

# Investigating the Influence of Digitalization and Social Media on the Value Formation and Corruption Propensity of Law Students in the Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated how digitalization and social media influenced the value formation and corruption propensity of law students in the Philippines. We utilized a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, quantitatively assessing students' digital engagement, their perceived digital influence on values, and their value profiles (using selected Panukat ng Ugali at Pagkatao (PUP) subscales) and corruption propensity (via adapted scenarios). Simultaneously, we gathered qualitative data through focus group discussions and interviews, exploring nuanced perceptions of online narratives regarding integrity and corruption. Findings indicated that while digitalization offered opportunities for positive influence by raising awareness of social issues, exposure to normalized corrupt practices online contributed to a heightened sense of cynicism and a subtle increase in students' conformity to unethical norms. This pervasive digital environment, in which many corrupt acts appeared to go unpunished, appeared to weaken the students' Pagkamapunahin (criticalness) and Lakas ng Loob (guts/daring), thereby elevating their corruption propensity. The research provides actionable recommendations for integrating digital ethics and critical media literacy into legal education to foster ethically resilient legal professionals.

**KEYWORDS:** Digitalization, Social media, Value formation, Corruption propensity, Law students, Ethical development, Legal education, Panukat ng Ugali at Pagkatao (PUP), Digital ethics, Critical media literacy.

## INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has ushered in an era of unprecedented connectivity and information flow, fundamentally altering the social fabric and influencing the cognitive and affective landscapes of individuals, particularly the digitally native generations. While foundational research had meticulously characterized the intrinsic value profiles and baseline corruption susceptibility of law students, these studies were conducted at a time when the full scope and impact of pervasive digitalization and social media on ethical development were still emerging. Today, social media platforms are not merely communication tools; they serve as powerful, often unfiltered, conduits for news, opinions, social commentary, and the portrayal of societal norms, including those related to integrity and corruption.

This constant immersion in digital environments subtly, or overtly, shaped an individual's belief systems, their perceptions of the legal system's integrity, and, by extension, their own susceptibility to unethical conduct.

For aspiring legal professionals, who are expected to embody the highest standards of integrity and uphold the rule of law, the uncritical consumption or engagement with certain digital narratives posed a significant, and previously unexplored, challenge to their ethical formation. The virtual world presented a complex reality where information was democratized, but also where misinformation and moral relativism could proliferate. Understanding how these pervasive digital ecosystems contributed to or detracted from

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the ethical development of future lawyers was therefore paramount. This study aimed to bridge this critical contemporary knowledge gap by thoroughly investigating the nuanced ways in which digitalization and social media influenced the value formation of law students, ultimately impacting their corruption propensity. The insights derived from this research have been instrumental in designing relevant and responsive legal education reforms that adequately prepare future legal practitioners to navigate the complex ethical terrain of a digitally interconnected world, thereby strengthening the bulwark against corruption within the legal profession.

### Objectives of the Study

This study investigated the influence of digitalization and social media on the value formation and corruption propensity of law students in the Philippines. Specifically, we:

- **Meticulously assessed the precise extent, patterns, and multifaceted nature** of law students' routine engagement with and exposure to various digital platforms and social media channels. This objective involved quantifying daily screen time, identifying the primary platforms utilized, and categorizing the types of content they consumed (e.g., legal news, political discussions, entertainment, online advocacy related to integrity or corruption).
- **Examined, through the direct perceptions and self-reflections of law students**, how their consistent exposure to specific social media content and their participation in various online interactions influenced their personal value formation. This particularly focused on values critical to the legal profession, such as integrity, accountability, justice, critical thinking, and a commitment to public service, investigating how these foundational values were either reinforced, challenged, or subtly reshaped by their evolving digital experiences.
- **Investigated the statistical relationship and intricate correlations** between identifiable patterns of digital and social media engagement and the law students' existing value profiles, as measured by relevant subscales of the **Panukat ng Ugali at Pagkatao (PUP)**. We focused specifically on traits like **Pagkasunud-sunuran (Conformity)**, **Pagkamapunahin (Criticalness)**, and **Pagkamaalalahanin (Thoughtfulness)**. We also assessed the correlation with their measured corruption propensity, drawing upon and adapting relevant items from a preceding research instrument.
- **Explored law students' nuanced perceptions** regarding how discussions, news, and portrayals of corruption within online spheres contributed to either the normalization or de-normalization of corrupt practices. This objective critically analyzed how these prevailing online narratives, whether explicit or implicit, might have influenced their personal ethical threshold for, or their active resistance to, engaging in or tolerating corruption within their future professional roles.
- **Identified both the perceived opportunities and the inherent challenges** that the current ubiquitous landscape of digitalization and social media presents for legal education institutions in effectively achieving their mission of fostering ethically sound and public-service-oriented legal professionals. This objective included exploring how digital tools could be innovatively leveraged for enhanced ethical training and education, as well as recognizing how these platforms might inadvertently expose students to detrimental influences or perpetuate unethical online behaviors.
- **Proposed strategic and actionable recommendations** for integrating comprehensive digital literacy, advanced critical media consumption skills, and specific ethical guidelines for professional online conduct into the standard legal education curricula. These recommendations aimed to strengthen students' ethical reasoning abilities, enhance their capacity to navigate complex digital ethical dilemmas, and proactively mitigate any potential negative influences of the digital environment on their corruption propensity.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

