers but also as active agents who critically evaluate the content they encounter. Many comments emphasise the importance of maintaining ethical communication, respecting privacy, and avoiding the dissemination of content that may harm others.

How important is media literacy in preventing gender-based deviant behavior on social media?

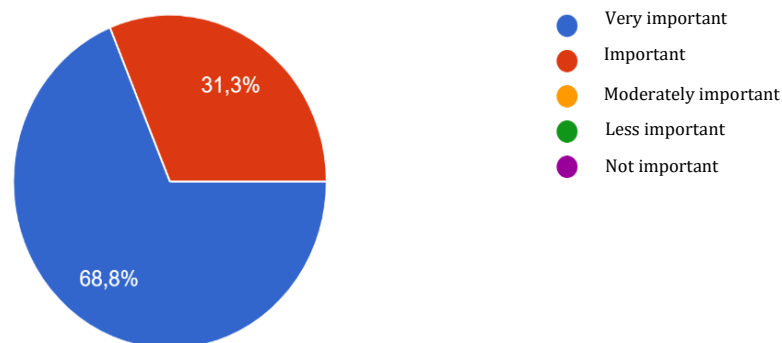


Figure 4. The Importance of Digital Literacy in Preventing Gender-Deviant Behaviour on Social Media.

Digital literacy plays a crucial role in preventing gender-based deviant behaviour on social media. The findings show that 68% of respondents consider digital literacy to be critical in addressing challenges related to gender bias on social media. Meanwhile, 31.3% of respondents indicated that being media-literate is important, as it can help prevent gender-related deviance in social media environments.

From a gender perspective, there are noticeable differences in response patterns between male and female users when addressing content related to digital sexual deviance. Female users tend to demonstrate a more assertive stance in rejecting practices such as online sexual

communication (e.g., call sex), the sharing of explicit sexual content, and other forms of digital interaction that may lead to the objectification of the body. This can be understood given that women are often the most vulnerable to exploitation and sexual harassment in digital spaces. In contrast, some male users exhibit more varied responses. While many also criticise such practices, others adopt more permissive attitudes or frame them as a form of digital entertainment. These differences indicate that social experiences and gender positioning significantly influence how individuals evaluate communication practices on social media.

The awareness of digital ethics observed in these interactions is reflected in users' tendency to emphasise the importance of maintaining privacy, limiting inappropriate content, and critically evaluating information that contains elements of misinformation, hate speech, or provocation. This practice indicates that media literacy among adolescents extends beyond technical skills in using media, encompassing cognitive and ethical dimensions in assessing information. However, this study also identifies an ambivalence in social media usage practices. Although some adolescents demonstrate relatively high levels of media literacy, they still experience the phenomenon of FoMO, defined as anxiety arising from being disconnected from ongoing activities on social media. This phenomenon can be explained through the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that individuals use media to fulfil various psychological and social needs, such as entertainment, information, and social integration. In this context, the need to remain connected with social networks and keep up with digital trends often outweighs ethical awareness regarding the limits of media use.

In other words, media literacy does not automatically reduce the intensity of social media use. Adolescents who possess a critical understanding of digital ethics may still become engaged in intensive usage patterns due to social needs for recognition, validation, and a sense of belonging. This finding suggests that digital literacy should be understood not only as a cognitive ability to evaluate information but also as a process of self-regulation in managing social pressures that emerge within digital environments.

In this context, media literacy can be understood as the outcome of interactions among various social factors, including formal education, awareness of legal regulations such as the Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) Law and the Pornography Law, and the internalisation of cultural and religious values within adolescents' social environments. These values function as reference frameworks for evaluating content circulating in digital spaces, while also serving as ethical foundations for fostering healthier and more responsible digital interactions.

4.2.2. Adolescents' Responses to Digital Sexual Deviance Content

Analysis of content and user interactions indicates that the majority of adolescents express rejection toward practices of digital sexual deviance, such as sharing explicit sexual content or engaging in online sexual communication. This rejection is reflected in various comments emphasising the importance of maintaining ethical standards, social norms, and religious values in the use of social media. Some comments explicitly state that such practices are inappropriate for display in digital public spaces, as they may undermine the moral development of younger generations and generate broader social consequences.

