

Article

Examining the relation of social networks with psychological wellbeing: Case study of young adults in Pakistan

Sara Akram^{1,*}, Muhammad Sardar Alam²

¹ Department of Sociology, School of Sociology and Anthropology, Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou 510275, China

² PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi 46300, Pakistan

* **Corresponding author:** Sara Akram, saraakram452@gmail.com

CITATION

Akram S, Alam MS. (2025).
Examining the relation of social
networks with psychological
wellbeing: Case study of young
adults in Pakistan. *Applied
Psychology Research*. 4(1): 2168.
<https://doi.org/10.59400/apr2168>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 29 November 2024

Accepted: 13 February 2025

Available online: 27 February 2025

COPYRIGHT



Copyright © 2025 by author(s).
Applied Psychology Research is
published by Academic Publishing
Pte. Ltd. This work is licensed under
the Creative Commons Attribution
(CC BY) license.
[https://creativecommons.org/licenses/
by/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Abstract: The present research looks at the effects that social networks use has on the mental health of young users aged between 18 and 25 in the case of Pakistan. Given that social networking sites are becoming more prevalent in the country, there is a growing concern regarding the adverse effects of these sites on the youth. The interviews have been conducted to examine the effects of social networking sites on mental health among the rural and urban population of Pakistan. This study highlights several problems such as social comparison, cyberbullying, sleep disorders, and social media benefits. Social comparison is an issue that social media elevates, as many young adults see posts of others living their desirable lives, wishing to live the same. Trying to live up to such expectations creates pressure within the youth, leading to feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem, and anxiety. Another issue is cyberbullying, which is harassment that many young adults experience online, which further affects their psychosocial well-being. The study also shows that social media use, mainly the ones used late at night, does result in sleep disturbances and higher stress levels, mainly attributed to Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). However, social media is helpful for adolescents. In many young adults, social media allows the sensation of existence, offers supportive speech, and is even helpful for self-presentation. Some of them also pointed to the reasons why they use social networks: they like to communicate with people who think alike or look for content related to mental disorders, which makes them feel not so lonely. Nonetheless, in the research, the Pakistani cultural environment is equally valid, where self-esteem, honor, and social recognition count more. Even these cultural frameworks may be of greater interest than learning about young people's use of social media networks and how this social networking shapes the adolescent youths' approach to mental health and how they connect with their peers virtually. More crucially, the findings of this study improve our understanding of the threats and positioning of social networks as well as making suggestions on how the social network misuse can be managed. The research attempts to raise these issues in order to alleviate the harmful effects of social media but also enhance its positive role among the mental health of Pakistan's youth.

Keywords: media; mental health; youth; social platform; culture

1. Introduction

It has been observed that social media has transformed into a necessity in the modern world. Social media has grown, from being just a tool that keeps people in touch with their loved ones to a medium through which people can communicate across the globe. In fact, many consider social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Snapchat as commonplace technologies, useful for the exchange of knowledge and for keeping people informed, as was never the case before (Akram and Alam, 2022).

Recently, a large number of studies have been undertaken that highlight psychological issues or negative views of the American youth aged 18–24 towards social media (Bekalu et al., 2019; Carr and Hayes, 2015). Social media is perhaps the most unique form of technology due to its expansion and its improvement. It often does not take long for social media users and other participating individuals to organize a “social” system. There are new forms of communication that use different time and location specifications and allow individuals to be interconnected (Coyne et al., 2020). Social media has surpassed the purpose of connecting with friends; for today’s youth, it is a major tool in the process of self-concept and self-esteem seeking. There is widespread concern that young people are highly susceptible to social media influences as they are in the process of constructing their identities and are highly impressionable (Gupta et al., 2022).

Social comparison is one of the detrimental activities among young people on social media that is in relation to adolescent self-esteem. There is an erroneous belief that social media portrays the true image of people and their lives, always sharing only successful highlights of their day. When young people get all updates regarding others and see their photos every day, such a habit leads them to unfathomable consequences of dissatisfaction about their own lives. Such upward social comparisons can bring one down as one can develop the desire towards the lifestyle, they are envious of and resent, thus making comparisons to those who are in better situations (Karim et al., 2020). Researchers have linked higher rates of social comparison on social media to depression and anxiety disorders (Niaz et al., 2024).

