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The Interplay of Social Media in Normalizing Youth Cognition About Drugs: A Social Learning Perspective

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Abstract

This study explored the normalization of youths' perception regarding drugs at the hands of social media. The theoretical framework of this study draws upon the incidental exposure framework and the risk perception of health behavior to map out the penetration of increasing drugs' representation on social media into the cognitive behavior of youth. Considering the quantitative nature of current study, the researchers virtually circulated the questionnaire among conveniently available 270 young social media users of Lahore – aged 16 to 25. The chi-square test on obtained responses approved the hypothesis – there's a strong association between social media usage and normalization of users' perception about drugs. Further data analysis suggested that the representation of drugs' consumption paves the way toward the normalization of youths' perception about drugs. Not to mention, the depiction of these substances is not solely limited to one's own social circle; instead, many influential people – particularly social media celebrities – also flaunt their smoking/drinking videos/images which collectively makes the latter one appear as a common practice – something that everyone must try!!!

Keywords: *Cognitive behavior, Youths' perception, social learning theory, social media, drugs representation*

1. Introduction

Social networking sites represent innovative technological frameworks that empower individuals, who were once former spectators of media, to generate and share their individual media content (Ng et al., 2023; Kuss & Griffins, 2022; Mandiberg, 2012). These platforms epitomize the progression of Web 2.0 technologies, offering public the ongoing capability to Craft, alter, and/or disseminate content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Nevertheless, virtual entertainment sites have become an important component of many people's daily routines especially among teenagers and young adults (Xiadong & Li, 2016; Arampatzi & Burger, 2018; Moon et al., 2014; Brunskill, 2013; Boyd, 2014; Hampton et al., 2011; Koles & Nagy, 2012). Not to mention, activesocial media users spend hours each day gazing at photos on Instagram or scrolling down TikTok. While the objective of these events is to offer fun, and get people networking on the internet, the exponential rise in screen time may have unintended consequences (Campos et al., 2016; Gowens et al., 2012; Chen & Schulz, 2016; Hampton & Sessions, 2009; Venkatesh, 2016).

The term 'drug' finds definition as a “a substance that produces physiological effect, pharmacological impact, or alteration when ingested” (Bell, 2012; Lüscher & Malenka, 2011; Nestler, 1992). In 2010, it was revealed that 45 hours per week were dedicated to media consumption by young people – including movies, video games, music, and websites – surpassing the time spent that is supposed to be spent at either school or with parents (Nunez-Smith et al., 2010). With the popularity and expansion

in number of these sites, many individuals are beginning to consider the link between social media and substance usage (Shawn et al., 2010; Depue et al., 2015). Nicotine, alcohol, and marijuana are more likely to be used by teen users than by their peers. (Phua, 2022). Therefore, the link between drinking and social media is particularly concerning (Depue et al., 2015). Furthermore, higher rates of self-reported drinking difficulties and alcohol use disorders are linked to increased alcohol-related social media activities (Zheng et al., 2010; Phua, 2022). What's even scarier than this is the exposure to alcohol-related social media content shared by friends that may actually predict the inclination of drinking among teens (Zheng et al., 2010; Pokhrel et al., 2018; Shawn et al., 2010).

