

**RESEARCH PAPER**

A Criminological Study of Link Between Social Media Addiction and Deviant Behavior among the Youth of Pakistan

¹Islahuddin, ²Hyder Ali Memon and ³Siraj ul Haq

1. LLM Scholars, Institute of Law, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Criminology, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan
3. LLM Scholars, Institute of Law, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan

Corresponding Author

islahuddinnarejo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the issue of social media addiction, the reasons behind the addiction, and its connection to deviant behavior among young people in Pakistan. As the digital use grows, anxiety regarding the addictive usage and their effects in behavioral trends has risen. The qualitative approach was used with the help of purposive sampling where 40 high-intensity social media users urban and rural were interviewed, and two psychologists and one psychiatrist were interviewed in-depth. Thematic analysis indicated that addiction is a major and inseparable factor with antisocial and increasing deviant behaviors. A contributing factor was behavioural addiction, peer pressure, psychological and environmental antecedents, parental neglect, and ineffective enactment of digital legislation and policy. Among them, the issue of parental neglect and ineffective state-level digital governance became the prevalent ones. The paper advocates greater enforcement of policies, digital literacy programs, curriculum changes, easy access to psychological assistance, and greater parental surveillance to ensure the adverse impacts of social media addiction are controlled and mitigated.

Keywords: Anti-Social Behaviors, Cyberbullying, Deviant Behaviour, Peer Pressure, Social Media addiction, Youth, Pakistan

Introduction

The unparalleled growth of the social media platforms has impacted the communication trend in the world. Social media also made the communication between individuals on the border with other people conveniently. The various social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, and Twitter, snapchat etc. have made the internet more accessible, particularly to the youth population that makes social media a crucial aspect of life. One cannot refute the fact that despite the ease of communication that these platforms have provided, the platforms are not without serious implications including negative ones especially on the psychological and behavioral health of young people (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019; Smith and Duggan, 2013). This dilemma is not ending here rather it highlights the most alarming signs especially among the youth. Pakistan is also no exception to such an escalating to serious concern. The growing addiction to digital platforms has sparked debates regarding its potential influence on deviant behaviors, making it a crucial domain for criminological research.

Andreassen (2015) stated that the usage of social networking sites is so addictive to the extent that it affects daily activities. Similarly, addictive and excessive usage of social media platforms can also be labelled as social media addiction which often contributes to disregard and neglect to the important arena of life which may include diverse range of relationships, obligations and responsibilities associated with education and academics, physical health as well (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Despite the fact that sufficient literature is already available on the psychological aspects of social media addiction, correlation of the addiction with criminology regarding the fostering of the deviant behaviors among youth, has not been completely looked into and examined. Moreover, this point is very much relevant to the Pakistani society where the youth constitute a significant proportion of the population, and the country is experiencing the unprecedented increase in the internet usage and social media engagement. The exorbitantly high use of social media makes it increasingly difficult for young people to distinguish between healthy and harmful online behaviors, potentially leading to exposure to risky content and engagement in harmful activities, plunging them into highly antisocial activities both offline as well as online.

Social media addiction bring along with it some potential threats. However, the matter of serious concern here is its serious potential to enhance the deviant behavior tendencies among the youth especially the teenagers. There is also no denying to the fact that these social media forums have greatly facilitated the spread of inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and other forms of cybercrime (Muzaffar, et. al., 2020 Tufekci, 2014). Additionally, it is alarming to note that the environment associated with these platforms mostly encourages deviant behavior due to the perceived anonymity and lack of accountability (Giles, 2006). Resultantly, this instant issue has occupied a vital importance in Pakistan, where a lack of comprehensive regulation over social media use, coupled with socio-economic disparities, creates a breeding ground for criminal behavior being gradually cemented among youth.