Cyberbullying is another pressing problem affecting young people. In contrast to bullying in real life, which takes place in pre-defined locations such as schools, cyberbullying never stops and is not regulated over locations. This means the victim can never escape from it even when they’re at home. They experience severe effects like increases in stress, deep depression, and contemplations of suicide, which are outcomes of bullying from the online space and social media. Social media platforms serve as a catalyst for bullying by harassment and dissemination of malignant gossip online towards others (Nagata et al., 2023).

Social media has exceptionally unique adverse repercussions on the sleep schedules of the young generation, which is a problem that seems to be widespread amongst young adults. Three main factors come into play: screen blue light, social media addiction, and the fear of missing out. Young people, and especially young adults, usually spend a few hours at night sifting through their phones, which usually erodes their sleep practices. Depression, low anxiety levels, and disrupted cognitive functionality are medical outcomes that have been linked with insomnia and terrible sleep etiquette (Naureen et al., 2022).

Though some of these issues obviously warrant concern, it would be careless not to point out that there are positive implications of social media usage. Such users do not feel lonely as they know that there are others out there going through the same issues as them. It is a fact of life that some people do feel lonely, and social media gives them an opportunity to integrate into online communities where their feelings and views can be heard and acknowledged. Social media is also a means through which people are able to showcase their creativity or thoughts, which is quite inspiring.

The current study has explored the dual and intricate interface between social media use and the mental health of young adults in Pakistan, considering negative aspects. It looked at the social comparison orientation on social media platforms and its influence on self-esteem. The results revealed situations where individuals have the tendency to look down on themselves because they are constantly looking at idealistic comparisons of other people's lives. It was also noticed in their research that cyberbullying is dominant on social media platforms; this was found to have a strong association with poor mental health, including high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression in young adults. The effect of modern social media on sleep was also explored by the study, with disruptive late-night social media use, blue light, and FOMO (fear of missing out) found to be affecting sleep quality negatively whilst increasing stress. On the contrary, the study also found the bright side of social media and its merits in terms of emotional support, community engagement, and self-revolutionization as some of the antitheses of the adverse mental health outcomes. Finally, the research took into consideration the cultural perspective regarding social media in Pakistan, substantiating how the aspects of family pride, social standing, and public image dictate young adults' interaction with social media and the impact it has on their psychological health.

Social Comparison Theory delineates the process where individuals rate themselves against others. It is of particular interest in this work because it has been established how social media interacts with mental health. People who have Instagram accounts, for instance, tend to look up towards others making upward social comparisons because the images that they receive are the edited perfection of someone's life. The self-expectations resulting from such comparisons make one perpetually feel as though they are not good enough or happy enough, which in this case is particularly concerning for the youth because they are yet to fully discover themselves.

The literature has also documented a link between higher levels of social comparison and anxiety, depression, and body image issues. Social media algorithms do not help the situation either since they prioritize posts that draw a great deal of attention, almost always at the expense of reality. As a result, they create a cycle of comparison that not only generates stress but also anxiety and depression.

Cyberbullying is another issue that is common in the digital world, where people can easily intimidate others from afar, without even showing up physically. Unlike physical bullying, the cyber version can be done anytime and anywhere, which makes it more dangerous for its victim, as there is nowhere to run. This can lead to some grave mental health disorders, including depression and suicidal ideation. In countries like Pakistan, where there is a great deal of emphasis placed on one's social image, being a victim of cyberbullying can be even worse because it can lead to shame and ostracization.

Social media causes sleep disorders too, as there are many who scroll through their feeds late at night, sitting in a mode of FOMO. Poor sleep can aggravate existing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. To conclude, Social Comparison Theory clarifies how simply updating oneself through scrolling pictures and posts on social media sites can have an adverse effect on self-image, hence leading to stress, depression, anxiety, and a multitude of other mental illnesses.

