

## The Unethical Practices on Social Media

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**Abstract:** Social media has also become a common ground for individuals to practise unethical acts. This study discusses the unethical acts that people have been involved in on social media, its effects on people's wellbeing and roles of the society to reduce these unethical acts. The study uses quantitative design whereby respondents were given questionnaires. The study reveals that unethical acts on social media are a normal occurrence faced by the participants and little is being done to address the situation. Thus, it is recommended that various measures must be implemented to prevent such heinous acts on social media.

**Keywords:** social media, unethical practices, society

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has revolutionised on how people communicate with one another. It has made communication faster and easier. People have benefited tremendously from this. They are now able to talk to families and friends around the world, be up-to-date on local and international news, find information on their academic work, and also it is a great source of entertainment. However, the evolution of social media and technology has resulted in people misusing it. The students and staff have encountered problems when using social media. They have seen or been victims of unethical practises on social media.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and so forth has become common ground for individuals to post negative comments about each other. People are able to express their own thoughts, feelings and opinions without realising the effect it has on others. As a result, it may have negative effect on the individual exposed to such unethical practises. The individual may not be able to cope with the content that has been posted against him or her on social media such may cause a drastic effect on his or her physical and mental wellbeing.

Legal actions can be taken against such individuals. People need to be aware of the implications of posting against families/friends or even false information to the general public. Such unethical practices on social media are considered serious offences and can be charged in relation to post/comments made via social media. As such, the society plays an important role in reducing unethical practises on social media. Social media has become an integral part in an individual's life and is used every day thus it is important to understand how to use it in the best possible way without offending, disrespecting, humiliating and being disloyal and inconsiderate to another person.

This study includes extensive research into identifying the different types of unethical practises on social media and how it effects an individual's physical and mental wellbeing. It examines the possible legal actions that an individual can take and how the society can help reduce unethical practises on social media.

The data that gathered from this research paper is beneficial as social media has become a daily part of an individual lives and though it has various advantages, it also has its disadvantages. Unethical acts on social media are a rising concern and the study intends to find solution for this major issue faced by the society currently. Parents can benefit from this research by monitoring the activities of their child/children on social media as well as restricting contents which are not suitable for children. In addition, councillors can provide consultation to students when facing such unethical acts on social media and methods to cope when involved in such situations. Also, the government can use this data to create awareness on this major issue and create regulations and efficient authorities to look after the practises that take place over the social media.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media has become a society within a society. It has created a network of people interacting virtually regardless of time and place. Though social media has played an important tool in communication, it also has its disadvantages. This research paper is important as it will define the unethical acts taking place in social media and how people are affected by it so that proper legislations can be implemented to prevent such activities giving rise to in future. This is a major issue taking place in this digital era and there has been

numerous research papers published however the following research papers were referred to as they have somewhat relevance to our study.

Social media is broadly defined as “any online service through which users can create and share a variety of content” (Bolton et al., 2009). Bolton et al. (2009) study was conducted in the USA, relied on self-report by different age-groups to deduce Generation Y’s social media use and the paper’s conceptual framework yields a detailed set of research questions. The introduction of social media has effect on the individual’s psychological, emotional, physical well-being and social development. Individual at times for social acceptance and popularity, disclose sensitive and personal information which later on may have serious negative consequences. People are aware of the potential dangers of social-network participation (such as defamation, humiliation) as they have little control over access to their information on social networks. In addition, social media users are more prone to making riskier financial decision that is, if things go wrong, they can gain support from online users though they are strangers.

Acknowledging that social media is complex, and in light of the vast and rapidly changing array of platforms and practices available in the current social media landscape, the review examined the literature on impacts of social media on the wellbeing of children and young people with reference to: mental and physical health; identity and belonging; formal and informal learning; play and recreation; consumer practices; civic and political engagement; risk and safety; and family and intergenerational relationships. These eight themes relate to recognized indicators of children and young people’s wellbeing (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2013; Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, 2011a).