Over the recent past, there has been an unprecedented influx of social media sites especially among the young people of Pakistan. This change has consequently led to changed traditional patterns of communication, socialization, and behavior. It should, however, be mentioned that this shift and excessive dependence on social media sites sparked some disturbing thoughts on its psychological and behavioral effects, in particular, the development of addictive nature (Salam, et. al., 2024). Social media has been turned into two pronged problem. On the one hand, it is a behavioral health problem and on the other hand, it presents a possible danger to the emergence of anti-social and deviant behavior. The already addicted people at these sites tend to show restlessness, aggression, isolation and emotional instability. These tendencies combined with peer pressure, lack of parental control, and unlimited access to electronic gadgets lead to a situation, in which deviant behaviour can start to emerge and develop.

Although there is an increasing body of anecdotal and clinical evidence in Pakistan, there is an evident gap in empirically tainted criminological research that examines the connection between social media dependence and deviant conduct among young people. The majority of the available literature is focused on either psychological effects or trends in the utilization of technology, which has caused an important gap in the discourse of criminology. Against this background, this study tries to find this possible correlation between the social media addiction and deviant behaviour among Pakistani youth that may be seen in criminological and behavioural terms with an accent on the qualitative information provided by psychologists, psychiatrist and also young social media addicts themselves. As such, the research also aims at providing policy, education practice and preventive measures in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, as it engages the youth of Pakistan. Although, there may be some bright sides of this absorbing engagement ease of communication, entertainment, certain emerging concerns about its potential negative impact, particularly social media addiction and its relationship to deviant behavior cannot be ruled out. In this backdrop, this literature review attempts to elucidate and explore the link between social media addiction and deviant among youth in Pakistan.

Social media addiction is characterized by excessive and compulsive use of social media platforms, leading to significant negative effects on an individual's daily life, including their mental health, social interactions, and academic performance (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). The same predicament situation is prevalent in Pakistan whereby a growing number of research indicates the increasing trend of social media addiction among youth. Sohail et al. (2020) has stated that youth residing in the urban areas of Pakistan spend a lot of time on social media platforms which include Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Having said that this over dependence and involvement in the social media affects their education and relationships. Thus, it reveals that this type of addiction has certain links with the various psychological problems which include anxiety, depression, ultimately influencing behavior and including criminal tendencies.

Socio-economic dynamics and challenges also have a deep impact on people of Pakistan, especially the youth that can lead to detrimental impacts of social media addiction. These said issues may not be restricted to the issues of high political instability, economic inequality, unemployment rates and limited educational opportunities (Khan, 2019). Nonetheless, these may however, may end up creating conditions which ultimately leave harmful influences of social media, causing to deviant or criminal behaviors.

Many countries have now come up with an approach of banning the use of internet sites, social media content and similar other stuff having a detrimental effect on the young ones. Feng & Guo (2013) investigated that Chinese government have devise strategies for blocking the website which are unimportant. Important websites. By building upon the legacy, China expanded the scope of restriction in 2023 by effecting new regulations especially aimed at minors in order to reduce screen time consumed on playing games and livestreaming.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Control Theory (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990)

According to this theory individuals who demonstrate low levels of self-discipline and impulsivity are more prone to indulge in deviant behaviors. Individuals lacking self-control are never afraid of seeking immediate gratification and take risks without considering the consequences of their actions. When this aspect is taken into consideration, especially for the social media addiction, youth who are not able to regulate themselves get immensely involved in online environments. This deficiency of self-restraint is demonstrated in various forms of cyber delinquency, such as cyberbullying, sexting, or engaging with explicit or illegal content. This theory is also applicable in Pakistan, where digital literacy and psychological support services are limited, many young individuals may lack the emotional tools to develop strong self-control, leaving them more susceptible to both addiction and deviant online behavior.