Necessity and importance of the research

This research is essential for understanding the impact of social networks on the mental health of young adults aged 18–25 in Pakistan, where rising social media use intersects with unique cultural and social dynamics. The rapid increase in social media penetration has made it a significant part of young people’s lives, yet limited research explores its specific effects in Pakistan’s context. This study fills that gap, addressing global concerns like anxiety and depression, while considering cultural factors that make Pakistan unique.

Cultural values such as self-esteem, social recognition, and honor amplify the effects of social comparison on social media. Young adults in Pakistan may feel heightened pressure from curated online lifestyles, leading to insecurity and anxiety. This study also considers the urban-rural divide, highlighting how social media impacts mental health differently in areas with varying levels of access and societal pressures.

Furthermore, the dual role of social media—causing issues like cyberbullying and sleep disorders but also fostering community and support—makes this research critical for developing balanced solutions. It offers valuable insights for addressing mental health challenges in a society where awareness is limited and stigma is high.

By exploring these dynamics, the study provides culturally relevant evidence for policymakers, educators, and mental health advocates, aiming to reduce the harmful effects of social media and enhance its positive role. Pakistan serves as a crucial case study, offering lessons that can inform strategies in similar cultural and developmental contexts globally.

2. Methodology

The objective of this study is to examine how social media affects young adults’ mental health in Pakistan. It was decided to use qualitative research as it aims to investigate how people’s emotions and personal opinions, which are central to understanding the effects of social media on mental health, are shaped by social media. To gather data, we primarily rely on semi-structured interviews. These interviews allow subjects to respond freely and in their own context, but still make sure that the essential issues are addressed. This semi-structured format allows the participants to express themselves more freely, and it gives the researcher the ability to probe the participants to find out more about interesting areas like social comparison, cyberbullying, sleep issues, and the positive sides of social media. We used a conversational and unstructured manner so that the main research topics could be concentrated on without making it overly clinical and rigid (Ostic et al., 2021).

The subjects of this research include adolescents, who are aged between 18 and 25 years old and come from both rural and urban backgrounds in Pakistan. This particular age group is selected since it is the stage in one’s life where they are still in search of their identities and are quite vulnerable to external stimuli—in this case, social media. The participants are selected using purposive sampling, meaning they have been selected for a particular reason: they are social media users and can bring up diversity in the topic at hand.

The study includes participants aged 18–25 years from both rural and urban areas of Pakistan, focusing on this age group due to their identity formation stage and vulnerability to social media’s effects. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity and relevance, specifically targeting active social media users. This method enabled us to capture varied perspectives across different socio-cultural settings.

Data analysis

After the data has been gathered, the researcher prepares and analyzes the data using thematic analysis in simple words (see **Figure 1**). This means skimming through the responses and noting the similar patterns that would enable one to view the impact of social media on mental health in the offered social media stereotypes. Thematic analysis assists in exploring the dominant narratives of social media as a society and also the various aspects of social media people experience.

After data collection, thematic analysis was used to prepare and interpret the interview responses (see **Table 1**). This method involved systematically identifying and analyzing patterns or themes across the data. The analysis focused on exploring dominant narratives, including social media stereotypes, the impact of social comparison, and the psychosocial effects of cyberbullying, sleep issues, and positive aspects of social media usage. Thematic analysis provided a structured yet flexible framework to examine shared experiences and identify the broader societal influences of social media on mental health.

The findings from this qualitative approach aim to inform public health strategies, promoting the responsible use of social media platforms and mitigating their negative effects on the mental health of Pakistan’s youth.

