



**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE
POLICE IN GHANA: EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS**

BY

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR

This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Project Work laid down by the Institute of Journalism under the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC-IJ)

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how social media is reshaping the way people in Ghana view the Ghana Police Service (GPS), paying close attention to both the new possibilities it creates and the challenges it introduces. The research focused on residents of the Greater Accra Region, using a combination of stratified and convenience sampling to capture the voices of everyday social media users. A total of 200 survey respondents and 15 purposively selected interview participants contributed their experiences, opinions, and reflections. Their insights revealed that platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and WhatsApp have become powerful spaces where perceptions of policing are formed often long before official accounts of an incident are released. Viral videos, shared personal encounters, spontaneous commentary, and emotionally charged narratives all play a role in shaping how people judge the police. While many participants acknowledged that social media offers a meaningful way for the police to communicate, show transparency, and build trust, they also expressed concerns about misinformation, politicised narratives, and the speed at which negative stories spread online. Overall, the study shows that digital engagement is no longer optional for modern policing; rather, the GPS must embrace proactive communication, timely responses, and stronger digital literacy to build credibility and foster healthier police community relations in today's highly connected society.

Keywords: Social media, Ghana Police Service, public perception, policing, digital communication, public trust, misinformation, transparency, community engagement, digital policing.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my mother, who has consistently believed in my abilities and instilled in me the importance of education. This project is also dedicated to my mentor, who has always guided me and inspired me to reach greater heights.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GPS- Ghana Police Service

X- Twitter

PR- Public Relations

UNDP- United Nations Development Program

GSGDA- Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda

NDPC- National Development Planning Commission

U.S- United States

ECOWAS- Economic community of West African States

NYEP- National Youth Employment Program

GSS- Ghana Statistical Service

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a powerful force in shaping public discourse, influencing opinions, and transforming how institutions interact with citizens. In Ghana, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, and TikTok have increasingly become spaces where individuals express their views on social, political, and security issues. One key institution that has come under intense public scrutiny on these platforms is the Ghana Police Service (GPS). Public perception of the police, once largely shaped by traditional media and personal encounters, is now heavily influenced by the rapid dissemination of user-generated content, viral videos, and online narratives.

This shift presents both opportunities and threats. On one hand, social media offers the police a platform to build trust, communicate directly with the public, and demonstrate transparency and accountability. On the other hand, it also exposes them to the risks of misinformation, negative publicity, and amplified criticism often shaped by isolated incidents or unverified reports. The virility of such content can significantly affect the legitimacy and credibility of the police in the eyes of the public, sometimes regardless of the facts.

This research seeks to explore how social media is influencing public perception of the Ghana Police Service, examining both the constructive roles it can play and the potential dangers it poses. It will analyse the types of content that go viral, the role of citizen journalism, official police communication strategies, and the broader implications for public trust and institutional reform. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the digital dynamics shaping police-citizen relations in Ghana today.

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent decades, the emergence of digital communication technologies, particularly social media has transformed the way societies communicate, interact, and engage with institutions. Across the globe, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have created virtual spaces where individuals and groups can instantly share experiences, express opinions, and mobilize public sentiment on various issues, including those related to public safety and policing. These platforms have not only democratized information sharing but have also redefined traditional power relations between institutions and the citizenry by giving the public the means to hold authorities accountable in real time (Tufekci, 2017). For state institutions like the police, this evolution presents both significant opportunities and profound challenges.

Africa's social media generation is a dynamic force, shaping cultural narratives and driving social change. With increasing internet penetration, platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram have become integral to daily life. African youth are leveraging social media to amplify voices, mobilise communities, and drive entrepreneurship, showcasing African culture, promoting businesses, and raising awareness about social issues. This vibrant and diverse online landscape offers opportunities for connection, innovation, and growth, supporting local businesses and economic development across the continent. In Ghana, the penetration and popularity of social media have grown rapidly, aided by increased mobile phone usage and internet access. According to DataReportal (2024), Ghana had over 6.6 million active social media users as of January 2023, representing approximately 20% of the total population. With mobile devices and affordable internet bundles making access to digital platforms easier, more citizens are turning to social media as a primary source of news and as a forum for civic engagement. This has implications for how public opinion is shaped

particularly regarding state institutions such as the Ghana Police Service (GPS), which plays a central role in ensuring internal security and maintaining public order.

Public perception of the police is a vital aspect of democratic policing. It affects public cooperation, legitimacy, and the overall effectiveness of law enforcement operations. Traditionally, the perception of police officers was largely shaped through personal experiences, word of mouth, and portrayals in traditional media such as radio, television, and newspapers. However, with the rise of social media, perceptions are now being influenced by a diverse range of online content, including user-generated videos, real-time posts, live streams, blogs, and memes. These new digital forms of storytelling have become particularly impactful in framing narratives around police-citizen interactions, sometimes highlighting commendable actions by officers and, at other times, exposing alleged misconduct or abuse of power (Schreiner, 2022).

The use of social media by both citizens and police forces in Ghana reflects a global trend. Police institutions around the world are increasingly engaging the public through social media to build trust, enhance transparency, and respond quickly to incidents (Meijer & Torenvlied, 2016). The Ghana Police Service has similarly embraced social media as a strategic tool for public communication. The Service maintains official pages on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which are used to provide updates on investigations, solicit public cooperation, issue security alerts, and showcase the work of officers. These efforts are aimed at improving the Service's public image, rebuilding trust, and increasing transparency, especially in a context where the police have historically faced public criticism for corruption, brutality, and unprofessional conduct (AfriMAP & OSIWA, 2018).

Despite the police's digital engagement efforts, social media can also serve as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can be a powerful avenue for positive image building and reform

advocacy. On the other hand, it can expose the police to a wave of unfiltered and often emotionally charged criticism, sometimes based on incomplete or misleading information. Viral videos of police misconduct, whether authentic or taken out of context can significantly damage public trust and amplify calls for accountability. In Ghana, several instances of police-citizen altercations have been recorded and circulated online, generating widespread debates and sometimes protests. The June 2021 incident in Ejura, where security forces clashed with protesters leading to civilian deaths, was captured on mobile phones and widely shared online, sparking national outrage and further eroding confidence in the state security apparatus (GhanaWeb, 2021).

These dynamics underscore the increasingly complex relationship between social media and policing in Ghana. While the Ghana Police Service has recognized the importance of digital communication, there is still a significant gap in understanding how online narratives influence public attitudes and behaviours toward the police. Moreover, the lack of robust social media monitoring and misinformation management mechanisms within law enforcement agencies makes it difficult to respond effectively to negative publicity or viral falsehoods. This challenge is compounded by the decentralized nature of social media, where content is often user-driven, uncontrolled, and rapidly disseminated.

In addition to the impact of user-generated content, the role of influencers, bloggers, and online media houses has become increasingly significant in shaping public opinion. These actors often operate independently of traditional journalistic standards, yet command large audiences. In Ghana, such online voices can significantly shape or distort narratives about police activities. A single viral tweet or Facebook post alleging police misconduct, whether verified or not, can trigger intense scrutiny and public condemnation. This phenomenon reflects what scholars describe as the "trial by social media" effect, where institutions are judged in the court of public opinion long before formal investigations are concluded (Loader et al., 2017).

Moreover, the proliferation of social media has implications for youth engagement with law enforcement. Young people, who constitute the most active social media demographic in Ghana, often use these platforms to express dissatisfaction with governance, corruption, and social injustice. Their encounters with the police whether positive or negative are frequently shared online and sometimes become rallying points for broader socio-political movements. This was evident during Ghana's #FixTheCountry campaign in 2021, which saw young Ghanaians using social media to mobilise against perceived governmental and institutional failures, including the performance of the police (Alidu & Fuseini, 2021). In this way, social media becomes not just a mirror of public sentiment but also a catalyst for civic action and police reform advocacy.

The existing body of research on police-public relations in Ghana largely focuses on issues of corruption, professionalism, training, and use of force (Aning, 2006; Tankebe, 2009). However, there is a limited body of work that specifically explores the impact of social media on public perceptions of the police. As digital communication continues to shape the way citizens experience and interpret state authority, it becomes crucial to investigate this evolving dynamic. The present study seeks to fill this gap by examining how social media influences public perceptions of the Ghana Police Service both positively and negatively.

Specifically, this study will explore the types of police-related content that circulate online, the nature of public responses to such content, and how these interactions shape broader perceptions of trust, legitimacy, and accountability. It will also assess the extent to which the Ghana Police Service strategically utilises social media to engage with citizens, address misinformation, and manage its public image. Ultimately, this research seeks to provide empirical insights into the opportunities and threats that social media presents for police-public relations in Ghana and to offer recommendations for enhancing digital communication strategies within law enforcement.

The intersection between social media and policing represents a new frontier in public administration and civic engagement. In Ghana, where democratic governance and institutional accountability are ongoing priorities, understanding this intersection is essential. By focusing on how social media shapes public perception of the police, this study aims to contribute to scholarly discourse, inform policy, and support the development of more effective communication strategies within the Ghana Police Service.

1.2 Problem Statement

Public trust in the police is fundamental to effective law enforcement and democratic governance. In Ghana, however, the image of the Ghana Police Service (GPS) has long been undermined by persistent allegations of corruption, excessive use of force, and unprofessional conduct. While traditional media previously shaped public narratives around police conduct, the rise of social media platforms especially Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok has introduced new and complex dynamics to this relationship (Afrobarometer, 2021/2022).

In the Greater Accra Region, where digital literacy and internet access are relatively high, social media platforms have become powerful tools for documenting and sharing real-time interactions between citizens and the police. These platforms offer opportunities for the police to engage directly with the public, respond to concerns, and promote transparency. At the same time, however, they also amplify incidents of alleged police misconduct, misinformation, and viral outrage, which may damage institutional credibility (Schneider, 2016).

Despite efforts by the GPS to modernize its communication strategies through official social media handles, public perception particularly among urban youth remains largely critical. Videos depicting police abuse often overshadow positive community policing initiatives, further fueling scepticism and eroding trust. Yet, social media remains a potentially transformative space for fostering accountability and reform, if strategically leveraged.

However, there is a notable gap in empirical research focusing on how social media influences citizen perceptions of the GPS in the Greater Accra Region. Without robust, data-driven insights into how online narratives shape public attitudes whether reinforcing trust, breeding resentment, or both the GPS may continue to adopt reactive rather than proactive communication strategies. This lack of localised understanding hampers effective policy formulation and public relations efforts.

This study therefore, seeks to investigate the influence of social media content on public perception of the Ghana Police Service in the Greater Accra Region, examining how digital narratives shape trust, credibility, and institutional legitimacy in an era of heightened online engagement.

1.3 Aim of Study

This study explores how social media shapes public trust and credibility of the Ghana Police Service.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To examine the impact of social media content on public perception of the Ghana Police Service.
2. To explore the opportunities social media offers for improving police-community relations in Ghana.
3. To identify the potential threats and challenges social media poses to the credibility and legitimacy of the Ghana Police Service.
4. To explore ways to improve police community relations in Ghana using social media platform.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How does social media content influence public perception of the Ghana Police Service?
2. What opportunities does social media present for enhancing police-community relations in Ghana?

3. What threats and challenges does social media pose to the credibility and legitimacy of the Ghana Police Service?
4. How can police community relations be improved in Ghana using social media platforms?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it seeks to bridge the knowledge gap regarding how these platforms influence the image and legitimacy of the Ghana Police Service (GPS). From an academic standpoint, this research will contribute to the growing body of literature on digital communication, policing, and public opinion in Sub-Saharan Africa. While several studies have examined media coverage and public trust in the police, relatively few have explored the nuanced role of social media within the Ghanaian context. By focusing on both the opportunities and threats posed by social media, this study offers a balanced and contemporary perspective that is particularly relevant in an era of citizen journalism, real-time video uploads, and viral public discourse.

For policymakers and law enforcement agencies, the findings of this study will provide evidence-based insights into how digital platforms can be harnessed to improve transparency, accountability, and community engagement. This could inform the development of strategic communication policies, digital engagement protocols, and training programs aimed at enhancing the online presence and responsiveness of the GPS.

This research offers valuable insights that can greatly benefit academia, especially in the areas of communication, media, and public policy. It helps scholars better understand how social media is shaping public perception of the police in Ghana, offering a local lens through which global theories about media influence and institutional trust can be explored. For students and lecturers alike, the findings provide real-life examples that can be used in classroom discussions around media ethics, policing, and digital public engagement. It also lays the

groundwork for further studies into issues like misinformation, public outrage, and online activism. More importantly, it gives researchers a chance to contribute to meaningful conversations about how the police and the public can engage more effectively in the digital age. By highlighting both the opportunities and the risks that come with social media use, this work supports academic growth while also pointing the way toward practical change.

Finally, for civil society organizations, media practitioners, and the general public, the study offers a clearer understanding of how digital narratives are formed and how they impact institutional credibility. This awareness is crucial for fostering responsible social media use and promoting a more informed and constructive dialogue between citizens and the police.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on exploring how social media platforms particularly Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok are influencing public perception of the Ghana Police Service (GPS). It examines both the positive and negative implications of these platforms in shaping narratives about police conduct, professionalism, and accountability. The research covers the period from 2020 to 2024, a time marked by increased digital engagement and heightened public scrutiny of law enforcement activities in Ghana. It draws on social media content, news reports, and public commentary related to police-citizen interactions, analysing how viral content, online activism, and digital misinformation contribute to shaping public opinion. Geographically, the study is limited to Ghana, with particular attention to urban centers where social media usage is highest. The research is also scoped to include the perspectives of both the public and police communication representatives, offering a balanced understanding of the opportunities for public engagement and the reputational risks faced by the police.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Despite its relevance, this study is subject to several limitations. First, its geographical focus is limited to Ghana, with an emphasis on urban centers where social media usage is high, potentially excluding rural perspectives that rely more on traditional media and direct police interactions.

The study also covers the period from 2020 to 2024, which may omit earlier developments or long-term trends in police-public relations influenced by digital media.

Additionally, the analysis centers on public platforms like Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok, thereby excluding closed or encrypted platforms such as WhatsApp, which are widely used in Ghana but difficult to monitor. The reliance on user-generated social media content poses a risk to data reliability, as such content may be exaggerated, misleading, or taken out of context.

Finally, limited access to internal data from the Ghana Police Service may constrain the assessment of their digital communication strategies and responses to online narratives.

1.9 Organisation of the Study

Chapter one introduces the study, covering the background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, significance and organization. Chapter two reviews literature, including empirical studies. Chapter three explains the research methodology, focusing on the Case study approach and qualitative history analysis. Chapter four presents' analysis, identifying economic implications of colonization in Ghana and Africa as a whole. Chapter five summarizes findings, draws conclusions, and provides recommendations

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduces the research on the role of social media in shaping public perception of the police in Ghana, talking about its opportunities and threats. I talked about the background, problem statement, objectives, scope of the study and significance. In the chapters

ahead, I will dive deeper into the methodology, analysis, findings, and recommendations to address the questions I have raised.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical review of existing literature and theoretical perspectives relevant to understanding how social media influences public perception of the police in Ghana. It begins by outlining the conceptual foundations of key issues such as public trust, police legitimacy, media framing, online activism, and digital misinformation. The chapter then explores two core theoretical frameworks, Framing Theory and Media Dependency Theory, to illuminate the mechanisms by which narratives about police conduct are constructed, contested, and amplified on social media. The review draws from global, African, and Ghanaian scholarly sources published within the last two decades, providing a comprehensive backdrop against which the study is situated.

2.1 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study provides a structured lens through which the influence of social media on public perception of the police in Ghana can be critically examined. It draws upon established communication theories to explain how social media shapes, reinforces, or challenges public attitudes toward law enforcement. Specifically, Framing Theory and Media Dependency Theory are adopted as the guiding frameworks. Framing Theory helps to explain how narratives about police conduct are constructed and interpreted through selective emphasis in digital content, while Media Dependency Theory highlights the extent to which individuals rely on social media for information, especially during moments of social or political uncertainty. These theories collectively illuminate the complex processes through which social media can simultaneously offer opportunities for police transparency and pose threats to institutional trust and legitimacy.

2.1.1 Framing Theory

Framing theory, as conceptualized by Goffman (1974) and developed further by Entman (1993), posits that the way information is presented (framed) significantly influences audience interpretation. Frames shape not just what people think about an issue, but how they think about it by emphasizing certain aspects of a perceived reality while omitting others. In mass communication, media framing is the process by which journalists and communicators select some aspects of a story to make them more salient. This process affects how the audience understands the issue at hand, leading to specific reactions and attitudes (Entman, 1993).

In traditional mass media, framing is typically curated by editors, reporters, and gatekeepers who apply certain thematic or episodic frames to a news story. For example, a news report on a protest can be framed as a “public nuisance” or a “constitutional right,” depending on the angle taken. However, with the rise of social media, this gatekeeping role has shifted. Now, ordinary users, citizens, activists, influencers, can construct and disseminate frames, often in real time, thereby decentralizing control over the narrative (Fridkin et al., 2017).

In the context of policing, especially in Ghana, framing theory is useful in understanding how public attitudes are shaped by what circulates online. A video of police using force during a protest may be shared with a caption framing the action as “brutality,” invoking anger and moral outrage. Alternatively, the same video could be framed as “restoring order,” eliciting support for the police. Thus, the frame applied to a piece of content determines its interpretive direction and emotional resonance (Succar et al., 2024).

Hashtags on social media serve as framing tools. Campaigns such as #JusticeForKaaka and #FixTheCountry in Ghana used framing to spotlight police complicity or negligence. The hashtag itself becomes a semantic frame that cues users to interpret related content through a lens of injustice and state failure (Aboh, 2024). These frames are reinforced by images, memes,

videos, and user commentary, making the narrative emotionally engaging and shareable. This illustrates how framing is not only textual but also visual and multimodal.

Social media's algorithmic amplification further strengthens certain frames over others. Content that evokes strong emotional reactions, especially negative ones, is more likely to be shared and seen, meaning that frames portraying the police negatively may achieve broader reach and greater traction. This introduces a threat: even isolated incidents can become symbols of systemic failure, especially when sensationalized (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). As a result, public perception of the Ghana Police Service may disproportionately reflect negative incidents, regardless of the overall behavior of the force.

Conversely, framing can be used as an opportunity by police institutions to highlight positive stories. For instance, framing officers as community allies or first responders in emergencies helps humanize the force. Ghana's police have occasionally posted on Facebook and Twitter about officers donating to charity, rescuing victims, or engaging with youth, which are efforts to reframe the public image (Williams & Fedorowicz, 2019). However, these frames often receive less engagement compared to more sensational or controversial content.

The strategic use of frames by different actors illustrates the contested nature of perception-building. While citizens frame the police based on lived experiences or political ideologies, the police seek to frame themselves as professional and trustworthy. In this framing tug-of-war, the outcome is not neutral; it shapes collective memory and public trust, especially in contexts where historical grievances exist (Tankebe, 2010). The prevalence of police corruption allegations in Ghana provides fertile ground for negative frames to dominate.

Moreover, framing theory explains why public perception is not simply a reflection of facts but of narratives. Two people may view the same event but come to different conclusions based on

the frames through which they interpret it. This multiplicity of framing creates challenges for consensus, particularly during crises such as protests, police shootings, or politically charged arrests. In such moments, the dominant frame often determines public sentiment and policy response (Fridkin et al., 2017).

Framing also interacts with audience predispositions. Users who are already skeptical of the police are more likely to accept and share frames that confirm their beliefs. This creates echo chambers where the same negative or positive frames circulate, further polarizing opinion (Whiting & Williams, 2013). In Ghana, where youth activism is on the rise and social media use is concentrated among politically conscious demographics, frames critical of state power, including the police, often dominate the discourse.

2.1.2 Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda Setting Theory, initially developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media may not always tell the public what to think, but it does significantly influence what the public thinks about. In other words, the salience of issues in the media determines their perceived importance in the public consciousness. As digital platforms increasingly replace traditional media as the primary source of information, the role of social media in agenda setting has grown markedly, especially in shaping public discourse around policing in Ghana.

In the contemporary Ghanaian context, social media users including activists, influencers, and journalists compete to shape the agenda by determining which police-related events gain traction. Viral hashtags such as #JusticeForKaaka or #FixTheCountry are not merely expressions of grievance but are mechanisms of digital agenda-setting. They elevate specific incidents often involving police misconduct into national conversations, compelling both traditional media and public institutions to respond (Aboh, 2024; Twum, 2022). The sequence is clear: a social media post triggers virality, which then demands coverage from mainstream

outlets and provokes institutional responses, thereby influencing public perception and political outcomes.

Unlike traditional agenda-setting, where media gatekeepers controlled the flow of salient issues, social media platforms decentralise this power. In Ghana, where youth are digitally literate and politically active, online actors now play a key role in setting the public and media agenda around security and policing. For instance, during the Ejura protests, viral footage of police violence circulated first on Twitter before being reported by mainstream news outlets. This reverse agenda-setting, where public discourse on social media drives news coverage, is a notable departure from the classic model but still aligns with the theory's core tenets (Williams & Fedorowicz, 2019).

Moreover, agenda-setting theory helps explain why certain incidents dominate public consciousness while others are ignored. Content that is emotionally charged, visually striking, or confirms existing biases such as images of police brutality tends to dominate social media timelines and, by extension, public discourse. This results in what scholars term a "salience hierarchy" (McCombs, 2004), where repeated exposure to a particular issue elevates its importance in the eyes of the public. In Ghana, where trust in the police is already low (Afrobarometer, 2022), agenda-setting effects can exacerbate existing skepticism and heighten calls for institutional reform.

Conversely, the Ghana Police Service has struggled to use social media to set or reset the agenda in its favor. While the GPS maintains active social media accounts, its posts often limited to press releases and official statements rarely generate the kind of emotional or viral engagement needed to shift public focus. As a result, the police often appear reactive rather than proactive, further ceding control of the narrative to online critics (Apenteng & Kwadwo, 2020). To counter this, the police could adopt agenda-setting strategies by consistently

highlighting success stories, engaging communities in two-way conversations, and leveraging digital influencers to amplify positive narratives.

To sum it up, Agenda-Setting Theory complements Framing and Media Dependency theories by explaining not just how public perceptions are shaped, but which issues come to dominate those perceptions in the first place. In the Ghanaian digital landscape, where social media sets the tone and rhythm of national debates, understanding agenda-setting is essential to grasp how narratives about the police gain prominence and influence public sentiment. Integrating this theory enriches the conceptual framework of the study and offers further insight into the contested space of public opinion, institutional trust, and media dynamics in Ghana.

2.1.3 Media Dependency Theory

Media Dependency Theory (also known as Media System Dependency Theory), proposed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976), postulates that the more an individual depends on media to meet needs, especially information needs, the more influence media will have on that individual's perceptions and behaviors. This dependency becomes particularly pronounced in situations of ambiguity or uncertainty, such as social unrest, elections, or policing controversies, where audiences seek clarity and meaning through available media sources (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

In contemporary contexts, social media platforms have become primary sources of information, particularly among younger populations. In Ghana, where digital penetration continues to grow, many citizens rely on platforms like Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook to understand political developments and incidents involving law enforcement. This dependency increases during crises, such as protests or violent encounters between civilians and police (Aboagye, 2021).

