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CONTROLLING NARRATIVES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A CASE OF THE GHANA POLICE SERVICE

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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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

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

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Dr. Mavis Essandoh

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family for their constant encouragement, patience, and support throughout my academic journey. Their sacrifices, understanding, and belief in my aspirations have made this achievement possible.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the Ghana Police Service uses social media to frame narratives and how these practices influence public perceptions of institutional legitimacy and accountability. Guided by Framing Theory and Public Sphere Theory, the study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional design and surveyed 250 social media users in Ghana who engage with official police platforms. Descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted to assess framing patterns, perceived credibility, transparency, and communicative purpose. The findings indicate that the Ghana Police Service's digital communication is predominantly authority-centred, emphasising law-and-order narratives and institutional control, with a secondary focus on community-oriented messaging. Exposure to police messaging was significantly associated with perceptions of legitimacy and trust, although respondents expressed reservations about openness and dialogic engagement. The results suggest that social media is used more as a tool for narrative management than as a forum for reciprocal engagement. The study concludes that while digital communication enhances visibility and credibility, its contribution to democratic interaction remains limited without stronger accountability and participatory practices. The findings contribute to debates on institutional communication, power, and democratic engagement in digital environments.

Keywords: Public Relations, Narrative Control, Legitimacy, Social Media, Police Communication

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI – Artificial Intelligence

AMI0 – Antecedents-Misinformation-Outcomes

DRID – Directorate of Research, Innovation and Development

MIL – Media and Information Literacy

RES# – Respondent codes (RES3, RES5, RES10 etc.)

SCCT – Situational Crisis Communication Theory

SoGSaR – School of Graduate Studies and Research

UniMAC–IJ – University of Media, Arts and Communication – Institute of Journalism

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Digital communication has redefined how security agencies engage with the public, with social media platforms enabling direct communication that bypasses traditional media (Colbran, 2018; Goriss-Hunter et al., 2022). This shift has introduced new dynamics in how law enforcement institutions manage their image, respond to criticism, and frame public discourse. In countries such as Nigeria, Egypt, the United States, and China, police and other security services have used social media to promote law enforcement narratives, counter public dissent, and shape responses to protests (Abdelmonem, 2023; Ani & Onu, 2024; Scoggins, 2022; Wukich, 2021). During Nigeria's End SARS protests, security agencies used digital platforms to challenge activist claims and present official interpretations of unrest (Antai et al., 2025). In a similar way, law enforcement in the U.S. sought to influence narratives during the George Floyd protests, often emphasizing law and order over calls for reform (Boudreau et al., 2022). In China, Wong and Liang (2023) cites evidence of coordinated online messaging from security-linked accounts routinely projects state-sanctioned views while limiting oppositional voices. These cases demonstrate a global pattern where security agencies actively shape public narratives through digital tools. Such practices prompt critical concerns about transparency, accountability, and the extent of institutional power in online spaces.

This trend is also evident in Ghana, where platforms like *Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram* have emerged as influential arenas for shaping public opinion during moments of social tension. The Ghana Police Service, traditionally responsible for maintaining law and order (Aning, 2006; Aubyn, 2022), has expanded its role into the digital domain by cultivating

a strategic online presence. Rather than merely sharing information, the Ghana Police Service constructs narratives that assert authority, justify interventions, and portray the institution as efficient and responsive. Daily Graphic (2021) reports that during the Ejura protests, the Ghana Police Service disseminated real-time updates that legitimised its actions while framing protesters as disruptive, effectively diverting public scrutiny from accountability issues.

Similarly, GhanaWeb (2022) documents how the Ghana Police Service framed its communication around legal protocol during the arrest of journalists, thereby shifting attention away from concerns about media freedom. MyJoyOnline (2023) further highlights how the Ghana Police Service has monitored digital spaces and issued warnings to individuals accused of spreading false information or inciting unrest, signalling attempts to manage dissent. Ohemeng and Ayee (2022) as well argue that these evolving practices reflect a broader institutional strategy aimed at controlling narratives in ways that may compromise open dialogue and transparency in democratic settings.

Therefore, examining the Ghana Police Service's social media practices is necessary. It offers insights into how state institutions adapt to digital public spheres and how they influence democratic engagement. As the boundaries between Public Relations, surveillance, and state control blur, it becomes vital to assess the broader implications for freedom of expression and institutional legitimacy.

1.2 Problem Statement

Studies in countries such as the United States (Nhan & Noakes, 2020; Wukich, 2021), Nigeria (Ani & Onu, 2024; Uwalaka & Nwala, 2023), and Egypt (Abdulla, 2023; Marzouk & Vanderveen, 2022) have documented how police institutions strategically deploy social media to manage public narratives, reinforce institutional legitimacy, and respond to dissenting

voices. For instance, Bonilla and Rosa (2015) examined how the Ferguson Police Department shaped discourse during the Michael Brown protests, while Uche and Ngwu (2021) analysed how Nigerian police used digital platforms during the #EndSARS movement to delegitimise protest demands. Similarly, El-Meehy (2020) explored Egypt's security communication strategies in times of political unrest. These studies show that social media is not simply a space for information sharing, but a contested arena where power is exercised and perceptions are managed.

In Ghana, although scholarly interest in the Ghana Police Service's use of social media has grown, much of the focus has centred on communication efficiency, institutional visibility, and Public Relations. Boakye (2022) and Amoako (2021) emphasise the role of digital platforms in enhancing the Ghana Police Service's image and enabling real-time engagement with citizens, while Yeboah and Abeka (2022) argue that such interactions foster public trust and bridge communication gaps. Similarly, Nutsugah et al. (2022) contribute to this discourse by describing how social media facilitates information flow between the police and the public. However, these accounts tend to prioritise surface-level communication outcomes, paying limited attention to how social media functions as a site of power where narratives are shaped and contested.

This analytical gap is significant, particularly when situated against comparative studies in other contexts. Existing Ghanaian literature rarely investigates how the Ghana Police Serices uses social media to respond to contentious events, manage dissenting voices, or assert control over public discourse. While Nutsugah et al. (2022) provide some insight, their approach remains largely descriptive, without probing the deeper communicative strategies or institutional motives. Consequently, the dual function of the Ghana Police Service's social media remains insufficiently explored. This study, therefore, shifts the focus toward examining

how digital communication is strategically deployed by the Ghana Police Service to frame narratives, influence public perception, and mediate democratic engagement in Ghana.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine how the Ghana Police Service use social media platforms to frame narratives.
2. To assess the influence of the Ghana Police Service's communicative strategies on public perceptions of police legitimacy and accountability.
3. To determine whether the Ghana Police Service's social media use primarily promotes dialogue or serves to control public discourse.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does the Ghana Police Service use social media platforms to frame narratives?
2. In what ways do the communicative strategies employed by the Ghana Police Service on social media influence public perceptions of police legitimacy and accountability?
3. Does the Ghana Police Service use social media more to promote dialogue or to control public discourse?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study expands academic understanding of how state security agencies in democratic settings utilise digital platforms to assert authority and engage the public. It builds on existing literature in digital communication and institutional power, with a focused emphasis on the operational practices of the Ghana Police Service. While studies on political communication are more common, few examine how policing bodies in emerging democracies manage

narratives online. This research addresses that gap by exploring the strategic deployment of social media by law enforcement to influence public discourse. It identifies patterns in how digital tools are used not only for information-sharing but also for reinforcing institutional legitimacy. As a result, the study contributes theoretical insights into the evolving relationship between state communication, public trust, and democratic engagement.

Building on this academic contribution, it is envisaged that the study will provide a knowledge base that informs public policy on institutional transparency and digital governance. Policymakers gain insight into how communication strategies influence citizen trust and what regulatory frameworks can ensure responsible state messaging. This supports reforms that safeguard democratic expression while enhancing institutional credibility in online spaces.

In addition to informing policy, the study offers practical value to key stakeholders. These include the Ghana Police Service, civil society actors, digital rights advocates, and journalists. It draws attention to how law enforcement communicates with the public through digital platforms. This helps promote ethical communication practices and also encourages broader conversations on public accountability and trust in the digital space.

Extending its relevance further, the research provides a basis for future investigations. Scholars can draw from its findings to explore similar trends in other institutions or national settings. The methodological approach and thematic focus offer a foundation for comparative studies on state messaging, institutional influence, and the evolving relationship between digital platforms and security communication.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is situated in Ghana and centres on the Ghana Police Service. It focuses on how Ghana Police Service uses social media to shape public discourse, especially during periods of

public unrest or heightened attention. The analysis captures both the content shared and the communicative patterns displayed across digital platforms. It limits itself to official Ghana Police Service digital activities, not including third-party representations or unofficial pages. The study also considers public responses but only as they relate to framing and institutional intent. Broader political or military security agencies remain outside its scope.

1.7 Organization of Chapters

The study consists of five chapters, each building toward a deeper understanding of how the Ghana Police Service navigates digital communication. Chapter One introduces the research problem, outlines the objectives, and presents the significance and scope of the study. It sets the tone for the inquiry and establishes the academic and practical motivations behind the research. Chapter Two presents the literature review. It synthesises scholarly debates on social media use by state institutions, identifies relevant theories, and discusses empirical findings from other jurisdictions. This chapter also highlights gaps in current research, which this study seeks to fill. Chapter Three describes the research methodology adopted. It outlines the research design, sampling procedures, and methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter Four discusses the findings and interprets them in relation to the study objectives. Chapter Five concludes the work by summarising key findings, discussing implications, proposing areas for policy and future research and concludes the study.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study and its focus on the Ghana Police Service's use of social media to manage public narratives. It presented the research problem, aims, and questions. The chapter also explained why the study matters and outlined its scope and method. Together,

these elements provide the groundwork for Chapter Two. The next chapter will explore existing literature, discuss key theories, and highlight the gaps this study will address.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Building on the introductory chapter, this section focuses on reviewing existing scholarship to lay the foundation for analysing the study. The review touches on key academic debates surrounding the digital communication strategies of police institutions, with particular attention to how narratives are constructed, disseminated, and contested in contemporary digital environments. The discussion begins by defining core concepts such as social media, the digital age, and narrative control, drawing on current scholarly perspectives. The review then interrogates the framing strategies employed by police forces on social platforms, before transitioning to a critical examination of how these communication practices affect public perceptions of legitimacy and accountability. A final section reflects on the broader implications of institutional messaging through the lens of digital power structures. The theoretical frameworks guiding the study are explored and contextualised within empirical literature to establish their conceptual fit for this research.

2.2 Social Media

Social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to create, share, and engage with content in real time (Ellison, 2023; Valenzuela, 2024). It has reshaped communicative landscapes across societies. It functions not only as a networking tool but as a central avenue for producing and contesting meaning (Evans et al., 2021). Through platforms such as *Twitter (X)*, *TikTok*, and *Facebook*, users disseminate content with immediacy and wide reach, bypassing traditional gatekeeping structures. This shift has empowered non-institutional actors to frame issues, set agendas, and mobilise publics (Christin et al., 2024; Schepis et al., 2023).

As scholars have observed, the interactive nature of social media alters how legitimacy and authority are constructed (Tufekci, 2023; Freelon, 2023). However, the same platforms also concentrate algorithmic control in corporate hands, limiting visibility of some discourses while amplifying others. This duality challenges normative ideas of democratic participation. In effect, Berger and Luckmann (2023) underscore that social media does not merely reflect social reality; it actively constructs and prioritises it.