Social Control Theory

Social control theory was developed by Travis Hirschi in 1969 posits conventional social institutions family, school, and religion act as the restraining force for the individuals from engaging in delinquent acts. In this regard Hirschi's theory highlights that when four states of individual binding characteristics i.e. attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief are weakened, individuals develop tendency to commit crimes. This tendency may have long term detrimental impacts on Pakistani by reducing face-to-face interactions with family members, decreasing academic involvement, and detaching users from societal norms and values. As a result, social media addiction can contribute to a breakdown in social control, thereby increasing the risk of deviant behavior.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory was presented by Bandura, 1977 that argues that behavior learning of individuals is done through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. There is immense amount of significance of modeling, where individuals mimic the behaviors of influential or admirable. In this regard, it is important to note that Pakistani youth when exposed to online figures demonstrating and promoting any anti-social ideologies, may succumb to similar behaviors in real life. Furthermore, environment being shown online apparently is quite deficient in projecting or demonstrating the negative consequences, which can reinforce the perception that such actions are acceptable or even desirable. The lack of regulation on digital platforms, combined with impressionable minds, makes youth vulnerable to the effects described by this theory.

Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979)

Routine activity theory propounded by Cohen & Felson, 1979 demonstrate that crime takes place when three elements namely a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship come together in time and space. The same situation applied in the context of social media addiction where these three conditions are often met. Young social media addicts often fall prey. Additionally, in this situation offenders hide their identity as parental control and institutional supervision is lacking. Youth in Pakistan also find themselves at high risk as parental monitoring is lacking in Pakistan resultantly they become perpetrators themselves. The theory helps explain the idea that digital platforms have become a breeding ground for deviant behaviour, especially among the individuals who are left unsupervised and vulnerable.

Power-Control Theory (Hagan, 1989)

Power-control theory also has direct relevance and affiliation with deviant behavior and criminal tendencies by explaining the relationship between gender, family structure, and delinquency. According to this theory in patriarchal families in Pakistan boys often receive more freedom, while girls are subjected to more stringent rules and monitoring. As a result, boys are statistically more likely to engage in delinquent behavior due to fewer constraints, while girls, being more closely monitored, exhibit lower levels of deviance. As the social and cultural dynamics predominantly indicate in relation to social media use, this theory suggests that male youth may have greater exposure to deviant online content and more freedom to engage in risky behavior, such as cyber aggression, participation in online scams, or accessing illicit materials. Contrary to that girls may be more restricted in their internet use, they are not often targets of online crimes such as blackmail or harassment. This theory emphasizes how gendered power dynamics within the family contribute to differences in social media behavior and related deviant tendencies.

Differential Association Theory: (Edwin Sutherland, 1939)

Edwin Sutherland, an American Criminologist posits that criminal behavior emanates out of the social interaction with others in the society. Learning of this type takes place through the communication taking place within the closest and intimate groups. The process involve the acquiring of both the techniques and the motives, attitudes, and rationalizations for criminal behavior.

Anomie Theory (Emile Durkheim- 1893 and Robert K. Merton -1938)

The Anomie theory was initially propounded by Emile Durkheim and subsequently improved by Robert K. Merton in 1938. The theory marked a significant shift from its initial idea of state of normlessness resulting from rapid social change to deviance as a result of the disconnect between societal goals and the legitimate means to achieve them.

Social Media Addiction and Deviant Behaviour

Social media addiction has been associated with the types of deviant behavior. If globally observed, many studies indicate correlation between excessive social media use and dangerous behaviors such as cyberbullying, identity theft, and online harassment (Smith & Duggan, 2013). Moreover, exposure of individuals to violent or illicit content on social media has also certain association and link with an increased likelihood of engaging in offline deviant and criminal activities, including theft, vandalism, and violence (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). These deviant behaviors are mainly prevalent among youth who may easily fall prey to the influence of online content.

As far as the impact of this deviant behavior in Pakistan is concerned, research by Rehman et al. (2020) examined the impact of social media on youth behavior and explored that exposure of youth to an extremist and violent content online lure them to accept radicalized and unconventional views and thus they engage in illegal activities.