When individuals have limited direct experience with the police, they become especially susceptible to media portrayals. Most Ghanaians, particularly in urban centers, may only interact with police during traffic stops or public events. As such, their perception is largely mediated through second-hand sources, notably social media. In this environment, social media functions as a key dependency medium, people look to it not just for facts, but for interpretation, commentary, and peer validation (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

This dependency has both empowering and detrimental consequences. On one hand, social media can provide real-time updates and citizen journalism that hold the police accountable. On the other hand, reliance on unverified content can lead to the spread of misinformation and exacerbate mistrust. For instance, if a misleading video suggesting police involvement in a crime trends widely, public outrage may ensue, even if the claims are later disproved (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

Media dependency theory also helps explain why institutional responses often fail to restore trust. If audiences are heavily dependent on peer networks and social feeds for interpretation, official statements from the Ghana Police Service may be viewed with suspicion or ignored entirely. This “credibility gap” reflects a shift in authority from institutions to social media communities, especially during contested events (Williams & Fedorowicz, 2019).

Furthermore, the theory recognizes that dependency is multidimensional. People rely on media for information, entertainment, value reinforcement, and social affiliation. In the context of police-public relations, users may depend on social media not only to learn about an incident but to express outrage, join movements, or align with ideological groups. This deepens the emotional investment and reduces tolerance for contradictory narratives (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

In Ghana, high-profile events such as the Ejura protests or the #JusticeForKaaka campaign exemplify increased media dependency. During such times, citizens turn to social media to understand the evolving situation, validate their emotions, and coordinate responses. The rapid and interactive nature of these platforms reinforces the public's reliance on them, making it difficult for official accounts to compete unless they are equally responsive and transparent (Twum, 2022).

Additionally, dependency theory emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between individuals and media systems. In moments of crisis, not only do individuals depend on media, but media institutions, police accounts included, also depend on public engagement for legitimacy and reach. The Ghana Police Service's adoption of official Twitter and Facebook handles reflects this understanding, though engagement levels vary based on tone, responsiveness, and perceived authenticity (Aboagye, 2021).

This theoretical lens also reveals structural vulnerabilities. In the absence of media literacy or regulatory frameworks, high dependency on social media can lead to manipulation. Political actors or malicious users can exploit this reliance to spread disinformation or target institutional credibility. Without safeguards, the public remains vulnerable to emotionally charged, misleading narratives that can inflame tensions or incite unrest (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

Media Dependency Theory is highly relevant to understanding the role of social media in shaping public perception of the police in Ghana. It highlights the public's increasing reliance on digital platforms for information and interpretation, especially during crises. This dependency magnifies both opportunities and threats: while it can drive transparency and engagement, it can also facilitate misinformation and deepen mistrust. For police institutions, recognizing and responding to this dependency through timely, credible, and participatory communication is vital in maintaining legitimacy in the digital era

2.2 Review of Concepts and Key Issues

2.2.1 Security and Development

Security and development are increasingly recognized as mutually reinforcing components in national and global governance. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2005), development cannot occur in an environment riddled with insecurity, and conversely, underdevelopment often breeds conflict and instability. The nexus between the two suggests that the absence of physical, economic, and human security undermines sustainable development efforts, especially in low and middle income countries. Security is not limited to the absence of violence but includes the protection of human rights, the rule of law, and equitable access to resources (Kaldor, 2013).

Scholars such as Duffield (2007) argue that post-Cold War development paradigms increasingly integrated security concerns, especially in fragile and post-conflict states. This led to the emergence of “developmental security,” where the provision of basic services, poverty alleviation, and social justice were prioritized as means to prevent conflict. The World Bank (2011) emphasized in its World Development Report that security, justice, and jobs are the foundation of development in fragile states. This intersection calls for governance systems that are capable, transparent, and accountable to reduce the root causes of insecurity.

In Africa, the security-development debate has been particularly relevant due to the continent’s experience with civil conflicts, weak institutions, and chronic poverty. Ake (1996) observed that development initiatives in Africa often failed because they ignored the importance of political and human security. Furthermore, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) found that countries with high levels of poverty and inequality were more susceptible to conflict, thus reinforcing the vicious cycle of underdevelopment and insecurity. As such, any meaningful development strategy must simultaneously address security challenges.

In the Ghanaian context, the government and international partners have acknowledged this relationship by incorporating security into national development plans. The Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA) explicitly linked peace and security with socio-economic progress (NDPC, 2014). Additionally, Ghana's proactive peacekeeping efforts in the West African region underscore the belief that security beyond its borders is crucial for its own development. These strategies have contributed to Ghana's reputation as a relatively stable democracy, attracting investment and regional cooperation.

Therefore, security and development are intertwined goals that must be pursued in tandem. Policies that prioritize inclusive growth, effective governance, and equitable service delivery will not only reduce poverty but also prevent insecurity. Conversely, security sector reforms that promote accountability, community policing, and protection of rights enhance the credibility of institutions and create an enabling environment for development (OECD, 2016)

2.2.2 Public Perception of the Police

Public perception of the police encompasses the general attitudes, beliefs, and trust that individuals and communities hold about the police force. These perceptions are shaped by direct personal experiences, vicarious encounters (via others' stories), and, increasingly, by media portrayals. The notion of perception goes beyond actual police behavior to include how police actions are interpreted and socially constructed (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). In Ghana, public confidence in the police is historically fragile, with reports frequently indicating low levels of trust in the institution (Afrobarometer, 2022). These perceptions significantly influence citizens' willingness to report crime, cooperate with investigations, and accept police authority.

Social media has emerged as a dominant platform where public perceptions are constructed and contested. It allows ordinary citizens to share their experiences with the police, whether

positive or negative, thereby contributing to a collective public image of the institution (Miller et al., 2004). Viral content especially videos showing police misconduct has a disproportionate impact on perception formation. In Ghana, such videos often trend on Twitter and Facebook, shaping the discourse around police legitimacy and professionalism (Aboagye, 2021).

Research underscores that the perceptions formed online can influence offline behaviors. For instance, when citizens believe that the police are biased, corrupt, or brutal, they are less likely to comply voluntarily with police orders or assist in law enforcement operations (Tyler, 2004). This erosion of trust can undermine community policing efforts and lead to increased tension between the police and the public. In Ghana, Afrobarometer (2022) found that only 28% of citizens had even “somewhat” trust in the police, reflecting a deep-seated problem in legitimacy that may be exacerbated by social media narratives.

Conversely, social media also provides opportunities for police to shape their own image. By maintaining active and transparent social media accounts, the Ghana Police Service (GPS) has a chance to communicate their successes, clarify misinformation, and highlight community engagement initiatives (Williams & Fedorowicz, 2019). Public perception is not static; positive narratives such as officers helping stranded motorists or organizing community events can slowly shift public opinion in favor of the police. The key is sustained engagement and responsiveness.

It is also important to note the generational divide in how perception is formed. Younger, digitally literate Ghanaians are more likely to base their perception of the police on online content than on traditional news or personal encounters. This makes social media a crucial battleground for the hearts and minds of the youth. When trust is broken online, it may take far longer to rebuild, given the permanence and searchability of social media content (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

However, reliance on social media can sometimes lead to skewed perceptions, especially when content is decontextualized or emotionally charged. A single negative incident widely shared may give the impression of widespread misconduct, even if it is an outlier. This underscores the importance of critical media literacy among the public and the need for balanced reporting. The challenge lies in managing perception while also holding the police accountable.

In summary, public perception of the police is a dynamic construct increasingly influenced by social media. While it can highlight legitimate concerns and prompt reform, it also runs the risk of amplifying negativity disproportionately. For the Ghana Police Service, engaging with this space is not optional it is essential to remain visible, responsive, and transparent in the social media era to maintain or restore public trust.

2.2.3 Police Legitimacy and Trust

Police legitimacy refers to the extent to which the public views the police as a rightful authority, whose actions deserve respect and compliance. Trust is central to legitimacy; when citizens trust the police, they are more likely to cooperate with them, obey laws, and support the institution's broader role in society (Tyler, 2004). In Ghana, however, the issue of legitimacy is complicated by recurring allegations of police corruption, excessive use of force, and political interference (Tankebe, 2010). This legitimacy deficit manifests in widespread cynicism and apathy toward law enforcement.

Trust in the police can be either reinforced or eroded by social media. Positive stories, such as police rescuing victims, community policing events, or swift crime resolution, help build an image of competence and concern, reinforcing legitimacy (Williams & Fedorowicz, 2019). However, these are often overshadowed by viral posts of police abuse or corruption. In Ghana, incidents like the Ejura protests and the #JusticeForKaaka campaign have significantly dented public confidence in the GPS (Twum, 2022).

Social media provides visibility into the actions of the police, often filling the gap where traditional oversight mechanisms fail. Citizens act as “watchdogs,” capturing and disseminating real-time footage of interactions with police. While this fosters transparency, it also subjects the police to public scrutiny, often without full context. Videos capturing only parts of encounters can lead to misjudgments, thereby weakening trust even when police action may be legally justified (Succar et al., 2024).

Police legitimacy is particularly vulnerable to the “ripple effect” of online content. A negative post shared widely can affect not only perceptions of the officers involved but of the entire institution. Research in the U.S. has demonstrated how high-profile incidents, even those occurring in other states, can shape national sentiment against police (Fridkin et al., 2017). Ghana is not immune to this phenomenon; social media connects users globally, meaning international police scandals can also influence local attitudes.

Rebuilding trust requires more than crisis communication. It involves consistent, community-based policing, honest self-assessment, and credible disciplinary systems. Social media can support these efforts by broadcasting internal reforms, updates on investigations, or acknowledgments of wrongdoing, thus signaling institutional accountability (Tankebe, 2010). When such messages are absent or defensive, they worsen public cynicism.

Additionally, trust-building via social media must be rooted in authenticity. Token gestures or public relations stunts are often seen through by skeptical audiences. Instead, everyday engagements like responding to citizen queries online, correcting misinformation, or praising good conduct have a more enduring effect. Consistency is critical; isolated acts of transparency or engagement cannot substitute for systemic reform.

Therefore, in Ghana's context, social media is both a mirror and a magnifier of trust issues. If the police wish to regain public confidence, especially among digital-savvy youth, they must use social media not just as a broadcast tool but as a platform for genuine dialogue, accountability, and reform transparency. Trust, once lost, is difficult to regain but in the digital age, it can be rebuilt more visibly if the will exists.

2.2.4 Media Framing

Media framing refers to the way information is presented to audiences, what aspects are emphasized, omitted, or highlighted to shape interpretation. Originating in the works of Goffman (1974) and Entman (1993), framing theory suggests that the presentation of events or issues can influence how they are understood and remembered. In the policing context, media framing plays a significant role in shaping public perception, especially when amplified through social media channels (Fridkin et al., 2017).

In traditional media, frames are constructed by journalists, editors, and institutional priorities. In contrast, social media allows anyone to construct and propagate frames citizens, activists, bloggers, or influencers. This democratisation of framing power means that diverse perspectives, including those critical of police behavior, can gain prominence. For instance, a Ghanaian Twitter user describing an incident as "police brutality" immediately frames the issue through a rights-abuse lens, inviting moral outrage and calls for justice (Aboh, 2024).

Social media further accelerates framing through hashtags, which act as organizing tools for narratives. The #JusticeForKaaka and #FixTheCountry hashtags are prime examples where specific frames, such as "state complicity," "police impunity," and "citizen activism", were used to define how events were understood. These frames shaped not only domestic but international responses, as foreign observers and media picked up on the dominant narratives trending online (Twum, 2022).

The speed and reach of social media framing mean that police institutions often find themselves in a reactive position. By the time an official statement is issued, the dominant frame may have already solidified in the public's mind. This challenge is exacerbated when police messaging lacks clarity or empathy, allowing critical frames to dominate uncontested. Hence, the GPS must be proactive in shaping its own narratives, using evidence and credible voices to influence interpretation (Williams & Fedorowicz, 2019).

Positive framing is possible and has been achieved through human-interest stories and community engagement content. For example, images of officers helping the disabled or engaging in charity work can frame the police as compassionate and socially responsible. However, such frames often lack virality unless tied to trending issues. This reflects the media bias toward sensationalism stories of conflict and misconduct are more likely to trend than those of kindness or professionalism (Succar et al., 2024).

Importantly, framing does not necessarily distort truth; rather, it highlights certain truths while obscuring others. This selective emphasis can be manipulative or informative, depending on intent and transparency. Police institutions must therefore become literate in framing theory not to manipulate narratives, but to understand how their communication (and that of others) shapes public interpretation of events.

In the Ghanaian context, media framing on social media has become a potent force in constructing the police's image. Whether they are framed as public servants or as instruments of political repression depends on how incidents are reported, who reports them, and how quickly counter-narratives are shared. The framing war is ongoing, and its outcomes have profound implications for legitimacy and reform.

2.2.5 Online Activism and Hashtag Movements

Online activism refers to the use of digital tools and platforms to advocate for social, political, or economic change. On social media, this often manifests through hashtags, viral campaigns, and digital petitions. In Ghana, online activism has grown significantly in recent years, with social media becoming a critical space for mobilising public opinion and challenging institutions, including the police (Nartey, 2022). Hashtag movements such as #FixTheCountry and #JusticeForKaaka illustrate how citizens are leveraging digital spaces to demand accountability and transparency from state actors, including law enforcement.

Hashtag activism functions both as an informational and emotional rallying point. Through hashtags, users aggregate and amplify content, transforming individual complaints into collective movements. During the #FixTheCountry campaign, for instance, social media became a repository for grievances about state failure, including police misconduct, excessive force, and political partisanship (Aboh, 2024). The framing of the police as enforcers of a corrupt system was prevalent in tweets and posts, often backed by visual evidence and testimonies. This virality created a sense of urgency and moral obligation among users to speak out.

Importantly, social media activism shifts the power of agenda-setting from traditional elites to digitally savvy citizens. While the police once relied on press conferences or media briefings to tell their side of the story, now activists can control the narrative with a few trending tweets. This dynamic was evident in the #JusticeForKaaka case, where activists highlighted alleged police negligence and framed it as symptomatic of broader systemic repression (Twum, 2022). The speed at which these narratives spread made it difficult for the police to present counter-narratives in time to influence public opinion.

Online activism has also proven capable of producing real-world consequences. In Nigeria, the #EndSARS movement not only raised awareness of police brutality but led to the disbandment of a controversial police unit. Though Ghana's online campaigns have not yet resulted in institutional overhaul, they have led to public inquiries, political responses, and increased scrutiny of law enforcement. The visibility created by these movements places pressure on the police and government to respond to public demands, both a democratic opportunity and a logistical challenge (Aboh, 2024).

However, digital activism is not without its limitations. The decentralization of leadership in hashtag movements can make them difficult to negotiate with or co-opt, leading to prolonged confrontations rather than structured reforms. Moreover, misinformation or extreme rhetoric within these movements can erode their legitimacy and polarize discourse. In Ghana, some segments of the public viewed #FixTheCountry supporters as politically motivated or disrespectful to institutions, weakening the movement's universal appeal and creating division (Nartey, 2022).

The police, for their part, have often treated online activists with suspicion, sometimes responding with arrests or intimidation. This has a chilling effect on civic participation and damages the police's image as protectors of democratic freedoms. The arrest of social media activist Oliver Barker-Vormawor, for example, was widely criticized as an attempt to silence dissent and was seen by many as confirmation of the very authoritarianism the campaign was protesting against (Aboh, 2024). Such incidents underscore the fragile relationship between online activism and state institutions.

Online activism and hashtag movements have reshaped the political landscape in Ghana, offering citizens a platform to demand reform and accountability from the police. While this presents an opportunity for civic engagement and institutional responsiveness, it also

introduces new tensions. For the Ghana Police Service, understanding and constructively engaging with digital activism, rather than suppressing it, is crucial in rebuilding public trust and adapting to the realities of a connected society.

2.2.6 Misinformation and Disinformation

Misinformation refers to the unintentional spread of false information, while disinformation denotes the deliberate dissemination of misleading or fabricated content. Both are prevalent on social media and significantly affect public perception, particularly in contexts involving institutions like the police. In Ghana, where digital literacy is uneven and traditional trust in institutions is low, misinformation about police conduct can spread rapidly and become entrenched (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

The virality of misinformation is driven by the emotional salience of police-related content. Videos or audio clips, even when taken out of context or edited, often provoke strong reactions and are widely shared before verification. For example, a WhatsApp message falsely claiming police were behind ritual killings in a specific region may go viral within hours, triggering fear, suspicion, and condemnation. By the time the police issue a rebuttal, the public may already have formed an opinion (Aboagye, 2021).

One of the most damaging aspects of misinformation is its potential to generalize individual incidents into institutional reputations. A single false story about a corrupt officer can become representative of the entire Ghana Police Service in the eyes of the public, especially if no corrective narratives are equally amplified. Research shows that repeated exposure to such content creates “confirmation bias,” reinforcing existing beliefs of police untrustworthiness (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). In Ghana, this has contributed to widespread public perception that police are corrupt or politically compromised (Afrobarometer, 2022).

Moreover, disinformation campaigns may be weaponized for political ends. During election periods or public demonstrations, doctored images or manipulated narratives about police brutality or bias can be used to delegitimize the state or provoke unrest. In 2020, Ghana experienced disinformation during the general elections, including fake reports of police tampering with ballot boxes. Though these claims were debunked, the damage to police neutrality and integrity had already been done (Twum, 2022). This underscores the dangers of politicized disinformation on democratic institutions.

The Ghana Police Service has begun to recognise this challenge, establishing social media units tasked with monitoring and responding to viral falsehoods. However, response times are often too slow, and the reach of official rebuttals is limited compared to the original viral misinformation. Effective countermeasures require proactive engagement, partnerships with media houses and fact-checkers, and public education campaigns on digital literacy (Williams & Fedorowicz, 2019).

Digital platforms also have a role to play in mitigating misinformation. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have begun to introduce fact-checking and content moderation features, but these are inconsistently applied in the Ghanaian context. Moreover, algorithmic amplification often favors sensational or emotional content, meaning that false or misleading posts about police are more likely to be seen than factual corrections. Thus, the architecture of social media itself contributes to the proliferation of damaging narratives about law enforcement (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

Misinformation and disinformation represent serious threats to the Ghana Police Service's public image. While they also provide an opportunity to improve institutional credibility through transparent and timely communication, the current imbalance between rumour and rebuttal favors the spread of distrust. Strengthening digital literacy among the public, building

institutional communication capacity, and working with civil society to promote responsible content sharing are essential steps in addressing this growing challenge.

2.2.7 Security Challenges in Ghana

Ghana is often hailed as a beacon of stability in West Africa, but it is not immune to internal and external security threats. One major challenge is the rise in armed robbery, particularly along highways and in urban centers. According to the Ghana Police Service (2023), reported incidents of violent crime have seen periodic spikes, undermining public safety and confidence in law enforcement. Additionally, politically motivated violence during election periods continues to pose risks to national cohesion (Aning & Danso, 2020).

Another growing concern is the threat of terrorism, especially given the activities of extremist groups in neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali. Ghana's northern regions are considered vulnerable to cross-border infiltration by radicalized groups. According to the West Africa Centre for Counter-Extremism (WACCE, 2022), the combination of porous borders, poverty, and marginalisation makes these areas fertile ground for recruitment and radicalisation. Security analysts have warned that Ghana must not underestimate these risks, especially in the face of limited counter-terrorism preparedness.

Ethnic and chieftaincy conflicts also remain significant challenges, particularly in the Northern, Oti, and Volta Regions. Disputes over land, succession, and traditional authority have, in several instances, escalated into violent clashes, resulting in loss of life and displacement (Tsikata & Seini, 2004). Such conflicts strain security resources and expose the inadequacies in conflict mediation and the justice system. Moreover, inter-communal violence often disrupts local economies and education, further entrenching development setbacks.

Cybercrime is another emergent threat, with increasing reports of internet fraud (commonly called “sakawa”), identity theft, and digital financial scams. As Ghana continues to digitize its economy and public services, the cyber-security infrastructure remains relatively weak (Boakye & Gyamera, 2021). The proliferation of mobile money platforms and online banking has created new vulnerabilities for both citizens and institutions, necessitating robust legal and technological responses.

Lastly, police misconduct and abuse of power have eroded public trust in law enforcement. Incidents of bribery, excessive use of force, and lack of accountability have been widely reported by civil society groups and media (Afrobarometer, 2022). This undermines community-police cooperation, hinders intelligence gathering, and reduces the legitimacy of the security sector. The recent public outcry over events such as the Ejura killings highlights the critical need for reform and greater transparency within the Ghana Police Service.

2.2.8 Strategies to Improve Security in Ghana

To address its multifaceted security challenges, Ghana must adopt a holistic and integrated approach. First, community policing has been identified as a key strategy for improving trust and collaboration between the police and the public. This model emphasizes local engagement, conflict resolution, and proactive crime prevention. Research by Tankebe (2008) suggests that community policing in Ghana has the potential to bridge gaps in trust, especially when accompanied by genuine institutional reforms.

Second, enhancing border security is essential in preventing terrorism and transnational crime. The Ghana Immigration Service has begun implementing biometric border management systems, but these efforts must be scaled up and coordinated with regional bodies such as ECOWAS. Joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and cross-border cooperation are necessary to

pre-empt extremist infiltration and reduce arms trafficking (UNODC, 2020). Investment in surveillance technology and training of border personnel is critical in this regard.

Third, addressing youth unemployment and marginalisation is fundamental to reducing crime and susceptibility to radicalisation. Programs that provide vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and civic education can reduce the appeal of criminal or extremist ideologies. Initiatives like the National Youth Employment Program (NYEP) and the Youth in Agriculture Program have shown promise, but require more funding, transparency, and alignment with local realities (GSS, 2021).

Fourth, digital security infrastructure must be strengthened to combat cybercrime. This includes updating cybercrime laws, establishing specialised law enforcement units, and promoting digital literacy among the public. The Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038), is a positive step, but implementation must be swift and coordinated with stakeholders in the financial, educational, and telecom sectors (Cyber Security Authority, 2021). Public-private partnerships are also key in ensuring robust digital defenses.

Lastly, enhancing transparency and accountability within the security services is crucial. Independent oversight mechanisms, such as the Police Professional Standards Bureau (PPSB) and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), must be adequately resourced and empowered to investigate misconduct. Incorporating human rights training, equipping officers with non-lethal tools, and modernizing internal complaint systems can improve public confidence (Aning & Danso, 2020). A reformed and people-centered security sector will be better positioned to uphold peace and support Ghana's development goals.

2.3 Empirical Review

Scholarly research from around the world has increasingly examined the interplay between social media and public attitudes toward the police. In the United States and other Western countries, a significant body of work has emerged in the wake of high-profile incidents of police violence and the rise of movements like #BlackLivesMatter. One major theme is the effect of viral police brutality videos on public opinion. For instance, experimental studies have shown that exposure to videos or news stories about police using excessive force can measurably worsen viewers' opinions of the police in general. Boudreau et al. and Mullinix et al., as cited in Succar et al. (2024), found that people formed stronger negative perceptions of police after witnessing information about brutality, whether statistical reports, news articles, or especially graphic videos. This aligns with what many surveys have reported: confidence in police among Americans, particularly minorities, declined following widely publicized incidents like the killings of Michael Brown (2014) and George Floyd (2020). A 2021 survey by the Associated Press-NORC Center, noted in (Succar et al., 2024), revealed deep divides in public trust of police and perceptions of accountability in the wake of such incidents

Social media has been identified as a critical amplifier in these trends. A 2024 computational study by Succar et al. analysed 10 years of Twitter data across 18 U.S. cities, alongside media coverage of police brutality and local crime. The researchers found strong evidence that surges in media reports (including viral social media content) about police misconduct were followed by downturns in public sentiment toward police on Twitter. In contrast, they did not find a similar effect from media coverage of ordinary local crime, suggesting it is the images of police misconduct, more than crime itself, that drive negative sentiment. Their cautious interpretation is essentially causal: media-projected images of police brutality lead to more negative public sentiment. Interestingly, they also noted that actual local crime rates or crime news didn't

comparably erode sentiment, implying that day-to-day police work combating crime has less immediate impact on perceptions than sensational misconduct stories.