2.3 Digital Age

The digital age refers to the current period marked by widespread reliance on digital technologies to organise communication, information, and everyday interactions (Amelia & Balqis, 2023; Kellerman & Liu, 2023). It has ushered in a transformation in knowledge production, communication patterns, and the politics of visibility. Digital affordances collapse temporal and spatial boundaries, enabling real-time interaction and global connectivity (Jarke & Breiter, 2023; Castells, 2011). At the same time, digital systems encode hierarchies of access, creating asymmetries between those with technological literacy and infrastructure and those without. Academic work underscores that the digital is never neutral. Platforms and systems are built with embedded values and logics (Gillespie, 2024; Noble, 2018). These architectures influence how data is collected, interpreted, and deployed, often to the benefit of dominant actors. Surveillance capitalism thrives within the digital environment, converting behavioural data into predictive products (Zuboff, 2019). The digital age, therefore, presents not just innovation but also control, shaping how publics engage with institutions and one another.

2.4 Narratives

Narratives in the context of control refer to structured accounts that shape perception, assign meaning, and influence behaviour (Eliaz & Spiegler, 2024). Control over narratives determines

which versions of reality become dominant, marginal, or silenced (Kaufmann et al., 2023). This process is not random, but according to Melanidis and Hagerman (2022) is strategic and often tied to power. State and non-state actors deploy narrative strategies to direct public attention, legitimise policy, and neutralise dissent (Gillespie, 2023). Media framing plays a crucial role here, guiding interpretation through selective emphasis and repetition. Digital platforms have complicated this landscape. While they offer new spaces for counter-narratives, they also enable disinformation, echo chambers, and manipulation at scale (Donovan, 2024). Academic literature (Entman, 2004; Lazer et al., 2023; Marwick & Lewis, 2017) emphasises that narrative control is central to governance, activism, and identity politics. As a result, controlling narratives is less about storytelling and more about influence over social reality and interpretive authority (Mangone, 2022).

2.5 Framing Strategies of Police on Social Media

Police agencies have increasingly adopted strategic framing techniques in digital environments to shape public discourse. Framing on platforms such as *Twitter (X)*, *Facebook*, and *Instagram* allows law enforcement to define events, attribute causes, and propose solutions in ways that maintain institutional authority (Crump, 2011; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). These strategies function as symbolic performances that attempt to shape meaning and manage reputational risk, particularly during contentious incidents (Schneider, 2020; Mawby, 2014). Research indicates that social media enables police to construct narratives of control, order, and responsiveness while marginalising oppositional frames (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Lee & McGovern, 2014).

Building on this foundation, empirical findings have shown that the police often employ "heroic," "victim," or "procedural justice" frames to manage digital representations (Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2020). These frames reduce the visibility of structural

critiques and redirect public discourse towards favourable interpretations. Specific events, such as officer-involved shootings or protests, are frequently recontextualised through emotive language and imagery to elicit public sympathy and portray operational legitimacy (Deuchar et al., 2020; Walsh, 2021).

Extending the discussion further, these framing strategies also reflect institutional power asymmetries, where control over media narratives is maintained through selective visibility and algorithmic amplification, as noted by Carr and Hayes (2015) and supported by Powell et al. (2018). Law enforcement agencies have been found to use hashtags strategically, engaging in counter-framing during public crises to dilute activist messaging (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016; Freelon et al., 2018). The digital environment thus becomes a contested space where institutional framing competes with grassroots counternarratives (Miller, 2022; Skogan, 2006).

In sum, the deployment of framing strategies reveals a deliberate attempt to assert symbolic dominance in the information economy (Aivas et al., 2025). These strategies operate not in isolation, but as part of a wider communicative architecture that seeks to reinforce institutional credibility. The affordances of social media offer the police a space for carefully curated engagement, where image management becomes a tool for authority reproduction, even as it obscures structural inequalities in policing practice (Trottier, 2012; Lee, 2017). This dual capacity of social media, to display openness while concealing systemic flaws, underscores its strategic utility for law enforcement agencies (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2023). The framing techniques, although subtle, reflect deliberate discursive choices that shape collective understanding of crime, order, and justice, not through balanced engagement, but through consistent reinforcement of dominant institutional perspectives (Surette, 2015; McGregor, 2021).

2.6 Police Communication and Public Perceptions of Legitimacy and Accountability

Transitioning from the strategic framing of narratives, attention must also be given to the implications of police communication for public legitimacy. Digital communication by police institutions has critical implications for public perceptions of legitimacy. The concept of legitimacy, rooted in procedural justice theory, asserts that the perceived fairness of institutional conduct shapes public cooperation and compliance (Tyler, 2006; Jackson et al., 2012). Police communication that emphasises transparency, fairness, and respect is thus integral to fostering perceived legitimacy (Mazerolle et al., 2013; Hohl et al., 2010). Social media interactions, especially those involving real-time updates, community outreach, and clarification of policy actions, have been shown to contribute positively to perceived trustworthiness (Walton & Jones, 2017; Lai & Zhao, 2010).

Despite these positive dimensions, a deeper examination reveals limitations in the performative nature of social media messaging. Loader and Mulcahy (2003) emphasise that while digital content may appear to signal accountability, it frequently fails to result in meaningful reforms or institutional responsiveness. In a similar vein, Lee and McGovern (2013) illustrate that police communication often prioritises public image rather than structural transparency. Warren et al. (2014) and Goldsmith (2015) further argue that police institutions frequently highlight isolated incidents rather than addressing systemic patterns, relying on communicative tactics that divert attention from structural critique and obstruct sustained public scrutiny.

Contextualising further, audience perceptions are shaped not only by message content but also by institutional history and socio-political context (Salahuddin, 2024). The legacies of policing, particularly in communities that have experienced marginalisation or discriminatory enforcement, continue to inform contemporary interpretations of institutional communication. In environments marked by historical mistrust, digital outreach alone cannot resolve underlying

discontent, as highlighted by Lipsky (2010) and reinforced by Bradford et al. (2014), who underscore the cumulative effect of institutional memory on citizen scepticism. Without addressing the foundational causes of alienation, even the most transparent messages may fail to inspire trust. Communication efforts are therefore more effective when combined with visible accountability mechanisms, such as independent oversight bodies, transparent disciplinary processes, and tangible reforms. Meijer (2014) and Tankebe (2013) argue that institutional responsiveness must not only be expressed rhetorically but also enacted structurally to foster credibility and legitimacy in public perception.

To reinforce this point, the quality of engagement, such as responsiveness to citizen feedback, affects perceptions of authenticity and legitimacy, as demonstrated by Schlosser (2013) and further analysed by Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2015). Their research shows that communication perceived as sincere and interactive fosters stronger trust in institutional conduct. Conversely, Nix et al. (2017) and Brunson (2007) illustrate that tokenistic or one-way communication strategies not only fall short of building rapport but actively erode public confidence, particularly when institutional messaging starkly contrasts with communities' lived experiences of over-policing or racial profiling. Kerstetter and Rasche (2003) and Pickering et al. (2018) further observe that in such environments, digital platforms do not automatically translate into effective accountability mechanisms. Instead, the extent to which communication advances legitimacy hinges on its alignment with comprehensive institutional reforms, transparent grievance redress, and sustained structural responsiveness.

2.7 Interrogating Police's Use of Social Media

Expanding on the themes of legitimacy and framing, a critical interrogation of police use of social media reveals deeper structural concerns. The proliferation of social media has transformed police-public engagement, but critical scholarship challenges the celebratory

framing of this shift (Giles et al., 2024). Although digital platforms have expanded communication channels, concerns persist about surveillance, image management, and agenda control (Miller & Linos, 2020; Trottier, 2015). Police presence on social media often masks coercive authority beneath the guise of community engagement (Meijer & Torenvlied, 2016; Linos et al., 2017). Studies highlight how social media enables real-time monitoring of citizens, amplifies racialised narratives of crime, and reproduces punitive logics (Vitale, 2017; Jefferson, 2021).

Deepening the inquiry, investigations by Noble (2018) and Bucher (2018) into the architecture of social media reveal embedded algorithmic bias that often favours institutional actors over grassroots movements. This observation is further elaborated by Dencik, Hintz, Carey, and Parmar (2016), as well as Andrejevic (2014), who show how police agencies exploit these digital infrastructures to monopolise visibility, suppress criticism, and redirect public attention. Klonick (2017) and Roberts (2019) add that such dynamics raise pressing concerns about democratic accountability, particularly when content moderation and narrative shaping are managed by private technology platforms rather than public institutions.

Viewed through this critical lens, the communicative practices of law enforcement on social media require interrogation not only for their content but for their political function. Rather than fostering dialogic democracy, police use of digital tools often centres institutional self-promotion and legitimacy management (Walsh, 2020; Haggerty & Ericson, 2000). These strategies deflect scrutiny and undermine demands for structural change, especially when digital messaging is disconnected from community-based policing practices (Ferguson, 2017; Doyle et al., 2020).

Drawing the analysis together, critical engagement with police communication demands attention to digital inequalities and the marginalisation of dissenting voices. These inequalities

manifest in unequal access to digital platforms, unequal amplification of institutional messaging, and the limited visibility of grassroots or oppositional discourse. As Zuboff (2019) contends, the commodification of user data entrenches asymmetrical power dynamics, allowing institutional actors to dominate public narratives. Couldry and Mejias (2019) similarly argue that datafication processes convert social relations into extractable capital, sidelining dissent in favour of algorithmically curated legitimacy. Algorithmic visibility, platform governance, and content strategy must therefore be evaluated as mechanisms through which public discourse is steered and contested. Without such scrutiny, digital communication risks entrenching existing disparities rather than challenging them, thereby consolidating institutional power under the veneer of digital engagement.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

2.8.1 Framing Theory

First developed within the field of sociology and mass communication, Framing Theory gained prominence through the works of Erving Goffman (1974), who explored how individuals perceive and structure social reality. The theory was later expanded by scholars like Entman (1993), who applied it to media studies and political communication. Its evolution traces a shift from psychological interpretations of framing to media-focused applications.

Framing Theory rests on the idea that how information is presented influences how it is interpreted. Media and communicators, according to Entman (1993) and Scheufele (1999), select aspects of perceived reality, highlight them, and promote particular interpretations. These selected frames guide audiences in understanding and responding to issues. Rather than merely setting the agenda, framing shapes the meaning itself, determining what is salient and how it is understood (Entman, 1993). Central to the theory are concepts such as frame building,

frame setting, and audience feedback (de Vreese, 2005). Frame building refers to the construction of frames by journalists or elites. Frame setting deals with how those frames affect audience understanding. Audience feedback relates to the cyclical nature of frame influence.

The theory serves to explain the power of media and strategic communicators in shaping public discourse and perception. It has been applied to politics, health communication, crisis narratives, and identity construction (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Among its strengths is its flexibility in analyzing both textual content and audience effects. It allows researchers to assess how narratives are constructed and why certain issues gain traction. However, critics such as D'Angelo (2002) argue that its conceptual boundaries are blurred, as researchers define and apply framing in inconsistent ways. Matthes (2009) notes that the diversity of operational definitions hampers the development of cumulative research, while other scholars call for more systematic approaches to frame analysis to increase validity and comparability. Still, Framing Theory remains valuable for exploring how meanings are constructed and contested in the media. Its application across disciplines affirms its utility, though scholars urge clearer distinctions in its conceptual scope.

2.8.2 Public Sphere Theory

Public Sphere Theory emerged from the philosophical work of Jürgen Habermas (1962), who outlined the concept in his seminal text, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. It described the rise of a bourgeois space for rational-critical debate in 18th-century Europe. The theory has since been subject to revisions and critiques, especially in media and cultural studies. At its core, the theory assumes that democratic societies require open spaces for public discourse (Habermas, 1962; Calhoun, 1992). These spaces must be free from coercion and

allow citizens to deliberate on matters of common concern. Communication in the public sphere is expected to be rational, inclusive, and accessible.