Youth Vulnerability to Deviant Behavior due to Social Media Addiction

Pakistani youth, particularly those in urban areas, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the negative effects of social media addiction. Ali and Mehmood (2019) posit that youth addicted to social media have relatively more propensity to indulge in in cybercrimes. The types of cybercrimes are not limited. However, some of the types included online fraud, spreading misinformation hacking etc. It is quite alarming to notice that in some of the cases the overuse use of social media has its links with the glamorization of criminal behavior, which may have a long term indelible impact on youth by alluring them in pursuit of validation or excitement (Bashir, 2017).

The concerns regarding the cybercrimes in Pakistan are scaling up with the passage of time as it is evident from the fact that youth are found involved in playing a significant role behind the escalation of these deviant and criminal activities. Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA, 2021) has also reported that there has been increase in the cybercrime activities. According to Bashir (2017), youth take a full advantage of the facility of anonymity provided by social media platforms to indulge in criminal activities without the fear of consequences, which provide them an urge to become part of illegal acts.

Existing Body of Laws on Social Media Addiction in Pakistan

Pakistan has been prolific in terms of legislation- law making, rules and regulations to maintain the decorum and smooth functioning of public and private institutions. Despite the existing regulations in place, the extent of their full and effective implementation has remained unclear over the years. Regarding the social media control, Pakistan has introduced "The Citizen's Protection Rules, (2020), "Removal and Blocking of unlawful online content (2021)" subsequently replaced with the "Removal and Blocking of Unlawful online content (Procedure, oversight and safeguard), Rules, 2021. Moreover, rules relating to electronic and cybercrimes are also in place in Pakistan which include "Pakistan Electronics Crime Act, 2016 (PECA)". Although, number of laws are in place in Pakistan, their effectiveness is a question mark due to absence of proper monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system to evaluate the laws. Meanwhile, the problem of social media addiction persists and continues to grow at an alarming pace, putting the life of our youth at stake.

Material and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using a thematic analysis approach to explore the relationship between social media addiction and deviant behaviour among youth in Pakistan. A qualitative approach was selected due to the exploratory nature of the topic and the need to understand emotional, psychological, and social dynamics in

depth. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather rich primary data, allowing participants the flexibility to express their experiences and perceptions.

A purposive sampling strategy was applied to select two groups of participants: (1) two psychologists from the University of Sindh, Jamshoro, and one psychiatrist from Mirpurkhas, who provided expert insights; and (2) forty male social media addicts from both urban and rural areas, selected based on their self-reported excessive social media use and observable behavioral impacts. This ensured that participants possessed relevant experiences aligned with the study objectives. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, recorded with prior permission, transcribed, and analyzed.

Thematic analysis was carried out following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Although theoretical perspectives such as self-control theory, social learning theory, social control theory, routine activity theory, power-control theory, differential association theory, and anomie theory were reviewed to contextualize the findings, they were not part of the analytical procedure itself.

The study acknowledges certain limitations, including a small sample size of forty male participants, which restricts generalizability, and the exclusion of female addicts due to cultural and accessibility constraints. The reliance on self-reported data may also involve social desirability bias. Ethical considerations were strictly observed: informed consent was obtained, participation was voluntary, interviews were confidential, and participants' anonymity was maintained throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

Through purposive sampling, 40 social media addicts were selected for the interview. All the addicts are the male from both urban and rural settings and female could not be included due to cultural constraints. Addicts up not above the age of 19 were selected due to the age sensitivity and inclination of being drawn to addiction. They were of different background with backgrounds education level up to intermediate. They were indulged into different platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Tiktok, Instagram, different games such PUBG and Free Fire.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Groups	11-13 years	9	22.5
	14-16 years	15	37.5
	17-19 years	16	40.0
Educational Level	Primary	11	27.5
	Middle	6	15.0
	Matriculation	13	32.5
	Intermediate	10	25.0
Financial Status	Lower	15	37.5
	Lower Middle	15	37.5
	Middle Class	10	25.0
Residence	Urban	20	50.0
	Rural	20	50.0