This study adopted a **convergent parallel mixed-methods research design**. We collected quantitative data through surveys to establish relationships between variables. Simultaneously, qualitative data was gathered through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews to provide rich, in-depth contextual understanding and explore underlying mechanisms. The study was both descriptive and correlational.

#### Locale of the Study

The study encompassed multiple law schools across key urban centers in the Philippines, with a particular focus on the Eastern Visayas region (including Tacloban City) to maintain relevance to previous research. This broader scope ensured the capture of diverse digital exposures and socio-cultural nuances. Law schools were selected based on size, geographic

location (urban vs. provincial), and public/private institutional type.

### Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of undergraduate law students currently enrolled in law schools across the Philippines who were active users of digital platforms and social media.

- **Sampling for Quantitative Phase:** We utilized a multi-stage stratified random sampling approach. Law schools were stratified by type (public/private) and geographic location. Within each selected law school, students were stratified by year level (e.g., second to fourth year) to ensure proportional representation.
- **Sampling for Qualitative Phase:** A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants for focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Participants were chosen based on their diverse digital engagement patterns, varying viewpoints on digital ethics, and willingness to share in-depth experiences. We made efforts to include students from different socio-economic backgrounds and genders.

### Respondents

The primary respondents were a statistically representative sample of law students from the selected institutions. We also conducted a small number of key informant interviews with legal ethics professors or deans to provide institutional perspectives.

### Research Instruments

We deployed a combination of existing and newly developed instruments:

- **Digital Engagement and Media Consumption Survey (DEMCS):** A newly developed, quantitative survey instrument designed to capture granular data on students' digital habits, including frequency and duration of use, platforms utilized, and content types consumed.
- **Perceived Digital Influence on Values (PDIV) Scale:** A newly constructed 5-point Likert-scale instrument to measure students' perceived impact of digital and social media on their values and ethical frameworks.
- **Panukat ng Ugali at Pagkatao (PUP) Subscales:** We administered selected relevant subscales from the **PUP Bersyong 1997**, focusing on traits like **Pagkasunud-sunuran (Conformity)**, **Pagkamapunahin (Criticalness)**, and **Pagkamaalalahanin (Thoughtfulness)**.

- **Corruption Propensity Scenarios (CPS) in Digital Context:** Building upon a preceding instrument, we developed a set of scenario-based questions that specifically integrated ethical dilemmas arising in a digital context relevant to future lawyers.

- **Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Semi-structured Interview Guides:** These qualitative guides were designed to elicit rich narratives and in-depth discussions on students' perceptions of online narratives and their ethical responsibilities in the digital space.

### Validation of the Instrument

All new or significantly adapted instruments underwent rigorous validation processes, including a review by a panel of experts for **content validity**, **cognitive interviews** with a small group of students, and **pilot testing** to assess the reliability of the quantitative scales.

### Data Gathering Procedure

We obtained prior approval from the institutional review boards (IRBs) of participating universities. All students provided informed consent. Quantitative surveys were administered online through secure platforms for wider reach and efficient data collection. FGDs and interviews were conducted by trained researchers, with all sessions audio-recorded with explicit consent and transcribed verbatim. All collected data was anonymized and stored securely.

### Statistical Treatment

We employed both descriptive and inferential statistics for the quantitative data. **Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations** were used for a descriptive summary. **Correlation analysis** (e.g., Pearson  $r$ ) was used to determine the relationships between digital engagement metrics and PUP subscales. **Multiple regression analysis** identified significant predictors of value formation or corruption propensity. **ANOVA** and **t-tests** were used to compare mean scores across different groups.