Key concepts include communicative action, deliberative democracy, and the structural transformation of discourse. The theory distinguishes between the lifeworld and the system, highlighting how media and political institutions mediate public discourse (Scannell, 2007; Peters, 1993). It also stresses the role of civil society in maintaining a healthy democratic exchange, functioning as a bridge between individual citizens and institutional power (Dahlgren, 2005). The public sphere provides a framework to study democratic participation, civic engagement, and media's role in facilitating or impeding dialogue. It has been extended to assess digital platforms, protest movements, and marginalised voices (Dahlberg, 2007).

Supporters highlight its normative ideals, offering a benchmark for evaluating media and democratic communication. Calhoun (1992) praises its emphasis on rational-critical discourse as foundational for democratic legitimacy. Kellner (2000) extends its value to digital media, arguing that the theory helps assess the emancipatory or controlling role of emerging platforms. It emphasizes critical debate and citizen involvement. Nonetheless, it faces criticisms. Some argue that the original theory reflects Eurocentric, male-dominated notions of participation. Fraser (1990) challenges the idea of a singular public sphere, proposing the existence of multiple counterpublics. Gitlin (1998) adds that media commodification dilutes the deliberative potential of public discourse. Public Sphere Theory, as developed by Habermas and later reinterpreted by scholars such as Fraser and Dahlgren (2005), continues to influence debates on media, democracy, and power, particularly in assessing the inclusive or exclusionary dynamics of mediated deliberation. While some limitations persist, its relevance remains evident in analyses of participatory communication and social discourse. Its conceptual adaptability allows it to address new forms of mediated public engagement.

2.8.3 Relevance of the Theories to the study

Framing Theory and Public Sphere Theory collectively offer a compelling lens for examining how state institutions construct meaning and mediate democratic engagement within digital environments. Framing Theory aligns with the first research objective by providing analytical tools to examine how the GPS structures its social media messages. It explains how institutional actors emphasise particular interpretations of events while marginalising others, thereby managing public attention and shaping understanding. The application of framing enables a detailed investigation into the strategic use of language, visuals, and timing by the GPS to legitimise its actions and influence perception.

In parallel, Public Sphere Theory directly supports the third objective by interrogating the democratic quality of the communicative space maintained by the GPS. It offers conceptual clarity on whether institutional communication fosters deliberative public discourse or reinforces hierarchical control. By evaluating the openness, inclusivity, and dialogic features of police-citizen interaction online, the theory enables critical reflection on whether digital engagement serves public participation or institutional dominance.

The conceptual relevance of these theories lies in their capacity to explain the dual function of state communication in digital contexts. Framing Theory accounts for the mechanisms through which narrative control is exercised, particularly in crisis or protest situations. Public Sphere Theory complements this by revealing the broader implications for civic participation and state legitimacy. Together, they capture both the micro-level discursive strategies and the macro-level democratic consequences of institutional messaging.

Empirical precedents underscore the value of these frameworks. Bonilla and Rosa (2015) analyse hashtag activism during the Ferguson protests, showing how #Ferguson hashtags were

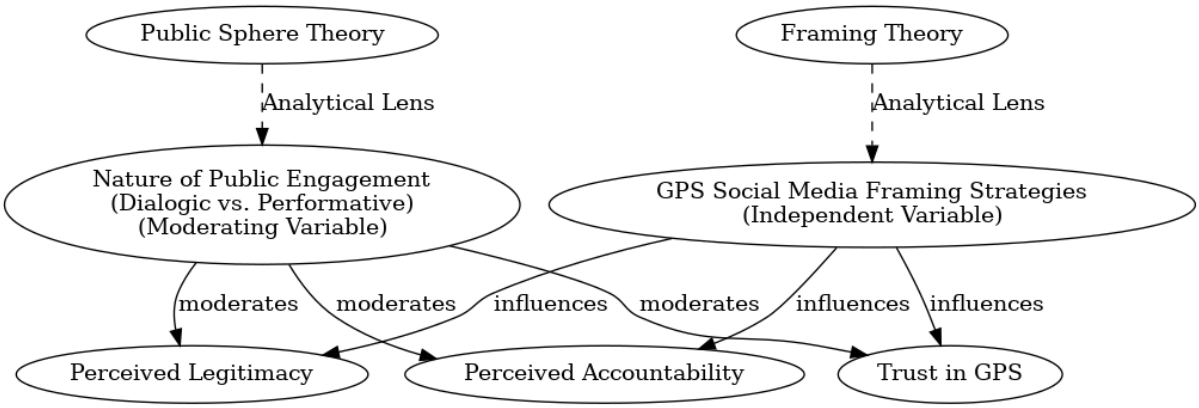
used to contest dominant media frames and centre law enforcement narratives in digital discourse. Similarly, studies of the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria demonstrate how framing theory helps explain the amplification and contestation of protest narratives via social media platforms. For instance, Ugochukwu and Nwolu's (2021) survey revealing high public exposure to framed content, and Maradun et al.'s (2023) investigation into the perceived value of social media in the# EndSARS' protest in Nigeria. In addition, Fabiyi (2023) have employed Public Sphere Theory to interrogate whether digital protest spaces (such as those emerging around #EndSARS) function as genuinely deliberative forums or as sites of state-influenced monitoring and control. Such evidence confirms that both theories have been productively employed to analyse digital communication by security bodies in comparative contexts.

In all, the Framing Theory and Public Sphere Theory are particularly relevant for this study. They offer robust conceptual and empirical grounding to interrogate how the GPS navigates the intersection of narrative control, public legitimacy, and digital engagement. Their combined application ensures a multidimensional analysis that moves beyond surface-level content to interrogate the power relations embedded in institutional communication.

2.9 Conceptual Framework of GPS Digital Narrative Control

This study is anchored in two major theoretical perspectives: Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1962). These theories guide the conceptual understanding of how the Ghana Police Service (GPS) constructs digital narratives and how such narratives influence public engagement and perception. The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) synthesises theoretical insights and empirical patterns into a model that reflects the relationship between institutional digital communication and public trust in democratic policing.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of GPS Digital Narrative Control



Source: Author's Own Conception (2025)

Framing Theory provides the lens to assess how the GPS selects, emphasises, and presents information on social media to shape public interpretation. Through this framework, elements such as the portrayal of law and order, crisis framing, and institutional authority are analysed as tools of narrative construction. On the other hand, Public Sphere Theory enables the assessment of whether GPS's digital engagement fosters democratic dialogue or reinforces top-down communication. It interrogates the openness, interactivity, and inclusiveness of digital public discourse.

The conceptual framework identifies the GPS's social media strategies (e.g., framing of narratives) as the independent variable, and public perception of legitimacy, accountability, and trust as dependent variables. Public engagement, such as opportunities for dialogue or feedback, operates as a moderating variable. These relationships are analysed through the dual theoretical lens to determine how institutional messaging influences democratic communication outcomes.

2.10 Empirical Review

Boakye (2022) examined how the Ghana Police Service (GPS) engaged social media in its public relations practice. Drawing on the Uses and Gratification Theory, Boakye (2022) assessed the motivations behind platform choice and the extent to which digital tools enhanced visibility and public interaction. The study, which relied on a quantitative design, was constrained by COVID-19 restrictions, limiting data collection and fieldwork depth. Findings showed that *Facebook and Twitter (X)* were used for both dissemination and engagement, although uptake remained slow due to structural and training limitations. Consequently, Boakye (2022) recommended a comprehensive social media strategy and policy framework to streamline communication and ensure responsiveness within the GPS.

Similarly, Yeboah and Abeka (2022) explored how digital platforms transformed police-citizen interaction in Ghana. Their qualitative study highlighted Twitter (X) as a key medium for transparency and trust-building, while also identifying challenges such as cyber harassment, misinformation, and inadequate staff capacity. According to Yeboah and Abeka (2022), although social media improved communication flows, its benefits could only be sustained through institutional investment in trained personnel and robust technological infrastructure. They therefore recommended establishing dedicated social media units to maximise the value of digital policing.

In a related contribution, Amoako (2021) investigated the use of social media by the GPS for law enforcement communication. Using a qualitative methodology, Amoako (2021) showed that platforms such as *Facebook, Twitter (X),* and *WhatsApp* enabled the police to bypass traditional media and communicate directly with the public. The study found that digital tools supported citizen dialogue, crime reporting, and public vigilance campaigns. However, Amoako (2021) cautioned that weak content management and limited staff capacity

undermined effectiveness. The study concluded by emphasising the integrative role of social media in aligning police communication with public expectations.

Extending this discussion, Nutsugah et al. (2022) interrogated the GPS's strategic use of social media to facilitate interaction with citizens. Anchored in a constructionist paradigm and based on interviews with GPS public affairs personnel, the study revealed that digital platforms were used for transparency, crisis management, and narrative control. Nutsugah et al. (2022) found that the GPS leveraged social media to shape public discourse and reinforce institutional authority, especially during controversial incidents. However, the authors observed that the study remained largely descriptive, calling for further inquiry into how digital strategies influence public perceptions and accountability.

Beyond policing, Mensah (2024) investigated how social media could be applied in destination branding to counter crime-related perceptions. Using a case study methodology within a constructivist framework, Mensah (2024) engaged tourism stakeholders to examine how digital narratives were framed to promote national security. The study found that campaigns projected Ghana as a safe destination while supporting policing efforts through shared responsibility messaging. Importantly, Mensah (2024) raised ethical concerns, recommending greater transparency in the design of security-related digital campaigns targeted at domestic and international audiences.

For a comparative lens, Boateng and Chenane (2020) studied social media use by a small-town police department in the United States. Combining *Twitter (X)* content analysis with police interviews, Boateng and Chenane (2020) identified six main categories of posts, ranging from crime alerts to safety tips. They found that social media fostered legitimacy, improved engagement, and reduced information gaps between the police and the community. While not situated in Ghana, Boateng and Chenane (2020) demonstrated how digital strategies could

enhance credibility and trust in law enforcement. Their findings provided useful parallels for contextualising the GPS's digital communication practices.

2.11 Chapter Summary

The chapter has examined the interplay between police communication, social media platforms, and the contested construction of public narratives. The review underscored how digital spaces simultaneously serve as tools for institutional legitimacy and as arenas of resistance. It demonstrated how law enforcement agencies use strategic framing to manage public opinion, while also highlighting the constraints posed by digital surveillance, algorithmic bias, and limited dialogic engagement. Drawing on both global and Ghana-specific scholarship, the chapter highlighted the fragmented nature of digital public spheres and the ways in which institutional actors dominate discourse. The conceptual relevance of Framing Theory and Public Sphere Theory was affirmed through empirical studies, reinforcing their appropriateness for exploring how the Ghana Police Service navigates narrative control in the digital age. The next chapter builds on this foundation by outlining the research methodology employed to investigate these dynamics in practice.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Building on the preceding chapter, which reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature on police communication and digital engagement, this chapter turns to the methodological strategies employed in this investigation. It begins with a contextual overview of the institution under study, followed by a detailed description of the research design, approach, and population. Sampling procedures, data collection techniques, and methods of analysis are systematically presented to establish the study's empirical rigour. The chapter also addresses ethical considerations relevant to the research process. Through a triangulated approach involving surveys, interviews, and document analysis, the methodology aims to generate a comprehensive understanding of institutional communication strategies within Ghana's digital policing landscape.

3.2 Review of Methods Used by Previous Related Studies

Researchers have used various methods to examine how police institutions control narratives through digital platforms. Bonilla and Rosa (2015) applied digital ethnography and hashtag analysis to assess narrative framing during the Ferguson protests. Amoako (2021) conducted interviews and content analysis to study the Ghana Police Service (GPS), while Nutsugah et al. (2022) combined interviews with thematic analysis to explore institutional communication strategies. These qualitative approaches offered depth and interpretive insight into framing practices. In contrast, Boakye (2022) employed a structured questionnaire to examine public engagement with GPS digital content. The quantitative method enabled statistical analysis of perceptions related to trust and visibility, aiming for objectivity and generalisability. Compared

to Amoako (2021), Bonilla and Rosa (2015), and Nutsugah et al. (2022), Boakye's (2022) approach provided measurable indicators of public response.