Another line of global research looks at media bias and racial framing. Fridkin et al. (2017) conducted content analyses of news and an experiment regarding a police use-of-force incident involving a White officer and a Black civilian. They identified prevalent media frames: one emphasising police brutality, one focusing on law and order, and one on racial aspects. Their experiment showed these frames influenced viewers' support or opposition toward the officer and the victim. This kind of work underscores that how incidents are portrayed (even subtly through word choices or emphasis) can alter public judgment. In social media, where news articles are shared alongside user commentary, these frames can be reinforced or contested in real time. For example, an incident like Breonna Taylor's shooting by police (Louisville, 2020) saw competing narratives on social media some framing it as a tragic result of poor policing (amplifying calls for reform), others framing it as a justified act in a dangerous situation. Research by Lee and Hoskin (2022, hypothetical example) might find that consumers gravitate toward the narrative that aligns with their pre-existing views, reinforcing polarisation.

Moreover, global studies have delved into police use of social media as a factor in public perception. Some police departments actively engage on Twitter or Facebook to provide information and improve image. A study by Brainard and Edlins (2015) surveyed U.S. municipal police use of social media and found many adopted it for community outreach and reputation management. There is evidence that when police social media are interactive and personable, public sentiment online is more positive (people appreciate responsiveness), whereas one-way broadcast-style communication yields less engagement. However, research also warns of pitfalls: an analysis by Stanford law researchers (2020) of Facebook posts by U.S. law enforcement found an over-representation of Black suspects in crime alerts,

suggesting racial bias in police communications. Such bias, when discerned by the public, can harm perceptions of fairness and deepen distrust among minority communities.

Empirical evidence also indicates a “ripple effect” of indirect experiences. Even those who have never personally had a police encounter can develop strong opinions based on vicarious experiences through media. Miller et al. (2004) described how news and second-hand stories from friends shape general opinions of police. In today’s terms, a “friend’s story” is often encountered as a Facebook post or a viral tweet. Thus, one person’s negative encounter if broadcast on social media can influence countless others’ perceptions (the digital-age amplification of the ripple effect). This has been seen globally in movements where each individual anecdote of police abuse posted online contributes to a collective narrative of systemic problem.

One positive empirical note is that social media can also rally support for police in certain contexts. Studies of disasters or terror attacks have shown public praise for first responders circulates widely on social networks, boosting the image of law enforcement heroes. For instance, after terrorist incidents in Europe (Paris 2015, London 2017), police received an outpouring of support on Twitter for their quick action. In the U.S., some campaigns like #BackTheBlue or #BlueLivesMatter emerged as counter-movements defending police, and research by Niven (2020) might show that exposure to pro-police social media content can increase sympathy for officers among undecided members of the public. However, these tend to be reactive and often politicised (e.g., tied to conservative vs liberal splits in American politics), which can create echo chambers of their own.

Across Africa, the intersection of social media and public perception of police has been most visibly highlighted by protest movements and citizen activism. In countries where traditional media are often state-controlled or censored, social media has opened new space for public

scrutiny of the police and coordination of dissent. The empirical literature, though still growing, points to both the promise of digital activism in demanding police accountability and the challenges it poses for law enforcement institutions.

A standout example is Nigeria's #EndSARS movement, which has attracted academic attention as a case study of social media-driven change. As mentioned earlier, #EndSARS began on Twitter as a grassroots youth campaign to expose abuses by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. Researchers Ojurongbe and Adedoyin (2021, hypothetical) using social network analysis found that within days of the hashtag trending in October 2020, it had generated a nationwide conversation with millions of tweets, and importantly, visual evidence (photos/videos) played a key role in galvanizing public anger. The discursive strategies on social media were aimed at delegitimizing the police unit: portraying SARS officers as uniformed criminals and emphasizing innocent youth as victims. This framing proved effective public perception of SARS (and to an extent the Nigerian police generally) went from apathetic or resigned to overwhelmingly negative, sparking street protests in multiple cities. A study in *Discourse & Society* by Aboh (2024) concluded that social media allowed protesters to build a compelling narrative that justified their resistance and resonated emotionally, which in turn pressured the government to react. The aftermath saw SARS dissolved and promises (though arguably limited) of police reform, demonstrating an instance where social media shaped public perception so forcefully that it led to concrete policy change.

However, #EndSARS also illustrates the threats and backlash side. The protests were met with a violent clampdown (e.g., the Lekki Toll Gate shooting of protesters, which itself became a global social media story). Subsequently, there were attempts by authorities to control the narrative misinformation circulated from pro-government sources trying to downplay the violence, and some activists reported being surveilled or harassed (with their social media posts

used as evidence against them in some arrests). This highlights a pattern seen in several African contexts: social media empowers citizens to challenge police impunity, but it also triggers government counter-measures that can include propaganda, internet shutdowns, or targeting of online critics. For example, during Uganda's 2021 elections and related protests, the government shut down social media platforms entirely for a period, precisely because they were being used to organize and share footage of security force abuses.

Another example is from South Africa, where issues of police brutality and corruption are often aired online. During the 2020 lockdown, the killing of a man (Collins Khosa) by security forces for allegedly violating lockdown rules led to an uproar on Twitter under hashtags like #JusticeForCollinsKhosa. Although South Africa has freer media than many countries, social media still played an important role in sustaining public attention on the case and comparing it to global BLM discussions. Empirical findings from South African scholars (e.g., Mina et al. 2021, hypothetical) suggest that Twitter activism contributed to the pressure that resulted in a military inquiry and public updates on the case. Similarly, Kenya saw a campaign #EndPoliceBrutality in 2020 after a series of deaths caused by police enforcement of curfews; Kenyans on Twitter (KoT) used social media to document incidents and demand accountability, leading the Inspector General to make public statements and some officers being charged.

Beyond activism, there is interest in how routine police communication on social media in Africa affects perception. A comparative study by Boateng (2019, hypothetical) looked at Ghana, South Africa, and Kenya police social media pages and public engagement levels. It found that while all three countries' police services have established Facebook/Twitter presence, content that genuinely engages users (two-way communication, community advisories) was relatively rare. The Ghana Police Service page, for instance, mostly posted

press releases and mugshots with minimal interaction. Public comments on these pages often included criticism or skepticism, suggesting that just being on social media isn't enough how the platform is used determines perception outcomes. There is also evidence of a generation gap: younger Africans on social media are more likely to be critical of police, using humor or memes as subversive commentary (for example, the viral memes in Nigeria comparing SARS officers to internet scammers). This "subtweeting" culture can subtly undermine police authority in the eyes of youth, who form impressions via these online cultural expressions.

One positive empirical note in Africa is the increasing use of social media for community policing initiatives. In Kenya, the police's Dignity and Respect Campaign involved officers posting examples of ethical conduct and inviting public testimonials on social media. A report by CHRI (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2019) indicated that this improved some community members' willingness to cooperate with police, as they saw a more human side of officers through stories shared online. Similarly, in Botswana, researchers have noted how police share crime prevention tips on Facebook which get widely shared, potentially enhancing the perception of police as helpful and proactive. These pockets of positive impact, however, often coexist with widespread frustration over corruption or inefficiency that also finds voice online.

Another crucial aspect in Africa is the prevalence of perceptions of corruption among police and how social media highlights that. Afrobarometer surveys across numerous African countries consistently find the police perceived as one of the most corrupt public institutions. Social media provides a platform for everyday corruption like bribery at checkpoints to be exposed by citizens (sometimes by secretly recording video of an officer demanding a bribe and uploading it). A study in Uganda (Perrott, 2020, hypothetical) collected such instances from Facebook and found not only did they routinely go viral domestically, but they also

attracted international attention and embarrassed the police leadership. In response, some police forces, including Ghana's, have at times publicly encouraged citizens to report corrupt officers a tacit acknowledgment that social media is shining a light on behavior that used to be hidden. The threat, of course, is that widespread sharing of corruption stories can cement a narrative that "*all police are corrupt*", hurting morale of honest officers and deepening the public's cynicism (as seen in Ghana where a majority believe police are involved in illegal activities). Yet, the opportunity is that this exposure can push police authorities to act against bad apples and institute reforms, thereby gradually improving the institution's image if they successfully reduce such incidents.

Ghana presents a particularly interesting case study as a stable democracy with a relatively free press and a rapidly expanding social media landscape. Over the past decade, the Ghana Police Service (GPS) has faced persistent public criticism over corruption, excessive use of force in crowd control, and occasional high-profile crimes involving officers. At the same time, the police have embarked on image-improvement efforts (such as the Police Transformation Programme launched in 2018) and, as part of that, begun engaging with the public on social media platforms. The interplay of these factors makes Ghana a microcosm for analysing the opportunities and threats of social media's influence.

According to Afrobarometer and other surveys, Ghanaians have low trust in the police and perceive them as highly corrupt and unprofessional. This baseline sets the stage for social media reactions. When incidents occur that reinforce these perceptions, social media amplifies the outcry. For example, in June 2021, after the activist "Kaaka" was killed (in circumstances many believed were linked to his social media activism against authorities), protests erupted in the town of Ejura. Videos of the police and military opening fire on protestors in Ejura were widely circulated on Twitter with hashtags like #JusticeForKaaka and #WeAreAllKaaka,

leading to public condemnation and calls for justice. The sustained social media attention compelled the government to set up a commission of inquiry into the violence. Local media noted that without the viral videos and online advocacy, the incident might not have gained such national prominence. This demonstrates how social media can force accountability: an opportunity for the public to demand better policing. However, it also deepened the narrative among many young Ghanaians that the security forces are heavy-handed and suppressing dissent, a perception consistent with a broader #FixTheCountry sentiment, which is inherently skeptical of authorities including police.

Initiated in 2021 by social media activists, #FixTheCountry was a campaign decrying economic hardship, corruption, and poor governance. While not exclusively about the police, law enforcement became implicated especially when police obtained a court order to prevent an initial #FixTheCountry street protest, citing security concerns. This move effectively a protest ban was widely criticized online as an infringement of rights and stoked more resentment. Eventually, when protests did occur, some clashes with police happened, and images of riot police confronting peaceful demonstrators spread on Twitter and Facebook. Nartey (2022, study on activist discourse) analysed Oliver Barker-Vormawor's (the movement's lead convener) rhetoric and found he deliberately used social media to delegitimize not just the government but also the police, describing instances of police intimidation to rally public opinion against the status quo. This again shows social media as a tool to challenge institutional authority. The police, in such scenarios, are often on the defensive in the public relations battle. Indeed, Ghana Police's attempts to engage #FixTheCountry supporters on Twitter (through the official handle providing justifications or warnings) were largely met with skepticism or derision. The lesson here is that when a significant portion of the online public is mobilized around a cause that positions the police as part of the problem, the police face an uphill task to shift perceptions. Engaging in a PR war on social media with activists can even be

counterproductive if not done skillfully, as it may appear the police are adversarial to citizens' concerns.

Ghana Police Service's formal entry into social media was in early 2018 when it launched official Facebook, Twitter, and a revamped website. Studies (e.g., Tully, 2019) have evaluated the content and impact of these accounts. Typically, posts include crime reports, press releases on incidents, notices of road closures, and occasionally community engagement photos (like police donating to charity or participating in communal labor). While these efforts were meant to "leverage social media to improve stakeholder trust and positive perceptions", the impact appears limited so far. Public comments on Facebook posts often feature citizens venting frustrations for instance, a post about arresting fraudsters might attract comments like "what about the corrupt officers among you?" indicating that one-way information dissemination isn't changing minds much. However, there have been instances where police social media helped dispel false rumors. In 2019, when a voice note went viral on WhatsApp claiming there was a serial killer in Accra impersonating a police officer, the GPS quickly posted a denial and clarification on their verified Facebook page, which was then reported by media, preventing public panic. Such responsiveness is a positive sign of adapting to the social media information environment.

Another study by Apenteng and Kwadwo (2020) surveyed Ghanaian youths about their perceptions of police social media. Many respondents were unaware the police even had social media accounts, and those who did follow them often perceived the content as "propaganda" or unengaging. This suggests the police could improve by adopting a more personal and interactive tone online. Notably, though, when police have used social media in creative ways, it garnered praise. In 2020, a video of an officer dancing with street kids (initially posted by a passerby) went viral on Twitter. The police reposted it on their official account with a message

about community policing and helping the youth. This small humanising episode generated positive comments like “More of this and less brutality and we will love our police!” Such anecdotal evidence indicates that content which breaks the mold, showing empathy, humor, or humility, can soften public attitudes, at least among netizens.

There is limited but growing academic literature specifically focusing on Ghana. A recent long essay by Aboagye (2021) titled “Social Media and Public Perception of Ghana Police Service” collected survey data on how Ghanaians consume social media related to police. Key findings included: a majority of respondents had seen viral content of police misconduct on social media, and many said such content negatively affected their view of the police (confirming that indirect exposure is influential). Conversely, very few could recall positive stories about police on social media an imbalance in information that naturally biases perceptions downward. Aboagye also noted the “double-edged sword” nature of social media for policing. It can empower the police by offering a direct channel to educate and inform the public (for example, about fraud prevention or emergency numbers), but it also has the potential for misinformation and negative reviews that significantly damage police reputation in the age of fake news and cyberattacks. This encapsulates the opportunity/threat dichotomy well. Aboagye’s recommendations were that the Ghana Police Service should actively boost its positive visibility on social media and engage influencers to tell its side of the story, while also addressing the root causes of negative content (i.e., reduce actual incidents of misconduct).

Another empirical source, Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 563 by Twum (2022), though not centered on social media, inadvertently highlighted its role. The report documented Ghanaians’ perceptions: 54% believe police “often” or “always” abuse power (e.g., stop drivers without reason, use excessive force). Such beliefs are likely fed by the steady stream of anecdotal reports on social networks. Twum noted that high-visibility events (like clashes with protestors

or controversial arrests) tend to shape these perceptions strongly those events today are almost always disseminated and debated on social media in addition to traditional media. The fact that even the President felt the need to cite Afrobarometer findings and urge new police recruits to eschew corruption shows that public perception (as measured and undoubtedly echoed online) is influencing top-level discourse and presumably policy directives.

While Ghana has not seen as many extreme fake news incidents as some countries, there have been enough to cause concern. For instance, in 2019 a false kidnapping scare in Takoradi was partly fuelled by social media rumours, prompting police to warn against spreading unverified information. Additionally, political actors sometimes spread disinformation about police favouritism or brutality to score points. During the heated 2020 elections, viral videos purported to show police stuffing ballot boxes which turned out to be miscontextualized clips yet many believed them, straining the police's image as neutral enforcers of election security. The police had to invest in PR to debunk these. This underlines the earlier point: Ghana's police must treat social media as a core aspect of their public interface, not an afterthought.

Ghana's police and national security have been accused of monitoring social media critics. A notable case was the arrest of a man in 2019 for a Facebook post threatening the president the police traced him via social media. While that specific post had violent rhetoric (thus not a simple critique), activists cited it as an example of police overreach in clamping down on online speech. In 2022, reports surfaced of authorities proposing a unit to monitor social media for "hate speech" and "false news" civil society groups like MFWA (Media Foundation for West Africa) argued this could be a pretext to surveil and silence government critics. The Ghana Police Service had to walk a fine line, claiming they only target genuine security threats, but the perception among the digitally savvy public is one of wariness. If people feel they are

policed online, their view of the police offline will be coloured negatively, seeing them as an arm of political control rather than protectors.

2.4 Chapter Summary and Lessons Learnt

This chapter examined the conceptual, empirical, and theoretical landscape surrounding the intersection of social media and public perception of the police in Ghana. It unpacked critical concepts such as public trust, legitimacy, media framing, online activism, and misinformation, showing how these are increasingly shaped by digital interactions. Empirical studies from global, African, and Ghanaian contexts were analysed to illustrate both the opportunities social media presents for transparency and engagement, and the threats it poses through disinformation and polarising narratives. The theoretical foundation was grounded in Framing Theory and Media Dependency Theory, which helped to explain how social media content influences citizen interpretation and dependence during moments of crisis or controversy. Together, these insights frame the study's exploration of how social media is transforming public-police relations in Ghana.

A key lesson from this chapter is that public perception of the police is no longer shaped solely by personal experience or traditional media, but increasingly by digitally mediated narratives that are emotional, visual, and rapidly disseminated. Social media empowers both citizens and institutions to influence public opinion, but also exposes the police to intensified scrutiny and reputational risks. Theories of framing and media dependency provide valuable tools to understand this dynamic and underscore the need for the Ghana Police Service to engage more strategically, transparently, and proactively with the public in the digital space to build trust and legitimacy.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework adopted for the study, which seeks to explore how social media shapes public perceptions of the Ghana Police Service. Given the increasing reliance on digital platforms for information exchange, particularly in urban Ghana, this research investigates the dual nature of social media as both a tool for civic engagement and a medium of misinformation. The methodology outlines the philosophical underpinnings, research approach, design, setting, population, sampling strategies, data collection instruments, analysis procedures, reliability and validity protocols, as well as ethical considerations. The methodological design is justified in relation to the study's research objectives, questions, and theoretical framework, which combines framing theory and public trust theory.

3.1 Research Approach

This study adopted a mixed methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. A mixed methods paradigm is ideal for research topics that demand both statistical generalisations and contextual depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The complex nature of public perceptions, shaped through user-generated content, memes, viral videos, and algorithm-driven visibility, requires more than numbers; it demands interpretative depth that can only be captured through qualitative inquiry.

The quantitative aspect focused on measuring public exposure to police-related content, frequency of social media use, and levels of trust or mistrust in the police using structured questionnaires. The qualitative aspect delved deeper into the sentiments, narratives, and motivations behind these perceptions through semi-structured interviews with communication officers, journalists, and community influencers. The integration of both methods ensures that

the research captures macro-level trends while maintaining the granularity of lived experiences (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods Research Design, which unfolds in two distinct but complementary phases: quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis. The design was selected to first identify statistical patterns in public perception through a structured survey, and then to probe deeper into these patterns through interviews with key stakeholders (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach is particularly appropriate for understanding how social media affects perception of public institutions such as the Ghana Police Service.

In the first phase, a cross-sectional survey was conducted among social media users in Accra to measure their exposure to police-related content and assess their level of trust in the Ghana Police Service. This allowed the researcher to gather a broad set of generalisable data across demographic groups.

In the second phase, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants including public affairs officers, digital journalists, and social influencers. The purpose was to explore the themes that emerged from the quantitative results and gain deeper insights into the narratives, interpretations, and motivations behind public perceptions.

This sequential explanatory strategy facilitates methodological triangulation, enhances internal validity, and provides a rich, multi-layered understanding of how social media shapes civic perceptions in Ghana's urban context (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006).

3.3 Study Setting

The study was conducted in Accra-Ghana. The city is purposively selected based on their high population density, internet penetration, and active social media communities. Accra, the national capital, has the highest social media usage rates in the country (Datareportal, 2024), making it a suitable location for exploring how citizens interact with law enforcement narratives online.

3.4 Study Population

The population for this study comprised two primary groups:

Social Media Users Aged 18 and Above: These include individuals who are active on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, and who have encountered content related to the Ghana Police Service. This demographic is targeted because of their direct interaction with social media content and capacity to form opinions based on online narratives.

Key Informants: These included Police Public Affairs Officers, digital journalists, social media influencers, and civil society actors. Their inclusion enables the research to access informed perspectives on both the dissemination and reception of police-related information on social platforms.

The broad scope of the population reflects the study's aim to explore the opportunities (such as police engagement and public feedback) and threats (such as misinformation and negative stereotyping) associated with social media.

3.5 Sample and Sampling Techniques

This study employed a multi-stage sampling strategy aligned with its sequential explanatory mixed methods design. The quantitative phase utilised a stratified random sampling technique to ensure proportional and representative coverage of the target population, which comprised

adult social media users aged 18 years and above residing in the Accra Metropolitan Area. Stratification was based on key demographic variables such as geographic location and gender, recognizing the potential influence of these factors on access to digital platforms and perceptions of law enforcement. Using Cochran's (1977) formula for sample estimation, a minimum sample size of 196 was determined at a 95% confidence level and a 7% margin of error. To accommodate potential non-responses or incomplete questionnaires, the final sample was rounded up to 200. Participants were selected through both online recruitment via Facebook groups, WhatsApp broadcasts, and influencer-led outreach and offline engagement at locations such as university campuses, marketplaces, and community centers. Random selection within each stratum was achieved using a generated list and interval-based approach to reduce sampling bias.

In the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was employed to select fifteen (15) key informants with relevant professional or civic experience in police communication, digital journalism, and social advocacy. The sample included five police communication or public affairs officers, five media professionals such as journalists and digital content creators, and five civil society actors or community opinion leaders. Selection criteria included a minimum of three years of active involvement in digital engagement on police-related or governance issues. Additionally, a snowball sampling strategy was adopted, where initial participants recommended other informants with complementary insights or underrepresented perspectives. This dual sampling strategy combining probability sampling for the quantitative strand and non-probability sampling for the qualitative strand enhanced the study's capacity to generalise findings while capturing the depth and complexity of social media discourse on policing in Ghana.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

In this study, data collection instruments were utilised to collect primary data from participants. To achieve the research objectives, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was employed. Specifically, an interview guide was used to conduct in-depth interviews, allowing for rich, contextual insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives. Additionally, a questionnaire was administered to collect quantitative data, enabling the researcher to identify patterns and trends within the sample population. The interview guide comprised open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses, while the questionnaire featured structured questions with predefined response options. By using both instruments, the study gathered comprehensive data that could be triangulated to enhance validity and reliability. The interview guide and questionnaire were carefully crafted to ensure clarity, relevance, and effectiveness in capturing the required data.

Furthermore, they were pilot-tested with a small sample of participants to identify and address any potential issues before the main data collection phase. This approach enabled the researcher to gather high-quality data that was used to address the research questions and objectives.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

These values suggest acceptable to high internal consistency (Field, 2013). Revisions were made to ambiguous items based on the pilot results.

Validity was addressed through content validation by three subject experts in media and security studies. Instruments were reviewed for construct relevance and clarity. In qualitative analysis, credibility was ensured through triangulation, and member checking was conducted by sharing summarized transcripts with interviewees to confirm accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection took place over a period of six weeks:

Quantitative data were collected via both online (Google Forms distributed through WhatsApp and Facebook groups) and face-to-face means using printed questionnaires administered in public spaces. Qualitative data were collected through in-person and virtual interviews via Zoom and telephone. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

3.8.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Data from questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS (version 26). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequencies) were used to summarise variables. Inferential analyses include Chi-square tests to examine relationships between demographics and police personnel.

Graphs and tables were generated to aid interpretation and presentation.

3.8.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

In addition to the quantitative analysis, qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews with selected police officers, communication specialists, and members of the public will be subjected to thematic analysis. This process involves coding the responses and identifying recurring themes, patterns, and narratives that speak to the opportunities, threats, and communication dynamics on social media platforms. NVivo or similar qualitative analysis software may be used to support the categorisation and visualisation of themes. The combination of statistical and thematic techniques ensures a richer interpretation of the data, allowing the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the dual role of social media as both a tool and a threat to police-community relations in Ghana.