Social media dimensions can also be deployed in negative ways – specifically in relation to content which can lead to potentially harmful practices. This focus on content assists in identifying the potentially negative impacts of online practices which pastes a negative picture of social media. For example, the videos or documentation of gang fights and communities which promote eating disorders or self- injury). An Australian Communications and Media Authority report highlighted one in five 8 to 13 year olds and one in four 14 to 17 year olds have “seen or experienced something on the internet in the last year that bothered them” (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2013: 35). Examples of problematic content include pro-eating disorder sites, normalising and/or glorifying suicide-related deaths, online hate speech and radicalisation. social media; suggesting online campaigns which support young people to counter negative messages could be an effective strategy An example of such a campaign is Appreciate - a - Mate, an app developed with Australian teenagers to promote positive body image and communication (Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, 2014). Online sharing can also be a forum for the rapid spread of information which may include videos, notes, methods and suicide prevention schemes which can promote teenagers to being normal and not to be affected by the negative practices on social media. (Robinson et al., 2014a) Thus, the above studies have discussed factors which are essential to the current research however the study intends to find the unethical practises on social media, its consequences and means and measures to prevent it.

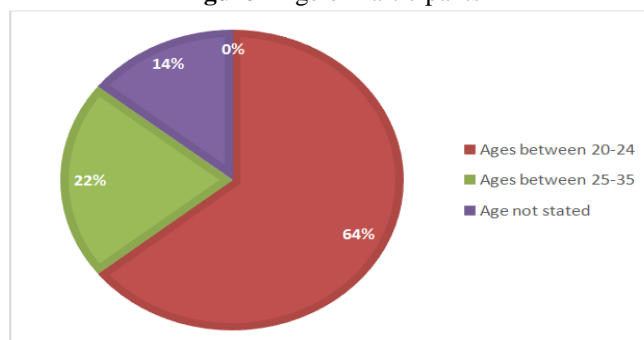
### III. METHODOLOGY

Participants for the study were randomly selected using simple random sampling method. Questionnaires were distributed to participants and both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Quantitative method was used to find a precise numerical value of participants who have seen unethical practises on social media, have been involved in it and the influence society has on what they post on social media. Qualitative method was used to engage the participants in an in-depth discussion on what they believes were the consequence of unethical practises media are on a person’s well-being as well as provide solution both legal and societal base.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Socio- Demographic Information of the Participant

Figure 1 Age of Participants

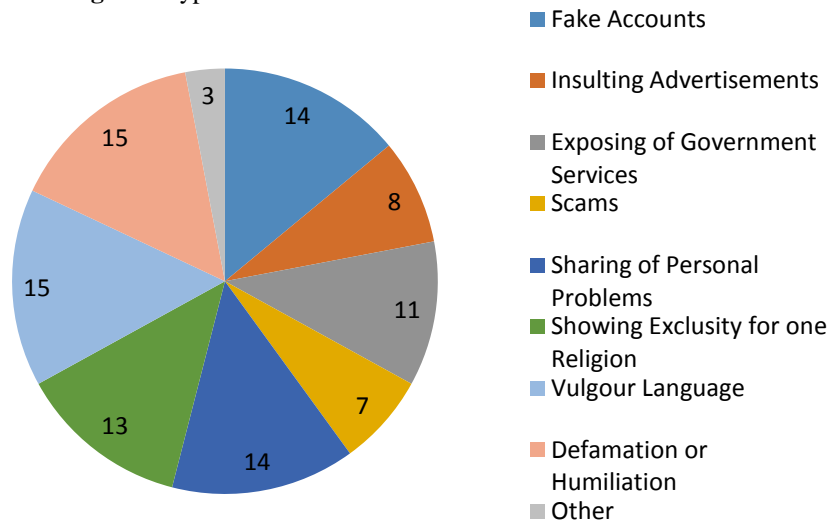


The above figure 1 shows that 64% of the participants were aged between 20-24, the 22% was aged between 25-35 and the 14% did not mention their age. Bolton et al. (2009) has indicated that social media users 18 to 34 years old are more likely than older age groups to prefer social media for interactions with acquaintances, friends and family. As such we believe that our sample would be an average age of 25 as they would most likely have seen unethical acts being practised on social media.

**Unethical Practises on Social Media**

This study aimed to identify some of the unethical practises participants have seen on social media as well as the physical and mental effects on a person’s wellbeing.

**Figure 2**Types of Unethical Practises Seen on Social Media



The above analysis shows the number of people who found each of the problems stated on social media sites. The 15% of the participants has seen Defamation or Humiliation and Vulgar Language as the most unethical practices seen on social media. Next to this is, sharing of personal problems which was identified by 14% of the participants. The third major practice experience by 13% of the participants are showing of exclusivity of one’s religion and exposing of government services. Also, 7% of the respondents stated scams are also part of unethical practices on social media. Others were identified by only 3% of the respondents which included cyber bullying, harassment, stalking, gender inequality, human rights and fake death news.