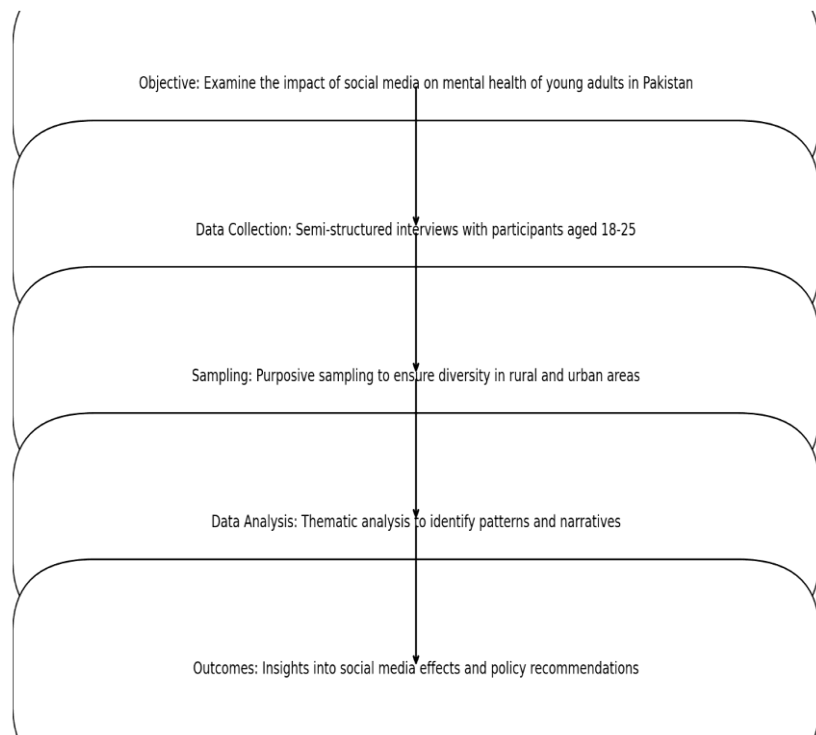


Figure 1. Flow chart for methodology.

Through the qualitative methods, the research seeks to explore the factors and the impacts of social media on the mental health of the young population. The results will provide findings that would assist in enhancing the public health approaches and promote good use of social media platforms.

Table 1. Themes and subthemes: Social media’s impact on mental health in Pakistan.

Themes	Subthemes
1. Social Comparison and Self-Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure to portray an ideal self-image. • Feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. • Amplified social comparison in Pakistani culture.
2. Scroll Time and Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged social media use linked to anxiety. • FOMO and toxic idealism are contributing to stress.
3. Appearance-Related Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure to conform to societal beauty standards. • Increased appearance-related self-consciousness.
4. Impact of COVID-19 on Social Media Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased social media reliance during lockdowns. • Heightened anxiety, isolation, and FOMO during the pandemic.
5. Emotional Dysregulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media as a coping mechanism leading to emotional avoidance. • Addiction to online presence is causing stress.
6. Stress from Overuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curated online personas are causing mental fatigue. • Sleep disturbances from nighttime social media usage.
7. Social Media Influence on Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idealistic content causing alienation and depression. • Cognitive dissonance between real and online selves.
8. Cultural Impact of Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on social recognition and family honor intensifying mental health challenges. • Stigma limiting mental health discussions.

3. Results and discussions

In Pakistan, the youth who are heavy social media users seem to be undergoing simultaneous positive and negative effects on their mental health. This social comparison forms the biggest threat given that young adults, for instance, who are in their late teens or in their early twenties, are constantly looking for approval and validation through photographs and imagery they see on such platforms. This cycle of evaluation breeds inadequacy, self-doubt and reduced self-worth amongst the individuals. Many Pakistanis have lived experience of this pressure of exposure to content over social media that establishes unattainable beauty and ideal lifestyles (Ostic et al., 2021). An additional factor is the time spent on social media, which is driven by the intent of fitting into the space; studies show that excessive time results in a higher level of anxiety and stress amongst the users. The same has been evident amongst young adults in Pakistan as a result of the social media culture in the country.

Furthermore, besides anxiety, the study investigated whether social media activities are disturbing sleep patterns. A large number of the young adults in Pakistan indicated that they experienced sleep disturbance due to late nights, blue light, and FOMO. Such sleep interruptions not only lead to physical tiredness but also allow further emotional fatigue, thus creating a vicious cycle that deteriorates mental health. This research also focused on how social media is associated with emotional

regulation, including the addiction to social media itself. Social media is often beneficial in relieving negative feelings for people because there is always a lot of negativity behind their actions; however, the use of such platforms can be even more harmful to emotions as it weakens regulatory mechanisms, which in turn fosters anxiety, depression, and a high degree of dependence on social endorsement.