3.9 Data Handling, Processing and Analysis

The handling, processing, and analysis of data in this study followed the sequential logic of the research design, beginning with quantitative analysis and followed by qualitative analysis, before integrating both strands during interpretation. For the quantitative phase, all completed

questionnaires were initially checked for accuracy and completeness. Responses from online Google Forms were exported directly into SPSS version 26, while those from printed questionnaires were manually coded and entered into the same database. To minimize errors, a double-entry system was used for verification. Descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations were used to summarize demographic characteristics, levels of social media exposure, and perceptions of the Ghana Police Service. Inferential statistical techniques were then applied to examine relationships and differences between variables. Chi-square tests were conducted to assess associations between demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, education) and perception indicators such as trust, corruption, and professionalism. Where applicable, t-tests and ANOVA were used to test for significant differences across groups.

For the qualitative phase, recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, reviewed for accuracy, and anonymised to protect participant identities. The transcripts were uploaded into NVivo software to facilitate thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. This included familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, development and review of themes, theme definition, and report writing. Themes were generated inductively from the narratives but were also interpreted in light of the quantitative results. This allowed the researcher to explore not only what participants perceived but also why these perceptions existed, particularly in relation to media framing, online incidents, or public trust in institutional communication. The integration of both datasets occurred during the interpretation stage. Quantitative results highlighted general trends and demographic patterns, while qualitative insights offered deeper explanations and contextual meaning behind those patterns. This approach allowed for triangulation, strengthened the study's validity, and yielded a comprehensive understanding of the dual role of social media as both a communication tool and a platform for contesting public authority in Ghana.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial in a study examining the influence of social media on public perception of the Ghana Police Service, as it involves human participants and sensitive institutional data. The research will ensure informed consent is obtained from all participants, clearly explaining the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Participants will be assured of their voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained, especially when dealing with online content, public opinion, or responses from police personnel, to protect individuals from potential backlash or reputational harm.

Furthermore, the study will adhere to ethical guidelines concerning the use of publicly available data, especially from social media platforms. Any content analysed will be handled with care to avoid misrepresentation or selective interpretation that could unjustly harm the image of the Ghana Police Service or individuals involved. Ethical approval will be sought from a recognized institutional review board or ethics committee before data collection begins. Additionally, the research will avoid bias and uphold objectivity throughout the study to ensure the findings contribute constructively to discussions around police-community relations and digital communication practices in Ghana.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has detailed the methodology used to explore the role of social media in shaping public perception of the police in Ghana. Employing a convergent mixed methods design, the study effectively combines statistical and narrative approaches to offer a robust, multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon. The chapter covered the research approach, design, setting, population, sampling, data instruments, reliability and validity strategies, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. The next chapter presents the data analysis and key findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the systematic analysis and interpretation of data collected to examine *the role of social media in shaping public perception of the police in Ghana*. It explores how online platforms, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and WhatsApp, serve as critical spaces for citizens to express their views, share experiences, and engage in public discourse about policing practices. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the chapter analyses patterns of engagement, sentiment trends, and thematic narratives emerging from survey responses and content analysis of social media posts. The findings highlight the dual nature of social media as both an opportunity for improved police citizen communication and a potential threat when misinformation and negative stereotypes are amplified. The results are presented through statistical tables, visual graphs, and thematic summaries to offer a comprehensive picture of how digital interactions are influencing public trust, legitimacy, and accountability of the Ghana Police Service

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

4.1.1 Demographic Data

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. The demographic data provide essential background information that helps contextualise the findings and understand the diversity of perspectives expressed. Variables such as age, gender, educational level, occupation, geographical location, and frequency of social media use were analysed to illustrate the composition of the study sample. Understanding these demographic patterns is crucial, as social media engagement and perceptions of the police may vary significantly across different social groups. For instance, younger respondents may rely more heavily on social media for news and discussions about

policing, while older participants may form opinions through traditional media or personal encounters. The demographic analysis thus establishes a foundational understanding of the respondent population. It informs the interpretation of subsequent findings on how social media influences public perception of the Ghana Police Service.

Table 1: Sex distribution of respondents

SEX		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Female	90	45.0
	Male	110	55.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The gender distribution presented above shows a sample composition of 90 females (45% of the total respondents) and 110 males (55%). This near even representation indicates a fairly balanced gender participation, which enhances the credibility and inclusiveness of the study. The slightly higher proportion of male respondents suggests that men constituted a marginally larger segment of the population surveyed. From a research standpoint, this gender pattern may reflect broader demographic realities in the population from which the sample was drawn, possibly in occupational, institutional, or community-based settings where males are often more represented. In quantitative analysis, this distribution ensures that both gender perspectives are adequately captured, providing a reliable basis for comparative analysis across gender lines. The 45:55 ratio indicates that while male opinions may slightly dominate, female voices remain strongly represented, ensuring that interpretations drawn from the data are not overly gender-skewed. This proportion also supports inferential analysis, particularly when assessing gender-based differences in attitudes, experiences, or perceptions relevant to the study's objectives.

Furthermore, the total sample size of 200 respondents demonstrates a sufficiently large and manageable population for meaningful statistical generalisation. The gender parity within the

data also reinforces the reliability of findings related to gender-sensitive issues, as both male and female perspectives are adequately incorporated. In social science research, such balanced participation is critical in minimising sampling bias and increasing external validity (Saunders et al., 2019). The near-equal representation enables the researcher to examine not only the aggregate trends but also to explore how gender dynamics influence specific research variables such as opinions, behaviours, or experiences under investigation. For instance, if the study explores empowerment, participation, or access to resources, this balance ensures that gendered nuances are not overshadowed. Ultimately, this gender distribution reflects methodological rigour, inclusivity, and attention to diversity, key factors that contribute to the robustness and interpretive depth of quantitative research findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Table 2: Age distribution of respondents

Age		Frequency	Percent
Valid	18-24 years	76	38.0
	25-34 years	76	38.0
	35-44 years	47	23.5
	63 years	1	.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The age distribution data reveal that the majority of respondents fall within the younger age brackets, specifically 18–24 years (38%) and 25–34 years (38%), together accounting for 76% of the total sample. This dominant representation of younger respondents suggests that the study population is largely youthful, reflecting a demographic trend commonly observed in many African societies, including Ghana, where the youth constitute the largest proportion of the population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). The substantial presence of participants within these age ranges may indicate that the issues explored in the study, such as digital engagement, empowerment, or civic participation, are of particular relevance to younger adults who are often more socially active, technologically inclined, and economically aspirational.

The equal percentage of respondents in these two categories further implies an even spread between early adulthood and young adulthood, which allows the study to explore differences in perspectives between emerging adults who are still in transitional stages and slightly older individuals who may already have stable livelihoods or family responsibilities. This age pattern also highlights the potential influence of generational factors on the study's subject matter, offering insights into how age shapes attitudes, awareness levels, or participation patterns.

On the other hand, respondents aged 35–44 years constitute 23.5% of the sample, representing a smaller but still significant segment of the middle-aged population, while only one respondent (0.5%) falls within the 63-year category. The relatively low participation of older adults could suggest limited engagement or accessibility among this group, which might be due to factors such as lower exposure to digital tools, reduced interest in the subject of study, or demographic realities of the target population. This skew toward younger respondents indicates that the findings are likely more reflective of youth-centred experiences and perceptions, which is methodologically appropriate if the study's focus concerns youth empowerment, social media usage, or developmental participation. However, it also implies that interpretations should be made cautiously when generalising to older demographics. From a statistical standpoint, the overall distribution shows sufficient diversity to permit age-based comparisons while still emphasising youth perspectives as central to the study's conclusions. This aligns with existing literature that identifies young people as critical agents of change in communication, innovation, and social transformation processes (UNDP, 2022; Ahiabenu, 2023). Consequently, the age composition enhances the study's ability to contextualise its findings within contemporary social dynamics driven by youthful populations.

The educational distribution of respondents reveals that an overwhelming majority, 172 out of 200 (86%), have attained tertiary-level education, while 25 respondents (12.5%) possess

secondary education, and only 3 (1.5%) have a basic level of education. This pattern suggests that the study population is predominantly composed of individuals with advanced educational backgrounds, implying that the respondents are likely to possess higher levels of literacy, analytical ability, and awareness of social, economic, or political issues relevant to the study's focus.

Table 3: Education level of respondents

Level		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Basic	3	1.5
	Secondary	25	12.5
	Tertiary	172	86.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The dominance of tertiary-educated participants enhances the reliability of the data, as these individuals are more likely to comprehend survey instruments and provide informed responses. This educational profile also suggests that the study's findings reflect perspectives that are cognitively sophisticated and grounded in formal education, which is particularly important when the research deals with topics requiring critical thinking, media interpretation, or understanding of complex social concepts. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), such a respondent composition often enriches data quality in quantitative studies, since educated participants can interpret questions accurately and offer more nuanced insights. The significant presence of tertiary-educated respondents could also point to the social composition of the study area, possibly urban or semi-urban settings where educational attainment tends to be higher compared to rural areas.

Conversely, the very low representation of respondents with only basic (1.5%) or secondary (12.5%) education may indicate limited participation of individuals from lower educational

backgrounds, which could influence the generalisability of findings to the wider population. This imbalance might stem from the sampling frame used or from structural inequalities in access to education and digital resources, especially if the study context involves knowledge-based or technologically driven themes. While the dominance of tertiary-educated respondents ensures the intellectual rigour of responses, it also suggests a potential bias toward the experiences and perceptions of a relatively privileged, urban, and educated class. Therefore, interpretations of the data should acknowledge this limitation and avoid overextending conclusions to populations with lower educational attainment who may hold different views or face distinct challenges. Nonetheless, the high literacy level of respondents enhances the internal validity of the study, as it minimises the likelihood of misinterpretation or response errors. The data ultimately reflects the growing expansion of higher education in Ghana, where tertiary enrollment has increased significantly in recent years (Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, 2023), reinforcing the relevance of education as a key factor in shaping knowledge, attitudes, and participation in developmental or social change processes.

The employment status data indicate that a plurality of respondents, 84 out of 200 (42%), are employed, followed by 59 students (29.5%), 32 self-employed individuals (16%), and 25 unemployed participants (12.5%). This distribution highlights a relatively diverse socioeconomic composition, with the majority of respondents engaged in some form of productive or academic activity.

Table 4: Employment status of respondents

Type		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Employed	84	42.0
	Self-employed	32	16.0
	Student	59	29.5
	Unemployed	25	12.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The dominance of the employed category suggests that a substantial portion of the study participants have a steady source of income and are likely to have financial stability, which may influence their perspectives on issues such as empowerment, access to resources, or participation in socio-economic activities. The significant number of students also underscores the youthfulness of the sample, aligning with earlier age distribution data that revealed a concentration of respondents between 18 and 34 years. This correlation suggests that many participants are either in the process of building their careers or transitioning from education to employment. The inclusion of self-employed respondents (16%) further enriches the dataset by reflecting entrepreneurial activity within the sample, often associated with independence, creativity, and adaptive strategies in a challenging job market. The distribution collectively demonstrates that the respondents represent a microcosm of Ghana's active population, comprising formal sector workers, students, entrepreneurs, and a smaller group of unemployed individuals, thereby ensuring that diverse socioeconomic experiences are captured in the analysis.

The 12.5% unemployment rate among respondents, though relatively low in this sample, remains an important indicator of the persistent employment challenges facing sections of the population, particularly the youth. In the context of Ghana, where national unemployment rates hover around 14% according to the Ghana Statistical Service (2023), the sample reflects a slightly better employment outlook, possibly due to higher educational attainment among participants. The combination of employment, self-employment, and student status accounting for nearly 87.5% of the total respondents demonstrates an active, engaged population that is either contributing to or preparing to join the workforce. This has implications for understanding how employment influences perceptions, behaviours, and participation in societal issues. Employed individuals may express perspectives shaped by job security and professional exposure, while students might reflect more idealistic or aspirational views. The

presence of self-employed respondents also sheds light on the growing informal and entrepreneurial economy in Ghana, often driven by youth innovation and limited formal job opportunities. Consequently, the employment distribution enriches the study’s interpretive depth by capturing multiple social and economic realities that influence respondents’ attitudes and actions. It reflects a dynamic segment of society actively engaged in the labour market or educational system, thereby providing a balanced foundation for analysing employment-related patterns and their broader developmental implications (World Bank, 2024; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The data on frequently used social media platforms indicates that Facebook (30%) remains the most dominant platform among respondents, followed by WhatsApp (23%), TikTok (20%), Twitter (X) (14.5%), Instagram (10.5%), and YouTube (2%). This distribution demonstrates a clear preference for interactive, community-oriented platforms that facilitate both personal and public communication. Facebook’s leading position reflects its enduring relevance as a multipurpose social networking platform in Ghana, serving functions that range from social interaction and news sharing to business promotion and civic engagement.

Table 5: Social media platforms respondents mostly use

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Facebook	60	30.0
	Instagram	21	10.5
	Tiktok	40	20.0
	Twitter (X)	29	14.5
	Whatsapp	46	23.0
	Youtube	4	2.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The high usage of WhatsApp further emphasises the centrality of instant messaging and closed-group communication in everyday digital interactions. These two platforms together account for over half (53%) of total usage, underscoring the predominance of meta-owned ecosystems

in shaping social media communication behaviours. The strong representation of TikTok (20%) illustrates the growing influence of visual and short-form video content among younger demographics, aligning with global trends where TikTok serves as a space for creativity, entertainment, and socio-political expression. Similarly, the moderate use of Twitter (X) (14.5%) highlights the platform's niche role in news dissemination, political debates, and opinion sharing, especially among educated and urban audiences. The comparatively lower usage of Instagram (10.5%) and YouTube (2%) may reflect limited data affordability or preference for more interactive and text-based platforms over highly visual and data-intensive ones.

From a research interpretation standpoint, the platform distribution suggests diverse patterns of engagement that reflect both technological accessibility and sociocultural dynamics. The overwhelming preference for Facebook and WhatsApp aligns with existing studies indicating that these platforms dominate Ghana's social media landscape due to their affordability, ease of use, and multifunctional features (Ahiabenu, 2022; Nyarko & Boateng, 2023). The prominence of TikTok and Twitter also signals a generational shift toward participatory and performative communication spaces where users, especially the youth, engage in identity expression, digital activism, and entertainment. The low percentage of YouTube users (2%) could indicate that while video content consumption is rising globally, it remains secondary among this sample due to high data costs or limited content relevance. The distribution also provides insight into potential communication strategies policy communicators, advocacy groups, and marketers targeting Ghanaian audiences may need to prioritise Facebook and WhatsApp for outreach, while leveraging TikTok and Twitter for engagement with younger, trend-driven audiences. Overall, the data underscores the heterogeneity of social media use, reflecting a hybrid media environment in which traditional communication practices coexist with evolving digital behaviours. It highlights how digital ecosystems continue to influence

social discourse, information exchange, and civic participation, offering researchers and practitioners a rich context for exploring how platform preference shapes communication outcomes and societal engagement (Papacharissi, 2015; Castells, 2021).

4.1.2 Research Objective one: To examine the impact of social media content on public perception of the Ghana Police Service

This section investigates how social media content, ranging from news reports, user-generated posts, and viral videos to online discussions, affects the public’s perception of the Ghana Police Service. In the digital age, platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and WhatsApp have become key spaces where narratives about policing are constructed and contested. By analysing the tone, frequency, and nature of social media content related to the police, this objective seeks to understand whether online engagement contributes to trust, skepticism, or hostility toward law enforcement. The findings help uncover how both factual information and misinformation shape citizens’ attitudes and levels of confidence in the Ghana Police Service.

The data on respondents’ exposure to police-related content on social media reveals that a majority of participants, comprising 67 (33.5%) who “agree” and 37 (18.5%) who “strongly agree,” acknowledge frequently encountering such content. Combined, this constitutes 52% of the total sample, indicating that more than half of the respondents are regularly exposed to police-related materials across digital platforms.

Table 6: How often respondents come across police related content on social media

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	67	33.5
	Disagree	34	17.0
	Neutral	54	27.0

	Strongly agree	37	18.5
	Strongly disagree	8	4.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This finding underscores the growing visibility of the Ghana Police Service and policing activities within online spaces, reflecting both institutional communication efforts and citizen-driven content. The relatively high exposure can be attributed to the increasing integration of law enforcement communication into digital ecosystems, where official pages, journalists, and citizens alike share stories, images, and videos involving police operations, public safety campaigns, or misconduct incidents. The presence of sceptic respondents (27%) who selected “neutral” suggests a significant segment that either occasionally encounters such content or remains indifferent to police-related posts, possibly due to selective media consumption habits or algorithmic filtering effects. The lower proportions of respondents who “disagree” (17%) and “strongly disagree” (4%) indicate that only a minority rarely or never encounter police-related content, reinforcing the notion that social media has become a primary arena for discourse about law enforcement visibility, accountability, and image construction in Ghana.

From a broader interpretive standpoint, these findings highlight the centrality of social media as a site for shaping public perceptions of the police through mediated experiences rather than direct interactions. The fact that over half of the respondents regularly encounter police-related content suggests that digital media significantly influences how citizens evaluate the credibility, professionalism, and legitimacy of the police institution. This aligns with the Media Dependency and Framing Theories, which posit that audience perceptions of social institutions are increasingly dependent on media exposure and narrative framing (McQuail, 2010; Entman, 1993). The high level of exposure could have dual implications: on one hand, it may enhance transparency and foster community engagement when the police share positive stories or community policing initiatives; on the other hand, frequent exposure to negative or

sensationalised incidents, such as reports of brutality or corruption, could reinforce distrust or skepticism toward law enforcement. The neutral responses also reflect a potential saturation effect, where constant exposure to policing content leads to desensitisation or reduced emotional engagement. Overall, the data suggests that social media has become a crucial interface between the police and the public, shaping narratives that can either strengthen or undermine institutional trust depending on how content is produced, shared, and interpreted (Boateng & Darko, 2023; Tankebe, 2020).

The data presented indicates that a significant majority of respondents 93 (46.5%) who “strongly agree” and 41 (20.5%) who “agree” believe that viral videos or images depicting police misconduct negatively affect their trust in the Ghana Police Service. Together, this represents 67% of the total respondents, showing a dominant perception that digital exposure to unprofessional or unethical police behavior undermines institutional credibility and public confidence. Only a small minority 7 (3.5%) who “strongly disagree” and 26 (13%) who “disagree” believe such content does not influence their trust, while 33 (16.5%) remain “neutral.” This distribution reveals that social media imagery and viral content are powerful tools in shaping citizens’ emotional and cognitive responses to law enforcement institutions.

Table 7: Viral videos or images of police misconduct affect my trust in the Ghana police service

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	41	20.5
	Disagree	26	13.0
	Neutral	33	16.5
	Strongly agree	93	46.5
	Strongly disagree	7	3.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The overwhelming agreement also underscores the broader social phenomenon in which visual evidence often captured by citizens and widely circulated acts as a catalyst for public opinion

formation and outrage. In Ghana, where citizens increasingly rely on social media for information about governance and public service delivery, such viral videos often transcend their immediate context, symbolizing systemic failures or abuses within the police institution. This aligns with previous research suggesting that public trust in law enforcement is highly sensitive to mediated representations of misconduct (Tankebe, 2020; Aning & Lartey, 2021). The findings therefore illustrate that trust in the Ghana Police Service is not only contingent on direct encounters but also on mediated narratives amplified through the digital ecosystem.

From a research interpretation perspective, the strong correlation between exposure to viral misconduct content and declining trust highlights the critical role of media framing, emotional resonance, and collective interpretation in public trust dynamics. According to Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), audiences depend on media especially social media for constructing social realities, and the framing of events influences how institutions are evaluated. In this case, recurring viral incidents of police brutality, corruption, or unprofessionalism shape a negative collective image that can erode legitimacy even when the broader institution performs effectively in other areas. This erosion of trust may manifest in decreased public cooperation, resistance to law enforcement directives, and diminished willingness to report crimes, thereby undermining community policing efforts. The small percentage of respondents who disagreed may represent individuals with strong institutional loyalty or skepticism toward the authenticity of viral content, reflecting the contested nature of digital truth in the age of misinformation. Nonetheless, the data reveals that the Ghana Police Service faces a critical communication and reputation challenge in the digital era one that necessitates proactive transparency, accountability, and narrative management to counterbalance the viral amplification of misconduct. These findings reaffirm global studies which show that police legitimacy in the digital age is deeply intertwined with online visibility and mediated accountability (Reiner, 2021; Surette, 2022).

The data on respondents' reactions to positive stories about police activities shared online reveals that a large majority 85 respondents (42.5%) who “agree” and 69 respondents (34.5%) who “strongly agree” believe that such content enhances their perception of the Ghana Police Service. Combined, these two categories represent 77% of the total sample, signaling that positive narratives play a crucial role in rebuilding and sustaining public trust in law enforcement institutions. Conversely, only 7 respondents (3.5%) “disagree” and 2 respondents (1%) “strongly disagree,” while 37 respondents (18.5%) remain “neutral.”

Table 8: Positive stories of police activities shared online improve my perception of the police

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	85	42.5
	Disagree	7	3.5
	Neutral	37	18.5
	Strongly agree	69	34.5
	Strongly disagree	2	1.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This overwhelming consensus demonstrates that citizens' perceptions of the police are strongly influenced by the tone and framing of online content. When the police or media highlight acts of professionalism, community engagement, or heroism, these stories tend to generate goodwill and a sense of reassurance among the public. Such positive visibility humanizes the police force, counterbalancing negative viral stories of misconduct that often dominate digital spaces. In Ghana's media landscape, where social media serves as a primary platform for information dissemination and image formation, positive storytelling emerges as a powerful communication strategy for enhancing institutional legitimacy and improving public-police relations (Boateng & Darko, 2023).

From a research interpretation perspective, this finding reinforces the theoretical principles of Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and Image Restoration Theory (Benoit, 1997), which argue that communication framing and strategic messaging can significantly shape public attitudes toward institutions. Positive digital narratives about police interventions such as officers rescuing citizens, enforcing laws fairly, or engaging in community service contribute to cognitive and emotional reframing, allowing audiences to associate the police with protection, service, and integrity rather than aggression or corruption. The high percentage of agreement also underscores the public's readiness to appreciate credible and transparent institutional communication, suggesting that trust in the Ghana Police Service can be strengthened through deliberate digital engagement strategies that emphasise accountability and empathy. The 18.5% of neutral responses, however, indicate that while positive stories are impactful, sustained trust requires consistency between online representation and real-world conduct. This finding aligns with global literature that emphasizes the role of "digital legitimacy building" in contemporary policing, where image management and interactive communication are integral to maintaining social order and cooperation (Reiner, 2021; Surette, 2022). Thus, the data affirms that digital storytelling, when anchored in authenticity serves not merely as public relations but as a participatory mechanism for fostering transparency, confidence, and mutual respect between the police and the citizenry.

The data presented reveals that a significant proportion of respondents 93 (46.5%) indicated that they "sometimes" believe social media posts about the police more than official police statements, while 31 (15.5%) said they "often" do, and 20 (10%) claimed they "always" believe such posts. Collectively, these categories represent over 70% of the respondents, showing a clear trend of conditional trust in social media content over institutional communication. Meanwhile, 30 respondents (15%) stated that they "rarely" believe social media posts, and 25 (12.5%) "never" do, while one respondent (0.5%) selected "strongly," indicating strong

affirmation toward believing social media content. This distribution underscores the growing credibility crisis faced by official communication from law enforcement agencies like the Ghana Police Service in the age of digital media (Table 9).

Table 9: Respondents’ views on how likely they would believe social media posts about police than official police statements

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Always	20	10.0
	Never	25	12.5
	Often	31	15.5
	Rarely	30	15.0
	Sometimes	93	46.5
	Strongly	1	.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The predominance of the “sometimes” category suggests that most respondents evaluate content based on situational factors such as the source’s credibility, visual evidence, or consistency with past experiences, rather than exhibiting blind trust in either channel. The data implies that social media has become a parallel information ecosystem where public opinion about institutional behavior is shaped through user-generated content, eyewitness accounts, and viral narratives often perceived as more authentic, immediate, and transparent than official statements. This reflects the evolving dynamics of information trust in the digital age, where institutions must now compete with decentralised citizen journalism for credibility and narrative control.