Numerous types of social interaction sites and apps are encompassed by the term 'social media' (Erreygers et al., 2017; Kemp, 2022; Verduyn et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2022). Many individuals acknowledged that social media glamorizes the alcoholic consumption by individuals (Whaite et al., 2013; Camenga et al., 2018; Al-sharqi et al., 2015; Primack et al., 2019; Parigi & Henson, 2014; LaRose et al., 2014). 97 percent of alcohol-related posts on Instagram and Facebook by teenagers depicted alcohol in a good social setting (Boyd, 2014; Hampton et al., 2011; Venkatesh, 2016). Not to mention, celebrities as well as ordinary young adults are uploading images of themselves with fancy alcoholic cocktails or drinking-out with pals (Alpert et al., 2021; Shawn et al., 2010; Phua, 2022; Depue et al., 2015; Pokhrel et al., 2018). Instagram, in particular, has long been chastised for being a highlight reel and a major source of FOMO (fear of missing out). It's easier to get caught up in these prominent social activities when the rich and famous celebrities share lavish photos of themselves with a drink in hand – pushing people to give them a try (Camenga et al., 2018). The visibility of friends and family enjoying lively social events on platforms like Facebook or Instagram can influence young and impressionable individuals, tempting them to engage in risky behaviors to conform. Conversely, for some, such content can lead to feelings of depression, potentially driving them towards the use of drugs or alcohol. Consequently, the promotion of illicit substance use is widespread on social media, with both celebrities and others endorsing such behavior (Phua, 2022; Pokhrel et al., 2018). There have been reports of drug sales being carried out through the platforms – users using hashtags to connect with potential buyers. Nonetheless, the tobacco, alcohol, and electronic cigarette industries have also integrated their marketing strategies into these social networking platforms (Alpert et al., 2021).

Through social media, the cannabis industries have been able to reach out to youth even though they are against the direction of their marketing strategies towards minors (Thanki & Fredrick, 2016). This, somehow, is also beneficial for the industry as it allows more teens' exposure (Malik et al., 2022). Peer injunctive standards act as a middle person between web-based entertainment openness and the commencement of drinking ways of behaving highlights intercession focuses of companion impact and regulating ways of behaving (Camenga et al., 2018; Phua, 2022).

Celebrities actively endorse drug and alcohol use on social media platforms, serving as influential figures that young people often find encouragement from (Phua et al., 2018; Shawn et al., 2010; Depue et al., 2015; Phua, 2022). Moreover, celebrity-driven advertising portrays smoking and drinking as enjoyable and cool activities, subtly exerting pressure on teenagers to experiment with similar products (Vogel et al., 2010; Alpert et al., 2021). The strategic deployment of celebrities, music industry figures, and attractive young models is a common practice in many digital advertisements, exemplifying the efficacy of these marketing strategies among children and teenagers (Zheng et al., 2021). Studies suggest that advertising may be attributed to as much as 30% of adolescent tobacco and alcohol consumption (Zheng et al., 2010). High-profile celebrities like Justin Bieber, Drake, and Cardi B consistently share images of themselves engaging in drinking and recreational drug use across various platforms, impacting the adolescents who follow their posts (Pokhrel et al., 2018; Alpert et al., 2021). While exposure to celebrities and influential figures engaging in such behavior is not the sole factor influencing youngsters, it does contribute significantly to shaping their perspectives (Cortese et al., 2018). This kind of glamorized social media posts, somehow, promotes drug use as well as raising a ruckus around town hard, paving the way for youth to adopt such practices (Camenga et al., 2018; Alpert et al., 2021).

1.1 Research objectives

This study has following research objectives

- To explore the influence of social media on the perception of youth regarding drugs
- To know the influence of peer pressure on the perceptions of the youth regarding drugs.
- To see how the youth maintain their virtual identity by either adopting/rejecting the drug incentives

1.2 Research questions

RQ1: Does social media influence the youngsters' perception regarding drugs?

RQ2: Does the depiction of drugs on celebrities' or friends' posts on social media change the perception of youngsters regarding drugs?

1.3 Hypothesis

H1: There is an association between uses of social media and normalizing perceptions of youngsters regarding drugs.