**Figure 3**Involvements of Unethical Practices on Social Media

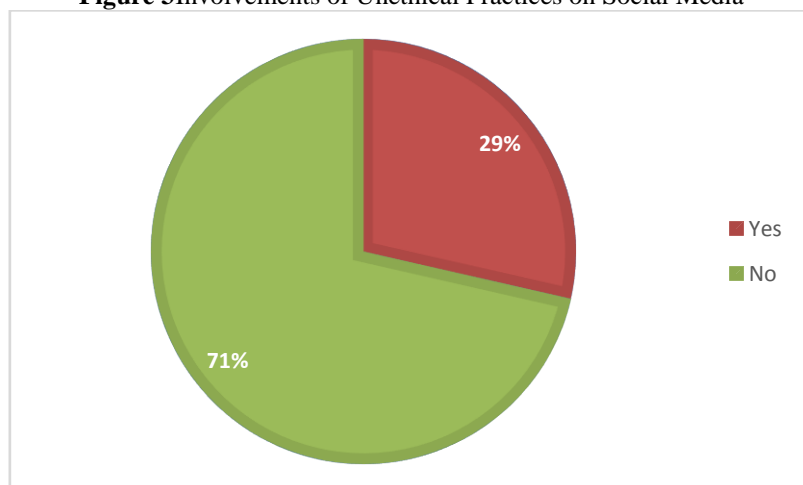


Figure 3 shows 71% respondents denied their involvements in unethical practices on social media while 29% of the respondents agreed they have been involved in such unethical practices that take place over social media.

## **Effect of unethical practices on person's wellbeing**

### Depression

An individual's daily activities should be comprised in meeting families and friends, exercising and various other activities that brings pleasure and boost understanding. Individuals when engaging too much off their times on social media result in their family time and social bonding moments being decreased which result in loneliness. As such, when being faced with unethical acts on social media it becomes difficult for them to approach and share their problems. This leads to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). In addition, respondents have claimed that sharing of personal problems is another factor resulting in depression as that particular personal information becomes shared by people, seen and commented on, thus becomes viral. As such, they are creating depression on themselves by themselves. Also, respondents have stated negative comment, status updates or content on an individual's rights, privacy and so forth result in generating feelings of stress, pressure, jealousy, dislike, lowers self-esteem and loneliness. This all factors continuously creates depression on the individuals life as he or she will not be able to cope with daily activities and will not approach anyone as they constantly worry what others might be thinking of him or her.

### Suicidal Thoughts

Respondents have identified individuals subject to negative criticism resulting in humiliation, defamation in public (open group pages) as the leading cause of suicides. People get ashamed of what has been posted against them on social media and to end the stigma, start thinking of suicidal thoughts to run away from their problems. Furthermore, other respondents have agreed that cyberbullying faced by individuals, take up the option of suicide. Due to continuous and deliberate harassment, individuals having no choice and not sharing their problems, end up taking their own lives. A respondent has also stated that social media can also give variety of ideas of how to carry out suicidal attempts.

### Stress

People being victims of unethical social media practises become stressed about themselves as well as other's opinions about them. Respondents has identified that some people often sharing personal problems on social media has at times become a "joke" to other online users. This may at times lead to humiliation and use of vulgar languages. The individual might get disheartened from other people's opinions which result in stress. Respondents claimed that as a result of unethical practises faced by individual on social media, it will result in stress in their daily lives which may lead to health problems. Other respondents believe that sharing of personal information on social media, people tend to forget that by doing so fraudsters take advantage of this. A respondent believes social media is a cause of stress as it is a public domain, and when faced with unethical acts on social media, it becomes an invasion of privacy since people have no control of information on the internet. Other scenarios identified by respondents include scams, insulting advertisement and fake accounts which result in deception of trust, negative publicity and fake identity. All in all, the person's sole attention will always be focused on social media which will affect their mental and physical capabilities. They become centre of attention to the public and are not able to approach people.