From an interpretive and theoretical standpoint, the results align with Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) and the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), both of which emphasise how citizens rely on diverse media sources to construct social realities and engage in discourse. The high proportion of respondents showing varying levels of belief in social media over official communication illustrates a trust deficit that may stem from

perceptions of institutional opacity, delayed responses, or historical inconsistencies in police communication. The conditional trust reflected in the dominant “sometimes” response also reveals that audiences exercise critical media literacy by triangulating between formal and informal sources before forming judgments. In the Ghanaian context, where social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter (X) often serve as first points of news circulation, real-time posts about police operations, misconduct, or community outreach can shape narratives long before official clarifications are issued. This shifting communication power balance places pressure on the police to adopt transparent, responsive, and evidence-based digital communication strategies to regain public confidence. The findings therefore suggest that the effectiveness of official statements in influencing public perception depends not only on accuracy but also on timeliness, openness, and engagement. As such, building institutional trust in the digital era requires a strategic fusion of authenticity, interactivity, and accountability across both traditional and social media platforms (Reiner, 2021; Surette, 2022; Tankebe, 2020).

The data reveals that 43 respondents (21.5%) “agree” and 34 respondents (17%) “strongly agree” that international stories of police brutality shared on social media influence their perception of the Ghana Police Service. Together, these account for 38.5% of the total respondents, showing that a significant segment of the population perceives a connection between global narratives of police misconduct and their trust in local law enforcement. On the other hand, 55 respondents (27.5%) “disagree,” and 16 (8%) “strongly disagree,” while 52 respondents (26%) remain “neutral.

Table 10: International stories of police brutality shared on social media influence my perception of the Ghana police service

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	43	21.5
	Disagree	55	27.5

	Neutral	52	26.0
	Strongly agree	34	17.0
	Strongly disagree	16	8.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This mixed distribution suggests a nuanced public response while some individuals internalize global stories of brutality as reflective of policing culture everywhere, others compartmentalise these incidents, distinguishing between international and domestic policing contexts. The nearly balanced proportions of agreement and disagreement highlight a divided perception among Ghanaians regarding whether global media narratives of police violence, particularly those from Western countries such as the United States or the United Kingdom, shape their local trust and attitudes toward Ghanaian police. The presence of a high “neutral” response (26%) further implies that many respondents either lack exposure to such international stories or consciously separate global incidents from their local realities. Nevertheless, the data underscores the globalized nature of media consumption, where events transcending national borders can still influence domestic perceptions through transnational empathy, moral reflection, or comparative evaluation.

The findings reflect how globalization and the digital media environment blur boundaries between international and local experiences of law enforcement legitimacy. The fact that over one-third of respondents acknowledge being influenced by international stories aligns with the concept of “mediated global interconnectedness,” where visual and viral content such as the George Floyd incident in the United States becomes symbolic of systemic power abuse and sparks broader reflections on justice, equality, and accountability (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). According to Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1998), consistent exposure to such content may gradually cultivate perceptions of policing as inherently violent or discriminatory, even when such patterns may not mirror local realities. Conversely, those who disagreed may exhibit a

form of “localised perception,” shaped by direct experiences with Ghanaian policing rather than by global media representations. This divergence suggests that while international narratives can act as lenses through which citizens evaluate local institutions, the extent of their influence depends on contextual familiarity, critical media literacy, and national identity. Importantly, this dynamic also reflects the Ghana Police Service’s ongoing struggle to assert an independent and credible image amid the homogenizing effects of global digital storytelling. Overall, the results demonstrate that public perception of policing is no longer shaped solely by local performance but also by the broader global discourse on law enforcement and human rights, emphasising the need for strategic communication that contextualizes Ghana’s policing practices within transparent, rights-respecting, and community-centered narratives (Reiner, 2021; Surette, 2022; Tankebe, 2020).

The data reveals that 66 respondents (33%) “agree” and 18 respondents (9%) “strongly agree” that social media frames such as hashtags, captions, and contextual commentaries strongly shape how they interpret police-related incidents. Collectively, these account for 42% of the total sample, suggesting that nearly half of the respondents consciously recognize the influence of digital framing on their understanding of policing events. Conversely, 28 respondents (14%) “disagree,” and 7 (3.5%) “strongly disagree,” while a large portion 81 respondents (40.5%) remain “neutral.”

Table 11: Social media frames (eg: Hashtags and captions) strongly shape how I interpret police related incidents.

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	66	33.0
	Disagree	28	14.0
	Neutral	81	40.5
	Strongly agree	18	9.0
	Strongly disagree	7	3.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The high proportion of neutral responses indicates that while many users might be subconsciously influenced by digital framing, they may not explicitly acknowledge or be aware of its effect on their interpretation of police activities. The overall pattern highlights the subtle yet significant role of digital narratives in shaping public opinion, especially in contexts where viral hashtags and emotionally charged captions serve as interpretive lenses for audiences. For example, hashtags such as #JusticeForKaaka or #FixTheCountry have previously influenced how Ghanaians understood policing actions and state accountability, underscoring the power of online framing in constructing meaning. This distribution also implies that while some respondents maintain an independent or critical stance toward media narratives, others rely heavily on social media cues to guide their emotional and cognitive responses to police-related issues.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding aligns closely with Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), both of which assert that the way media presents information influences how audiences perceive, evaluate, and respond to social phenomena. The strong influence of hashtags and captions demonstrates how social media users, whether journalists or ordinary citizens, act as agenda setters by attaching interpretive frames that signal moral judgments or emotional tones. For instance, a video of police enforcement framed with a caption like “police brutality” may trigger outrage, while another framed as “police discipline” may elicit approval despite showing the same event. The data thus reflects the performative and participatory nature of digital communication, where framing devices serve as cognitive shortcuts that help audiences quickly assign meaning within a fast-paced information environment (Papacharissi, 2015). The significant neutrality rate, however, suggests that a considerable segment of users may not be critically aware of how framing subtly shapes their perceptions, reinforcing the need for improved digital literacy. This insight is particularly important for the Ghana Police Service and other stakeholders, as it underscores

the necessity of proactive engagement on social media to shape narratives before they are defined externally.

The data reveals a nearly even split among respondents regarding whether social media negatively influences their perception of the Ghana Police Service. A total of 55 respondents (27.5%) “agree” and 24 (12%) “strongly agree,” together accounting for 39.5% of participants who believe social media content adversely shapes their view of the police. On the other hand, 58 respondents (29%) “disagree,” and 11 (5.5%) “strongly disagree,” representing 34.5% who reject the notion of social media’s negative influence. Meanwhile, 52 respondents (26%) remain “neutral,” suggesting a significant portion of the sample perceives social media’s impact as context-dependent or balanced between positive and negative effects.

Table 12: Overall, social media negatively influences how I view the Ghana police service

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	55	27.5
	Disagree	58	29.0
	Neutral	52	26.0
	Strongly agree	24	12.0
	Strongly Disagree	11	5.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This distribution highlights the complexity of the relationship between media exposure and institutional trust, showing that while social media amplifies narratives of police misconduct and inefficiency, not all users interpret such content uniformly. The close percentages between agreement and disagreement indicate that perceptions of the police on social media are polarized and influenced by personal experiences, critical thinking skills, and the type of content consumed. Those who view social media as negatively influential may associate their distrust with viral images or videos of police brutality, corruption, or abuse of power that dominate online spaces. Conversely, those who disagree might see social media as a tool for

transparency and accountability, offering the public insight into both the strengths and weaknesses of law enforcement.

From a theoretical perspective, this divided pattern reflects the dual nature of social media as described in both the Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989). Social media platforms serve as modern public spheres where diverse narratives about state institutions, including the police, are contested and reinterpreted. The finding that almost one-third of respondents remain neutral underscores the selective and interpretive nature of media consumption many users process information through personal biases, community discussions, or prior beliefs about institutional credibility. This aligns with the notion that audiences are not passive recipients of information but active meaning-makers whose interpretations are shaped by both exposure and experience. The relatively balanced levels of agreement and disagreement also suggest that while negative stories about the police may dominate digital platforms, counter-narratives such as positive community policing efforts, public engagement posts, or humanitarian interventions help mitigate the overall negative effect. This dynamic interplay indicates that social media is neither wholly damaging nor purely beneficial to the Ghana Police Service's image; rather, its impact depends on how narratives are managed and communicated. Therefore, the findings call for the Ghana Police Service to adopt a more deliberate digital communication strategy that leverages transparency, empathy, and storytelling to balance public discourse. By engaging directly with citizens online, clarifying misinformation promptly, and highlighting credible positive interventions, the police can counteract the polarizing effects of digital narratives and gradually rebuild public trust (Reiner, 2021; Surette, 2022; Tankebe, 2020).

4.1.3 Research Objective Two: To explore the opportunities social media offers for improving police-community relations in Ghana.

This section focuses on the positive potential of social media as a tool for enhancing communication, transparency, and cooperation between the Ghana Police Service and the public. It explores how digital platforms can facilitate timely information sharing, public education, crime reporting, and citizen feedback. By highlighting instances where social media has been effectively used to build mutual understanding and trust, this objective examines how the police can leverage online spaces to strengthen community policing and responsiveness. The analysis also considers how proactive engagement and digital literacy can transform social media into a bridge for collaboration rather than a source of division.

The data indicates that an overwhelming majority of respondents 113 (56.5%) who “strongly agree” and 55 (27.5%) who “agree” believe that social media provides a good platform for the Ghana Police Service to communicate effectively with the public. Combined, these groups represent 84% of the total respondents, demonstrating a strong consensus that digital platforms have become essential tools for police citizen engagement. Only a small minority 9 respondents (4.5%) “disagree” and 6 (3%) “strongly disagree” expressed skepticism about the usefulness of social media for police communication, while 17 respondents (8.5%) remained “neutral.”

Table 13: Social media provides a good platform for the police to communicate with the public.

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	55	27.5
	Disagree	9	4.5
	Neutral	17	8.5
	Strongly agree	113	56.5
	Strongly disagree	6	3.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This overwhelming approval signifies that the majority of Ghanaians perceive social media as a transformative medium through which the police can enhance transparency, accessibility, and responsiveness. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and WhatsApp are particularly

valued for their immediacy and wide reach, enabling real-time dissemination of public safety information, crime alerts, traffic updates, and institutional statements. The results also suggest that citizens increasingly view online spaces as legitimate extensions of traditional law enforcement communication, where dialogue, accountability, and community policing can flourish. In a context like Ghana where mobile connectivity and digital literacy continue to expand social media serves as a democratising tool that bridges the communication gap between the police and the citizenry, empowering both sides to exchange information directly and efficiently.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding aligns strongly with the principles of the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989) and the Participatory Communication Model (Servaes, 1999), both of which emphasize dialogue, mutual understanding, and inclusivity in public communication processes. The high level of agreement demonstrates citizens' recognition of social media as a participatory space where the police can engage in two-way communication rather than relying solely on top-down, bureaucratic approaches. This reflects a shift from traditional public relations models toward digital community engagement, where institutional credibility is built through openness, consistency, and interaction. The small fraction of respondents who disagreed may do so due to concerns about misinformation, inadequate responsiveness, or perceived misuse of social platforms by police officers. Nonetheless, the dominance of positive responses suggests that the public perceives online policing communication as a modern necessity for fostering trust and transparency. This interpretation also resonates with studies showing that digital engagement enhances police legitimacy when handled with professionalism, empathy, and accountability (Boateng & Darko, 2023; Reiner, 2021). Moreover, social media communication allows for humanizing the police by highlighting their service-oriented roles such as community outreach, rescue operations, and public safety education thereby reshaping public attitudes. Overall, the data emphasizes that

social media, when strategically and ethically managed, is not merely a supplementary tool but a vital component of 21st-century policing and public trust-building in Ghana’s evolving democratic landscape.

The data reveals that a significant majority of respondents 95 (47.5%) who “strongly agree” and 72 (36%) who “agree” believe that police social media campaigns, such as those on crime prevention and safety education, are useful and impactful. Collectively, this constitutes 83.5% of the total sample, indicating a dominant positive perception of the Ghana Police Service’s use of social media for public education and awareness. In contrast, only 3 respondents (1.5%) “disagree” and 1 respondent (0.5%) “strongly disagree,” while 29 respondents (14.5%) remain “neutral.”

Table 14: Police social media campaigns (eg: Crime prevention, safety tips) are useful and impactful.

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	72	36.0
	Disagree	3	1.5
	Neutral	29	14.5
	Strongly agree	95	47.5
	Strongly Disagree	1	.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This overwhelmingly affirmative response underscores that police social media campaigns are recognized and valued as effective tools for disseminating safety information, promoting civic responsibility, and enhancing public security consciousness. The high approval rating suggests that digital communication has become a key mechanism for extending the reach of community policing and engaging citizens in preventive actions against crime. The results also imply that audiences are not only aware of but also responsive to digital campaigns focusing on safety tips, traffic regulations, and emergency alerts. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and WhatsApp have proven instrumental in ensuring that such messages reach large and diverse populations almost instantaneously. This widespread approval of police digital initiatives

reflects both improved institutional communication strategies and the growing digital literacy of the Ghanaian public, enabling greater interactivity, feedback, and collaboration between the police and citizens.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with the principles of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) and the Participatory Communication Model (Servaes, 1999), which emphasise that audiences actively engage with media content to satisfy specific needs such as security information, trust-building, and reassurance. The positive responses demonstrate that the public perceives value in police-generated content and that these campaigns fulfil their intended social functions of education, awareness creation, and behavioural influence. The minimal level of disagreement indicates strong institutional credibility and acceptance of police messages in digital spaces, possibly due to increased transparency, consistency, and relevance of information shared online. The neutrality rate, however, could represent individuals who are either infrequent social media users or have limited exposure to official police accounts. The results suggest that well-designed digital campaigns can effectively counter misinformation, reduce fear of crime, and enhance public cooperation with law enforcement. Furthermore, the findings resonate with global studies emphasizing that proactive police communication through social media fosters community safety partnerships, strengthens institutional legitimacy, and projects the police as service-oriented rather than punitive actors (Reiner, 2021; Boateng & Darko, 2023). Therefore, the data confirms that social media is not merely a broadcasting tool but a participatory platform through which the Ghana Police Service can influence public attitudes, promote preventive behavior, and foster mutual trust essential for maintaining law and order in a digitalised democratic society.

The data indicates that an overwhelming majority of respondents 97 (48.5%) who “strongly agree” and 53 (26.5%) who “agree” express trust in information shared by the Ghana Police Service through their official social media accounts. Together, these two categories account for 75% of the total sample, suggesting a high level of institutional credibility in the digital communication sphere. Conversely, only 8 respondents (4%) “disagree,” 5 (2.5%) “strongly disagree,” and 37 respondents (18.5%) are “neutral.”

Table 15: I trust police information when it is shared on their official social media accounts.

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	53	26.5
	Disagree	8	4.0
	Neutral	37	18.5
	Strongly agree	97	48.5
	Strongly disagree	5	2.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This overwhelmingly positive response underscores the success of the Ghana Police Service’s efforts in establishing a trustworthy digital presence, where audiences perceive official online communication as reliable, timely, and authoritative. The findings also reflect a broader public shift toward recognising official social media handles as legitimate sources of verified information in an era of rampant misinformation and unverified citizen reporting. The consistency of police engagement, frequent updates, and public responsiveness on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram likely contribute to this confidence. The relatively small percentage of disagreement suggests that while skepticism exists possibly due to occasional delays in clarifications or past inconsistencies the overall perception is one of confidence in institutional transparency and authenticity. This trend reveals that social media has become not only a tool for broadcasting information but also a strategic platform for

building and maintaining public trust through visible, interactive, and evidence-based communication.

From a theoretical perspective, the results align with the tenets of the Institutional Trust Theory (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995) and the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), which emphasise credibility, consistency, and openness as essential components of building trust between public institutions and citizens. The strong agreement levels indicate that the public values the Ghana Police Service's digital communication strategy as a legitimate and modern extension of state transparency and accountability. This finding also resonates with empirical studies suggesting that when law enforcement agencies actively engage online, respond promptly to misinformation, and provide real-time updates, public confidence in their operations and legitimacy increases significantly (Boateng & Darko, 2023; Reiner, 2021). The high percentage of trust further illustrates that the audience differentiates between official police communications and user-generated content, recognizing the former as more authoritative. However, the presence of neutral respondents (18.5%) highlights the continued need for consistency in engagement, tone, and responsiveness to sustain trust over time. The implications are clear: the police's digital credibility depends not only on message accuracy but also on their ability to maintain dialogue and openness in public discourse. Overall, this data affirms that social media serves as a crucial trust-building instrument for the Ghana Police Service, enabling the institution to reinforce legitimacy, strengthen transparency, and foster mutual understanding within a digitally active citizenry.

The data reveals that a strong majority of respondents 85 (42.5%) who "agree" and 50 (25%) who "strongly agree" believe that social media can help improve police community relations in Ghana, together representing 67.5% of the total sample. In contrast, 7 respondents (3.5%) "disagree" and 33 (16.5%) "strongly disagree," while 25 respondents (12.5%) remain

“neutral.” This distribution indicates a prevailing optimism among the public regarding the potential of digital platforms to foster more constructive, transparent, and participatory relationships between the Ghana Police Service and citizens. The high level of agreement suggests that many respondents view social media as a bridge that can close the long-standing communication gap between law enforcement and the general public.

Table 16: Overall, I think social media can help improve police community relations in Ghana.

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	85	42.5
	Disagree	7	3.5
	Neutral	25	12.5
	Strongly agree	50	25.0
	Strongly disagree	33	16.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

Through platforms like Facebook, X (Twitter), TikTok, and WhatsApp, the police can share timely information, clarify misinformation, respond to citizen inquiries, and humanise their image, actions that contribute to mutual understanding and trust. The minority who disagreed or strongly disagreed may represent individuals sceptical of the police’s digital engagement practices, possibly due to concerns about inconsistent responsiveness, propaganda, or previous negative encounters. Nonetheless, the overall response pattern highlights that citizen increasingly recognise social media as a strategic communication tool capable of reshaping institutional image and enhancing accountability in policing.

From a theoretical and interpretive perspective, these findings align with the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), Dialogic Communication Theory (Kent & Taylor, 2002), and the Participatory Communication Model (Servaes, 1999), which collectively emphasize the importance of dialogue, inclusivity, and mutual engagement in building institutional legitimacy. The data demonstrates that respondents perceive social media not merely as a tool

for information dissemination but as a space for deliberation and relationship-building between the police and communities. This reflects a shift from traditional top-down policing toward a more community-centred and interactive approach. The relatively small neutral segment (12.5%) suggests that while most citizens believe in the potential of social media, a few remain cautious about its effectiveness due to possible misuse, lack of transparency, or unresponsiveness by the police. However, the findings affirm that the Ghana Police Service's active social media presence can enhance trust, strengthen cooperation, and promote citizen participation in crime prevention and public safety initiatives. The challenge lies in sustaining consistent, transparent, and empathetic communication that aligns with citizens' expectations. Overall, the data underscores that social media, when used strategically and ethically, holds significant potential to transform police community relations in Ghana by promoting openness, accountability, and dialogue key pillars of democratic policing and institutional legitimacy (Tankebe, 2020; Boateng & Darko, 2023; Reiner, 2021).

4.1.4 Research Objective Three: To identify the potential threats and challenges social media poses to the credibility and legitimacy of the Ghana Police Service.

This section examines the darker side of social media's influence, how it can threaten the image, authority, and legitimacy of the Ghana Police Service. False information, sensationalised narratives, and unverified videos often spread rapidly online, shaping negative public sentiment even before facts are verified. This objective seeks to identify the key challenges the police face in managing their reputation in an environment where online content can easily distort perceptions. It also explores how biased reporting, politically motivated commentary, and viral misinformation undermine police credibility and weaken public trust in law enforcement institutions.

The data indicates that an overwhelming majority of respondents 152, representing 76% of the total sample reported having seen false or misleading information about the police on social media, while only 48 respondents (24%) said they had not.

Table 17: I have seen false or misleading information about the police on social media

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	48	24.0
	Yes	152	76.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This finding clearly demonstrates that misinformation and disinformation about the Ghana Police Service are widespread in the digital information environment. The high percentage of respondents acknowledging exposure to false content underscores the challenges faced by the police in managing their reputation in an era dominated by user-generated content and viral communication. The data suggests that social media platforms, while serving as valuable tools for community engagement and transparency, have also become fertile grounds for the rapid spread of unverified, distorted, or sensationalized narratives about policing. Such misinformation may include doctored videos, out-of-context images, fabricated stories of police misconduct, or exaggerated crime incidents, all of which can undermine public trust and distort perceptions of institutional credibility. The smaller proportion of respondents who have not encountered such false information likely represents individuals with limited social media activity or those who primarily follow official and verified accounts. However, the overwhelming exposure rate points to a significant reputational risk for the Ghana Police Service and highlights the need for a proactive and strategic digital communication policy to counter misinformation before it shapes public opinion.

Theoretically, these findings strongly align with the principles of Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and the Information Disorder Framework (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), both of which

emphasize how misleading narratives and framing choices influence how audiences interpret institutional behavior. The high rate of misinformation exposure suggests that audiences are vulnerable to cognitive biases and emotional triggers often exploited in viral content, which may erode trust and reinforce negative stereotypes about the police. The results also resonate with the Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), which explains that in times of social uncertainty or limited institutional communication, individuals rely heavily on social media for information, making them susceptible to manipulation. Additionally, this underscores the importance of media and information literacy (MIL) among citizens to help them critically evaluate online content and distinguish between authentic and false information. Overall, the data reveals that misinformation about the police is not an isolated occurrence but a systemic challenge in Ghana’s digital ecosystem. Addressing it requires a collaborative approach involving the police, media organizations, influencers, and fact-checking institutions to safeguard the integrity of public discourse and maintain trust in law enforcement (Ahiabenu, 2022; Boateng & Darko, 2023; Reiner, 2021).

The data shows that a significant majority of respondents 76 (38%) who “agree” and 47 (23.5%) who “strongly agree” believe that viral incidents of alleged police misconduct reduce their trust in the Ghana Police Service. Combined, these groups constitute 61.5% of the total sample, indicating that a clear majority of Ghanaians are negatively influenced by viral online reports or visuals depicting police wrongdoing. Conversely, 22 respondents (11%) “disagree,” 3 (1.5%) “strongly disagree,” while 52 (26%) remain “neutral.”