2. Literature Review

While social media platforms typically demand varying levels of user

registration, they predominantly operate on the web, making them easily accessible to all internet users (Khosravi et al., 2016; Xiadong & Li, 2016; Arampatzi & Burger, 2018). According to Nielsen (2012), an international information and measurement company based in the US and Netherlands, more time is dedicated to interacting at social networking sites by internet users than any other online platforms. Significantly, Facebook, which was made publicly accessible in late 2006, is endowed with over 1.6 billion registered users globally (Sun et al., 2023; Gokalpt et al., 2023; Ng et al., 2023; Kuss & Griffins, 2022). Out of these, 1.35 billion were active in the span of only thirty days (Kuss & Griffins, 2022; Verduyn et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2022; Pew, 2018; Valkenberg, 2022). Additionally, YouTube has surpassed 1B active users, and Twitter over 500M users. Furthermore, anonymous access to users on the deep web through the Tor Browser has recently been permitted by certain social media platforms situated on the surface web, including the prominent Facebook. The recent surge in the internet's exponential growth, notably within the domain of social media, has left an indelible mark on contemporary society. (Xiadong & Li, 2016; Arampatzi & Burger, 2018; Verduyn et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2022).

2.1 Drug addiction

Addiction induces alterations in the brain through two distinct mechanisms (Berke & Hyman, 2000). Initially, the brain undergoes transformation due to repeated exposure to drugs (Lüscher & Malenka, 2011; Nestler, 1992); this corresponds to Koob's conceptualization of drug-induced sensitization of anti-reward. Subsequently, the brain undergoes modifications through the formation of memory nerves linked to the experience of drug in-take. Therefore, it is acknowledged that secondary form of cerebral modification, the progressive formation of memories linked to the drug encounter, represents the more pivotal distinction between the neurology of addiction and the non-addicted neural state. Increasingly apparent is the recognition that autonomous intake of substances with addictive properties induces neurological and peripheral alterations surpassing those prompted by the passive receipt of the drug (Krawczyk et al., 2013). Moreover, these alterations play a role in determining the expected availability of the drug (You et al., 2007).

For individuals who smoke, the primary trigger for craving is not necessarily the duration of abstinence but rather the anticipation of when the next cigarette will be available (Dar et al., 2010; Dar et al., 2005). Henceforth, it is more judicious to employ the term 'addiction' in reference to the preliminary signs of compulsive drug consumption and the correlated cravings, rather than exclusively fixating on the ensuing physiological repercussions., which may manifest after prolonged drug self-administration, as seen with substances like nicotine and alcohol. While drug addiction shares close connections with manic-depressive illness, it is not synonymous with it. Drug addicts employ specific mechanisms, and these mechanisms undergo reinforcement and alteration due to drug influence.

A drug holds both symbolic and pharmacologic significance. Symbolically, it

is linked to unconscious fantasies and the act of drug use. Pharmacologically, it enhances the potency of the employed mechanisms and the omnipotence of the impulses (Caillé et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2008; Dumont et al., 2005). The detrimental phases in drug addiction closely resonate with the destructive facets intrinsic to mania. Furthermore, drug use often carries a depressive connotation, wherein the drug symbolizes a deceased or ailing entity that the patient feels compelled to incorporate out of guilt (Krawczyk et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2005; Wang et al., 2013; Wise et al., 2008; You et al., 2007). An integral function in the landscape of drug addiction is assumed by several phenomena's such as ego splitting and the projection of both positive and particularly negative facets of the self – mechanisms that manifest with greater prominence than in states characterized by manic-depressive tendencies (Rosenfeld, 1960).

2.1 Social media's impact on drug addiction

Elevated concerns have surfaced regarding the potential ramifications of drug content proliferating on social sites, serving as a catalyst in shaping normative behaviors associated with drug utilization (Krawczyk et al., 2013). This exposure, as elucidated by Phua (2022), carries the plausible consequence of fueling an escalated demand for drugs among the younger demographic. In a discerning examination of the demographics encapsulating, Cavazos-Rehg et al. (2014) unveiled a predominant presence of individuals aged 19 years or younger, constituting a substantial 73%, with a noteworthy 54% being female. The thematic core of the content predominantly revolved around affirmative discussions regarding cannabis, often artfully interwoven with elements of humor. The authors, in their analysis, underscored the influential role wielded by social media during the formative years of adolescence, shedding light on its potential sway in steering behaviors related to drug consumption.