Different Deviant Behaviours By The Youth As A Result Of Social Media Addiction

The addicts poured their heart out and explained that they exhibit different types of unusual and weird types of behavior as a result of social media addiction. Different types of deviant behaviors. A sample of 40 social media addicts reveals that they demonstrate the behaviors such as use of abusive language, venting out anger by slamming doors or other means, theft, cyber bullying, blackmailing, manhandling, harassment, insulting/humiliating elders, watching porn or explicit sexual content etc. These findings were also corroborated

through the interview conducted from the psychologists as well as the psychiatrist. During the course of interview, it also became clear that some of the participants out of 40 experienced more than one deviant behavior at a time, while some encountered only one behavior. The factor of the overriding importance in this entire research was the fact that restlessness was experienced due to non-availability of internet services or mobile phone.

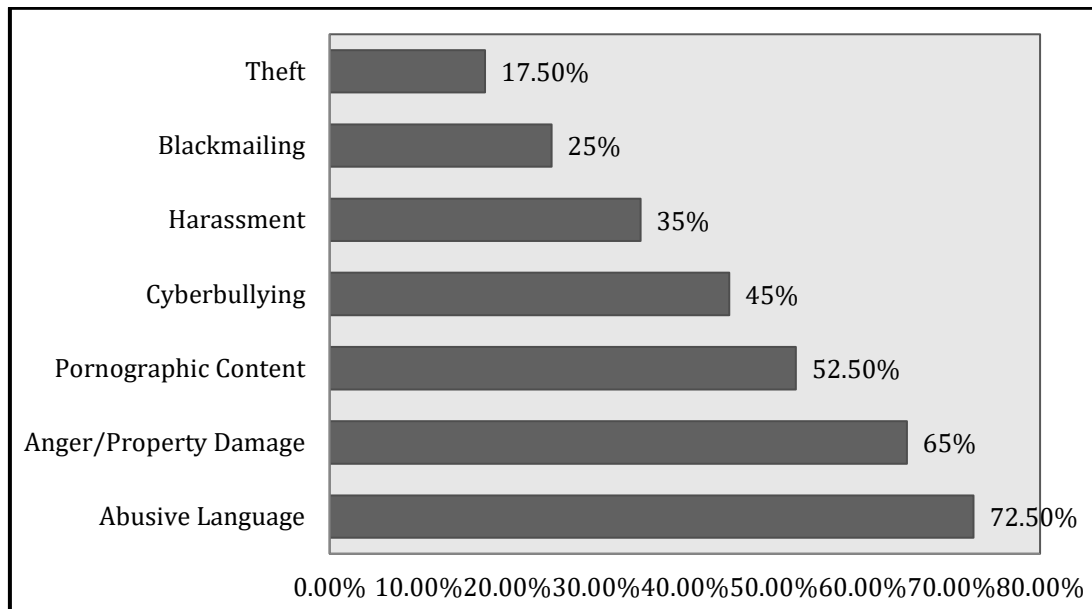


Figure 1 Reported Deviant Behaviors Triggered by Social Media Addiction

This section presents the core findings based on the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with two psychologists, one psychiatrist and youth identified as social media addicts. The demographic details of the social media addicts have been mentioned in the table below. These themes were developed through interpretation of responses and aligned with the study's three core objectives: understanding causes, identifying correlations with deviant behavior, and evaluating existing regulatory frameworks.

These findings will help understand the facts about the social media addicts, the circumstances and the issues that surround the social media addicts. The generated themes under discussion are then used to present the findings of the qualitative interviews. The following findings are crucial in identifying the root causes of social media addiction.