Table 18: Viral incidents of alleged police misconduct reduce my trust in the Ghana police service

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	76	38.0
	Disagree	22	11.0
	Neutral	52	26.0
	Strongly agree	47	23.5
	Strongly disagree	3	1.5

	Total	200	100.0
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Source: Field Data 2025

This distribution suggests that while most citizens perceive digital depictions of police misconduct as damaging to institutional credibility, a significant minority either maintain trust in the police despite such incidents or exercise cautious skepticism about the authenticity of online content. The strong correlation between exposure to viral misconduct and diminished trust underscores the profound impact of digital media framing and emotional contagion in shaping public perception. In a country where mobile connectivity and social media penetration continue to expand, such viral stories often accompanied by compelling visuals and sensational captions can rapidly influence collective sentiment. The data also implies that repeated exposure to negative portrayals may reinforce generalized distrust, where isolated acts of misconduct are interpreted as representative of the entire institution. This perception challenge illustrates the dilemma of policing in the digital era: while social media enhances transparency, it simultaneously magnifies errors and can amplify partial or misleading narratives.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings resonate strongly with Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1998), and Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), which collectively explain how repeated media exposure to negatively framed incidents cultivates long-term attitudes of distrust and skepticism toward public institutions. The fact that more than half of respondents lose trust after viewing viral misconduct incidents demonstrates how digital media act as powerful agents of attitude formation. According to these theories, viral content functions as both a frame and a cue, influencing how audiences interpret the motives, integrity, and professionalism of the police. The 26% of neutral respondents may represent those who critically evaluate online content, wait for official verification, or are aware of the potential for misinformation and bias in user-generated posts. Nonetheless, the dominance of negative perception highlights the urgent need for the Ghana

Police Service to strengthen its crisis communication strategies, including rapid response mechanisms, clarification posts, and transparency initiatives to counteract misleading or exaggerated narratives. Furthermore, this finding aligns with global studies emphasizing that public trust in the police is increasingly mediated by digital reputation rather than personal experience (Tankebe, 2020; Reiner, 2021; Surette, 2022). The implication is clear: without a proactive digital engagement strategy and visible accountability measures, viral narratives of misconduct can erode confidence, weaken cooperation, and undermine the legitimacy of the Ghana Police Service in the eyes of the very citizens it seeks to protect.

The data indicates that a significant proportion of respondents 74 (37%) who “agree” and 30 (15%) who “strongly agree” believe that political bias in social media posts about the police makes them question the credibility of such content. Together, these groups represent 52% of the total sample, showing that more than half of the respondents are skeptical of politically slanted narratives about the police that circulate online. Conversely, 21 respondents (10.5%) “disagree” and 20 (10%) “strongly disagree,” while 55 respondents (27.5%) remain “neutral.”

Table 19: Political bias in social media posts about the police makes me question their credibility

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	74	37.0
	Disagree	21	10.5
	Neutral	55	27.5
	Strongly agree	30	15.0
	Strongly disagree	20	10.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This distribution highlights a general awareness among the public that political actors, partisan bloggers, or interest groups often frame police-related stories to serve specific agendas, particularly during periods of heightened political tension or electoral activity. The fact that over half of respondents acknowledge this skepticism suggests that citizens are increasingly

media literate and aware of how political manipulation can distort perceptions of law enforcement. This finding also reflects a growing mistrust of politically charged digital communication, where opposing camps use social media to frame the police either as tools of state repression or as defenders of partisan interests. The high neutral rate (27.5%) implies that some respondents are cautious or undecided, possibly due to the difficulty of discerning authentic information amid the noise of politically influenced content. Overall, the data underscores the complex intersection between media, politics, and institutional trust revealing that political framing on social media can undermine not only the credibility of specific posts but also the broader public image of the police service.

From a theoretical perspective, these results align with Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), Political Economy of Media Theory (Mosco, 2009), and Media Literacy Theory, all of which emphasize that the framing of news and information is often influenced by power dynamics, ownership structures, and political interests. The data demonstrates that respondents recognize how partisan biases in media posts through selective wording, emotive language, or agenda-driven storytelling can distort reality and erode institutional legitimacy. The 52% agreement rate suggests that Ghanaians are not passive consumers of social media content but are critically engaging with the information they encounter, questioning motives and scrutinizing sources. This also resonates with Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which highlights how repeated exposure to politically skewed narratives shapes public priorities and interpretations of law enforcement actions. The presence of 20 respondents (10%) who “strongly disagree” may indicate individuals who either trust their political sources uncritically or who differentiate between the credibility of content and the perceived integrity of the police. The implications are significant: political framing not only polarises public opinion but also threatens to delegitimise the police as a neutral state institution. Therefore, this finding reinforces the need for the Ghana Police Service to adopt nonpartisan, transparent, and data-

driven communication strategies to counter politically motivated misinformation. Strengthening partnerships with independent fact-checkers, promoting verified digital content, and maintaining consistent neutrality in public messaging can help preserve the service’s credibility amid Ghana’s increasingly polarised digital environment (Tankebe, 2020; Boateng & Darko, 2023; Reiner, 2021).

The data shows that a substantial majority of respondents 88 (44%) who “agree” and 62 (31%) who “strongly agree” believe that a lack of digital literacy among citizens worsens the spread of misinformation about the Ghana Police Service. Together, these categories represent 75% of the total respondents, demonstrating strong consensus that limited digital competency among the public contributes significantly to the persistence and amplification of false or misleading information about law enforcement online. In contrast, only 12 respondents (6%) “disagree” and 8 (4%) “strongly disagree,” while 30 respondents (15%) remain “neutral.”

Table 20: Lack of digital literacy among citizens worsens misinformation about the police

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	88	44.0
	Disagree	12	6.0
	Neutral	30	15.0
	Strongly agree	62	31.0
	Strongly disagree	8	4.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This overwhelming agreement suggests that most participants recognize the connection between citizens’ inability to critically evaluate online content and the viral spread of misinformation that undermines police credibility. The findings indicate that many Ghanaians are aware that social media users often lack the skills to verify sources, detect fake news, or differentiate between official statements and opinionated narratives. Consequently, emotionally charged or sensationalized posts about the police tend to circulate rapidly, shaping

negative public perceptions before factual corrections are issued. The small percentage of disagreement may represent individuals who attribute misinformation to deliberate disinformation campaigns or political manipulation rather than lack of digital literacy. Nevertheless, the dominant response pattern highlights the role of public education in addressing the trust deficit between citizens and the police. It shows that misinformation is not solely a communication failure on the part of the police, but also a societal challenge linked to information consumption behavior and critical media engagement.

From an interpretive and theoretical standpoint, the findings align with Media and Information Literacy Theory (UNESCO, 2021) and Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), which stress that citizens' ability to navigate, interpret, and verify digital content directly influences their understanding of institutional realities. The high level of agreement indicates that respondents see misinformation about the police as a by-product of a digitally active but poorly informed citizenry. This suggests that without adequate media literacy training, social media users are vulnerable to manipulation through framing, confirmation bias, and emotional triggers that distort institutional image. The results also support Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), emphasizing that when users lack analytical skills, they are more likely to accept the first or most sensational interpretation of an event. This dynamic contributes to the rapid erosion of trust in the police whenever viral misinformation circulates. The 15% neutral responses may reflect those who are undecided about whether misinformation is primarily a literacy issue or an institutional communication failure. Nonetheless, the consensus underscores an urgent need for collaborative interventions between the Ghana Police Service, the Ministry of Information, civil society groups, and educational institutions to promote digital literacy and fact-checking awareness. As scholars such as Ahiabenu (2022) and Boateng & Darko (2023) argue, enhancing citizens' digital competencies can significantly reduce the influence of false narratives and help build a more informed, discerning, and cooperative

public. Therefore, the data reinforces that combating misinformation about the police in Ghana requires not only institutional transparency but also empowering citizens with the knowledge and tools to engage responsibly in the digital information ecosystem.

The data reveals that a majority of respondents 68 (34%) who “agree” and 37 (18.5%) who “strongly agree” believe that social media exaggerates police misconduct and damages the reputation of the Ghana Police Service unfairly. Combined, these categories account for 52.5% of the total sample, indicating that over half of the respondents perceive social media narratives as often amplifying or sensationalising negative incidents involving the police. In contrast, 21 respondents (10.5%) “disagree,” 13 (6.5%) “strongly disagree,” and 61 respondents (30.5%) remain “neutral.”

Table 21: Social media exaggerates police misconduct and damages their reputation unfairly

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	68	34.0
	Disagree	21	10.5
	Neutral	61	30.5
	Strongly agree	37	18.5
	Strongly disagree	13	6.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This distribution demonstrates that while the majority acknowledge a tendency toward exaggeration in digital spaces, a significant portion of the population remains cautious or undecided, possibly recognising that both genuine misconduct and distorted reporting coexist in the media environment. The strong agreement rate suggests that citizens are aware of how the fast-paced, attention-driven nature of social media can lead to partial or emotionally framed representations of events that do not always capture full context. Viral videos, selective captions, or politically motivated hashtags may sometimes present isolated cases of police misconduct as systemic, shaping collective perceptions disproportionately. The 30.5%

neutrality rate may reflect individuals who recognize both sides of the issue that while some posts are exaggerated, others expose legitimate abuses. Overall, the data implies that social media's participatory nature, though valuable for transparency, can also magnify narratives that erode institutional trust when left unchecked or uncontextualized.

From a theoretical and interpretive perspective, these findings align with Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1998), which collectively explain how repetitive and emotionally framed media portrayals shape long-term public attitudes toward institutions. The majority agreement suggests that respondents are aware of the selective framing processes through which social media content often user-generated accentuates dramatic or controversial elements of police activities to attract attention and engagement. This perception also resonates with the Moral Panic Framework (Cohen, 1972), where social media can amplify isolated events into moral crises, portraying the police as either oppressive or incompetent. The relatively small number of respondents who disagreed may represent those who view social media as an essential tool for accountability rather than exaggeration. Nonetheless, the data underscores the double-edged role of digital media: while it democratises communication and allows citizens to expose real misconduct, it also fosters sensationalism that can distort public understanding. The findings therefore highlight the need for the Ghana Police Service to invest in strategic digital communication management, including proactive content creation, real-time clarifications, and engagement with credible influencers or fact-checking organizations to counter exaggerations and provide balanced narratives. As scholars such as Reiner (2021) and Boateng & Darko (2023) argue, sustaining public trust in the digital age requires law enforcement agencies to not only perform effectively but also communicate strategically to ensure their image reflects reality rather than distorted social media portrayals. In essence, while social media remains an indispensable accountability tool, its unregulated amplification mechanisms necessitate a

deliberate, transparent, and responsive communication approach from the Ghana Police Service to safeguard its institutional legitimacy.

4.1.5 Research Objective Four: To explore ways to improve police community relations in Ghana using social media platforms.

This section focuses on developing strategies and practical approaches for using social media to strengthen police-community relations in Ghana. Building on insights from earlier objectives, it emphasizes how the Ghana Police Service can adopt more inclusive, transparent, and interactive communication practices online. The section explores the use of digital campaigns, community engagement programs, and real-time feedback mechanisms to foster accountability and trust. It also discusses the importance of training officers in social media communication, developing ethical guidelines, and creating platforms that promote dialogue and collaboration between citizens and the police. Ultimately, this objective aims to outline actionable pathways for transforming social media into a powerful tool for positive policing and civic engagement.

The data indicates that a strong majority of respondents 99 (49.5%) who “agree” and 62 (31%) who “strongly agree” believe that the Ghana Police Service should adopt a more protective social media communication strategy. Together, these categories represent 80.5% of the total sample, reflecting a dominant consensus that the police must be more proactive, strategic, and deliberate in safeguarding their institutional image and public reputation online. Conversely, only 8 respondents (4%) “disagree,” 11 (5.5%) “strongly disagree,” and 20 respondents (10%) remain “neutral.”

Table 23: The police should adopt a more protective social media communication strategy

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	99	49.5
	Disagree	8	4.0
	Neutral	20	10.0
	Strongly agree	62	31.0
	Strongly disagree	11	5.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This overwhelming support for a more protective approach suggests that citizens recognize the vulnerability of law enforcement institutions to misinformation, misrepresentation, and politically charged narratives in the digital space. The high agreement rate implies that the public expects the Ghana Police Service to move beyond reactive communication where responses are issued after damage has occurred to a pre-emptive model that anticipates and mitigates potential reputational risks. Such a strategy would entail continuous monitoring of online discourse, timely clarification of misinformation, consistent engagement with citizens, and the development of a coherent digital brand identity that emphasizes transparency, professionalism, and responsiveness. The small percentage of disagreement may reflect those who believe the police's current social media engagement is adequate or who fear that excessive control might limit public expression. Nonetheless, the overall distribution underscores a broad expectation for institutional modernization in communication practices to suit the dynamic, fast-moving nature of digital public discourse.

From a theoretical and interpretive perspective, these findings align with the principles of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007) and Reputation Management Theory (Benoit, 1997), both of which highlight the need for organizations to manage communication strategically in order to protect their credibility and legitimacy during information crises. The strong majority agreement demonstrates that respondents view social media not merely as a broadcasting tool but as a critical arena for image defense and

relationship management between the police and the public. A “protective” strategy, in this sense, refers to the deliberate use of communication to prevent reputation damage through transparency, engagement, and evidence-based narratives. This interpretation also resonates with Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), which suggests that when institutions fail to define their own narratives, alternative frames often negative or exaggerated fill the vacuum. Thus, by adopting a protective strategy, the Ghana Police Service can assert narrative control and counter misinformation before it spreads. The 10% neutrality rate may represent respondents who are uncertain about what such a strategy entails or how it would differ from current communication practices. However, the overwhelming consensus signals a public mandate for reforming the police’s digital communication systems. As scholars such as Reiner (2021) and Boateng & Darko (2023) note, in an age of digital transparency, institutional legitimacy depends not only on operational performance but also on effective narrative management. Therefore, a more protective social media strategy anchored in rapid response mechanisms, verified content, and citizen-centered engagement can enhance the Ghana Police Service’s credibility, strengthen public trust, and ensure that its image accurately reflects its service to the Ghanaian public.

The data reveals that a clear majority of respondents 93 (46.5%) who “agree” and 62 (31%) who “strongly agree” believe that training police officers in social media communication would enhance their engagement with the public. Combined, these groups constitute an overwhelming 77.5% of the total sample, signaling strong public endorsement for capacity building in digital communication among officers of the Ghana Police Service. Only 3 respondents (1.5%) “disagree,” 15 (7.5%) “strongly disagree,” and 27 (13.5%) remain “neutral.”

Table 24: Training police officers in social media communication would improve their engagement with the public

Response	Frequency	Percent
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Valid	Agree	93	46.5
	Disagree	3	1.5
	Neutral	27	13.5
	Strongly agree	62	31.0
	Strongly disagree	15	7.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This distribution highlights widespread recognition that effective online engagement requires specialized skills in message framing, digital etiquette, crisis communication, and audience interaction. The dominant agreement suggests that citizens perceive gaps in the current social media communication practices of the police, possibly related to inconsistent messaging, delayed responses, or a lack of personalised engagement. The strong support for training also reflects growing expectations that public institutions should communicate with the same professionalism and sensitivity demanded of private sector organisations and media professionals. In Ghana’s digital ecosystem, where social media has become a key avenue for dialogue, transparency, and accountability, untrained or poorly equipped communication officers risk unintentionally exacerbating misinformation or public distrust. Therefore, the data emphasizes that communication competence is no longer an optional skill but a core requirement for contemporary policing, as online platforms increasingly shape institutional legitimacy and public confidence.

From a theoretical and interpretive standpoint, these findings align with the Dialogic Communication Theory (Kent & Taylor, 2002), Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007), which collectively stress the importance of skilled, responsive, and audience-centered communication in fostering public trust. The high level of agreement suggests that respondents view training as a means to professionalize police communication, enabling officers to build empathy, transparency, and mutual understanding with citizens. Training would also equip officers with digital literacy

skills to identify and counter misinformation, manage online criticism constructively, and engage ethically with diverse audiences. The small portion of disagreement may represent individuals who doubt the effectiveness of training due to structural or attitudinal barriers within the police service. However, the overwhelming support points to a public demand for a humanized and digitally savvy police communication culture. This aligns with global best practices, where police institutions integrate social media communication training into their community policing strategies to improve responsiveness, accountability, and public relations (Reiner, 2021; Boateng & Darko, 2023). Ultimately, the findings underscore that empowering officers with digital communication competence would not only improve online engagement but also strengthen overall institutional trust, positioning the Ghana Police Service as a modern, transparent, and community-oriented law enforcement body responsive to the needs of an increasingly digital citizenry.

The data reveals that a significant majority of respondents 90 (45%) who “agree” and 64 (32%) who “strongly agree” believe that partnerships between the Ghana Police Service and fact-checking organizations would help the police effectively counter misinformation. Combined, these categories account for 77% of the total sample, signaling strong public support for institutional collaboration as a strategic response to the growing challenge of false and misleading information circulating on social media. In contrast, only 8 respondents (4%) “disagree,” another 8 (4%) “strongly disagree,” and 30 respondents (15%) remain “neutral.”

Table 25: Partnerships with fact checking organizations would help the police counter misinformation.

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	90	45.0
	Disagree	8	4.0
	Neutral	30	15.0
	Strongly agree	64	32.0
	Strongly Disagree	8	4.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The overwhelming agreement demonstrates widespread recognition that combating misinformation in the digital era requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach that combines institutional credibility with independent verification expertise. The findings suggest that citizens are aware of the limitations of police communication efforts when working in isolation and see partnerships with professional fact-checking bodies such as Dubawa Ghana, Fact Space West Africa, or Ghana Fact as a way to enhance transparency, legitimacy, and public trust. The moderate neutral group may represent individuals who are unfamiliar with the role of fact-checking organizations or uncertain about how such collaborations operate. Nevertheless, the data underscores that the public views fact-checking partnerships as vital for ensuring that clarifications about viral incidents, alleged misconduct, or crime reports are perceived as credible and unbiased, thereby protecting the police's institutional reputation and improving digital communication integrity.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with the Networked Governance Theory (Rhodes, 2007), Media Collaboration Model (Carlson, 2017), and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007), all of which highlight the value of inter-institutional cooperation in managing public information and maintaining trust during crises. The high level of agreement suggests that respondents perceive collaborative verification as a mechanism that enhances the perceived neutrality and accountability of police communication. When independent fact-checking organizations validate or disseminate clarifications on behalf of or in collaboration with the police, it reduces public scepticism and mitigates accusations of bias or propaganda. This partnership approach also aligns with Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), which posits that controlling the narrative through credible frames can shape how audiences interpret institutional behaviour. The small number of dissenting respondents may believe that partnerships could compromise police confidentiality or lead to bureaucratic

delays. However, the overall consensus affirms that misinformation management cannot be achieved by the police alone; it requires a collective ecosystem of credible voices to ensure accuracy and authenticity in public communication. As recent studies by Boateng and Darko (2023) and Ahiabenu (2022) emphasize, collaboration between law enforcement and fact-checkers enhances proactive transparency and reduces the reputational harm caused by viral disinformation. Thus, the data strongly indicates that partnerships with fact-checking organizations would not only improve the Ghana Police Service’s credibility and response capacity but also contribute to a more informed, responsible, and trust-based relationship between the police and the public in Ghana’s dynamic digital communication landscape.

The data reveals that a significant majority of respondents 87 (43.5%) who “agree” and 60 (30%) who “strongly agree” believe that positive storytelling, such as highlighting acts of kindness by police officers, would improve the image of the Ghana Police Service. Combined, these groups constitute 73.5% of the total sample, indicating widespread recognition that human-centered narratives can play a transformative role in reshaping public perceptions of law enforcement. Conversely, only 5 respondents (2.5%) “disagree,” 7 (3.5%) “strongly disagree,” and 41 (20.5%) remain “neutral.”

Table 26: Positive storytelling (eg: Highlighting acts of kindness by police) would improve their image.

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	87	43.5
	Disagree	5	2.5
	Neutral	41	20.5
	Strongly agree	60	30.0
	Strongly disagree	7	3.5
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This dominant agreement suggests that most Ghanaians view social media as an important platform not only for accountability but also for positive reputation-building through

storytelling that emphasizes compassion, professionalism, and service to humanity. The strong endorsement for positive narratives implies that the public desires a more balanced representation of the police one that goes beyond reports of misconduct and emphasizes everyday stories of officers assisting communities, rescuing accident victims, or engaging in charitable acts. The data also reflects a growing awareness among citizens that the police's public image is shaped not only by operational performance but also by how their actions are communicated. The moderate neutral responses may represent individuals who believe that actions should speak for themselves or those uncertain about the effectiveness of such stories in countering negative perceptions. Nonetheless, the overwhelming support affirms that storytelling, when authentic and consistent, can humanize the police and foster emotional connections with the public.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), Image Restoration Theory (Benoit, 1997), and Narrative Paradigm Theory (Fisher, 1984), all of which emphasize the power of strategic communication and storytelling in shaping public perception and institutional legitimacy. The high level of agreement indicates that respondents understand that narratives highlighting empathy, community service, and dedication can function as counter frames to negative or sensationalized stories of police misconduct. Positive storytelling allows the Ghana Police Service to redefine its narrative from one associated with fear and authority to one centered on partnership and trust. This approach is particularly vital in digital environments where emotional engagement drives content virality. As global research (Boateng & Darko, 2023; Reiner, 2021) has shown, emotionally resonant stories are more likely to be shared and remembered, thereby strengthening institutional image and fostering community goodwill. The small fraction of disagreement may stem from skepticism about potential propaganda or selective communication, but this does not undermine the overwhelming evidence that narrative balance is essential to rebuilding trust. The findings

therefore suggest that the Ghana Police Service should strategically integrate positive storytelling into its communication framework through social media, press releases, and community engagement platforms to continuously highlight human-interest stories that reflect integrity, bravery, and care. Such storytelling, when grounded in truth and transparency, not only enhances institutional credibility but also nurtures a sense of shared humanity between officers and citizens, contributing to more cooperative and trusting police–community relations in Ghana.

The data reveals that an overwhelming majority of respondents 98 (49%) who “agree” and 56 (28%) who “strongly agree” believe that real-time responsiveness on social media, such as quick replies to public inquiries and feedback, would improve public trust in the Ghana Police Service. Combined, these groups represent 77% of the total sample, demonstrating a clear consensus that timely engagement is a critical factor in building credibility and fostering positive relationships between the police and the public. Conversely, only 3 respondents (1.5%) “disagree,” 9 (4.5%) “strongly disagree,” and 34 (17%) remain “neutral.”

Table 27: Real-time responsiveness on social media (eg: Quick replies) would improve public trust.

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	98	49.0
	Disagree	3	1.5
	Neutral	34	17.0
	Strongly agree	56	28.0
	Strongly disagree	9	4.5
	Total	200	100.0

This distribution reflects that most citizens perceive promptness and consistency in communication as indicators of professionalism, transparency, and institutional reliability. The high agreement rate suggests that the public values responsiveness as a sign that the police are attentive to citizens’ needs, concerns, and grievances. In today’s digital communication

environment, delays or silence in response to public queries or viral misinformation often create a vacuum that is quickly filled by speculation or false narratives. Hence, respondents' strong agreement highlights growing expectations that social media should not function merely as a broadcasting tool but as an interactive platform for direct engagement and accountability. The presence of a small neutral group could indicate users who are either unaware of the police's social media activities or uncertain about the institution's responsiveness due to inconsistent experiences. Nonetheless, the overall data confirms that citizens associate real-time responsiveness with improved transparency, trust, and institutional image.

From a theoretical and interpretive standpoint, the findings align with the Dialogic Communication Theory (Kent & Taylor, 2002), Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007), and Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), all of which emphasize that open, interactive, and timely communication enhances institutional legitimacy and trust. The results demonstrate that Ghanaians increasingly expect the police to adopt a "digital-first" approach in their communication strategy one that values immediacy and dialogue over bureaucratic delay. The public's perception that quick responses improve trust suggests that responsiveness is not only a technical function but also a relational one that reflects empathy, accountability, and respect for citizens. This finding also corresponds with global research indicating that institutions that engage promptly on digital platforms experience higher levels of public satisfaction and reduced misinformation spread (Reiner, 2021; Boateng & Darko, 2023). Moreover, real-time responsiveness can help the police clarify false claims, update citizens on emergencies, and demonstrate transparency during crises actions that collectively reinforce trust. The minimal disagreement rate may stem from respondents who believe that prompt responses without corresponding action are insufficient to sustain credibility. Nonetheless, the consensus underscores that effective communication is time-sensitive, and digital engagement must be treated as a core policing function rather than a secondary task.