Surprisingly, the study also evaluated the positive sides of social media, including getting emotional support and building networks. For many Pakistani young adults, social media serves an essential role for self-engagement and support, which together can help counterbalance the impact of self-image and mental health-related issues such as cyberbullying. At the same time, such benefits are quite often lost in the overwhelming frustration and worry that occur when a so-called ideal lifestyle is portrayed on social media. This, coupled with the cultural orientation towards status and aesthetics, takes an even greater toll on one's mental well-being.

3.1. Effects on mental well-being in the context of Pakistan

Overall, social media use in Pakistan seems to have a negative correlation with one's level of self-esteem as well as overall quality of life, particularly in the case of people who remain hooked to such websites for long hours. Kross et al.'s (2013) research has shown that adolescents between the late teenage period and the early twenties are extremely affected in terms of their life satisfaction levels, due to the addictive nature of social media (Koehler and Parrell, 2020). Though this study was conducted in the United States, the same trends are witnessed among the youth of Pakistan. The necessity of being able to portray an 'ideal' self-image on the social media platforms has been noted to increase the sense of inadequacy, particularly in younger adults who feel that they are still trying to find themselves. The need to constantly see how everyone else's lives seem to be put together induces feelings where the youth question their self-worth; however, more often than not, only the highlight reels of others' lives are shown. In Pakistan, where individuals are often judged based on certain parameters, this situation is even more exacerbated. Such qualitative interviews in this study supported these fears, as most participants recognized that exposure to 'the good life' of others made them more insecure and uncertain of themselves. The results are consistent with Social Comparison Theory. It states that social comparison is a natural tendency that people usually engage in to evaluate their self-worth, and it can have detrimental consequences on confidence when a person perceives themselves to be worse than others (Chatterjee, 2020; Koehler and Parrell, 2020). In general, these results emphasize the serious psychopathological concerns that include prolonged exposure to such idealistic images on social media and its uses among young adults in Pakistan.

3.2. Scroll time and mental health concerns

There is a strong association between anxiety disorders and social networking sites; in fact, social networking addiction in some studies indicates high levels of anxiety. This was also discovered in a study conducted in Norway studying people aged from 16 to 88 years. In a similar instance, among 563 young American adults, Peters found that animosity is latent for those who spend more time on social media

(Primack et al., 2017). Although this does not mean that the use of social networking sites promotes anxiety, such immersion in these kinds of platforms for a long time can result in anxiety disorders. Pakistan has also revealed an increase in anxiety and panic among its youth who feel inadequate due to others. Idealism and FOMO tend to have a toxic relationship, and addiction to these traits is associated with heightened anxiety and stress. The more time one consumes on social media, the more consumed and out of control the person becomes, and eventually, mental issues arise (Chen and Li, 2017). These findings are echoed in the qualitative data of this study, as many participants explained that they experienced increased levels of anxiety and stress, particularly in situations where they compared themselves to other people that they saw online. The findings indeed highlight the need to treat social media as a potentially harmful component for mental health in Pakistan, where social comparison tendencies are common.

3.3. Social media and mental health

Findings from research by Primack et al., conducted in America, show that the frequency with which a person uses social media is associated with mental illnesses. Of the 1787 study participants, it was found that those who used fewer platforms (0–2) were less likely to suffer from anxiety or depression compared to those who used more platforms (Primack et al., 2017). Hence, as a person engages with more platforms, they are likely to be exposed to a greater idealism and, consequently, the likelihood of negative mental health issues. In the context of Pakistan, where there are widespread images of social media across a range of sites, the risks are even graver. Importantly, continuous distress from trying to reach the perfect life to only distress from maintaining exaggerated images opens more doors to anxiety and depression in more severe ways; socially asymmetrical images are abused, for the “you can only see what I want you to see” style is more common. Especially young people are more victims of the social comparison effect on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc., where most people only post the best parts of their lives and not the struggles. This problem is further complicated by the attention given to appearance and social class in the culture of Pakistan, which also makes it harder for the youth to break free from the constant suffering and tagging of themselves against others (Fardouly et al., 2015).