### Family Reputation

All the participants have claimed that victims of unethical social media practises has a disastrous impact on the family reputation. Respondents stated that sharing of personal problems, use of vulgar language, negative information or pictures towards the individual or the family has a negative impact on the family reputation as people will definitely gossip about it. An example given by one of the respondents is relationship status posted on Facebook becomes public and known to family relatives which may affect family reputation if the individual belongs to a strict Indian family. Social media has broken the barriers of privacy and family member, friends, teacher or any other member of the community are able to know what has been posted against you that can tarnish the name of the individual and the family reputation. In a country like Fiji, where everyone is closely knit with blood ties and people are known for their family lineage, family reputation is recognition in the face of society and it being destroyed is a shameful thing.

### Disagreement

There will always be disagreement because every individual has a different view and perception on the matter. A respondent has stated that families at times have disagreements which they take to social media as such conflicts, misunderstanding and arguments arise with one another and results in stress. Another respondent claims it can lead to behavioural problems in terms of violent behaviour against the other party. In addition it can also lead to anxiety disorders. Also a respondent has stated that due to disagreement with one another, they

will not be able to communicate properly and will appear tensed. Participants have also identified factors such as exposing of government services, insulting advertisements, showing exclusivity's of one's religion, use of vulgar languages as the result of disagreements. All individuals have different opinions and social media has become a familiar battleground in which clash of opinions takes place.

#### Others

A respondent states that revenge becomes another factor that affects person's wellbeing. The individual might become violent towards the offender due to the humiliation he or she experienced and as a result from their (offender) behaviour seek revenge on them. Another participants claims that a result of the bad publicity on social media, it can result in family being torn apart, divorce and so forth. In addition another factor identified by a participant was indulging in alcohol or drug abuse to ease the pain and humiliation that he or she suffered from. A respondent has also highlighted the case of defamation which was Fiji Fashion Week v. Radrodoro. In the case Ms Whippy Knight and Fiji Fashion Week alleged that Mr Radrodoro published defamatory and false statements about them on the social platform and due to which they reputation has been seriously damaged. Moreover offensive words were used by Radrodoro on Facebook. The case was successful and Mr Radrodoro was ordered to pay. This case gives an insight that they are many scenarios like this that people are facing on social media but is yet to report to relevant authorities.

#### Possible solutions of unethical practises on social media

The study examines the possible solutions that was given by the respondents.

#### Legal consequences of unethical practices of social media

All participants have stated that they should be heavy fines and penalties imposed on the person caught doing unethical acts on social media. In addition, a thorough police investigation need to take place and ensure all culprits are caught and taken to justice. However, a respondent believes that not much legal actions are being taken in Fiji to address the problem.

Figure 4 Influence of the Society on the Contents Posted on Social Media

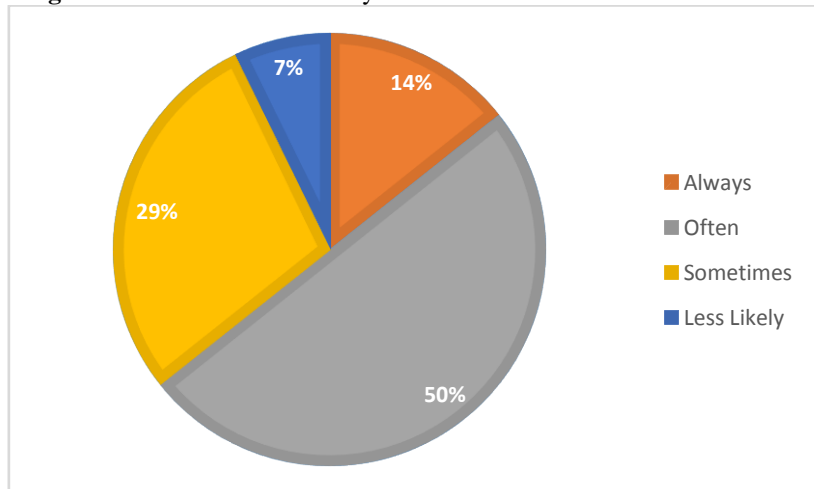


Figure shows that 50% of the respondents are often influenced by society what they post on social media. The 29% has indicated sometimes as society plays a minor role in deciding what needs to be posted on social media or not. The 14% of the respondents are always influenced by the society on what they post on social media. The 7% of the respondents show that society has few or no influence on what an individual post online.