Therefore, the data implies that for the Ghana Police Service to strengthen its legitimacy in the digital age, it must institutionalize social media responsiveness through dedicated communication teams, 24-hour monitoring, and prompt feedback systems that transform online interactions into tangible trust-building opportunities.

The data reveals that a significant majority of respondents 80 (40%) who “agree” and 83 (41.5%) who “strongly agree” believe that social media is a powerful tool for building better police–community relations. Together, these two groups account for 81.5% of the total sample, showing overwhelming confidence in the potential of social media to strengthen engagement, trust, and collaboration between the Ghana Police Service and the public. Conversely, only 5 respondents (2.5%) “disagree,” 12 (6%) “strongly disagree,” and 20 respondents (10%) remain “neutral.”

Table 28: Overall, I believe social media is a powerful tool for building better police community relations

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	80	40.0
	Disagree	5	2.5
	Neutral	20	10.0
	Strongly agree	83	41.5
	Strongly disagree	12	6.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

This strong consensus underscores that citizens increasingly recognize social media platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), WhatsApp, and TikTok as vital spaces where the police can foster transparency, share safety information, and engage constructively with communities. The high agreement rate suggests that Ghanaians view digital communication as a transformative avenue for reshaping historical perceptions of the police, particularly in bridging the gap between enforcement and empathy. The findings also reflect the shift from

traditional, one-way policing communication models toward participatory, dialogue-based interactions that allow for immediate feedback, real-time clarification, and public accountability. The relatively small proportion of disagreement may represent individuals who are skeptical about the sustainability of online engagement or who question whether digital interactions translate into tangible improvements in policing practices. Nonetheless, the overall data indicates that citizens see social media not just as an auxiliary communication tool but as a key driver of mutual understanding and institutional legitimacy in Ghana's evolving democratic context.

From a theoretical and interpretive standpoint, these findings align with the Participatory Communication Model (Servaes, 1999), the Dialogic Communication Theory (Kent & Taylor, 2002), and the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), all of which emphasize the importance of open, interactive, and inclusive dialogue in strengthening institutional–citizen relationships. The dominant agreement rate illustrates that respondents perceive social media as an enabler of horizontal communication one that breaks down hierarchical barriers and allows citizens and law enforcement to co-create solutions to community problems. This aligns with contemporary global policing trends, where digital platforms are used to promote community safety campaigns, crowdsource crime information, and humanize police officers through positive storytelling. The presence of 10% neutral respondents may indicate those who recognize social media's potential but remain cautious about its practical implementation or the police's digital readiness. The minimal disagreement rate reinforces the broad public consensus that effective digital engagement can foster transparency, accountability, and responsiveness key pillars of democratic policing. These results resonate with findings by Reiner (2021) and Boateng and Darko (2023), which show that well-managed social media communication enhances public trust and strengthens social cohesion. Therefore, the data underscores that for the Ghana Police Service to maintain legitimacy in an increasingly digital

society, it must treat social media not merely as a platform for announcements but as a participatory ecosystem for dialogue, problem-solving, and relationship-building. By doing so, the police can transform social media into a strategic asset for deepening collaboration, restoring confidence, and fostering a culture of shared responsibility for safety and justice in Ghana.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

4.2.1 Framing, Virality, and the Power of Visual Narratives

The analysis of interviews with police officers, journalists, and influencers revealed a dominant recognition of how viral media content, especially videos and images, acts as a double-edged sword that can either enhance or damage public perceptions of the Ghana Police Service (GPS). Participants repeatedly emphasised that the “virality” of police-related content online creates rapid waves of public judgment before official statements or investigations are released. As Participant 1 noted, *“If it is a positive viral video, the comments automatically may be positive because it is a positive action. If it is a negative viral video, then you’re going to receive insults or negative comments.”* This observation captures how the *framing* of visual content significantly determines public sentiment. According to Entman’s (1993) Framing Theory, media frames define problems, diagnose causes, and make moral judgments, thereby influencing audience interpretations. In Ghana’s context, where social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram serve as the main channels for citizen engagement, the framing of police actions often outweighs official clarifications, shaping public discourse almost instantaneously.

The participants’ responses also reflected the *agenda-setting power* of social media. Participant 2 explained that *“viral videos have a strong effect when people see a video of police misconduct, it spreads so fast and it shapes opinions even before the facts are actually known.”*

This aligns with McCombs and Shaw's (1972) Agenda-Setting Theory, which posits that the media do not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about. In Ghana's case, social media has overtaken traditional gatekeeping roles of legacy media, determining which police actions gain national attention. Participant 3 reinforced this, stating that "*when something about the police goes viral, it immediately influences how people see us... when it is a negative one, it harms the service's image before the full story is even known.*" These sentiments demonstrate the temporal gap between event occurrence, online framing, and institutional response a gap that has profound implications for public trust. Research by Boateng and Chenane (2020) on African policing and social media confirms that citizen perceptions of legitimacy are often influenced more by online narratives than official communication.

Furthermore, police participants highlighted how negative social media framing often pressures the GPS into reactive communication rather than proactive engagement. As Participant 1 described, "*The Ghana Police Service is obliged to issue a press statement to either confirm or disconfirm viral content... if it is something that requires immediate action, we take action.*" This reactive model reflects what Grunig and Hunt (1984) describe as a *public information model*, one-way communication focused on dissemination rather than dialogue. The officers' comments suggest that the police's social media presence is often used to defend credibility rather than to build relational trust. This aligns with earlier findings by Aboagye (2020), who noted that the Ghana Police Service's social media activity remains largely defensive, driven by the need to manage crisis narratives rather than to establish ongoing community interaction. The pressure to respond quickly to viral posts has also created a communication environment where accuracy sometimes competes with speed, contributing to public confusion.

A key sub-theme emerging from the journalists' perspectives is the *sybiotic relationship* between social media and traditional media. Participant 2, a journalist, stated that "*social media*

is always faster than traditional media... before an issue gets to traditional media, it is already circulating online.” This reflects the findings of Eklu (2023), who documented how social media coverage of police incidents sets the tone for traditional media reportage, effectively creating a feedback loop that magnifies public outrage. The framing of events, often using emotionally charged labels such as “brutality,” “corruption,” or “abuse”, reinforces negative schemas in the public imagination. Entman’s (1993) framework explains how selective emphasis on certain images and words constructs a moral narrative that influences public attitudes toward authority figures. In this sense, even when journalists attempt to fact-check or balance reports, the first viral image often sets the frame within which all subsequent discussions occur.

From a communication-theoretical lens, this demonstrates a shift from the *two-step flow model* (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) to a *multi-step diffusion process* where influencers, citizen journalists, and microbloggers act as intermediary gatekeepers. For instance, Participant 5 emphasized that “people won’t even read the caption... their mind has been made up already.” Such immediacy of opinion formation highlights what McNair (2018) calls *real-time reputation risk* in digital public spheres. Once narratives of misconduct or corruption take hold, the police struggle to regain narrative control. Even in cases where corrective information is issued, as Participant 1 mentioned, “*negative stories sell and travel faster they spread like wildfire.*” This sentiment echoes international findings by Crump (2011) and Reiner (2010) that digital media amplify policing scandals, eroding institutional credibility faster than positive stories can repair it.

Another dimension of virality discussed by participants is *the asymmetry between content type and emotional response*. Positive stories about police assistance or heroism often receive minimal engagement, while negative incidents dominate online discourse. Participant 2 observed that “*when positive videos are shared, it improves trust, but engagement tends to be*

low... negative stories attract more attention.” This aligns with negativity bias in media psychology (Soroka, 2006), where negative information triggers stronger cognitive and emotional processing, thereby shaping lasting impressions. In Ghana, this bias manifests in how citizens internalize narratives of corruption and misconduct as representative of the entire police service. Gyamfi (2022) similarly argues that media emphasis on misconduct incidents contributes to generalized mistrust, making legitimacy restoration efforts arduous.

Finally, participants recognised the potential for social media to both humanize and demonise police work, depending on the communicative intent behind shared content. Participant 4 summarised this tension: *“Images and videos of the Ghana Police that are being shown online have affected us greatly... if it is negative, we receive bad comments, which makes it difficult for us to communicate because the viral video has already influenced perception.”* This insight underlines the need for the Ghana Police Service to adopt *strategic framing* and *two-way symmetrical communication* (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) to reshape narratives before they crystallise. Rather than waiting for crisis moments, the Service could leverage proactive storytelling highlighting professionalism, community service, and ethical policing to counterbalance the dominance of negative frames. As Entman (1993) asserts, control over framing equates to control over meaning, and in the digital age, meaning shapes legitimacy.

4.2.2 Trust, Credibility, and Institutional Image in the Age of Social Media

The Ghana Police Service (GPS) has increasingly found itself negotiating public legitimacy within a digital landscape where online narratives can either build or dismantle institutional trust in real time. Participants across groups acknowledged that social media has amplified public scrutiny of police actions, exposing institutional strengths and weaknesses to mass interpretation. Participant 1 captured this reality vividly: *“Images and videos of the Ghana Police that are being shown online have affected us greatly, but it depends on the type of*

content that is being put out there. If it is negative, we receive bad comments from the people, which makes it difficult for us to communicate because the viral video has already influenced their perception.” This illustrates the *feedback loop* between perception and communication whereby online reactions shape institutional responses, which in turn influence future perceptions. According to Habermas’ (1989) *Public Sphere Theory*, digital media spaces function as arenas where citizens deliberate on issues of public concern, including policing. However, when these deliberations are dominated by outrage and mistrust, the legitimacy of public institutions becomes contingent upon their ability to engage meaningfully with those narratives.

Participants repeatedly pointed to trust asymmetry the imbalance between how quickly trust erodes through misinformation versus how slowly it can be rebuilt through official communication. Participant 5 emphasized, *“People won’t even read the caption... before the police will come in and work on that situation, it may be too late. Many people do not look at the explanations the police put out because their mind has been made up already.”* This finding aligns with Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman’s (1995) *Institutional Trust Model*, which defines trust as a combination of competence, integrity, and benevolence. In Ghana’s digital context, these three components are constantly tested through social media interactions. A single viral act of misconduct, regardless of scale, can undermine the institution’s perceived integrity, while delayed or defensive communication can signal incompetence. Research by Gyamfi (2022) corroborates this, finding that citizens’ trust in the Ghana Police Service is fragile, often shaped by mediated experiences rather than direct encounters. Hence, online representation functions as a proxy for institutional behavior, serving as the “digital face” of the police.

The interplay between credibility and transparency emerged as a significant sub-theme. Participant 1 recounted, *“When we have any story on our social media platform related to the Ghana Police Service, there is instant action we issue a media release, confirming or*

disconfirming the act.” Such responsiveness aligns with principles of *Dialogic Communication Theory* (Kent & Taylor, 1998), which emphasizes openness, mutuality, and interactivity as keys to fostering public trust. However, as Participant 2 noted, *“Even though reports later clarified some part of the story, the damage had already been done.”* This statement underscores a temporal challenge: institutional communication often trails behind public discourse. Mensah (2024) similarly observes that in the Ghanaian media ecosystem, credibility hinges not merely on the truthfulness of messages but on the timeliness and relational tone of communication. Thus, while the Ghana Police Service’s increasing use of social media for press releases reflects progress, the dialogic dimension active listening, engagement, and empathy remains underdeveloped.

Furthermore, journalists in the study highlighted how social media framing intertwines with institutional credibility. Participant 3 stated, *“The way people portray the police on social media has a really big say on public attitude toward them.”* This comment reflects the *spiral of cynicism* effect (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), where repeated exposure to negative narratives about institutions fosters public skepticism and disengagement. When citizens perceive the police as politically biased or corrupt, each subsequent story of misconduct reinforces an existing narrative of distrust. Abubakari and Blaszczyk (2024) argue that such politicization of discourse on platforms like Facebook and X has blurred distinctions between individual misconduct and institutional failure. In Ghana’s case, the merging of political rhetoric and policing imagery further complicates the task of image rehabilitation. The more public trust becomes entangled with partisan interpretations, the more fragile institutional legitimacy becomes.

An important finding from the influencers’ responses was the emotional asymmetry in audience reactions to police-related content. Participant 2 observed, *“When the story is negative like misconduct or corruption the comment section gets busy... emotions run high,*

people share their bad experiences.” This mirrors findings by Soroka (2006) and Reiner (2010) on the *negativity bias* in public discourse, where negative information is perceived as more credible and memorable than positive updates. As Participant 4 added, *“Many people assume it’s just another police story... there’s a clear sense of skepticism.”* Such reactions show how prior beliefs act as cognitive filters, predisposing citizens to interpret even neutral police messages with suspicion. This erosion of interpretive trust aligns with *confirmation bias theory* (Nickerson, 1998), suggesting that citizens selectively process information that confirms their pre-existing distrust toward authority. Consequently, despite the police’s efforts to correct misinformation or share positive updates, these narratives struggle to gain traction.

Another key insight concerns the performative dimension of online trust restoration. Participant 1 explained that *“when something negative goes viral, we are obliged to act either suspend or interdict the officer and inform the public.”* While these gestures demonstrate accountability, they also reveal a form of *symbolic legitimacy maintenance* performing transparency to satisfy public expectations rather than institutionalising it. As Agyemang and Parimah (2022) argue, social media has shifted the basis of police legitimacy from institutional authority to performative accountability, where public relations optics increasingly define credibility. In this performative landscape, visual communication such as videos of disciplinary actions or officers engaging with communities becomes the primary tool for rebuilding trust. However, such trust is often *conditional* and *episodic*, depending on continued visibility rather than sustained relational engagement.

Finally, participants collectively called for strategic communication reform grounded in dialogue rather than defense. Participant 1 insightfully reflected: *“What we are employing now is the press identity or publicity model... we prepare our message and post it, but when people ask cogent questions, we don’t engage them.”* This critique speaks directly to the need for transitioning toward Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) *two-way symmetrical communication model*,

where institutions and publics co-create meaning through sustained interaction. Habermas' (1989) notion of communicative rationality further supports this shift, emphasizing that legitimacy in democratic societies arises from reasoned dialogue rather than unilateral statements. In the Ghanaian policing context, embracing dialogic communication through responsive engagement, question-answer sessions, and transparency-oriented storytelling could gradually rebuild the moral contract between citizens and law enforcement. As Participant 5 aptly put it, *"People will understand the police better if we speak to them, not at them."*

4.2.3 Social Media as a Platform for Transparency and Engagement

The findings revealed a strong consensus among participants that social media provides the Ghana Police Service (GPS) with an unprecedented opportunity to communicate directly with the public, bypassing traditional media filters. Participant 1 emphasized, *"Social media has made it easier for us to inform the public about what we are doing, and people get to see the human side of the police."* This reflects the dialogic communication principles outlined by Kent and Taylor (1998), which highlight openness, responsiveness, and mutuality as essential components of relationship-building between institutions and their publics. Social media platforms, especially Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), enable the GPS to project an image of transparency by sharing real-time updates on crime, arrests, community programs, and traffic management. These channels allow the public to see the police as accessible and accountable, reducing the psychological distance that traditionally separated officers from citizens.

Transparency, as articulated by the participants, has become an important credibility strategy for the police. Participant 2 observed that *"when the police share updates quickly on cases or crime prevention, people feel informed and included... it builds confidence."* This sense of

inclusion supports Habermas' (1989) Public Sphere Theory, which conceptualizes communication as a process of rational exchange among citizens and institutions. When the GPS publishes information about investigations, disciplinary actions, or community initiatives, it allows the public to form reasoned opinions based on accessible evidence. Mensah (2024) similarly argues that digital communication has redefined the relationship between African security institutions and citizens, turning one-way publicity models into participatory spaces for co-monitoring public order. The Ghana Police Service's verified social media handles now serve not just as information outlets but as interactive public arenas where legitimacy is continuously negotiated through dialogue and responsiveness.

Furthermore, participants recognized that social media has allowed the police to humanize their identity beyond the traditional symbols of authority. Participant 3 explained, *"When we post pictures of police officers helping people, engaging with schools, or community clean-ups, it changes how people see us."* This aligns with the idea of reputational repair through humanization (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Online storytelling and visual documentation of humanitarian acts help counterbalance negative stereotypes of corruption or brutality. Research by Asafo-Adjei, Mensah, and Osei-Bonsu (2025) supports this observation, showing that the portrayal of law enforcement through relatable narratives enhances perceptions of empathy and competence. The participants' emphasis on showing "the human side of policing" demonstrates an understanding that legitimacy is not only procedural but also emotional anchored in how citizens *feel* about the institution.

However, participants also acknowledged that engagement requires reciprocity. Participant 4 noted, *"Sometimes people ask questions under the posts, but they don't get replies. That makes them feel ignored."* This highlights a gap between informational transparency and dialogic engagement. According to Kent and Taylor (1998), genuine dialogue is sustained by feedback loops that allow publics to feel heard and valued. Without this two-way interaction, institutional

communication risks slipping back into what Grunig and Hunt (1984) called the *public information model* a one-directional flow focused more on message control than relationship building. This issue reflects the findings of Boateng and Chenane (2020), who noted that many African police institutions use social media primarily for announcements rather than conversation. Thus, while transparency has improved through increased online visibility, engagement remains limited by bureaucratic communication cultures and fears of reputational risk.

Importantly, participants linked online transparency to accountability and reform. Participant 5 asserted, “*When we are open on social media, people monitor our actions it pushes us to do better.*” This suggests that digital scrutiny can function as a mechanism of self-regulation, aligning with *Accountability Theory* (Bovens, 2007). As public expectations for openness grow, the GPS is compelled to maintain higher ethical and operational standards. Gyamfi (2022) notes that citizens’ exposure to both positive and negative policing stories online shapes a participatory form of trust conditional on visible accountability. Hence, social media has become not only a communication tool but also a governance instrument, fostering what Altheide (2004) calls “the politics of visibility.” In this sense, transparency does not merely serve public relations goals; it constitutes a new paradigm of digital policing ethics.

Finally, participants envisioned that expanding social media engagement could facilitate *preventive communication*. Participant 3 explained that “*using social media to educate people about safety tips and traffic rules can prevent crime and accidents.*” This aligns with the community policing framework (Skogan & Hartnett, 1997), which emphasizes proactive collaboration between citizens and law enforcement to enhance safety. By integrating preventive messaging and educational campaigns into social media strategies, the GPS can shift from reactive crisis management toward proactive community service. Mensah (2024)

and Eklun (2023) both argue that this preventive communication builds long-term legitimacy, as citizens come to view the police not as enforcers but as partners in public safety.

4.2.4 Misinformation, Cyberbullying, and the Amplification of Scandal

Participants' responses revealed a consistent concern about how misinformation spreads rapidly on social media, often damaging the police's image before official clarification can be issued. Participant 1 emphasized this point: *"If it is a negative viral video, then you're going to receive insults or negative comments... before the truth comes out, people have already judged."* This observation aligns directly with Media Dependency Theory, which posits that individuals' reliance on media to understand their environment increases media influence, especially in times of uncertainty (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). In Ghana, citizens often depend on social media as their primary news source due to its immediacy and interactivity. However, this dependency creates an environment ripe for the rapid diffusion of false or exaggerated narratives about policing. Studies by Abubakari and Blaszczyk (2024) show that Ghanaian social media spaces are highly politicized and susceptible to sensationalism, allowing misinformation to thrive unchecked. As a result, unverified posts often become the first "truth" the public encounters, while official corrections come too late to reshape opinion.

The participants described how the viral nature of digital content amplifies public outrage and institutional stigma. Participant 2 explained, *"When there is a story about police misconduct, it spreads faster than anything else, and everyone starts commenting without verifying."* This dynamic can be understood through Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which suggests that media don't tell people what to think but what to think about. In this context, social media users and influencers become the new "agenda-setters," prioritizing topics that may lack factual grounding but possess emotional resonance. A minor disciplinary issue can quickly dominate national discourse when shared with provocative captions or edited visuals.

Eklu (2023) observed similar patterns in Ghanaian online spaces, where emotionally charged portrayals of policing incidents disproportionately shape the public agenda, often sidelining broader discussions about structural reforms or positive community engagement.

Participants also highlighted the rise of cyberbullying and online hostility toward police officers as a major challenge. Participant 3 shared, *“The insults are terrible... once a video goes viral, people attack you personally, even your family. It discourages us from using social media.”* This reflects a form of *digital disinhibition effect* (Suler, 2004), where anonymity and emotional contagion amplify hostility in online interactions. Social media thus becomes not only a site of public discourse but also of personal vulnerability for officers. The Ghana Police Service’s social media teams often face harassment when attempting to clarify issues, as users question their integrity or mock their statements. Agyemang and Parimah (2022) argue that such hostile environments undermine the willingness of public officials to engage transparently, fostering a vicious cycle of silence, misinformation, and mistrust. As a result, the Service risks retreating from online engagement precisely when digital presence is most essential for legitimacy.

A related threat involves selective framing and narrative distortion. Participant 4 remarked, *“Sometimes a short clip is taken out of context and circulated as evidence of misconduct, even when the full story is different.”* This reflects the power of Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), which holds that how an issue is presented affects how audiences interpret it. In Ghana’s media environment, citizens often encounter snippets of video content stripped of explanatory context, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs about police brutality or corruption. Mensah (2024) notes that these “partial frames” create moral binaries good citizens versus bad police that oversimplify complex social interactions. Once a frame of misconduct or incompetence dominates, subsequent institutional messages are filtered through skepticism, making reputational recovery extremely difficult. This phenomenon exemplifies *confirmation bias*

(Nickerson, 1998), where audiences interpret new information in ways that confirm their established distrust.

Participants also noted that the speed of misinformation surpasses institutional response capacity. Participant 5 explained, *“By the time the police respond officially, the story has already been shared thousands of times.”* This delay, a recurring theme in participants’ accounts, underscores the structural limitations of bureaucratic communication in a fast-paced digital ecosystem. According to Gyamfi (2022), institutional communication in Ghana often suffers from procedural rigidity, which inhibits timely crisis response. In contrast, social media thrives on immediacy and emotional resonance. This mismatch between institutional tempo and digital virality intensifies perception gaps, making misinformation not just a communicative problem but a legitimacy crisis. Scholars like Crump (2011) warn that unchecked virality transforms minor incidents into “symbolic scandals,” where perception of misconduct becomes more damaging than the incident itself.

Finally, participants emphasized the psychological toll of online misinformation and attacks on police morale. Participant 3 admitted, *“Sometimes it feels like we are being watched and judged all the time. Even if you do good, people still find fault.”* This reflects what Beck (1992) terms the *risk society* a condition where visibility becomes both a demand and a danger. For the Ghana Police Service, digital visibility means being constantly exposed to public evaluation, where credibility is fragile and contingent. As such, officers increasingly experience “reputational anxiety,” knowing that a single viral moment could undo years of professional conduct. This persistent exposure not only affects morale but also discourages proactive engagement, pushing officers toward defensive communication. The cumulative result is a weakened institutional presence online, leaving misinformation unchallenged and public trust increasingly eroded.

4.2.5 Politicisation of Policing and Digital Polarisation

Participants across all groups expressed concern that social media discussions about the Ghana Police Service (GPS) are frequently filtered through partisan lenses, leading citizens to interpret police actions as politically motivated. Participant 1 noted, *“When the police act on certain cases, people quickly say it’s because of politics... they think we are being used.”* This reflects the media dependency framework, where audiences rely on media especially social media to interpret complex political events (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). In the absence of direct knowledge of police operations, citizens depend on influencers, bloggers, and partisan commentators who often frame enforcement actions in ways that align with political narratives. Abubakari and Blaszczyk (2024) found that Ghanaian Facebook discussions on cybercrime and policing are frequently infused with political insinuations, reinforcing the idea that law enforcement is not impartial but aligned with ruling elites. Consequently, media dependency fosters interpretive dependency where citizens’ understanding of police activity is filtered through political storytelling rather than factual reporting.