YouTube stands as the most hitting sharing platform, while picture-sharing sites are equally prevalent among the youth (Kuss & Griffins, 2022; Mandiberg, 2012). Furthermore, numerous other social media channels, not primarily associated with visual media sharing, offer users the opportunity to disseminate pictures and videos (Whaite et al., 2013; Al-sharqi et al., 2015; Primack et al., 2019). Lau et al. (2012) emphasize the potential adversarial ramifications of social media content portraying substance utilization, calling for further research into the dissemination and processing of such online content. Manning (2013) explored the link between YouTube, drug videos, and drug education, conducting a content analysis of 750 drug videos, of which 12% were posted by official agencies. Notably, a minority (16%) of the drug-related videos were celebratory (hedonistic), varying by drug type, with no celebratory videos found for heroin or crystal meth. The study also identified cautionary videos ('vernacular prevention') and 'Do-it-yourself' (DIY) videos, providing instructions on activities such as growing cannabis, along with legal high advertisements. App stores host a plethora of drug-themed apps, including those

designed to prevent drug use, allowing users to visualize the physical degradation resulting from methamphetamine use (Thanki & Fredrick, 2016)

2.2 Social media and youngsters' perception about drugs

The contemporary cohort of adolescents and young adults is undergoing a maturation process deeply entrenched in the expansive realm of social digital platforms, exemplified by the likes of Facebook and Twitter, where the emphasis lies on the emergence and interaction of user-generated content (Lenhart et al., 2005; Camenga et al., 2018; Grizane & Jurgelane, 2017; Lule, 2021; Leong et al., 2019; Alpert et al., 2021). The utilization of such media exhibits a distinctive prevalence, particularly within the demographic folds of these lining cohorts (Madden et al., 2013b). On social media, there is a frequent creation and consumption of alcohol-related content by adolescents and young adults (Moreno et al., 2009; Alpert et al., 2021). Studies have presented that engagement with social media platforms may heighten the risk of substance abuse, particularly among adolescents (Zheng et al., 2010; Phua, 2022; Pokhrel et al., 2018; Shawn et al., 2010).

In 2011, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse conducted a study exploring the nexus between social networking and substance abuse. Their revelations laid bare that adolescents engaging in social networking platforms are quintuple more prone to tobacco use, triplicate more inclined towards alcohol consumption, and doubly as likely to partake in marijuana. (Califano, 2004). Furthermore, social media platforms serve as robust connection-building environments for networking (Alpert et al., 2021). These relationships constitute vital social circles with the potential to influence behavior, given the unique norms and values shared among like-minded virtual group members. Indeed, in the realm of social media, no user operates in isolation, and the social element holds particular significance in public health research. To comprehend how messages related to alcohol are presented on social networking sites might impact young people, it is crucial to acknowledge the dynamic patterns of social media (Eyesenbach, 2009; Pokhrel et al., 2018; Alpert et al., 2021; Shawn et al., 2010). Different social media platforms have experienced shifts in heightened recognition with time, with new ones continually launching to respond to individualized needs, resulting in a perpetually evolving landscape of sites and mobile applications (Meshi & Ellithorpe, 2021; Abbasi & Homayoon, 2014; Asur & Huberman, 2010).

One of the more senior social media platforms, MySpace, boasts a distinctive focus on music sharing and held global prominence (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). As Facebook got introduced in 2004 initially exclusively for Harvard University students, it expanded its reach to other colleges and eventually the general public by 2006. Moreover, it broadened beyond its original scope limited to college students, the dominance of MySpace began to wane. In 2006, Twitter emerged, emphasizing concise messages (Lenhart et al., 2010). Alongside these well-known social networking platforms, others have emerged, specializing in professional networks, photo sharing,

video sharing, and various other niches.