According to the demographic data research, most young teenagers up to age of 19 were primarily selected for the study. A small scale of forty respondents of different social status, age, educational qualifications were interviewed regarding the usage of social media platforms. The respondents were equally divided into urban and rural set ups with different financial status, educational qualifications and age groups. Majority of the respondents responded about their addiction level and the feelings and experiencing they undergo while using the social media platforms. The qualitative interview data was assessed which produced the following findings, as depicted in the figure 1 above and discussed as under:

Social Media as a Behavioral Addiction Comparable to Substance Abuse (One of the causes of addiction)

Social media addiction, as described by both professionals as well as addicts indicate symptoms of substance dependence. Participants frequently reported number of symptoms which included restlessness, irresistible urges, anxiety, self-harm tendencies and withdrawal-like symptoms, which label it as it as a behavioral addiction. This point can be substantiated with its neurological parallels such as the release of dopamine and "bio-

feedback". Both psychologists and a psychiatrist referred to social media addiction as involving neurochemical responses similar to drug addiction (e.g., "bio-feed," dopamine release). Meshi, Elizarova, Bender, and Verdejo-Garcia (2019), in their study *"Excessive social media use is comparable to drug addiction,"* argue that unchecked and extremely high use of social media can produce behavioral patterns and neural responses similar to those found in drug addiction. They emphasize impaired decision-making and diminished cognitive control, traits commonly observed among substance-dependent individuals. Using psychological assessments and self-reported behaviors, they demonstrate that excessive social media users experience compulsive checking and craving responses equivalent to addiction. Rasouli and Khorrami Banaraki (2024) likewise identify neurobiological foundations of social media addiction, noting that both behavioral and substance addictions activate similar reward-related brain regions, particularly dopamine pathways. They conclude that social media addiction should be treated with seriousness comparable to chemical addiction due to its psychological consequences.

Peer Pressure and Environmental Triggers (Cause of Addiction)

Several times, respondents said that peer influence is one of the biggest contributors to the onset and maintenance of social media addiction. The absence of outdoor activities, proper social conventions, and more time on the computer leads to lack of physical activity and dependence on the computer. Such a trend is in line with the environmental reinforcement theory that behavior is influenced by the environmental conditions. The majority of the participants indicated that they were initially introduced to excessive social media use through their friends, and it was supported by psychologists who related the trend to the altered manner of socialization and the fear of missing out (FOMO). Toyin and Nkechi (2024) also point out that high use of social media is strongly associated with deviant behaviors, which are usually precipitated by the social norm of peer pressure and the inappropriate content on the internet. It is the duty of teachers and learning institutions, therefore, to observe the activities of students through the internet to ensure that no bad results are produced. Likewise, Shahid, Yousaf, and Munir (2024) established a close relationship between social media addiction, aggression, and depressive symptoms in young adults. Their results show that peer interactions, online settings, and unrelenting digital compassion have a profound influence on the development of behavioral results. The research presents the need of interventions to deal with online and offline social situations to alleviate the negative impacts.

Parental Neglect and Weak Digital Supervision (Cause and Correlation with Deviant Behavior)

The lack of parental supervision, limited digital literacy, and unlimited access to smartphones is one of the most overwhelming issues that will arise as a result of this study. All three groups, including the psychiatrist, psychologists and the respondents highlighted that addictive behaviors thrive due to low parental involvement. To reinforce this, as Bashir, Kazmi, and Naz (2022) describe, social media addiction moderates parental neglect and conduct problems, and adolescents exposed to parental neglect develop behavioral problems more in cases of high levels of addiction. Likewise, Wang, Jiang, and Zhang (2022) indicate that cyberbullying perpetration is strongly mediated by parental neglect, and smartphone addiction serves as a mediator. Their results also emphasize the importance of enhancing the self-regulation ability of adolescents to overcome these effects.