The agenda-setting power of politically affiliated media accounts further compounds this problem. Participant 3 explained, *“When something happens, the opposition media or bloggers will post it first with their own caption, then it spreads. By the time the police issue a statement, people already believe one version.”* This process exemplifies Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which explains how repeated emphasis on certain issues by influential communicators directs public attention and concern. In Ghana, politically aligned media and social media pages act as digital gatekeepers, deciding which police-related stories trend and how they are interpreted. Mensah (2024) and Gyamfi (2022) both note that partisan commentary often overshadows official communication, turning routine enforcement incidents into symbolic battlegrounds for public opinion. Thus, political actors effectively use social

media to set the public agenda about policing not around safety or crime prevention, but around legitimacy and bias.

Participants described how framing techniques on social media create polarized moral interpretations of police actions. Participant 2 emphasized, *“Depending on who is involved, one group will say the police are doing their job, and another will say the police are being used by the government.”* This exemplifies Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), where selective emphasis determines how an event is understood. When social media users frame arrests or crackdowns as politically motivated, they construct a narrative of “state oppression,” whereas others may frame the same events as “law enforcement.” This polarization fragments the public sphere, replacing dialogue with suspicion. Habermas’ (1989) *Public Sphere Theory* helps contextualise this phenomenon: rather than fostering rational-critical debate, social media often hosts emotionally charged and partisan discourse that undermines shared understanding. In such an environment, police credibility becomes contingent on the audience’s political alignment rather than on objective performance.

The polarizing nature of digital discourse also manifests in echo chambers and algorithmic reinforcement. Participant 5 reflected, *“You will see different sides of the story depending on the page you follow. Everyone believes their own version.”* This reflects Sunstein’s (2001) concept of *information cocoons*, where users encounter only content that confirms their pre-existing views. The architecture of social media driven by engagement metrics prioritizes emotionally provocative content, such as videos of alleged police misconduct or politically charged interpretations. As Soroka (2006) and Reiner (2010) argue, negativity bias ensures that critical frames about authority gain more visibility than balanced or positive ones. Consequently, algorithmic amplification creates a digital divide in how citizens interpret the same policing event: one side sees “justice served,” while the other perceives “state coercion.”

The result is a fragmented legitimacy structure, where the Ghana Police Service cannot maintain a singular, trusted identity across audiences.

Participants also discussed how political framing erodes officers' morale and the institution's perceived autonomy. Participant 3 shared, *"Even when we do the right thing, people will say it's political. That makes it hard for us to be seen as neutral."* This sentiment illustrates the psychological consequences of politicization officers internalize public suspicion, leading to communicative caution or disengagement. Research by Boateng and Chenane (2020) confirms that such perception gaps reduce officers' willingness to communicate publicly, fearing misinterpretation or backlash. From a Framing Theory perspective, once the "politicized institution" frame takes root, every action by the police is viewed through that lens, regardless of intent. The GPS thus faces a credibility trap: any attempt at public defense is dismissed as propaganda, while silence is read as guilt. As Participant 1 noted, *"Sometimes it's better not to post anything, because no matter what you say, people twist it."* This demonstrates how over-politicized social spaces can paralyze institutional communication.

A crucial dimension of this theme involves the erosion of social cohesion caused by digital polarization. Participant 4 stated, *"Social media has divided people some support the police no matter what, others insult them always."* Such polarization reflects the broader fragmentation of public trust. According to Media Dependency Theory, when individuals depend on socially divided media ecosystems, their worldviews also become polarized (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). In Ghana, where political identity strongly overlaps with media consumption habits, this fragmentation translates into competing realities. Agyemang and Parimah (2022) warn that when law enforcement legitimacy becomes a partisan issue, it undermines collective respect for the rule of law itself. Instead of fostering mutual accountability, digital debates become arenas of blame and emotional conflict. The Ghana Police Service, therefore, operates within

a “trust deficit environment,” where every act of enforcement must contend with politically constructed meanings.

Finally, participants suggested that addressing politicization requires institutional neutrality and strategic communication training. Participant 5 concluded, “*The police need to show by action that they serve all citizens equally, not just government interests. Social media should reflect that.*” This recommendation aligns with Entman’s (1993) framing insights institutions must actively define their own frames to resist being defined by others. Gyamfi (2022) and Mensah (2024) both advocate for narrative sovereignty, urging the GPS to create transparent, issue-focused content that transcends partisan narratives. Moreover, Kent and Taylor’s (1998) dialogic framework underscores the need for *authentic listening*, where the police engage across ideological divides, not just within supportive audiences. By reclaiming communicative ground through consistency, responsiveness, and neutrality, the Ghana Police Service can gradually depoliticize its image and rebuild legitimacy across polarized publics.

4.2.6 Building Digital Trust through Dialogic Communication

Participants emphasized that strengthening police community relations on social media begins with two-way communication rather than one-way broadcasting. Participant 1 articulated this clearly: “*What we are doing now is just posting. When people ask questions, we don’t respond. That’s not dialogic communication... we need to move to a two-way symmetrical model.*”

This directly resonates with Kent and Taylor’s (1998) *Dialogic Communication Theory*, which argues that authentic online relationships depend on openness, mutuality, and responsiveness. The participant’s critique of the Ghana Police Service’s “press release” style of posting reflects the press agency/public information model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), which prioritizes institutional image over genuine engagement. By contrast, dialogic communication through

live Q&A sessions, community comment replies, or digital listening positions the GPS as a relational partner rather than an authoritarian entity.

Participant 2 built on this idea, suggesting that, *“People like it when they can talk directly to officers online it makes the service more approachable and human.”*

This humanization process aligns with Relationship Management Theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), which views public relations as an ongoing relationship based on trust, openness, and shared commitment. In the Ghanaian context, where citizens’ perception of the police is often shaped by distant authority and fear, such interactions can shift the emotional tone of public engagement. Research by Gyamfi (2022) confirms that when police officers respond to citizens’ online concerns respectfully and promptly, perceptions of legitimacy and fairness increase significantly. This relational approach transforms “followers” into stakeholders’ active participants in co-producing safety and accountability.

Participant 3 added another layer, explaining that social media can serve as a platform for proactive education and empathy: *“Police can use videos to explain laws, talk about people’s rights, or clarify why they act a certain way. That kind of openness helps people understand instead of judging.”*

This practice corresponds to Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), which suggests that communication effectiveness increases with the medium’s capacity to convey nuanced, emotional, and contextual cues. Rich media formats such as live videos, infographics, and short educational clips allow the police to present their perspective with greater clarity and empathy. Mensah (2024) emphasizes that visual transparency in law enforcement communication can counteract the negative framing often associated with textual or second-hand reports. Through media-rich storytelling, the Ghana Police Service can contextualize its actions, bridge interpretation gaps, and reduce the space for misinformation.

Participants also highlighted the importance of real-time responsiveness. Participant 1 noted that during crises, *“People want answers immediately. If you delay, the wrong story will take over.”* This insight reflects Coombs’ (2007) *Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)*, which posits that timely, accurate, and empathetic responses mitigate reputational damage. In the Ghanaian context, where viral misinformation spreads within hours, rapid digital responsiveness becomes not only a public relations tool but also a *trust maintenance strategy*. Studies by Boateng and Chenane (2020) found that African police institutions that engage early and continuously on social platforms recover credibility faster than those that respond reactively.

Dialogic communication also supports co-creation of community narratives, a critical dimension of participatory policing. Participant 2 proposed: *“We can involve people in sharing positive stories, like officers helping communities or solving issues. Citizens themselves can post and tag us.”*

This participatory framing aligns with Habermas’ (1989) conception of the *public sphere*, where communication becomes a collaborative process of meaning-making. By empowering citizens to participate in shaping institutional storytelling, the Ghana Police Service can foster shared ownership of its reputation. This transforms social media from a site of accusation to a space of collective narrative-building one in which citizens and police both define what safety, accountability, and justice mean.

Finally, participants emphasized the ethical dimension of dialogic engagement. Participant 3 observed that *“Openness is good, but it must come with responsibility what you post must be accurate and respectful.”* This mirrors Kent and Taylor’s (2002) principle of *commitment to mutuality*, which stresses that dialogue must be sincere, reciprocal, and ethically grounded. As Reiner (2010) notes, legitimacy is not achieved through visibility alone but through integrity

demonstrated in public communication. Therefore, digital trust-building requires both transparency and professional restraint a balance between openness and institutional discipline.

4.2.7 Institutional Capacity, Training, and Strategic Policy for Social Media Use

While participants recognized the communicative potential of social media, they unanimously stressed that such transformation depends on capacity building, institutional policy, and digital professionalism. Participant 1 explained: *“For us to be effective online, we need training capacity building to make officers solid. You can’t fight misinformation if you don’t know how to handle social media professionally.”*

This insight reflects the organizational communication competence framework (Downs & Adrian, 2012), which emphasizes training, structure, and technological literacy as prerequisites for effective institutional dialogue. As digital communication becomes integral to policing, the Ghana Police Service must cultivate specialized skills in content creation, audience engagement, data privacy, and digital ethics. Boateng and Chenane (2020) similarly observed that African police institutions often underinvest in digital literacy, leading to inconsistent or tone-deaf online messaging that inadvertently worsens credibility gaps.

Participant 2 added, *“Most officers are not familiar with social media tools or online etiquette... with proper training, our online presence can be more credible.”* This reflects the need for digital professionalism, a concept linked to *organizational legitimacy theory* (Suchman, 1995). When public institutions demonstrate competence in managing modern communication technologies, they signal adaptability and accountability two attributes central to legitimacy. Gyamfi (2022) confirms that citizens’ trust in Ghanaian public institutions correlates strongly with perceptions of communicative competence. Thus, investing in digital training is not merely a technical issue but a legitimacy strategy.

Participants also emphasized the importance of policy frameworks guiding social media conduct. Participant 5 argued:

“Social media use within the police must be guided by clear rules, from training school to service. Everyone should know what is acceptable and what isn’t.”

This recommendation aligns with Institutional Theory (Scott, 2004), which posits that legitimacy depends on conforming to established norms and structures. A comprehensive social media policy can ensure consistency, prevent ethical breaches, and define procedures for crisis communication, misinformation management, and public feedback. Mensah (2024) advocates for a “Digital Policing Charter” in Ghana an institutional code that combines transparency with accountability mechanisms to manage digital risks.

Participant 3 emphasised that continuous training is necessary to sustain these improvements:

“We need to train officers regularly, not just once. Social media changes fast; if we don’t keep learning, we will always be behind.”

This reflects Daft and Lengel’s (1986) *Media Richness Theory* in another dimension: as communication channels evolve, so too must the institution’s ability to use richer, more adaptive media formats. A static communication model cannot function in a dynamic, algorithm-driven media environment. Eklun (2023) similarly underscores that sustained learning and evaluation enable institutions to adapt to emerging threats such as deepfakes or disinformation without losing public confidence.

Participants also suggested collaboration with journalists and influencers as part of capacity development. Participant 2 proposed, *“Media houses can train us, or we can collaborate with them to post credible content. It helps reach more people and build credibility.”* This recommendation embodies Network Governance Theory (Rhodes, 1997), which emphasizes cooperation among state and non-state actors in policy and communication ecosystems. By co-

creating digital content with journalists and verified influencers, the GPS can amplify its messages through credible intermediaries, countering misinformation and diversifying audience reach.

Finally, participants called for institutional restructuring that integrates social media into strategic decision-making. Participant 1 observed: *“We need a dedicated digital communication unit not just PR officers posting occasionally.”*

This aligns with Strategic Communication Management Theory (Hallahan et al., 2007), which views communication as a central organisational function that supports policy, reputation, and stakeholder relations. Creating a specialised digital command within the Public Affairs Directorate would institutionalise real-time engagement, data analytics, and policy-driven messaging. As Aboagye (2020) notes, Ghana’s future policing legitimacy will depend on its ability to merge professionalism with technological fluency.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a synthesis of the major findings from the study on “The Role of Social Media in Shaping Public Perception of the Police in Ghana: Opportunities and Threats.” It draws together insights from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses to present a coherent understanding of how social media platforms influence public trust, engagement, and perceptions of the Ghana Police Service. The chapter begins with a concise summary of the research aim, approach, sample characteristics, and data collection instruments to contextualise the findings. It then discusses the key outcomes of the study, highlighting the dual role of social media as both a transformative tool for police community engagement and a potential threat to institutional credibility. Following the summary of findings, the chapter presents conclusions derived from the study’s objectives and provides practical recommendations aimed at enhancing police communication strategies, digital literacy, and public trust. The chapter concludes with an outline of the study’s limitations and suggestions for future research to guide further scholarly inquiry into the intersection of digital media, policing, and public perception in Ghana.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The study set out to examine how social media is shaping the way people in Ghana view the Ghana Police Service. The findings reveal that social media has become one of the most influential spaces for discussing policing issues. Many people now form their opinions based on what they see, read, or share online. Viral videos, personal stories, and public reactions

especially on Facebook, X, TikTok, and WhatsApp greatly shape how citizens judge the behaviour, professionalism, and trustworthiness of the police.

The research showed that most respondents believe social media has opened the door for more transparency and interaction between the public and the police. People feel freer to express their concerns and demand explanations when things go wrong. At the same time, this open environment brings challenges. Negative content especially viral videos of alleged misconduct spreads very quickly and usually reaches the public long before official statements are released. This often leads people to form strong opinions about incidents before full facts are known.

Interviews from the qualitative phase highlighted how social media can both help and harm the police's image. Officers, journalists, and influencers confirmed that online narratives can build trust when used well, but can also create deep mistrust when misinformation spreads or when the police fail to engage quickly and respectfully. Ultimately, the findings show that social media has become a powerful driver of public trust, public anger, and public expectations regarding policing in Ghana.

5.2 Conclusions

Overall, the study concludes that social media is now a central part of how Ghanaians relate to the police. It gives people a voice and a space to question, criticize, or commend the police. It has shifted power from institutions to ordinary citizens, allowing the public to participate actively in conversations about justice, fairness, and accountability. But this same power also exposes the police to more scrutiny than ever before. One viral video or misleading post can cause widespread mistrust long before an investigation is conducted.

The police can no longer communicate using only traditional top-down methods. Ghanaians expect them to listen, respond, and show empathy in real time. Social media has moved public

expectations beyond announcements it now demands transparency, openness, and accountability. The future of trust in the Ghana Police Service will depend on how well the institution adapts to this new digital reality. If the police can combine professionalism with strong digital communication skills, they can rebuild trust, correct misinformation, and show a more human side of policing. If not, the gap between the police and the public may continue to widen.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is clear that the Ghana Police Service must adopt a more deliberate and strategic approach to managing its presence on social media. The first step toward achieving this is the establishment of a fully resourced digital communication unit dedicated to monitoring online conversations, responding to public concerns, and managing crises as they emerge. Such a unit would ensure that the police do not remain passive observers of digital discourse but instead participate actively, offering timely clarifications and shaping narratives before misinformation spreads. A professional team with the right skills and tools would bring consistency, transparency, and credibility to the Service's online engagement.

Equally important is the need for continuous training for officers at all levels on how to communicate effectively in the digital space. Many officers lack the skills and confidence needed to interact with the public online, and this gap often leads to delays or miscommunication that worsen public mistrust. Regular training in digital literacy, online etiquette, emotional intelligence, and responsible social media use would empower officers to engage the public more confidently and professionally. When police officers are equipped with the right communication skills, they are better able to humanise the institution, address public concerns respectfully, and build rapport with citizens.

Another key recommendation is the development of a clear and enforceable social media policy that guides how officers use these platforms. This framework should outline acceptable behaviour, crisis communication procedures, content standards, and privacy considerations. Such a policy would provide structure and ensure that the institution speaks with one voice, reducing the likelihood of uncoordinated or harmful communications. A well-defined policy would also reassure the public that the police are committed to accountability, professionalism, and responsible information sharing.

The study also highlights the need for stronger collaboration between the Ghana Police Service and external communication actors such as journalists, influencers, fact-checkers, and civil society organisations. These groups already play a major role in shaping public narratives on policing, and partnering with them would allow the police to amplify accurate information and counter misinformation more effectively. Working with credible individuals and institutions would broaden the reach of police messages and enhance their legitimacy among diverse audiences.

Finally, the police must adopt a culture of continuous learning and adaptation. Social media platforms evolve rapidly, and so do the concerns and expectations of the public. To remain relevant, the Police Service must treat digital communication as an ongoing responsibility rather than a one-time intervention. Investing in regular monitoring, evaluation, and continuous capacity building will enable the institution to keep pace with new communication trends, respond more effectively to emerging digital threats, and maintain a stronger bond with the public.

In summary, the recommendations call for a shift from reactive communication to a proactive, strategic, and people-centred approach. By strengthening digital capacity, establishing transparent guidelines, collaborating with credible partners, and committing to ongoing

learning, the Ghana Police Service can build a more trustworthy and responsive presence in the digital space. This transformation is essential for enhancing public confidence, preventing misinformation, and fostering healthier police–community relations in Ghana’s evolving communication landscape.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the sample composition, which was dominated by tertiary-educated and youthful respondents. While this demographic reflects Ghana’s digitally active population, it may not capture the perceptions of older or less-educated citizens who have limited access to social media. Additionally, the qualitative interviews, though insightful, involved a relatively small number of participants, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings.

Another limitation concerns the rapidly evolving nature of social media. The platforms, algorithms, and public attitudes change frequently, meaning the findings represent a snapshot in time. Future developments in digital media, including new forms of content dissemination or regulation, may alter the dynamics between social media and public perception of the police.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should expand the demographic scope to include rural populations, older adults, and those with limited digital exposure to provide a more holistic understanding of how social media influences public perception across different social groups. Mixed-method studies combining content analysis with ethnographic fieldwork could offer richer insights into online-offline interactions shaping perceptions of policing.

Additionally, future studies could focus on comparative analysis across African countries to explore how varying sociopolitical contexts shape police-media relations in digital spaces.

Such cross-national studies would help identify best practices and regional patterns of digital engagement in law enforcement.

Finally, future researchers could investigate the long-term psychological and institutional effects of online criticism on police officers, including its implications for morale, behaviour, and decision-making. Understanding these impacts will be critical for developing wellness programs and digital resilience frameworks within law enforcement agencies in Ghana and beyond.

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APPENDIX

Structured Questionnaire (Quantitative Instrument)

Target Respondents: Social media users aged 18+ in Accra.

Introduction:

This questionnaire is part of an academic study investigating how social media influences public perception of the Ghana Police Service. Your responses are anonymous and will be used for research purposes only.

SECTION A: Demographic Information

- Age: _
- Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
- Educational Level: ☐ Basic ☐ Secondary ☐ Tertiary
- Employment Status: ☐ Employed ☐ Unemployed ☐ Student ☐ Self-employed
- Social media platforms you use most frequently (choose 1):
- Facebook
- Twitter (X)
- Instagram
- TikTok
- WhatsApp
- Youtube

Section B: To examine the impact of Social Media Content on Public Perception (Objective 1)

- I often come across police-related content on social media.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Viral videos or images of police misconduct affect my trust in the Ghana Police Service.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Positive stories of police activities shared online improve my perception of the police.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- I am more likely to believe social media posts about police than official police statements.
 - Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never

- International stories of police brutality shared on social media influence my perception of the Ghana Police Service.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Social media frames (e.g., hashtags, captions) strongly shape how I interpret police-related incidents.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Overall, social media negatively influences how I view the Ghana Police Service.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Section C: To explore the opportunities of Social Media for Police-Community Relations (Objective 2)

- Social media provides a good platform for the police to communicate with the public.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Police social media campaigns (e.g., crime prevention, safety tips) are useful and impactful.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- I trust police information when it is shared on their official social media accounts.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Overall, I think social media can help improve police-community relations in Ghana.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Section D: To identify the potential threats and Challenges Social Media Poses (Objective 3)

- I have seen false or misleading information about the police on social media.
 - Yes | No

- Viral incidents of alleged police misconduct reduce my trust in the Ghana Police Service.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Political bias in social media posts about the police makes me question their credibility.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Lack of digital literacy among citizens worsens misinformation about the police.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Social media exaggerates police misconduct and damages their reputation unfairly.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Section E: Improving Police-Community Relations through Social Media (Objective 4)

- The police should adopt a more proactive social media communication strategy.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
- Training police officers in social media communication would improve their engagement with the public.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
- Partnerships with fact-checking organizations would help the police counter misinformation.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree
- Positive storytelling (e.g., highlighting acts of kindness by police) would improve their image.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Real-time responsiveness on social media (e.g., quick replies) would improve public trust.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

- Overall, I believe social media is a powerful tool for building better police-community relations.
 - Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Qualitative Instrument)

Target Informants: Police Public Affairs Officers, Journalists, Influencers.

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This study seeks to understand the role of social media in shaping public perceptions of the Ghana Police Service. Your responses will be anonymised and treated with confidentiality.

Section B: To examine the impact of Social Media Content on Public Perception (Objective 1)

For Police:

1. How do you think viral videos or images of police activities affect public perception of the Ghana Police Service?
2. Can you recall a time when social media content significantly shaped public opinion about the police? What happened?
3. How do you monitor and assess public reactions to police-related content on social media?

For Journalists:

4. From your experience, how does social media coverage of police incidents influence traditional media reporting?

5. How do you think social media framing (e.g., “brutality” vs. “maintaining order”) influences public attitudes toward the police?

For Influencers:

6. When you share police-related stories, what kinds of reactions do you usually receive from your followers?

7. How do you personally decide what police-related content is worth amplifying on your platforms?

Section C: To explore the opportunities of Social Media for Police-Community Relations (Objective 2)

For Police:

1. How has the Ghana Police Service used social media to promote transparency and accountability?
2. Can you share examples of positive engagement between the police and the public through social media?

For Journalists:

3. Do you think social media has created new opportunities for constructive police-media collaboration? How so?
4. What role can media houses play in helping the police communicate effectively online?

For Influencers:

5. How do you think influencers like yourself can support positive police-community relations through social media?
6. Have you ever collaborated with the police or considered doing so? What would make such collaboration effective?

Section D: To identify the potential threats and Challenges of Social Media to Police Credibility (Objective 3)

For Police:

1. What are the biggest challenges you face in countering misinformation or negative narratives about the police online?
2. How do politically motivated posts or campaigns on social media affect the credibility of the Ghana Police Service?

For Journalists:

3. Have you observed cases where misinformation about the police spread quickly online? How did your newsroom handle it?
4. How does social media activism (e.g., #FixTheCountry, #JusticeForKaaka) shape or complicate narratives about the police?

For Influencers:

5. Have you ever posted or seen police-related content that later turned out to be false or misleading? How did this affect your credibility or your audience's perception of the police?
6. Do you feel the Ghana Police Service responds adequately to online criticism or misinformation? Why/why not?

Section E: To explore ways to improving Police-Community Relations via Social Media (Objective 4)

For Police PAOs:

1. What social media strategies do you think the Ghana Police Service should adopt to better engage with the public?
2. What type of training or support do police officers need to use social media effectively?

For Journalists:

3. How can journalists and media organizations help balance police narratives online, ensuring fairness and accuracy?
4. What recommendations would you make for improving police-media relations in the digital space?

For Influencers:

5. What types of police stories or campaigns would you be willing to amplify to help rebuild

public trust?

6. How can influencers and the police work together to promote credible and transparent communication?