3.4. Appearance-related anxiety and depression

The overemphasis on individual physical features in social media and its conception of beauty are likely to alter how one is able to explain or understand oneself, provoking feelings of anxiety and even depression. Research has also indicated that with each additional hour spent on social media, an individual’s self-consciousness towards their physical body increases, and in turn, one’s social anxiety levels and level of appearance anxiety tend to rise too (Fardouly et al., 2015). It is worth highlighting that in Pakistan, this is more evident as prestige and looks are greatly prioritized. A great deal of young adults may face an overwhelming pressure to achieve certain physical features that are prevalent on social media platforms (Suisman et al., 2014). This is due to the fact that they are exposed to what society deems as “perfect” features, which they themselves may never be able to attain. Such

a mental overlay only increases the chances of mental health challenges such as depression being amplified. Individuals develop what can be described as a ‘defect’ mentality—they might feel that they do not belong to the contemporary beauty standards and normalcy and feel like losers. Young adults might start to feel that it is normal to do anything to look like the individuals they admire most. In Pakistan, where cultural norms dictate how individuals should be viewed by others, such pressures can even be more profound, and thus the need for sensitivity and interventions to deal with the complications young adults suffer from such appearance anxiety cannot be overemphasized (Perloff, 2014).

3.5. The relationship of mental health to social media during the COVID pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic witnessed a dramatic increase in the use of social networks as the internet enabled the long-distance contact desires of numerous individuals who sought entertainment and information. It was discovered in China that a high diffusion of social media across the population was detrimental, with depression and conflict being prevalent (Akram and Alam, 2022; Wang et al., 2020). Similarly, in Pakistan, a number of young adults have expressed concern about feeling heightened signs of anxiety, feelings of social isolation, and stress as a consequence of excessive usage of social media platforms. The boredom of being unable to move freely and see people caused a polar shift in many people who spent their time looking for others online, as this was the only means to further their social adaptation (Husain et al., 2023). The feeling of being oppressed by too much bad news as well as striving to maintain relationships made many anxious. Also, this was a time when there was a feeling of heightened FOMO when many other people were fully active, but many individuals were not as able, which further exacerbated the feeling of isolation. This pandemic documented how young adults are prone to mental health challenges, such as social media and its overuse or misapplication during distressful times in social strife (Akram et al., 2024).

3.6. Emotional regulation and social media use disorder

The use of social media helps many people to forget about the negative feelings they may have. It is not surprising that someone would like to experience something that can make them feel better, but such behavior may develop into emotional avoidance, which can lead to a host of issues with managing emotions. Several studies explain that if one were to self-medicate on social media, then it only fuels existing issues such as stress and depression because of social media (Kuss and Griffiths, 2017). However, in Pakistan, where social interaction is face-to-face and highly regarded, excessive social media use can increase the severity of pre-existing social disorders. Social media over-dependence develops because people never learn to control their emotions since they are too occupied with avoiding interactions with others. Such a social media addiction breeds an underlying emotional issue where the person begins to suffer with increased stress and anxiety due to social media platforms. The more someone uses social media, the more they become reliant on social media, and in turn, their mental health continues to deteriorate. Aside from this, social media

also includes other issues such as cyberbullying, one's online presence, and the social media pressure where one feels the need to always present 'the perfect self', which can continuously fuel emotional dysregulation, making it ten times harder for someone to feel normal again where they are able to healthily cope with their issues (Lindenberg et al., 2021).

3.7. Stress caused by social media overuse

It has been found, particularly in the younger population, that stress, anxiety, and sleeplessness are a result of excessive use of social media networks. In a study conducted on Lebanese adults, it was found that the stress caused by excessive social network usage was one of the causes of mental illness. Likewise, in Pakistan, the use of social media has become a necessity for the youth, but young adults are under a lot of stress going through a relatively open online platform. The stress to maintain an ideal online image or the fear of being ridiculed or unaccepted can lead to extreme levels of depression and anxiety. The curated version of young adults' lives in Pakistan is only online, which is not only tiring but also stressful. More harm, compounded stress of the need to present an idealized version and the need to compare with others, leads to negative spirals where overuse will only result in harm. Besides this, social media is frequently used late at night as a way to wind down, which may cause trouble sleeping and could promote further issues. All this indicates that more needs to be done to raise awareness towards the negative implications of social media stress and the ways to cope with online presence (Kuss and Griffiths, 2017).