For the qualitative data, we used **thematic analysis** to uncover deeper insights into how digitalization and social media affected students' ethical reasoning. We systematically integrated the quantitative and qualitative findings during the discussion and conclusion phases to provide a comprehensive and triangulated understanding.

### Results and Discussion

The study revealed several key findings regarding the intricate influence of digitalization and social media on law students. As anticipated, law students exhibited high levels of digital and social media



engagement, consistent with their demographic profile as young adults.

Regarding value formation, the study found a mixed influence. On one hand, social media served as a platform for positive exposure, increasing awareness of social justice issues, human rights, and anti-corruption movements, thereby reinforcing positive traits like **Pagkaresponsible (Responsibleness)** or fostering **Pagkamaalalahanin (Thoughtfulness)** towards societal problems. This finding aligns with the concept that exposure to diverse information can broaden perspectives and that knowledge and attitudes can shape practices.

However, a significant finding pertained to the negative influences. We found that exposure to a constant stream of news and discussions (or even humorous content) that portrayed widespread corruption, particularly within government and legal sectors, led to increased cynicism or desensitization among law students. This appeared to weaken their **Lakas ng Loob (Guts/Daring)** to challenge corruption and subtly fostered **Pagkasunud-sunuran (Conformity)** to unethical norms. The qualitative data was crucial in unpacking how these online narratives—including memes, viral stories, and online debates—shaped students' perceptions and eroded their idealism, thereby contributing to a sustained or even heightened level of corruption propensity.

Furthermore, the study uncovered a tension between the **Pagkamapunahin (Criticalness)** expected of legal minds and the often uncritical consumption of social media content. Students exhibited varying degrees of critical media literacy, with some being highly discerning about online sources while others were more susceptible to misinformation or emotionally charged narratives, which impacted their ethical reasoning. The **clash of moral values theory** also manifested in the digital realm, where personal loyalties expressed online—or "micro morality"—conflicted with the "macro morality" of universal justice when students dealt with online ethical dilemmas. The influence of **group culture** on social media, where echo chambers could reinforce certain beliefs, was also found to play a role in shaping individual ethical stances and contributing to a stronger corruption propensity, especially if they were embedded in groups that explicitly or implicitly condoned certain grey areas of legal conduct. We also found that gender differences in value profiles, particularly in traits like **Pagkamaramdamin (Sensitiveness)**, influenced how male and female students reacted to and were influenced by emotionally charged online content.

## Recommendations

Based on our findings, we proposed the following recommendations to proactively address the influence of digitalization and social media on law students' value formation and corruption propensity:

- **Integrate Digital Ethics and Critical Media Literacy into Legal Education:** We recommended that law school curricula formally incorporate dedicated modules on digital ethics, critical media literacy, and the ethical responsibilities of legal professionals in the online space. This should go beyond basic cybercrime laws to include topics such as responsible online conduct, navigating misinformation, and the psychological impact of online content on ethical decision-making.
- **Develop Scenario-Based Training on Digital Ethical Dilemmas:** We proposed that law schools create and utilize realistic, scenario-based training exercises that present students with digital ethical dilemmas relevant to the legal profession. This practical approach would strengthen their **Pagkaresponsible (Responsibleness)** and critical thinking skills.
- **Foster a Culture of Open Dialogue on Digital Influences:** We urged law schools to encourage open and safe discussions among students and faculty about the ethical challenges of social media. The goal was to create a reflective environment where students could articulate their concerns and develop strategies for navigating online pressures.
- **Promote Positive Digital Role Models and Narratives:** Educational institutions and professional legal organizations should actively identify and promote legal professionals who exemplify high ethical standards in their online conduct. Showcasing positive digital role models and fostering online communities that promote integrity can help counter negative narratives and reinforce desired values.
- **Research and Monitor Evolving Digital Landscapes:** We stressed the importance of continuous research to monitor the evolving digital landscape and its specific impacts on legal professionals' ethics and integrity. This ongoing research will ensure that legal education and professional development programs remain agile and responsive to the digital age's demands.
- **Collaborate with Social Media Platforms for Ethical Content Promotion:** We suggested that legal education bodies and anti-corruption advocates explore collaborations with social

media companies to promote ethical content, fact-checking initiatives, and responsible discourse related to law and governance.

➤ **Address Bias Awareness in Digital Contexts:**

We concluded that training programs for students and faculty should include modules specifically addressing implicit biases that can be perpetuated or exacerbated in digital spaces, a crucial step toward improving academic leadership and ethical awareness.

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