Escalation from Anti-Social to Criminal Tendencies (Correlation with Deviant Behavior)

Respondents also admitted they have committed antisocial crimes including verbal aggression, property damage, cyberbullying and identity theft, and how even minor acts of

deviance can lead to escalation where addiction is not addressed. Other antisocial behaviors that were also observed by psychologists included aggression on siblings, destruction of valuables and being more irritable. According to Shahid, Yousaf, and Munir (2024), the social media addiction is also found to be associated with aggression and depressive symptoms, and this fact also supports the fact that the behavior of online users correlates with real-world deviance. Satheesh, Prem, and Sahay (2024) discovered that social media addiction is associated with personality traits, including extraversion, openness, and emotional instability, and addictive use patterns coupled with personality factors contributed to deviant behavior.

Psychological Triggers and Emotional Vulnerability (Correlation with Deviant Behavior)

Poor self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, and emotional problems are some of the contributing factors to compulsive use and violent online behaviors. The study by Al Sabban and Al-Harbi (2019) demonstrated that psychological security was negatively correlated with the use of social media too much, and people who feel insecure are more susceptible to addiction and being victims of cybercrime. Zhang (2023) also states that some content available online glorifies deviant and criminal activities, changing the attitude and promoting dangerous behavior. The author emphasizes the pressing conscience and regulatory interventions in order to safeguard emotionally frail youth.

Ineffective Implementation of Social Media Laws and Digital Policies (Law and Policy Gap)

Despite the legislations that have been implemented in Pakistan concerning digital safety and cyber regulation, there is still a lack of enforcement. The poor enforcement provides young people an opportunity to overcome restrictions with the help of such tools as VPNs, which opens a loophole between the law and practice. Nweiran (2024) also cautions about increasing digital dependency due to weak implementation of digital policies, which is a key factor leading to online deviant behaviors. Equally, Farhan, Dinda, and Solekhan (2024) observe that inadequate law enforcement and a lack of proper training hinder the effective control of cybercrimes. Their research suggests the reinforcement of legal frameworks, enhancement of institutional capabilities, and improvement of training in order to enforce..

Need for a Multi-Tiered Preventive Approach (Remedial Measures)

Various articles recommend a multi-level solution to the problem of social media addiction and related deviant trends. The interventions highlighted by the respondents include grassroots interventions, which are often in the form of mass awareness campaign, curriculum reform, the participation of psychologists in schools, and early behavior screening. The institutional reforms, such as the data-driven policies and the programs of digital literacy, were also mentioned. S. J. and Kim (2023) also recommend the utilization of a public health model towards digital media overuse with the suggested use of global information systems and holistic intervention plans. Similarly, Perez-Lozano and Saucedo Espinosa (2024) point out that mass media literacy, artificial intelligence governance and cybersecurity can prevent addiction. They suggest that digital literacy should be implemented into education curriculums and that partnerships should be formed to build a healthier digital ecosystem..

Conclusion

This study unearthed the rudimentary definition of social media addiction with its slight comparison with chemical addictions, major reasons of this addictions, its severity,

the potential links between social media addiction and deviant behavior among youth of Pakistan, especially the teenagers through qualitative research method. The qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews from the psychologists, psychiatrist and the small scale of social media addicts. The findings of this study showed that some of the factors such as peer pressure, environment, weak parental control, ineffective social media laws and policies are behind the deviant behavior caused by excessive social media use. Initially, these deviant tendencies are nascent however subsequently develop and end up as severe in nature. These eventually, affect the lives of our youth to a great deal. The youth have been found involved in multiple type of deviant behaviors such as cyber bullying, abusive language, extreme anger with intimate relations and its violent expression through different means, theft, cyber bullying, blackmailing, manhandling, harassment, insulting/humiliating elders, watching porn or explicit sexual content etc. The study emphasizes upon diverse range of reforms such as parental level, policy interventions, and state responsibilities to control this growing menace. The literature expresses a growing concern on the correlation between social media addiction and deviant behavior among the youth in Pakistan. Notwithstanding the fact that research on this topic is still emerging, existing available studies indicate that excessive social media use is associated with a range of negative behavioral outcomes, including deviance and deviant behavior. The unprecedented surge in the social media addiction among Pakistani youth requires comprehensive preventive measures, including family involvement, societal regulation, and education, to curb its negative impacts, which, if not, controlled timely may render an irreparable loss to our young generation.