For the younger demographic, social media serves as a conduit for exposure to two influential factors linked to potential alcohol use. Alcohol researchers have initiated efforts to quantify exposure to and the impact of alcohol-related content, progressing towards developing intervention mechanisms through social media (Phua, 2022; Alpert et al., 2021; Camenga et al., 2018). However, the degree to which social media exposure aligns with, differs from, or reinforces offline counterparts remains not fully comprehended (Asur & Huberman, 2010; Cao & Yu, 2019; Lerma et al., 2021). Infodemiology represents a nascent field exploring the distribution and determinants of information facilitated through the Internet, including social media platforms.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study integrated the incidental exposure framework (Earp et al., 2013) and the risk perception of health behavior (Reyna & Parley, 2006) to provide insight into the normalization of youths' perception regarding drugs through social media. Firstly, the incidental exposure framework elucidates how individuals are exposed to information in high-choice media environments, such as social media platforms, even without actively seeking it (Earp et al., 2013). This exposure can significantly impact subsequent cognition, perception, and behavior, shaping youths' attitudes and beliefs regarding drug use (Earp et al., 2013). By integrating this framework, this study aims to understand the mechanisms through which social media influences the normalization of drug-related content among youth populations.

Secondly, the risk perception perspective emphasizes the role of risk perception in shaping health behaviors, particularly among youth (Reyna & Parley, 2006). Risk perception plays a crucial role in determining individuals' willingness to engage in risky behaviors, such as drug use (Reyna & Parley, 2006). This study acknowledges the relevance of risk perception in understanding youths' attitudes towards drugs and recognizes its significance in investigating the impact of social media on drug normalization among youths.

By integrating these two conceptual frameworks, this study builds a comprehensive model to investigate the association between social media use and the normalization of drug perception among youths. This model examines how incidental exposure to drug-related content on social media platforms influences youths' risk perceptions and subsequent behavioral intentions regarding drug use. Through this theoretical framework, this study contributes to our understanding of the complex interplay between social media, risk perception, and drug normalization among youth populations.

4. Methodology

To analyze the impact of social media's drug-related-content on the normalization of drugs in youth, the researcher conducted an online survey to quantify the responses. The age bracket for the respondents was 16-24. The questionnaire that had 17 closed ended questions was virtually circulated among the sample size by using convenient sampling technique – 250 to 300 respondents. This study collected the responses of 270 teenage social media users.

Table 1: Conceptualization & Operationalization

| Key terms | Conceptualization | Operationalization |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Role | A function or part performed especially in a particular operation or process. | The degree to which social media actively contributes to making drug use and related behaviors appear usual, socially acceptable, or enticing among youth. |
| Normalization | The process by which certain behaviors or attitudes become accepted, prevalent, and considered typical within a given society or group. | Drug use or related behaviors are perceived as common, acceptable, or even encouraged among youth social media users in Lahore. |
| Social Media | Social media refers to digital platforms and online communities where individuals can create, share, and interact with content, fostering connections and communication. | Social media can be operationalized by identifying specific platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) and measuring participants' frequency and extent of usage, content creation, and interaction on these platforms. |
| Drug | Drugs encompass a broad range of substances, both legal and illegal, that can have psychoactive effects when consumed. | Identifying specific types of drugs (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, cannabis) and assessing participants' familiarity with, exposure to, or engagement with these substances as portrayed on social media. |
| Addiction | Addiction refers to a complex condition characterized by the compulsive use of a substance or engagement in a behavior despite adverse | Assessing participants' awareness of the potential risks and consequences associated with drug use, as well as their own behaviors |

| | | |
|-------------------|--|--|
| | consequences. | indicative of potential addiction, such as frequency of use or failed attempts to quit. |
| Perception | Mental process through which individuals interpret and make sense of information from their surroundings, which can influence their attitudes and behaviors. | Participants' attitudes, beliefs, and cognitive associations related to drug use, as well as their perceptions of how prevalent and acceptable drug use is among peers and social media influencers. |

Hypothesis Testing

H₁: There is an association between use of social media and normalizing perception of youngsters regarding drugs.