In your opinion, is there a difference between how men and women respond to digital ethics violations on social media?

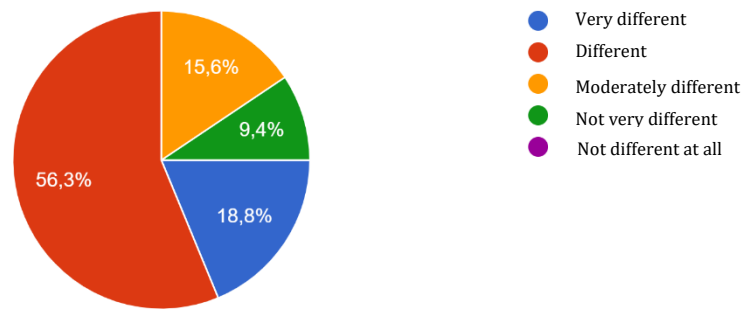


Figure 5. Differences in the Response of Men and Women in Responding to Digital Ethics Violations.

From a gender perspective, there are noticeable differences in response patterns between male and female users. Female users generally demonstrate a stronger and more assertive rejection of practices such as online sexual communication (e.g., call sex) and the sharing of explicit sexual content. In several observed comments, female users emphasise that such practices may position women as sexual objects and increase the risk of digital harassment. One comment, for example, claimed that "content like this only reinforces the perception of women as objects of entertainment on social media." Such statements reflect a critical awareness of the potential objectification of women's bodies within digital spaces.

In contrast, male users' responses tend to be more varied. While some male users also reject such practices on the basis of ethical and religious considerations, others perceive them as a form of digital entertainment or a normal phenomenon within internet culture. These differences indicate that social experiences and gender positioning influence how individuals evaluate and respond to online sexual communication practices. Women tend to be more sensitive to these issues, as they are more frequently the targets of objectification and harassment in digital spaces.

The rejection expressed in various comments can be understood as a form of cultural resistance toward content perceived as conflicting with prevailing moral values in society. In this context, adolescents position themselves not merely as media users but also as social agents who actively seek to uphold collective norms within digital spaces. Such rejection is often linked to an awareness of the potential legal consequences associated with the dissemination of sexual content online. Some users explicitly refer to regulatory frameworks, such as the Pornography Law and the Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) Law, when evaluating digital communication practices that are considered to violate ethical boundaries.

In the analytical process, this study employs Stuart Hall's representation approach to understand how meanings related to deviant behaviour and digital ethics are produced and negotiated by adolescents on social media. The analysis is conducted by identifying patterns of language, symbols, and narratives that emerge in user posts and comments. Each comment or user response is then categorised based on the dominant meanings constructed, such as moral rejection, normalisation of behaviour, or critical responses toward content perceived as deviant. Through this process, the study examines how adolescents engage in encoding and decoding digital content, as well as how they reconstruct social identities and moral values within the evolving discourse of digital spaces.

Furthermore, to understand the motivations behind the intensity of social media use, this study adopts the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory. The analysis is conducted by examining the reasons or motives expressed in user comments and interview responses regarding social media use, such as the need for information, entertainment, self-expression, and social connection. These motives are then categorised into several types of user needs, including cognitive needs (access to information), affective needs (entertainment and emotional fulfilment), and social integrative needs (a sense of connection with others). These categories are used to explain why adolescents with relatively adequate levels of media literacy remain highly engaged with digital trends and experience the phenomenon of FoMO. Thus, representation theory is employed to analyse how social meanings are produced within digital interactions, while Uses and Gratifications Theory is used to explain the motivations and psychosocial needs that drive patterns of social media use among adolescents.

Thus, media literacy does not automatically limit the intensity of social media use. Adolescents who possess critical awareness of digital ethics may still actively engage in digital spaces due to social needs for recognition, validation, and a sense of belonging. This finding suggests that digital literacy should be understood not only as a cognitive ability to evaluate information but also as a reflective capacity to manage social needs and cultural pressures that emerge within digital environments.