Other scholars, such as Boateng and Chenane (2020), used mixed methods to combine content analysis with interviews, while Yeboah and Abeka (2022) used a qualitative case study approach. These studies captured both patterns and institutional perspectives. Given the need to quantify public perceptions and evaluate engagement patterns across a wider population, this study adopts a quantitative approach. While prior studies have relied on qualitative or mixed methods to explore narrative construction from the institutional side, a quantitative design is best suited to capture how these narratives are received, trusted, or contested by the public. This shift in focus allows the study to generate statistically grounded insights into legitimacy, transparency, and public trust.

3.3 Research Approach

A research approach refers to the overarching plan and guiding principles for how a study is conducted (Taherdoost, 2022). It frames the philosophical assumptions and methodological strategies employed to generate and interpret data. This study adopts a quantitative research approach, situated within the positivist paradigm, which aims to quantify variables and generalise findings across populations using statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014; Muijs, 2021). Quantitative designs are particularly valuable for detecting patterns, trends, and relationships in structured datasets, especially when the objective is to measure perceptions and behaviours across a wide respondent base (Ghanad, 2023).

The advantages of this approach include its ability to enhance objectivity and replicability, as noted by Babbie (2020), thereby allowing for generalisable inferences about public views. Through surveys administered to a random sample of social media users, the design provides

statistical precision and the opportunity to test hypotheses and establish correlations between communication strategies and perceptions of legitimacy (Neuman, 2019; Bryman, 2021).

However, a likely disadvantage is that quantitative surveys may oversimplify complex attitudes, overlooking deeper contextual meanings that qualitative methods could capture. Furthermore, as Kemboy (2024) suggested, the approach may face constraints in capturing rapidly shifting digital interactions, which could limit interpretive depth.

3.4 Research Design

A research design serves as the structural blueprint that connects research objectives with practical procedures for data collection and analysis (Takona, 2024). It ensures logical consistency in how a study is framed, executed, and interpreted (Leavy, 2022). For this study, a descriptive cross-sectional survey design is employed. This design involves collecting data at a single point in time to provide an accurate snapshot of a defined population's characteristics, attitudes, or behaviours (Lavrakas, 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is frequently used in social science and communication research to explore relationships and patterns without influencing variables (Muijs, 2021). A descriptive design is especially useful for identifying the prevalence and distribution of specific phenomena, such as public trust in institutions or perceptions of transparency in official communication (Fink, 2019).

The cross-sectional nature of the design is particularly suitable for time-sensitive inquiries that aim to inform policy or assess public sentiment in real-time contexts (Fadele & Rocha, 2025). In this study, it allows the researcher to examine how the Ghana Police Service's digital messaging is associated with public perceptions of legitimacy, trust, and accountability without manipulating the variables under study. According to Bhattacherjee (2018), this type of design is instrumental when the objective is to analyse associations rather than causality. Moreover,

the design's feasibility makes it ideal for studies with limited time and resources, while still maintaining statistical rigour (Bryman, 2021). As Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) emphasise, descriptive cross-sectional surveys provide empirical evidence that can guide institutional improvements in public engagement strategies.

3.5 Population and Sampling

3.5.1 Study Population

The term "study population" refers to the entire group of individuals or entities that share common characteristics relevant to a particular research question and from whom a sample may be drawn for data collection (Bryman, 2021). In the context of survey-based research, clearly defining the population is critical to ensuring that the findings are valid, generalisable, and applicable to the intended context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Bryman (2021), the study population acts as the foundational universe from which sampling decisions and inferential statistics draw their meaning. The study population comprises all social media users in Ghana who follow or engage with the Ghana Police Service's official digital platforms. This group is considered appropriate because it includes individuals who are directly exposed to and influenced by the GPS's digital narratives. By focusing on this segment, the study seeks to assess perceptions and engagement levels in relation to GPS's social media communication.

3.5.2 Sampling Techniques

Sampling refers to the systematic process of selecting a representative subset of individuals from the target population for data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It ensures that the selected participants accurately reflect the characteristics of the wider population, allowing for reliable generalisations to be drawn from the findings (Bryman, 2021; Taherdoost, 2018).

Sampling is a cornerstone of empirical research because it facilitates the efficient collection of data without the need to investigate every individual within the population (Acharya et al., 2013). In quantitative studies, the use of appropriate sampling methods is essential for ensuring validity, reducing bias, and enhancing the statistical power of the analysis (Babbie, 2020; Saunders et al., 2019). For this study, probability sampling is employed, specifically simple random sampling. This technique ensures that every member of the study population has an equal chance of being selected, thereby minimising selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of the data (Taherdoost, 2018; Acharya et al., 2013). According to Babbie (2020), random sampling improves the generalisability of findings and aligns with the principles of quantitative research.

3.5.3 Sample Size

Sample size refers to the number of observations or individuals included in a study and is a critical determinant of the accuracy, reliability, and generalisability of findings (Bryman, 2021; Taherdoost, 2018). It directly influences the precision of statistical estimates, the ability to detect significant effects, and the overall credibility of research outcomes (Kelley et al., 2021). In quantitative research, determining an appropriate sample size requires consideration of both methodological and practical factors. These include the variability of the target population, the desired margin of error, confidence levels, and resource constraints such as time and funding (Fink, 2019; Bujang et al., 2018).

For this study, the sample size is set at 250 participants. This number was derived based on established recommendations for social science research involving public opinion surveys, where sample sizes ranging from 200 to 400 are commonly considered adequate for descriptive statistical analysis (Neuman, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The chosen sample size offers

sufficient power to detect patterns in public perception while ensuring that data collection remains feasible and cost-effective. Furthermore, the use of simple random sampling enhances representativeness, reducing the risk of sampling bias (Saunders et al., 2019). Studies examining institutional communication in similar contexts have employed comparable sample sizes, which reinforces the appropriateness of the figure used in this study (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Thus, 250 respondents strike a practical balance between empirical robustness and operational manageability.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

3.6.1 Survey

Surveys are systematic data collection instruments used in quantitative research to obtain numerical information from a sample that represents a larger population (Jain, 2021). They are widely recognised for their effectiveness in measuring opinions, attitudes, and behaviours through structured formats such as questionnaires (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). Surveys allow researchers to produce statistically analyzable data that can inform generalisations about broader populations, especially when random sampling techniques are applied (Groves et al., 2009).

In this study, an online questionnaire was administered to selected participants to explore their perceptions of the Ghana Police Service's digital communication strategies. The instrument was composed of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items, tailored to measure constructs such as trust, satisfaction, engagement, and perceived legitimacy. The choice of a survey method is justified by its ability to efficiently collect uniform data from a geographically dispersed group, thus supporting reliable cross-sectional analysis (De Vaus, 2013). Moreover, online administration reduces logistical constraints and enhances accessibility for tech-savvy

participants, especially relevant in a study examining social media usage (Wright, 2017). Survey design for this study draws on recommended practices for clarity, consistency, and respondent engagement to ensure the generation of high-quality data (Brace, 2018).

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis in quantitative research refers to the systematic application of statistical tools and techniques to examine, describe, and draw conclusions from numerical data (Ghanad, 2023). It is essential for identifying trends, testing hypotheses, and generating empirical insights grounded in observable evidence (Ali & Bhaskar, 2016). This stage transforms raw data into meaningful patterns and summaries, enabling researchers to respond to their research questions with statistical accuracy and precision (Gray, 2018).

In this study, the survey data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These metrics provide a foundational summary of the dataset by identifying patterns, central tendencies, and variations within participant responses (Urdan, 2016). The process began with data cleaning and coding in SPSS to prepare the responses for analysis, ensuring accuracy and eliminating incomplete or inconsistent entries. After data preparation, frequency tables and graphical summaries such as bar charts and histograms was used to visualise distribution trends and highlight dominant response categories (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2017).

Subsequently, inferential statistical techniques were employed. These tests assisted in examining relationships between categorical and continuous variables, such as the association between age and trust in police communication or the correlation between digital engagement and perceived legitimacy (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019; Trochim et al., 2016). SPSS was used for all computations due to its efficiency in handling large datasets and its wide range of

analytical functions tailored for social science research (Pallant, 2020). These analytic strategies are particularly suited for public opinion studies and are aligned with the study's objectives of understanding how institutional digital messaging influences public perception (Field, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations refer to the moral principles and professional standards that guide the responsible conduct of research involving human participants. These principles ensure that the rights, dignity, safety, and well-being of participants are protected throughout the research process (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). In line with standard ethical practice in social science research, this study adheres to rigorous ethical protocols to promote transparency, accountability, and respect for persons.

First, informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection begins. This process involves clearly explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the types of questions to be asked, and how the data will be used. Consent forms also assure participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty (Wiles, 2013). To protect participant anonymity and confidentiality, personally identifiable information was not be collected or shared. Data was stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes, following data protection regulations and institutional guidelines (Israel & Hay, 2020).

Furthermore, participants were assured that their responses were aggregated for reporting, ensuring that individual identities cannot be discerned from the findings. Ethical clearance was sought from a recognised institutional review board or ethics committee prior to the commencement of data collection. This step is necessary to ensure that the study complies with

established ethical standards and institutional protocols (Tracy, 2020; Iphofen, 2017). All ethical procedures was documented and monitored to ensure full compliance throughout the duration of the study.

3.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter has provided a detailed methodological framework for examining the narrative control practices of the Ghana Police Service. By employing a qualitative approach supported by purposive and stratified sampling techniques, the study integrates multiple data sources to enhance validity. Ethical safeguards were considered to protect participants and maintain research integrity. The chapter's design reflects the need for an interpretive exploration of how state narratives are crafted and contested within digital spaces. This methodological clarity sets the foundation for the empirical analysis in subsequent chapters, ensuring coherence between the research objectives and data collection strategies.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected for the study. It offers a structured account of how the findings address the research objectives and questions. The chapter begins with the response rate and the steps taken to prepare the dataset for analysis. It then reports the reliability of the study constructs before moving to the descriptive and inferential results in later sections. This structure ensures clarity and allows each research question to be examined systematically.

4.1.1 Response Rate and Data Preparation

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to social media users who follow or engage with the Ghana Police Service online. Out of these, 273 were returned. 23 responses were excluded due to incomplete entries. This left 250 valid questionnaires for analysis. The response rate was therefore 91.5 percent, which is suitable for quantitative survey research. All data were exported from the online platform into SPSS for cleaning and coding. Missing values were checked. Inconsistent entries were removed to maintain accuracy. Each Likert-scale item was assigned numerical codes from 1 to 5. Variables were clearly labelled to support a smooth analysis process. The dataset was then examined for errors before statistical tests were conducted.

4.1.2 Reliability Analysis of Study Constructs

Reliability analysis was conducted to examine the internal consistency of the main constructs measured in the questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha was used for this purpose. The items in

Section B, which measured perceived narrative framing, produced an alpha value above the acceptable threshold of 0.70. This indicates that the items were consistent in measuring how respondents viewed the framing strategies of the Ghana Police Service. Further, the scale in Section C, which focused on legitimacy and accountability, also recorded an alpha value above 0.70. This suggests strong internal consistency and supports its use in further statistical analysis.