Recommendations

Aligning the laws with best international practices

Adverse effects of social media is a new and growing phenomenon, affecting all age groups, especially the youth. Despite some of the rules in place to control the negative effects of social media, the issue seems to grow at a faster pace, posing serious challenge to the law and policy makers in the country. In the existing scenario, there is dire need to revisit the existing legal regime in Pakistan and aligning them with the best international practices.

Strict enforcement of Laws/ Policies

The exiting body of laws dealing with the social media are “The Citizen’s Protection Rules, (2020), “Removal and Blocking of unlawful online content (2021), “Removal and Blocking of Unlawful online content (Procedure, oversight and safeguard), Rules, 2021 and Pakistan Electronics Crime Act, 2016 (PECA)” and similar other laws, rules and policies. These laws have fallen short of their effective implementation so far. The study also explores institutional gaps, such as limited cybercrime reporting mechanisms, lack of trained professionals, and poor digital literacy in schools. Till the time government revisits the existing legal regime, it is essential to strengthen enforcement mechanism of existing social media rules and digital child safety protocols to help prevent and save the youth especially the teenagers from the social media addiction which is wreaking havoc with their lives nowadays.

Digital Literacy Campaigns

Although digital literacy exists in Pakistan but it lacks consistency in terms of its implementation across the board. This lacuna, therefore calls for the nationwide programs to educate parents, teachers, and youth alike on the associated risks of social media addiction and their dire consequences. Massive mass media programmes may be conducted to create awareness among the general public against the negative effects of social media addiction.

Curriculum Reforms

Curriculum reforms are the need of the day as their need has been felt since long. However, it is quite disheartening to note that this point has been neglected as there is almost nothing is mentioned about the adverse effects of social media addiction in the curriculum. Government of Pakistan, therefore, seriously need to look into this matter by incorporating necessary changes in the curriculum to avert impacts of social media addiction on youth.

Integration of psycho-therapy services in the Educational Institutions

Integration of services of psychologists is mandatory for the mental well-being of the students in our educational institutions. Public sector institutions in Pakistan do not have the services of dedicated mental and health professionals. Consequently, they succumb to the temptations of social media. As the youth especially teenagers are of tender age and any negative impression left on their minds leaves an indelible impression, therefore psychologist need to be engaged in schools for early detection of behavioral shifts so that necessary measures be taken timely and the issue be nipped in the bud.

Parental Engagement

Last but not the least is the role of parents in managing the routine of the children, strict surveillance and a watchful eye should be kept by the parents on their activities and instead of allowing time on social media platforms, they may be engaged in the physical activities. In this regard, community-based workshops may be developed and online parental control tools be implanted. This final theme attempts to identify and accordingly proposing pragmatic solutions to address both social media addiction and deviant behaviours associated with it. Similar, it is equally important to emphasize the importance of preventive education through schools and communities, parental involvement, youth counseling, and awareness campaigns. These activities may also be supplemented with the development of digital literacy programs and stronger partnerships between tech companies, educators, and policymakers to ensure safe and healthy online experiences for young people. Rehabilitation, rather than punishment can also pay off as a more effective long-term strategy in dealing with addicted youth.

Application of Age Restriction Laws

Several countries around the world have banned the use of internet for the specific age group to restrict the detrimental impacts on them and assist them not to develop social media addiction of the social platforms. These steps are not aimed at hampering any fundamental rights of the individuals rather they are mandatory in the larger interest of the youth. Australia has decided to ban social media for kids under 16. The Australian Government has so far named ten platforms to be banned, which include Facebook, X, YouTube, Reddit and other streaming Platforms. Similarly China has already implemented strict regulations to tackle the issue of internet addiction in minors. Government of Pakistan should also come up with the practical plans and strategies similar to the ones adopted by Australia and China for effectively overcoming this growing menace of social media addiction.

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