4.2.3. Ambivalence in Social Media Use and the Potential for Digital Dependency

In addition to the critical responses toward content perceived as deviant, this study also identifies an ambivalence in social media usage practices among adolescents. Some users demonstrate a tendency to remain continuously connected to social media, driven by the desire to keep up with ongoing information and social interactions within digital spaces. This constant connectivity indicates that social media functions not only as a communication tool but also as a social space in which identity, relationships, and social recognition are constructed.

How do you assess the level of social media users' awareness of digital ethics related to gender issues?

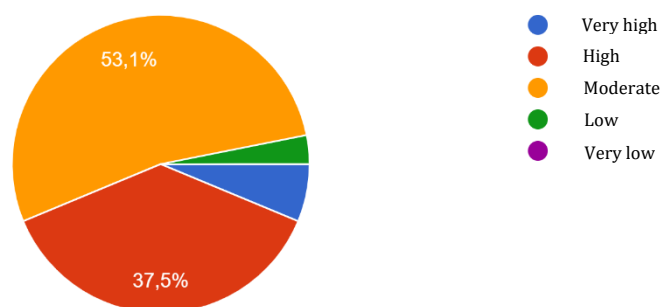


Figure 6. Assessment of the Level of Awareness of Social Media Users Towards Digital Ethics.

This phenomenon is closely related to the concept of FoMO, defined as the anxiety of being left behind in ongoing activities or conversations on social media. This condition encourages some adolescents to repeatedly check digital platforms, thereby contributing to more intensive patterns of use. Based on several comments and interview findings, users

expressed a perceived need to continuously monitor conversations and digital trends to remain connected to their social environment.

From a gender perspective, experiences of FoMO and patterns of social media use also exhibit distinct tendencies. Female users tend to be more active in monitoring social interactions, such as comments, private messages, and responses to posts, as social media often serves as an important space for building social relationships and emotional support. At the same time, however, women demonstrate a higher level of awareness regarding the risks of objectification and digital harassment. In contrast, some male users place greater emphasis on entertainment and the consumption of visual content in their use of social media. Nevertheless, they are also driven to follow digital trends in order to avoid being left behind in the ongoing dynamics of social interactions within their peer groups.

This ambivalence can be understood through the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, which explains that individuals use media to fulfil various psychological and social needs, such as the need for information, entertainment, personal identity, and social integration. In this context, the need for social integration and a sense of belonging often becomes the primary motivation driving adolescents to remain actively engaged in social media. As a result, even though some adolescents possess relatively adequate levels of digital literacy and are aware of the potential risks of excessive media use, they may still experience FoMO due to the desire to maintain social relationships and gain recognition within digital networks. However, not all adolescents perceive social media as problematic. Some users utilise it productively, for instance, to access information, expand social networks, and support educational or professional activities. This finding suggests that experiences of social media use are diverse and are strongly influenced by users' motivations and levels of digital literacy.

These findings affirm that social media possesses an ambivalent character: on the one hand, it offers opportunities for self-development, access to information, and the expansion of social networks; on the other hand, it also carries the risk of digital dependency when users are unable to manage their usage intensity wisely. Therefore, strengthening media literacy should not only focus on the ability to understand and evaluate information but also on developing reflective capacities to manage social needs, navigate digital cultural pressures, and uphold ethical boundaries in social media use.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that adolescents aged 18 and above engage with social media content related to gender deviance in complex ways. The majority of adolescents demonstrate a critical stance toward content perceived as violating moral, religious, and social norms. This attitude is reflected in various comments that reject practices of digital sexual deviance and emphasise the importance of ethical conduct in the use of social media.

On the other hand, the study also identifies an ambivalence in social media usage practices. While some adolescents are able to utilise social media productively, there are also indications of a tendency toward digital dependency, influenced by the phenomenon of FoMO. This finding suggests that media literacy and the internalisation of moral values have not yet been fully effective in reducing the risks associated with excessive social media use.

Based on these findings, this study recommends the strengthening of digital literacy programs that not only emphasise ethical media use and compliance with legal regulations but

also incorporate aspects of time management in social media use, awareness of mental health, and the development of a balance between online and offline activities. These efforts can be implemented through collaboration among families, educational institutions, and community organisations, ensuring that social media can be utilised in a healthier, more ethical, and more productive manner by younger generations.

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