3.8. Social media influence on mental health

Besides the duration of online engagement, some actions on social media could also adversely interfere with mental health for users. For instance, people who share content containing overly idealistic pictures or emotionally manipulative content tend to show increased feelings of marginalization and, in some instances, even suicidal thoughts. Young single females and males in Pakistan, where social status is of utmost importance, can indulge in painting a much better picture of themselves than what exists in reality (Robinson et al., 2015). This can cause feelings of alienation and depression, especially when such personas are not in sync with the actual lifestyle of the individuals in question. A sizeable proportion of youth feel distressed and sit in solitude inactive with much impeccably crafted content and flawless images because there is considerable cognitive dissonance between what their real selves are and what has been created on websites such as Instagram and TikTok. This kind of behavior can also cause feelings of loneliness and a sense of being an outsider resulting from deep-seated social issues like anxiety and depression. Those social media variables, which comprise taking images that may be misleading as well as taking images for the purpose of comparing oneself with other people, are determinants of social well-being outcomes and are accurately illustrated within the social My Body, My Image context of Pakistan. It is important to note that social media places a heavy emphasis on body image and reputation.

Pakistan's cultural emphasis on social recognition, family honor, and community expectations creates additional pressure for young individuals, amplifying the effects

of social comparison and online validation. These societal norms contribute to heightened anxiety and low self-esteem when individuals perceive themselves as not meeting socially desirable standards showcased on social media. Additionally, the stigma surrounding mental health in Pakistan discourages open discussions about its adverse effects, often leaving young people to cope alone.

4. Conclusion

Social media affects the mental health of young and adult individuals in Pakistan and has both merits and demerits. For one thing, social media enables people to interact with each other, expands their knowledge, and allows everyone to know about critical issues. On the contrary, it also leads to emotional issues such as social anxiety, depression, and poor self-image, as there is excessive reliance on opinions from others. This is particularly the case for the youth in Pakistan who seek perfection and great standing because of ideologies similar to family pride or a respected social standing.

Young people in Pakistan have many followers on social media and use comparisons with general peers as a basis for their self-evaluation. Social media is an effective platform where people only tend to share their best moments. As a result, it convinces people that they are also successful in every aspect of their life, when in reality, it may not be the case. Such comparisons lead to a lot of stress as an individual starts feeling anxious and having a lack of self-importance.

Another challenge is the expectation to be presentable, which has been enhanced by the growing popularity of beauty cultures on social media networks, particularly Instagram. These standards make many young people feel like they don't meet expectations and thus become insecure. Pakistan is even worse, as interdependence fosters increased concern for outer appearance and occupation. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this issue, with even more individuals using the internet for social interactions during restricted movement. The aftermath of being exposed to screens was terrible; in fact, it exacerbated feelings of isolation, panic attacks, and tension. The compulsive urge to check social media and FOMO caused sleep deprivation and even more panic attacks.