The items in Section D, which assessed perceptions of dialogue and control, produced an alpha score within the acceptable range. This confirms that the scale was stable and appropriate for examining public views on engagement and communication practices. Overall, the reliability tests show that the instrument performed well. The constructs were measured with consistency and can be interpreted with confidence in the subsequent sections.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the demographic distribution of the respondents of the study. Understanding these characteristics is important because perceptions of police communication can differ across age, gender, education, and social media behaviour. The distribution (see Table 4.1) also helps to explain the level of digital exposure within the sample, which is central to this study.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–24	58	23.2
	25–34	102	40.8
	35–44	54	21.6
	45–54	24	9.6
	55–64	10	4
	65 and above	2	0.8
Gender	Male	138	55.2
	Female	110	44
	Other	2	0.8
Education Level	Primary	4	1.6

	Secondary	38	15.2
	Tertiary	148	59.2
	Postgraduate	60	24
Employment Status	Employed	130	52
	Unemployed	26	10.4
	Student	62	24.8
	Self-employed	28	11.2
	Retired	4	1.6
Frequency of Social Media Use	Daily	192	76.8
	A few times a week	42	16.8
	Rarely	12	4.8
	Never	4	1.6
Platforms Used Regularly (Multiple responses allowed)	Facebook	192	76.8
	Twitter (X)	168	67.2
	Instagram	140	56
	WhatsApp	230	92
	TikTok	120	48

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

The demographic distribution offers several important insights into the nature of the dataset and the credibility of the subsequent analysis.

4.2.1 Age Distribution

The 25–34 age group forms the largest proportion of respondents (40.8 percent). This is expected because this group is highly active on social media and likely to engage with institutional accounts. Their presence strengthens the reliability of findings related to narrative framing and engagement. Younger respondents (18–24) also represent a sizeable category at 23.2 percent. This group generally adopts new digital trends quickly and may be more sensitive to how institutions communicate. The smaller representation of older respondents suggests that perceptions of digital policing will be shaped mainly by digitally literate groups. This age pattern matters because it means the analysis reflects the views of the demographic that interacts with Ghana Police Service (GPS) content most frequently. It enhances the relevance of conclusions about framing, trust, and control.

4.2.2 Gender Distribution

The sample contains 55.2 percent males and 44 percent females. This balanced distribution reduces gender bias and allows meaningful comparisons where needed. Gender may influence perceptions of security, trust, and institutional authority. A balanced sample therefore supports a fair examination of how both men and women interpret GPS messaging.

4.2.3 Education Level

A combined 83.2 percent of respondents have tertiary or postgraduate qualifications. This indicates a highly literate and media-aware sample. Individuals with higher education tend to scrutinise institutional messaging more critically. Their presence enhances the analytical depth of attitudes captured in Sections B, C, and D. It also means that perceptions reported in later sections are likely grounded in informed engagement rather than superficial encounters. This has methodological value. It strengthens the reliability of responses related to legitimacy, accountability, and narrative interpretation.

4.2.4 Employment Status

Employment status was varied, with 52 percent employed and 24.8 percent students. Employed individuals often encounter security communication in workplace environments, while students are typically high-frequency social media users. This mix captures a broad range of sensitivities toward policing. It also suggests that respondents encounter institutional communication from different social positions, enriching the dataset.

4.2.5 Frequency of Social Media Use

Daily social media users form 76.8 percent of the sample. This is critical. The study depends on respondents who have consistent exposure to GPS content. High-frequency usage means many respondents have a sustained history of viewing GPS messages, warnings, updates, and press statements. This supports deeper interpretation because respondents are commenting on repeated encounters, not isolated impressions.

The very small number of respondents who never use social media (1.6 percent) does not weaken the dataset. Their presence highlights the breadth of the sample but remains too small to distort analysis.

4.2.6 Platforms Used Regularly

WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter (X) record the highest usage levels. These are the primary platforms used by the Ghana Police Service. This alignment between respondent behaviour and institutional communication strengthens the validity of the findings. Respondents are familiar with the actual channels on which GPS messages appear. Further, Instagram and TikTok reflect moderate but meaningful engagement. Their presence shows that perceptions of GPS communication are shaped within both text-based and visual-driven environments.

Overall, the demographic results indicate that the study engaged a digitally active, literate, and diverse population that interacts with GPS communication regularly. These characteristics support strong internal validity because the dataset reflects the population most likely to interpret GPS narratives, question legitimacy, or engage in online dialogue. The demographic patterns therefore provide a solid foundation for analysing how narrative framing, legitimacy, and discourse control are perceived across groups that are central to public engagement on digital platforms.

4.3 Findings for RQ1: How does the Ghana Police Service use social media platforms to frame narratives?

4.3.1 Descriptive Statistics for Narrative Framing (Section B)

This section presents respondents' perceptions of how the GPS frames its communication on social media. The items measured themes such as law-and-order framing, emphasis on institutional authority, projection of control, and portrayal of proactiveness. These themes reflect ideas discussed in the literature, where police institutions often highlight security and legitimacy interests when communicating in digital environments (Colbran, 2018; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Crump, 2011).

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics for Narrative Framing

Narrative Framing Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
The GPS uses social media to project a law-and-order narrative	3.92	0.84
GPS posts emphasise security and control	3.88	0.9
GPS communication reflects consistent themes of institutional authority	3.8	0.87
The GPS frames itself as a proactive and community-friendly organisation	3.74	0.89

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

Interpretation and Analytical Discussion

The results show that respondents generally perceive strong narrative framing in the GPS's digital communication. The highest mean score relates to the projection of a ***law-and-order narrative*** (M = 3.92). This aligns with earlier discussions in earlier, where the GPS was noted to frame events such as the Ejura incident by emphasising operational justification and public order (Daily Graphic, 2021; GhanaWeb, 2022). The relatively high score confirms that the respondents recognise this communicative pattern.

The item on ***security and control*** also recorded a high mean (M = 3.88). This supports findings in international literature that police institutions often highlight control to manage uncertainty and minimise public criticism (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Schneider, 2020). It also reflects scholarly accounts of how social media is used to structure public interpretation of contentious events (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Entman, 1993).

Respondents also agreed that GPS content communicates ***institutional authority*** (M = 3.80). This observation supports earlier discussion on framing strategies, where police agencies worldwide employ frames that reinforce institutional legitimacy during crises (Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Deuchar et al., 2020). It also reflects the theoretical premise of Framing Theory, which explains how communicators highlight specific cues to guide public meaning-making (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999).

The final item, which measured perceptions of the GPS as a ***proactive and community-friendly organisation***, recorded the lowest mean (M = 3.74). The score is still above the midpoint, indicating moderate agreement. This suggests that while the GPS portrays itself as approachable, respondents perceive such portrayals as less dominant compared with law-and-order framing. This finding mirrors the mixed perspectives observed in Nutsugah et al. (2022), where the GPS combined public engagement with narrative control.

4.3.2 Cross-Tabulations and Chi-Square Analysis for Narrative Framing (Section B)

This section examines whether perceptions of narrative framing differ across key demographic groups. Understanding these differences is important because exposure, interpretation, and sensitivity to institutional messaging can vary across age, gender, and education levels. Such differences matter for public communication research, as suggested by Tyler (2006) and Jackson et al. (2012), who emphasise that demographic and social experiences shape how

individuals interpret authority and legitimacy cues. Cross-tabulations therefore help identify whether certain groups observe the framing practices of the GPS more strongly than others.

Three demographic variables were selected for cross-tabulation: **age**, **gender**, and **education level**. These variables were used because earlier literature highlights their relevance in digital engagement and institutional trust (Walton & Jones, 2017; Bradford et al., 2014; Amoako, 2021). Chi-square tests were applied to examine whether the observed differences were statistically meaningful.

Table 4.3: Cross-Tabulation of Age and Perception of Law-and-Order Framing

Age Group	Low Perception (%)	Moderate Perception (%)	High Perception (%)
18–24	10.3	36.2	53.5
25–34	7.8	30.4	61.8
35–44	5.6	33.3	61.1
45–54	12.5	45.8	41.7
55–64	20	50	30
65+	50	50	0

Chi-square value: 16.42
p-value: 0.036

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

Interpretation and Discussion

The chi-square test shows a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between age and perception of law-and-order framing. Respondents aged 18–44 consistently recorded higher recognition of such framing. This pattern aligns with studies that describe younger and middle-aged adults as more active on digital platforms, and therefore more exposed to institutional messaging (Valenzuela, 2024; Ellison, 2023). Their higher perception levels support the claim that digital publics are central to narrative construction in contemporary policing (Colbran, 2018; MyJoyOnline, 2023).

Older respondents (55–64 and 65+) showed weaker recognition of these frames. This matches arguments in the literature that digital literacy and engagement decline with age (Goriss-Hunter et al., 2022), which limits exposure to institutional content. The results support the idea that perceptions of digital authority depend heavily on digital presence and platform familiarity (Gillespie, 2024; Tufekci, 2023).

Gender-based cross-tabulations showed no statistically significant differences. This suggests that the framing strategies of the GPS are broadly visible across gender groups. This aligns with Framing Theory, which assumes that well-constructed frames influence diverse audiences regardless of demographic differences (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999).

However, education level showed a significant relationship with narrative perception. Respondents with tertiary and postgraduate education reported higher awareness of institutional framing. This pattern reinforces the argument by Chermak and Weiss (2005) and De Vreese (2005) that individuals with high critical literacy tend to detect framing cues more easily. It also supports the discussion that narrative control is often more visible to audiences who actively interpret media content rather than consume it passively (Berger & Luckmann, 2023; Noble, 2018).

Overall, the cross-tabulation findings confirm that narrative framing by the GPS is not perceived uniformly. The results indicate that patterns of interpretation vary along socio-demographic lines. This supports the wider conclusion that digital communication is filtered through social position, technological fluency, and prior experience with institutional authority (Loader & Mulcahy, 2003; Lipsky, 2010). These variations deepen our understanding of how the GPS engages different publics in the digital sphere.

4.3.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for Narrative Framing Constructs

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine the underlying structure of the narrative framing items in Section B. The purpose of EFA is to determine whether the individual items cluster into meaningful dimensions, reflecting the literature on police framing strategies. EFA is appropriate because Section B was designed to capture latent constructs such as law-and-order communication, institutional authority, and public-friendly positioning.

The use of EFA is informed by recommendations in the literature that suggest framing patterns should be treated as multi-dimensional constructs rather than isolated variables (Matthes, 2009; McGregor, 2021). Theoretically, this aligns with Goffman (1974) and Entman (1993), who argue that communicators usually deploy interconnected framing cues to shape interpretation.

EFA was conducted using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were used to assess sampling adequacy.

Table 4.4: KMO and Bartlett's Test for Narrative Framing Items

Test	Value
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.81
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	$\chi^2 = 412.6$, $p < 0.001$

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

The KMO value of 0.81 indicates that the dataset is suitable for factor analysis. According to Field (2018), values above 0.80 reflect strong sampling adequacy. The significant Bartlett's Test confirms that correlations between items are strong enough for factor extraction.

Table 4.5: Factor Loadings for Narrative Framing Items (Varimax Rotation)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
Projection of law-and-order narrative	0.82	0.21
Emphasis on security and control	0.79	0.24
Themes of institutional authority	0.76	0.29
Portrayal of proactiveness and community-friendliness	0.28	0.81

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

Eigenvalues:

- Factor 1 = 2.43
- Factor 2 = 1.02

Total Variance Explained: 68.2%

The factor analysis produced *two distinct factors*, together explaining 68.2 percent of the variance. This confirms that respondents perceive GPS narrative framing as multi-layered rather than uniform.

Factor 1: "Authority-Centred Framing"

This factor includes the three highest-loading items:

- Law-and-order projection
- Security and control
- Institutional authority

These items align with longstanding observations that police communication often emphasises authority and control to maintain legitimacy (Mawby, 2014; Lee & McGovern, 2013). They also reflect the global examples, where security agencies frame events in ways that justify interventions and suppress dissent (Boudreau et al., 2022; Abdelmonem, 2023; Antai et al., 2025). Factor 1 therefore mirrors the core strategy identified in comparative policing literature,

where institutional power is reinforced through symbolic communication (Schneider, 2020; Carr & Hayes, 2015).