#### Possible steps that can be taken to stop unethical practices on social media

The respondents gave their different opinions on how unethical practices can be curbed. Majority of the respondents suggested having awareness programmes in educational institutions, imposing strict fines and reporting to legal authorities. In order to spread this message to a wider audience a participant suggested to have talkback show on mass media, advertisements and community messages by mass media. There should be strict rules and regulations implemented by government. And also enforce an anti- cyber bullying team or unit that would look after the matters regarding unethical practices on social media. There is a need for individuals to have strict privacy of their accounts so that it would become difficult to hack or other people to misuse the accounts. Respondents recommended parents to be vigilant and active in monitoring their children's activities

on social media. Parents can protect sites which the children are not supposed to access and can also educate their children to use it in a right manner.

### **Roles of society towards overcoming unethical practices on social media.**

This study captures how the respondents believe the society could help in overcoming the unethical practices on social media

#### Role of community

Community plays a major role in influencing an individual's decision and mindset to do things in life which can be either good or bad. Majority of the respondents stated that in order to overcome this problem they have to work together in creating awareness on the unethical practices of social media and also organize group meetings or social gatherings to discuss on such matters to the community so that can share it with their family members and take precautions. A participant stated that communities can have a day for cyber bullying where they can advocate to all people on the unethical practices. Through social gatherings communities can invite potential guest speakers to create awareness on the issue of unethical practices on social media. Furthermore, such speakers might have a huge impact on the people's mind-set on the usage of social media since it is perceived that communities might not know about such practices which are happening around them. Also strong emphasis to completely refrain from posting irrelevant stuffs on social sites and do not support unethical practices on social media.

#### Role of parents

Parents built foundation for their children in the learning process as they are the first teachers who tell the difference between what is right or wrong. Parent's upbringing reflects a child's behaviour in the society. Respondents gave similar opinions on the roles of parents towards overcoming unethical practices on social media. Parents should spend quality time with their children and always try to find out if they are facing any problems in their life. If the children are on social media then parents should monitor their activities online and should place special restricts on which sites to their children must go to. One of the respondent said that parents to tell children not to take part in an open groups on social media and discuss the consequences of controversies on social media. Another respondent stated that small children should not be allowed to use social media as many children create fake accounts as they are not able to meet the age requirement. Hence, Parents should teach good values to their children and teach them the good and bad effects of social media. As children are naïve and they can be easily manipulated by other people so it is important to have counselling sessions with children as suggested a respondent.

#### Role of government

Government plays a crucial role in the society as the society is dependent on the government for their daily survival. Government becomes the voice of the people whereby it plays a major role in influencing an individual's decision. Most of the respondents suggested that government should come up with strict laws which could impose fines to individuals who indulge themselves in unethical practices. Mostly the law must be in form of penalties and fines or taken to task by the legal systems if caught in doing such activities on social media. The respondents stated that social media accounts should only be accessible to certain age group children. For example having a law which strictly allows children above a certain age to own social media pages. Another respondent said that police and cyber-crime unit to be equally equipped to take action on such issues whereby they should get government's full support in carrying out their duties. The government should support the legal authorities and create awareness to the general public as it is the largest platform which can cover a major audience.

#### Role of schools

After parents schools are the second teachers to an individual's life. An individual spends majority of their time in school as it gives knowledge, provides information and enlightens an individual's future dreams to become successful person in life. The respondents suggested incorporating classes in family life education unit so that the students are well aware of the negative and positive impacts of social media. The classes concluded should teach moral value lessons to children and advocate on the unethical usage of social media and its impacts on the individual or the long term effects on lives of people. School is the best place to teach children the difference between the do's and don'ts of life because they still are in that developing phase and it easy to feed children the correct information before it's too late. Some respondents suggested having a long week's awareness program on the impacts of social media. Here schools can organize competitions for students such as poster design, essays, drama or poems on the effects of social media. Guest speakers can be invited to make a greater difference. A respondent also said that students should be restricted on the usage of social media in schools as students can misuse the computer labs. The school can block certain sites such as face book and YouTube on their computers.

#### Role of religious institution

Religion is a set of belief which shows a direction in a person's life. It plays a major part in a person's life as it makes an individual feel where they actually belong to. Majority of the respondents feel that religious preachers should advocate on the unethical issues on social media in functions. One of the respondents stated to have young leaders appointed amongst religious groups who better knows about the effects of social media and can create awareness amongst other youths. Moving on, respondents stated the importance of installing moral values in the youths through the religious functions organized by communities. Another respondent suggested that communities can arrange special meetings with the help of religious leaders to talk with the people of the particular area.