To conclude, it is true that there are benefits of using social media platforms, but these also pose huge mental health difficulties at other levels, especially in cultures such as Pakistan's. There is a need for information campaigns encouraging young social media users to alter their habits for the better. Along with establishing the need for backing, the stigma surrounding mental health should be decreased, and safe online behavior should be encouraged to ensure mentally healthy Pakistani youth.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, SA and MSA; methodology, SA; software, SA; validation, SA and MSA; formal analysis, SA; investigation, SA; resources, SA; data curation, SA; writing—original draft preparation, SA; writing—review and editing, SA; visualization, SA; supervision, SA; project administration, SA; funding acquisition, MSA. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Akram, S., Alam, R. N. (2022). Social Constructions of the Concept of COVID-19 in Pakistan: An Anthropological Investigation. In: *Negotiating the Pandemic*. Routledge. pp. 255–269.
- Akram, S., Baloch, M. Y. J., Alrefaei, A. F., et al. (2024). Interface between mental health and the earthquake: Considering humanitarian endeavor. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12, 1326407.
- Bekalu, M. A., McCloud, R. F., Viswanath, K. (2019). Association of social media use with social well-being, positive mental health, and self-rated health: Disentangling routine use from emotional connection to use. *Health Education & Behavior*, 46(2_suppl), 69–80.
- Carr, C. T., Hayes, R. A. (2015). Social media: Defining, developing, and divining. *Atlantic journal of communication*, 23(1), 46–65.
- Chatterjee, S. (2020). Antecedents of phubbing: From technological and psychological perspectives. *Journal of Systems and Information Technology*, 22(2), 161–178.
- Chen, H.-T., Li, X. (2017). The contribution of mobile social media to social capital and psychological well-being: Examining the role of communicative use, friending and self-disclosure. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 75, 958–965.
- Coyne, S. M., Rogers, A. A., Zurcher, J. D., et al. (2020). Does time spent using social media impact mental health?: An eight year longitudinal study. *Computers in human behavior*, 104, 106160.
- Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., Halliwell, E. (2015). Social comparisons on social media: The impact of Facebook on young women's body image concerns and mood. *Body image*, 13, 38–45.
- Gupta, C., Jogdand, S., Kumar, M. (2022). Reviewing the impact of social media on the mental health of adolescents and young adults. *Cureus*, 14(10).
- Husain, F., Akram, S., Al-Kubaisi, H. A. R. A., et al. (2023). The COVID-19 pandemic exposes and exacerbates inequalities for vulnerable groups: A systematic review. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(3), 3755–3765.
- Karim, F., Oyewande, A. A., Abdalla, L. F., et al. (2020). Social media use and its connection to mental health: A systematic review. *Cureus*, 12(6).
- Koehler, S. N., Parrell, B. R. (2020). The impact of social media on mental health: A mixed-methods research of service providers' awareness [Master's thesis]. California State University.
- Kross, E., Verduyn, P., Demiralp, E., et al. (2013). Facebook use predicts declines in subjective well-being in young adults. *PLoS ONE*, 8(8), e69841. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0069841>
- Kuss, D. J., Griffiths, M. D. (2017). Social networking sites and addiction: Ten lessons learned. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 14(3), 311.
- Lindenberg, M., Retèl, V., van Til, J., et al. (2021). Selecting Image-Guided Surgical Technologies in Oncology: A Surgeon's Perspective. *Journal of surgical research*, 257, 333–343.
- Nagata, J. M., Yang, J. H., Singh, G., et al. (2023). Cyberbullying and sleep disturbance among early adolescents in the US. *Academic pediatrics*, 23(6), 1220–1225.
- Naureen, N., Javaid, M., Saif, S., et al. (2022). Impact of Social Media on Mental Health of Youth in Pakistan: A Reformation Plan, based on a Cross-Sectional Insight. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 19(2), 1378–1393.
- Niaz, M. J., Danish, S., Waqas, M. (2024). The social media's effects upon mental well-being: Insights from youth in pakistani context. *Journal of Social Research Development*, 5(2), 349–362.
- Ostic, D., Qalati, S. A., Barbosa, B., et al. (2021). Effects of social media use on psychological well-being: A mediated model. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 678766.
- Perloff, R. M. (2014). Social media effects on young women's body image concerns: Theoretical perspectives and an agenda for research. *Sex roles*, 71, 363–377.
- Primack, B. A., Shensa, A., Sidani, J. E., et al. (2017). Social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults in the US. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 53(1), 1–8.
- Robinson, L., Cotten, S. R., Ono, H., et al. (2015). Digital inequalities and why they matter. *Information, communication & society*, 18(5), 569–582.
- Suisman, J. L., Thompson, J. K., Keel, P. K., et al. (2014). Genetic and environmental influences on thin-ideal internalization across puberty and preadolescent, adolescent, and young adult development. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 47(7), 773–783.

Wang, C., Pan, R., Wan, X., et al. (2020). Immediate psychological responses and associated factors during the initial stage of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic among the general population in China. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(5), 1729.