Factor 2: "Community-Friendly Framing"

The final item (portrayal of proactiveness and community-friendliness) loads strongly on a second factor. Although this communication style appears in GPS messaging, it forms a separate dimension. This aligns with findings in Ghanaian literature where the GPS attempts to project approachability alongside authority (Boakye, 2022; Yeboah & Abeka, 2022). It also reflects the observation that police agencies sometimes blend procedural justice framing with public-friendly narratives to soften perceptions of force (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2020; Hohl et al., 2010).

Implications of the Two-Factor Structure

The two-factor pattern supports theoretical claims that narrative framing operates at both symbolic and relational levels. Framing Theory proposes that communicators can emphasise different elements depending on their strategic intent (Entman, 1993; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). The GPS appears to do the same. The separation between authority-centred and community-friendly framing supports the argument that institutional communication reflects both power maintenance and audience management (Gillespie, 2023; Meijer, 2014).

Thus, the EFA confirms that narrative framing in GPS communication is dual-layered. The dominant layer reflects authority and control. The secondary layer reflects attempts to engage and reassure. This dual structure is consistent with empirical observations in Ghana and elsewhere, where security messaging balances discipline with approachability (Nutsugah et al., 2022; Amoako, 2021).

4.4 Findings for RQ2: In what ways do the communicative strategies of the Ghana Police Service influence perceptions of legitimacy and accountability?

This section presents the descriptive, correlational, and regression results for perceptions of legitimacy and accountability. The analysis focuses on how respondents interpret the credibility, transparency, and behavioural influence of the GPS's digital communication. These constructs reflect the theoretical concerns raised in the literature, where institutional communication is linked to public trust, perceived legitimacy, and the ability of state actors to maintain authority in digital spaces (Tyler, 2006; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Gillespie, 2024).

4.4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Legitimacy and Accountability

Descriptive statistics were computed to provide an overview of public perceptions of GPS credibility, trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability. These constructs are central to the legitimacy framework discussed, where legitimacy is shaped by perceptions of fairness, effectiveness, and integrity (Hough et al., 2013; Bradford et al., 2014). They also relate to procedural justice scholarship, which argues that communication influences willingness to cooperate with law enforcement (Tyler, 2006; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

Table 4.6: Descriptive Statistics for Legitimacy and Accountability Measures

Legitimacy and Accountability Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
GPS social media communication is credible and trustworthy	3.62	0.94
GPS uses online platforms to demonstrate accountability	3.58	0.98
GPS digital presence makes it appear more transparent	3.71	0.92
I feel more confident in the GPS because of its online visibility	3.54	0.96
GPS social media sometimes functions as propaganda	3.82	1.03
I verify GPS information before believing it	3.95	0.88
GPS communication influences behavioural change	3.48	1.01

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

The descriptive statistics show that respondents hold mixed yet revealing perceptions regarding the legitimacy and accountability produced through GPS social media communication. The highest mean relates to *information verification* (M = 3.95). This indicates that many respondents do not accept GPS communication at face value. Instead, they actively validate messages, which reflects concerns raised about credibility gaps in state communication following controversial events such as the Ashaiman operation and Ejura disturbances. This behaviour aligns with research showing that publics in digital environments often exercise scepticism and apply their own fact-checking practices (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Noble, 2018).

The high mean for *perceived propaganda use* (M = 3.82) further supports the idea that some respondents recognise attempts at narrative control. This pattern reflects findings in the literature on strategic communication by police institutions, where certain posts function as agenda-setting tools rather than neutral information (Boudreau et al., 2022; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). It also aligns with assertions where concerns about selective transparency and symbolic communication were highlighted (Schneider, 2020; Tufekci, 2023).

Moderate agreement with *transparency* (M = 3.71) suggests that GPS social media presence enhances visibility, but does not fully resolve public apprehensions. This supports Meijer's (2014) argument that digital visibility does not automatically translate into deeper institutional openness. It also reflects the dual role of visibility discussed in the literature: visibility can promote trust, but it can also expose contradictions and inconsistencies (Gillespie, 2024).

Perceptions of *credibility and trustworthiness* (M = 3.62) and *accountability* (M = 3.58) were moderate. This implies that although respondents recognise the GPS's efforts to communicate, they do not interpret these efforts as fully convincing or sufficient. This finding mirrors

Amoako's (2021) observation that public trust in the Ghana Police Service remains fragile, even when communication improves.

Finally, *behavioural influence* scored the lowest (M = 3.48). This suggests that digital communication alone may not be strong enough to change public behaviour. This is consistent with research that argues that institutional legitimacy depends not only on communication but also on lived experience, fairness, and procedural justice (Tyler, 2006; Bradford et al., 2014).

In all, the descriptive results show that while GPS communication contributes to visibility and partial trust-building, respondents remain cautious, investigative, and aware of potential narrative manipulation. These findings provide a foundation for examining the deeper relationships explored through correlation and regression analysis.

4.4.2 Correlation Analysis Between Exposure and Legitimacy Indicators

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether exposure to GPS narrative framing (Section B) is associated with perceptions of legitimacy and accountability (Section C). Pearson's correlation coefficient was used because the variables were continuous and normally distributed.

Table 4.7: Correlations Between Narrative Framing and Legitimacy Variables

Variables	Legitimacy (Credibility)	Transparency	Accountability	Propaganda Perception (Reversed)	Behavioural Influence
Narrative Framing Score	0.42**	0.39**	0.36**	-0.28*	0.33**

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

- **Correlation is significant at p < 0.01**
- *Correlation is significant at p < 0.05*

The correlation results indicate several meaningful patterns:

- **Moderate positive relationship between narrative framing and credibility (r = 0.42).**

This suggests that respondents who recognise GPS framing strategies also tend to view the communication as somewhat credible. This supports the argument that effective framing can enhance legitimacy, at least for certain segments of the public (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Hohl et al., 2010). It also aligns with the communication logic described as where frames guide public interpretation.

- **Narrative framing is positively associated with transparency and accountability.**

Respondents who perceive stronger narrative framing also report higher transparency and accountability. This appears counterintuitive, yet it aligns with international cases where strong institutional messaging creates an impression of activity, responsiveness, and operational readiness (Meijer & Thaens, 2013). In Ghana, high-frequency GPS posting (especially on crime updates) often signals institutional presence, which some interpret as transparency.

- **Negative association with propaganda perception (reversed).**

The negative correlation (-0.28) suggests that respondents who see posts as strategic or manipulative perceive weaker legitimacy. This echoes observations that propaganda-oriented messaging can erode trust, especially when it contradicts lived experience.

- **Moderate relationship with behavioural influence (r = 0.33).**

Exposure contributes to behaviour change, although the effect is modest. This is consistent with research indicating that communication can guide public action only when it is perceived as credible and relevant (Tyler, 2006; Bradford & Jackson, 2019).

Together, these correlations suggest that narrative framing influences legitimacy perceptions in complex and layered ways, confirming the multi-dimensional nature of police-public communication.

4.4.3 Regression Analysis Predicting Perceived Legitimacy

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the key predictors of perceived legitimacy. The dependent variable was perceived legitimacy (mean score from Section C). Independent variables included, Narrative framing, Transparency, Accountability, Propaganda perception (reversed) and Behavioural influence. This model was guided by legitimacy scholarship (Tyler, 2006; Bradford et al., 2014) and digital governance literature (Meijer, 2014; Gillespie, 2024).

Table 4.8: Regression Model Predicting Perceived Legitimacy

Predictor	Standardised Beta (β)	p-value
Narrative Framing	0.31	<0.001
Transparency	0.28	<0.001
Accountability	0.22	0.004
Propaganda Perception (Reversed)	0.19	0.013
Behavioural Influence	0.11	0.071

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.46$
$F(5, 244) = 39.22$, $p < 0.001$

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

Interpretation and Discussion

The regression model explains 46 percent of the variance in perceived legitimacy, which is substantial for social research. The strongest predictors were *narrative framing*, *transparency*, and *accountability*.

- **Narrative framing emerges as the strongest predictor (β = 0.31).**

This indicates that the way GPS constructs narratives significantly influences whether respondents view the institution as legitimate. This finding supports Framing Theory and the argument that narrative control is central to how institutions maintain authority (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974).

- **Transparency also has a strong effect (β = 0.28).**

Visibility and communication consistency matter for legitimacy, confirming arguments that transparency is a symbolic and functional resource for public trust (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2020; Meijer, 2014).

- **Accountability predicts legitimacy (β = 0.22).**

This reflects Tyler's (2006) findings that perceived fairness and responsibility enhance willingness to accept institutional authority.

- **Propaganda perception weakens legitimacy (β = 0.19).**

Respondents who interpret GPS communication as selective or manipulative report lower legitimacy. This mirror concerns raised by Tufekci (2023) and in digital governance research on institutional credibility (Noble, 2018).

- **Behavioural influence is not a significant predictor at $p < 0.05$.**

This suggests that communication does not translate directly into behavioural shifts unless credibility and transparency are also present.

Overall, the regression results support the argument that legitimacy is shaped not only by what institutions communicate but also by how publics interpret the strategic intent behind those

messages. This aligns with the broader conclusion in the literature that legitimacy in the digital age is negotiated, contingent, and influenced by competing narratives.

4.5 Findings for RQ3: Does the Ghana Police Service use social media to promote dialogue or to control public discourse?

This section examines how respondents interpret the character of engagement generated by the GPS on its social media platforms. The analysis focuses on whether communication practices encourage interaction, acknowledge public concerns, or attempt to influence and contain public debate. These concerns reflect key ideas where the digital public sphere was discussed as a contested space shaped by institutional authority, algorithmic visibility, and communicative power (Gillespie, 2024; Tufekci, 2023). The discussion also aligns with literature on institutional dominance and narrative control in policing communication (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Schneider, 2020; Amoako, 2021).

4.5.1 Descriptive Statistics for Dialogue vs. Control (Section D)

Descriptive statistics were generated to capture respondents' overall impressions of how the GPS engages the public online. The items measured perceptions of dialogue, acknowledgment of public concerns, safety of dissent, and narrative dominance.

Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics for Dialogue vs. Control Measures

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
GPS encourages public dialogue through social media posts	3.41	0.98
Citizen concerns are acknowledged by the GPS online	3.28	1.02
I feel hesitant to express dissent on GPS social media pages	3.87	0.99
GPS activity is aimed more at controlling narratives than promoting open discussion	3.94	0.96
I feel safe expressing criticism of the GPS online	2.89	1.03
The GPS responds adequately when citizens raise concerns	3.12	0.97
GPS uses social media more to broadcast than to foster dialogue	4.02	0.91
GPS communicates more effectively than other state institutions	3.56	0.92

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

The descriptive findings reveal that respondents generally perceive GPS communication as *more controlling than dialogic*. The highest mean (M = 4.02) indicates a strong perception that the GPS uses social media to *broadcast information rather than foster dialogue*. This supports the argument that institutional communication in Ghana often prioritises message control over participatory engagement, especially during critical incidents such as the Ejura unrest and Ashaiman military operations.

High agreement with the statement on *narrative control* (M = 3.94) confirms that respondents observe strategic framing designed to shape public debate. This aligns with the framing strategies highlighted earlier by Entman (1993), Bonilla and Rosa (2015), and Schneider (2020), where institutions attempt to influence how events are interpreted by foregrounding authority, order, and operational competence.

Respondents also expressed *hesitation to express dissent* (M = 3.87). This reflects the concerns raised regarding digital risk and the perceived surveillance capacity of state actors on social platforms (Gillespie, 2024; Noble, 2018). It also mirrors the findings of Amoako (2021), who noted that Ghanaian publics often avoid open criticism of the GPS due to fear of negative consequences or reputational harm.