#### Role of mass media

Mass media is a significant force which can influence a larger proportion of audience because of its accessibility to people. Nowadays people have reach to various forms of mass media. Many respondents suggested the mass media to have more advertisements on television, radio and place billboards on the unethical practices of social media. That is, small video presentations about the unethical practices to be shown on television during intervals. Also newspaper articles can be written on such practices which can create awareness amongst the younger generation. Respondents also stated to have talk back shows on mass media to show the consequences on such acts and how can an individual refrain from doing such unethical practices.

### **V. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Nowadays, almost every person has access to the social media one way or another and it becomes solely their responsibility on how they intend to use it. The society at large has a part to play in reducing the unethical practises that take place over the social media. The following recommendations were made:

- The government need to provide resources as to assist the Cyber Crime Unit of Fiji to be more effective and vigilant as well as emphasize the importance of this issue to the general public by creating awareness program.
- Schools should implement a learning curriculum since most social media users exist in school and there is a need to educate on the proper use of social media. There can also be competitions organized within schools to advocate on the increasing cybercrimes that take place in the country.
- Parent needs to be vigilant and monitor the activities of their children on social media. Also, parents needs to have constant family time which would create family bonding moments and will allow the children to discuss their problems freely without any hesitations or fear.
- The Cyber Crime Unit needs to be active by spreading awareness in schools, business institutions, villages and so forth as to better communicate with the society and to identify problems people face and how it can be effectively dealt with.
- An advance online reporting system can be created where individuals who face the problems of unethical practices on social media can share their problems with their identity kept confidential.

### **VI. CONCLUSION**

Social media plays an integral part in society as it is the most preferred mode of communication but there is a growing concern of unethical practices on social media. The research has identified unethical practices on social media which our respondents have seen or been involved in. Though the identified practices are a normal occurrences seen on social media, there are various other unethical practices which has not been identified in our society. The victims of unethical acts on social media has a disastrous impact on their mental and physical capabilities as a result they are not able to perform or to cope with life and may end up making bad decisions for themselves.

The government has a major part to play in reducing the heinous crimes that take place over the social media. This can be in the form of having strict laws, heavy penalties and fines on people who indulge in such criminal activities. The various actors of society also play a vital role in curbing the problem of unethical practices on social media. This includes, the community, parents, government, schools, religion institution and mass media. If the entire society plays their part, the issue of unethical practices on social media can be controlled.

Hence, this research paper highlights some unethical practices stated by the respondents however further research needs to be done on other such acts that is not specified. The government can implement strategies as they are responsible for the safety and security of all its citizen.

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7.0 Appendices

**UUU 300: RESEARCH PAPER QUESTIONNAIRE**

**TOPIC: UNETHICAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

“We the UUU 300 students are carrying out a research on the above topic and request if you could take few minutes to fill the questionnaire.”

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What practises you have seen on social media? (Please tick all that apply)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Defamation or Humiliation                | <input type="checkbox"/> Vulgar language                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Showing of exclusivity of one’s religion | <input type="checkbox"/> Exposing on government services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sharing of personal problems             | <input type="checkbox"/> Insulting advertisement         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scams                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Fake accounts                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) _____             |  |

4. Have you been involved in such practises as stated above? (Please tick only one box)

- Yes  No

5. With reference to question number one, how do you think such practises affects a person’s well-being? As stated below, please explain.

- Depression \_\_\_\_\_
- Suicidal thoughts \_\_\_\_\_
- Stress \_\_\_\_\_
- Family reputation \_\_\_\_\_
- Disagreement \_\_\_\_\_
- Others (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

6. With reference to question number one, what are the legal consequences of unethical practises of social media? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Does the society has an influence on what you post on social media (Please tick only one box)

- |                                      |                                 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less likely | <input type="checkbox"/> Often  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes   | <input type="checkbox"/> Always |

8. In your opinion, what can be done to stop the unethical practises on social media?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. What roles should the following institutions play towards overcoming unethical practises on social media?

- Community \_\_\_\_\_
- Parents \_\_\_\_\_
- Government \_\_\_\_\_



- Schools \_\_\_\_\_
- Religious Institution \_\_\_\_\_
- Mass media \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for your cooperation. All information gathered will be kept confidential.*

IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Krishma Chandra. "The Unethical Practises on Social Media." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) 22.7 (2017): 46-54.