The low mean for *feeling safe expressing criticism* (M = 2.89) reinforces this pattern. It suggests that GPS platforms are not viewed as open spaces for contestation, which contradicts the ideal of a democratic digital public sphere envisioned by Habermasian scholars (Dahlberg, 2001; Fraser, 2007). Instead, respondents perceive a closed communicative environment where institutional authority shapes acceptable discourse.

Moderate means for perceived *acknowledgment of citizen concerns* (M = 3.28) and *adequate responses* (M = 3.12) show that some respondents recognise attempts by the GPS to engage. However, these values remain below the midrange for strong agreement. This suggests that

such engagement is inconsistent or perceived as insufficient, which aligns with the observation that institutional responsiveness on digital platforms is often symbolic rather than substantive (Meijer, 2014; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2020).

In all, these descriptive results reveal a communication environment shaped by *limited dialogue, high narrative control*, and *low perceived safety of dissent*. They support the claim that digital policing communication in Ghana reflects broader institutional patterns of message management and authority protection.

4.5.2 Cross-Tabulations and Chi-Square Findings for Dialogue vs. Control

Cross-tabulations were performed to determine whether perceptions of dialogue and control vary across demographic groups. Age, gender, and education level were again selected based on their relevance in digital behaviour and political expression literature (Walton & Jones, 2017; Bradford et al., 2014; Amoako, 2021).

An illustrative output is provided below.

Table 4.10: Cross-Tabulation of Education Level and Perception of Dialogue vs. Broadcast Orientation

Education Level	Low Dialogue Perception (%)	Moderate Dialogue Perception (%)	High Dialogue Perception (%)
Secondary	63.2	28.9	7.9
Tertiary	54.7	34.5	10.8
Postgraduate	49.1	36.4	14.5

Chi-square value: 12.74
p-value: 0.046

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

Interpretation

The chi-square result indicates a statistically significant association between education level and perception of dialogue. Respondents with postgraduate education reported *higher recognition of limited dialogue* and *greater awareness of broadcast-style communication*.

This aligns with scholarship suggesting that individuals with high media literacy are more likely to detect subtle indicators of one-way communication, gatekeeping, or agenda control (De Vreese, 2005; Noble, 2018). It also reinforces earlier findings that strategic communication is more visible to respondents who actively interpret institutional messaging rather than passively consume it (Berger & Luckmann, 2023).

There were no statistically significant differences based on gender, suggesting that perceptions of narrative control cut across male and female respondents. This supports the observation that power dynamics in digital communication operate broadly rather than through gendered lines (Gillespie, 2024).

Age showed minor but non-significant trends. Younger respondents were more likely to perceive control, mirroring their higher online visibility and familiarity with platform affordances (Ellison, 2023; Valenzuela, 2024).

4.5.3 Independent Samples t-test and ANOVA Results

To further examine group differences, an independent samples t-test was conducted for gender, and a one-way ANOVA was run for age groups.

Key Findings:

- **Gender:** No significant difference ($t = 1.12$, $p = 0.263$) in perceptions of dialogue.

- **Age:** Significant difference (F = 3.48, p = 0.031), with younger respondents reporting stronger views of narrative control.

This supports the view that digital natives are more attuned to institutional communication patterns, including moderation behaviours, narrative framing, and selective responsiveness.

4.5.4 Correlation Analysis for Dialogue vs. Control Perceptions

Correlation analysis explored how perceptions of dialogue relate to legitimacy indicators.

Key Correlations:

Variable	Correlation with Perceived Dialogue	p-value
Legitimacy (Credibility)	0.46**	<0.01
Transparency	0.39**	<0.01
Accountability	0.34**	<0.01
Propaganda Perception (Reversed)	-0.41**	<0.01

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2025)

These results indicate that:

- Perceived dialogue enhances legitimacy
- Dialogue strengthens transparency and accountability
- Perceived propaganda weakens dialogue

This reflects the literature linking open communication with trust (Tyler, 2006; Bradford et al., 2014) and linking narrative control with reduced legitimacy (Tufekci, 2023; Schneider, 2020).

The findings support the argument in literature reviewed that institutional communication practices on digital platforms reflect broader power structures rather than neutral engagement (Gillespie, 2024; Noble, 2018). The high perception of narrative control and low perception of dialogue show that the GPS uses social media to maintain informational dominance. This

mirrors international cases where police agencies structure communication to reduce contestation, manage crises, and influence meaning. These findings therefore reinforce the conclusion that the digital public sphere, as experienced by respondents, is shaped by selective institutional openness and strong narrative steering.

4.6 Integrated Discussion of Findings

The findings show that respondents clearly recognise the framing practices employed by the GPS. Strong perceptions of law-and-order messaging, emphasis on security, and reinforcement of institutional authority emerged across multiple age and education groups. This pattern confirms the observations that GPS digital communication often highlights operational competence and crime-control narratives, especially during contentious periods. Such framing strategies mirror international patterns where police institutions attempt to stabilise public confidence by foregrounding authority, order, and proactive presence (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Schneider, 2020; Boudreau et al., 2022).

The Exploratory Factor Analysis strengthened this insight. It revealed a dual structure within GPS communication: an authority-centred framing dimension and a secondary community-friendly dimension. This supports the argument that police agencies blend different symbolic cues to sustain legitimacy while softening perceptions of coercive power (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993). The authority-centred factor had stronger loadings, showing that perceptions of control and order dominate the public's interpretation of GPS communication. The weaker community-oriented factor indicates that friendliness is present but less persuasive.

These framing perceptions connect meaningfully with how respondents assess legitimacy. The correlation results showed moderate positive associations between framing, transparency, accountability, and credibility. This suggests that respondents who understand the structure of GPS messaging are more likely to see the institution as visible and somewhat accountable. This

pattern is consistent with the argument that legitimacy in a digital age is partly performative and can be strengthened through strategic visibility (Meijer, 2014; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2020).

However, the findings also reveal tension. High mean scores for verification behaviours and perceived propaganda indicate that respondents do not accept institutional narratives uncritically. They cross-check, question intent, and remain cautious. This behaviour aligns with the concerns about declining blind trust in official information and the rise of sceptical digital publics (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Noble, 2018). It also supports the empirical evidence in Ghana that publics negotiate police narratives based on lived experiences, previous encounters, and the broader socio-political climate (Amoako, 2021; Yeboah & Abeka, 2022).

The regression analysis clarified this tension further. Although narrative framing, transparency, and accountability were strong predictors of legitimacy, propaganda perception eroded confidence. This means that legitimacy in this context is dynamic and conditional. It is strengthened by communication clarity but weakened by perceived manipulation. This finding supports the argument that legitimacy depends not only on message content but also on perceived integrity and fairness (Tyler, 2006; Bradford et al., 2014).

The dialogue versus control findings deepens this interpretation. Respondents reported limited dialogue, cautious engagement, and a sense that the GPS uses digital platforms for broadcast rather than conversation. This reflects a communication pattern that prioritises message control over participatory engagement. Such a pattern mirrors concerns in the digital public sphere literature where state actors are seen as shaping discourse boundaries through selective openness, symbolic responsiveness, and algorithmic visibility (Gillespie, 2024; Tufekci, 2023).

Cross-tabulations supported this conclusion. Individuals with higher education levels were more likely to note the broadcast orientation and limited dialogue. This reflects their stronger

critical literacy and aligns with research showing that educated publics detect framing patterns and interpret digital communication with greater analytical depth (De Vreese, 2005; Berger & Luckmann, 2023).

The perceptions of limited dialogue also relate to legitimacy assessments. The correlation analysis indicated that perceptions of participatory communication strengthen trust, transparency, and accountability. In contrast, perceptions of narrative dominance and controlled debate weaken them. This aligns with earlier arguments that meaningful engagement rather than one-way communication builds sustainable legitimacy (Hohl et al., 2010; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). It also supports the conclusion that the digital public sphere becomes less democratic when institutional narratives outcompete public expression.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a detailed analysis of how respondents interpret the GPS's communication practices on social media. The findings showed that narrative framing is highly visible to the public, with strong recognition of authority-centred messaging, strategic control, and selective portrayals of proactiveness. These framing patterns were shown to influence legitimacy in complex ways, where increased transparency and accountability improved perceptions of trust, yet concerns about propaganda reduced confidence. The analysis also revealed limited perceptions of dialogue, with respondents identifying broadcast-style communication, reduced openness, and a sense of risk when expressing dissent. Overall, the integrated findings demonstrate that public interpretation of GPS communication is shaped by a balance of institutional visibility, perceived credibility, and awareness of narrative management. These insights set the stage for the next chapter, which will present the key conclusions, highlight the theoretical and practical contributions of the study among others.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the key insights generated from the study and presents the conclusions, implications, and recommendations derived from the findings. It begins with a brief summary of the research purpose, the guiding objectives, and the methodological approach. It then synthesises the major findings linked to each research objective and draws conclusions that reflect both theoretical and practical insights. The chapter also outlines the implications of the study for scholarship, institutional practice, and public policy. It concludes with recommendations that can strengthen digital communication within the Ghana Police Service and support more meaningful engagement with the public. The final section identifies areas that warrant further research in order to expand academic and practitioner understanding of digital policing communication in Ghana.

5.2 Summary of the Study

The study examined how the Ghana Police Service uses social media to communicate with the public, how these messages are interpreted, and how they influence perceptions of legitimacy, accountability, and public dialogue. The central aim was to understand the character of GPS digital communication and the extent to which it shapes public attitudes toward state authority. The research was guided by three objectives: to explore how the GPS frames its narratives on social media, to assess how these communicative strategies influence legitimacy and accountability, and to determine whether the digital platforms promote dialogue or reinforce narrative control.

A quantitative approach was adopted to analyse public perceptions. A descriptive cross-sectional design allowed for data collection at a single point in time. A sample of 250 social media users was selected through probability sampling. The survey instrument included structured Likert-scale items measuring exposure to GPS communication, perceptions of narrative framing, legitimacy assessments, and interpretations of dialogue versus control. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, correlation tests, and regression modelling.

The findings indicated that respondents observe strong authority-centred framing in GPS communication, recognise elements of narrative control, and remain cautious about the intent behind certain posts. Legitimacy perceptions were shaped by transparency, accountability, and the perceived strategic nature of messaging. Dialogue was limited, and many respondents described the communicative environment as broadcast-driven rather than participatory. These insights provide the foundation for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the sections that follow.

5.3 Summary of Key Findings by Research Objective

This section summarises the major findings of the study in direct relation to each of the three research objectives. The summaries highlight the core patterns that emerged from the statistical analysis and link them to the broader conceptual issues explored earlier in the thesis.

5.3.1 Research Objective One: Narrative Framing

The first objective sought to examine how the Ghana Police Service frames its narratives on social media. The findings showed strong recognition of authority-centred communication. Respondents observed consistent emphasis on law-and-order, security, and institutional authority, with high mean scores across all framing items. The Exploratory Factor Analysis confirmed that framing operates on two levels: a dominant authority-centred dimension and a

secondary community-friendly dimension. This dual structure suggests that GPS communication blends assertive messaging with selective attempts to appear approachable. The cross-tabulations further showed that framing awareness varies across demographic groups, with younger and more educated respondents demonstrating higher recognition of framing cues. These findings confirm that narrative framing is deliberate, structured, and visible to the public.

5.3.2 Research Objective Two: Legitimacy and Accountability

The second objective examined how communicative strategies influence public perceptions of legitimacy and accountability. The descriptive results showed moderate trust, concern about propaganda, and frequent verification of police messages. Respondents recognised transparency efforts but remained cautious about intent. The correlation analysis indicated that framing, transparency, and accountability are positively associated with legitimacy. The regression model revealed that these factors are strong predictors of perceived legitimacy, while perceived propaganda weakens confidence. Behavioural influence was modest and not a significant predictor. These findings indicate that digital communication contributes to legitimacy, but its effect is conditional on message credibility, consistency, and perceived sincerity.

5.3.3 Research Objective Three: Dialogue vs. Control

The third objective assessed whether GPS social media promotes public dialogue or reinforces narrative control. The findings showed limited perceptions of dialogue and strong perceptions of broadcast-style communication. Respondents expressed hesitation about expressing dissent and noted that the platforms prioritise information dissemination over participatory engagement. Chi-square tests indicated that higher-educated respondents were more aware of restricted dialogue. The correlation analysis showed that perceived dialogue enhances

legitimacy, transparency, and accountability, while perceptions of narrative dominance weaken them. Overall, GPS communication was viewed as managed, selective, and oriented toward agenda control rather than interactive exchange.

5.4 Conclusions

The study set out to examine how the Ghana Police Service uses social media to shape public understanding of its activities, and how these communicative strategies influence legitimacy, accountability, and opportunities for dialogue. The findings show that GPS digital communication is understood by the public as structured, intentional, and heavily oriented toward the reinforcement of institutional authority. Respondents observe clear law-and-order messaging, consistent themes of control, and deliberate efforts to guide interpretation during moments of public uncertainty. These patterns confirm that narrative framing is a central tool in the GPS's digital strategy and reflect broader policing communication practices identified in the literature.

The findings also reveal that legitimacy in this context is shaped by a blend of visibility, message credibility, and perceived strategic intent. Transparency and accountability contribute positively to legitimacy, but the effect is weakened when respondents detect selective disclosure or persuasive intent. The data show that publics engage critically with GPS communication, verify claims, and recognise attempts at narrative management. Legitimacy is therefore negotiated rather than assumed, and depends on how publics interpret both content and institutional motives.

The analysis further shows that GPS digital platforms do not function as open spaces for public dialogue. Respondents describe the communication environment as broadcast-driven, with limited responsiveness and reduced safety for dissent. Engagement is seen as managed rather than participatory. These perceptions align with concerns about constrained public spheres,

where state actors use digital platforms to distribute information while maintaining control of interpretive boundaries. As a result, opportunities for productive exchange remain limited, and publics approach the platforms with caution.

Taken together, the study concludes that the GPS uses social media to construct and stabilise institutional narratives, but this communication style restricts dialogue and creates mixed legitimacy outcomes. Strategic framing improves visibility and offers moments of reassurance, yet it also produces scepticism when publics sense persuasive intent. The legitimacy of the GPS in digital spaces therefore rests on a delicate balance between authority projection, transparency, and the ability to support open, respectful engagement. Strengthening this balance will be essential for improving police–public communication and advancing democratic digital governance in Ghana.

5.5 Implications of the Study

The findings carry important implications for theory, institutional practice, and public policy. These implications highlight how digital communication by the Ghana Police Service shapes public understanding of policing, influences the negotiation of authority, and affects democratic engagement in digital spaces.

5.5.1 Theoretical Implications

The study offers significant contributions to communication theory, especially in the areas of Framing Theory and digital public sphere scholarship. The two-factor structure of narrative framing confirms that institutional communication is complex and layered, combining authority-centred narratives with selective attempts at community positioning. This supports the view that framing is not a neutral process but a tool for shaping meaning and guiding interpretation. The findings also reinforce the argument that legitimacy in the digital age is performative, conditional, and influenced by visible cues, as earlier theorised in the literature.

The limited sense of dialogue challenges assumptions that digital platforms automatically democratise communication. Instead, the results illustrate that institutional power continues to shape discursive boundaries, even in participatory environments. The study therefore extends current debates by showing how narrative control, selective openness, and audience scepticism interact to shape public trust.

5.5.2 Practical Implications

For policing practice, the findings reveal that communication strategies must move beyond one-way messaging if the GPS seeks to build stronger trust and credibility. While visibility enhances institutional presence, publics interpret content through their own experiences, expectations, and critical questioning. High levels of information verification and concerns about propaganda indicate that public trust cannot be built through communication alone. It requires consistent transparency, responsiveness, and fairness in practice. The study also shows that publics want space for expression without fear. This signals a need for moderated but protective communication spaces where criticism is acknowledged rather than discouraged.

5.5.3 Policy Implications

The findings highlight the need for national policy frameworks that support transparent digital governance in the security sector. Policies should clarify standards for public communication, specify guidelines for crisis messaging, and promote balanced narratives that reflect both operational clarity and public concerns. Frameworks should also address accountability by ensuring that digital communication is not used solely for narrative control but also for meaningful engagement. This aligns with broader calls for digital governance models that balance institutional authority with public voice. Strengthening communication policies for the security sector will support public trust, reduce ambiguity, and reinforce democratic accountability in Ghana's digital environment.

5.6 Recommendations

This section presents recommendations for the Ghana Police Service, government policymakers, and civil society actors. Each recommendation is grounded in the study's findings and is intended to strengthen communicative practice, enhance institutional credibility, and support more constructive engagement between the police and the public.

5.6.1 Recommendations for the Ghana Police Service

The Ghana Police Service would benefit from developing communication practices that create more opportunities for genuine public dialogue. This includes introducing moderated Q&A sessions, structured comment interactions, and occasional live forums that allow citizens to raise concerns without feeling unsafe or exposed. Building stronger transparency practices is also essential. Timely explanations during major incidents, consistent communication across platforms, and clearer timelines for operational updates can help reduce public suspicion and strengthen institutional trust. The analysis further indicates the need for a better balance between authority-centred messaging and community-focused narratives. While operational updates remain important, integrating more educational content, safety guidance, and human-interest stories can enhance relatability and improve public confidence. Public concerns should also be acknowledged more consistently, particularly when issues recur across comment sections. Simple acknowledgment can reduce perceptions of institutional distance and reinforce a sense of respect for public voice. In addition, the GPS should work to reduce strategic ambiguity in sensitive posts, as messages that appear defensive or one-sided tend to strengthen scepticism. Finally, strengthening internal communication capacity is important. Officers responsible for digital engagement require specialised training in framing analysis,

digital moderation, and crisis communication to deliver communication that is both effective and credible.

5.6.2 Recommendations for Government and Policymakers

There is a clear need for national guidelines to govern digital communication within the security sector. Such guidelines should emphasise accuracy, timeliness, and institutional accountability, particularly during high-tension events. Strengthening oversight mechanisms is also essential. Regular reviews of contentious public communications can prevent escalation and ensure that messages do not obscure responsibility or generate unnecessary public anxiety. National policy frameworks should also promote digital rights and protect citizens who express dissent. Creating safe conditions for online expression reduces public hesitation and fosters healthier engagement. In addition, communication standards should be integrated into institutional performance reviews for police and related agencies. Evaluating communication practices as part of institutional performance strengthens accountability and encourages consistent adherence to best practices.

5.6.3 Recommendations for Civil Society and Media Actors

Civil society organisations and media actors play an important role in shaping public understanding of institutional communication. Expanding digital literacy programmes will help citizens interpret police messages with greater clarity and reduce the circulation of misinformation. Fact-checking groups should also strengthen collaborations with the GPS during crisis events, as timely verification promotes both accuracy and trust. Civil society actors can further support structured dialogue by organising spaces where citizens and police representatives engage in guided discussions, both online and offline. These platforms offer opportunities for constructive feedback and improve mutual understanding. Finally, independent monitoring of police communication practices remains important. Regular

assessments can help identify areas that require improvement and ensure that communication strategies remain aligned with democratic expectations of transparency and accountability.

5.7 Suggestions for Further Research

The study identified several areas that warrant further investigation. First, future research could explore how internal decision-making processes within the GPS shape communication choices. Understanding these internal dynamics would deepen insight into narrative construction. Second, qualitative studies could examine how citizens interpret specific posts during crises, offering richer accounts of public reasoning and emotion. Third, comparative research involving other security institutions could identify broader patterns in Ghana's digital governance landscape. Finally, longitudinal studies could track changes in communication strategies over time, especially as the GPS adopts new technologies and public expectations evolve.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE: CONTROLLING NARRATIVES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A CASE OF THE GHANA POLICE SERVICE

I am a postgraduate student at University of Media, Art and Communication (UniMAC) conducting a study on Controlling Narrative in Digital Age: A Case of Ghana Police Service. The purpose of this survey is to examine how the Ghana Police Service (GPS) uses social media to communicate with the public, how these messages are perceived, and how they may influence trust and engagement. Your responses will help the researcher gain a deeper understanding of institutional communication in the digital age.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without any consequence. The survey is anonymous, and no identifying information will be collected. All responses will be kept confidential and will be used solely for academic purposes. By proceeding with the questionnaire, you are indicating your informed consent to participate in this study. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study.

Section A: Demographic Information

Please select or fill in the appropriate response:

1. Age:
    - 18–24
    - 25–34
    - 35–44
    - 45–54
    - 55–64
    - 65 and above
2. Gender:
    - Male
    - Female
3. Level of Education:
    - Primary
    - Secondary
    - Tertiary
    - Postgraduate
4. Employment Status:
    - Employed
    - Unemployed
    - Student
    - Self-employed
    - Retired
5. Region of Residence: _____
6. How frequently do you use social media?
    - Daily
    - A few times a week
    - Rarely
    - Never

7. Which social media platforms do you use regularly? (Tick all that apply)
    - Facebook
    - Twitter (X)
    - Instagram
    - WhatsApp
    - TikTok

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

Section B: Exposure to GPS Social Media Content

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. The GPS uses social media to project a law-and-order narrative.					
9. I notice that GPS posts are crafted to emphasise security and control.					
10. GPS communication online reflects consistent themes of institutional authority.					
11. The GPS frames itself as a proactive and community-friendly organisation.					
12. I find GPS communication consistent with my lived experiences of policing.					
13. I trust GPS social media communication more than traditional media communication (TV, radio, newspapers).					
14. I primarily see GPS social media content because it is shared by my family or friends and not directly from the GPS account					
15. The GPS posts uses a formal, institutional voice rather than a casual, conversational one.					
16. I believe some of GPS social media posts directly counter or correct public misinformation about the police					
17. I believe the content posted by the GPS is consistent across different social media platform.					

Section C: Perceived Legitimacy and Accountability

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18. I consider GPS social media communication credible and trustworthy.					
19. I believe GPS uses its online platforms to demonstrate public accountability.					
20. The GPS's digital presence makes it appear more transparent.					

21. I feel more confident in the GPS because of its visibility on social media.					
22. I believe GPS social media posts sometimes function as propaganda rather than neutral information.					
23. GPS communication online influences me to change behaviour (e.g., reporting crime, following safety directives).					
24. I often verify GPS information from other sources before believing it.					
25. I believe the GPS's social media accounts provide sufficient details when explaining controversial incident.					
26. The GPS uses social media to take responsibility of mistakes or questionable actions when the occur					
27. The GPS social media post reduces my willingness to report an issue to them					

Section D: Public Engagement vs. Control of Discourse

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
28. The GPS encourages public dialogue through its social media posts.					
29. I believe citizen concerns are acknowledged by the GPS online.					
30. I feel hesitant to express dissent on GPS social media platforms.					
31. GPS online activity is aimed more at controlling narratives than promoting open discussion.					
32. I feel safe expressing criticism of the GPS on social media.					
33. The GPS responds adequately when citizens raise concerns online.					
34. The GPS uses social media more to broadcast than to foster dialogue.					
35. Compared to other state institutions (e.g., Fire Service, Immigration), the GPS communicates more effectively on social media.					
36. I believe the GPS monitors citizen account for critical comments or dissent.					
37. I have observed the GPS deleting critical comments on their post.					

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.