H₀: There is no association between use of social media and normalizing perception of youngsters regarding drugs.

Table no. 2: Chi-square test for association between social media usage and normalizing perception of drugs

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 483.649 ^a | 16 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 279.734 | 16 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 161.287 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 268 | | |

Interpretation

Since the p-value is lower (0.000) than the accepted alpha value i.e., 0.05, the H₁ hypothesis, which states that the two variables are dependent on one another, is accepted in this situation. According to the statistics, there is a significant association between social media usage and normalizing perception of youngsters regarding drugs. Hence H₁ is accepted, and H₀ is rejected.

5. Findings & Analysis

RQ1: Does social media influence the youngsters' perception regarding drugs?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly agree | 51 | 18.9 | 19.0 | 19.0 |
| | Agree | 135 | 50.0 | 50.2 | 69.1 |
| | Neutral | 47 | 17.4 | 17.5 | 86.6 |
| | Disagree | 32 | 11.9 | 11.9 | 98.5 |
| | Strongly disagree | 4 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 269 | 99.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 1 | .4 | | |
| Total | | 270 | 100.0 | | |

Table 2: *Do you think using social media leads youngsters towards drugs?*

Interpretation:

Table 1 showed that the perception of youngster regarding drugs is influenced by social media. According to the result 19% strongly agree, and 50.2% agree that social media has the tendency to shape your perception about the use of drugs; whereas, 17.5% chose to be neutral. On the other hand, 11.9% disagreed, and 1.5% strongly disagree as they believed social media has nothing to do with your perception about drugs – it's individual's free will whether he wants to be a drug addict or refrain from doing so.

Since 60% youngsters agreed with this statement, hence one can say that social media shape the users' perception about drugs. Young people think that putting pictures on social media platforms make you look good. Observing individuals sharing images of themselves holding drinks can inadvertently create a notion that these substances are indispensable for a pleasurable experience, subtly coaxing youngsters to experiment with these substances themselves.

Table 3: *Does social media glamorize drug usage?*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly agree | 52 | 19.3 | 19.4 | 19.4 |
| | Agree | 142 | 52.6 | 53.0 | 72.4 |
| | Neutral | 44 | 16.3 | 16.4 | 88.8 |
| | Disagree | 26 | 9.6 | 9.7 | 98.5 |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| Strongly disagree | 4 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 100.0 |
| Total | 268 | 99.3 | 100.0 | |
| Missing System | 2 | .7 | | |
| Total | 270 | 100.0 | | |

Interpretation

According to the result 19.4% strongly agreed, 53% simply agreed; whereas, 16.4% were neutral about the glamorization of drugs on social media. 9.7% disagreed, and 1.5% strongly disagreed with the role of social media in glamorizing drug usage. Since 72% sided with the notion that social media glamorizes the drug use, hence we can conclude that social media has strong role in changing the perception of youngsters; about drugs by painting it with a good ink. The reason why the social media glamorization of drugs lead to its normalization is that when their friends post on social media about the kind of fun they are having while taking drugs, it gives a birth to an impulsive nerve in the viewers who wants to give it a try – although just for the sake of fun.

RQ2: Does the depiction of drugs on ones' social circle or celebrities' posts on social media change the perception of youngsters regarding drugs?

Table 4: Does celebrity smoking and drinking seem like appeal to you?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly agree | 36 | 13.3 | 13.3 | 13.3 |
| | Agree | 132 | 48.9 | 48.9 | 62.2 |
| | Neutral | 32 | 11.9 | 11.9 | 74.1 |
| | Disagree | 43 | 15.9 | 15.9 | 90.0 |
| | Strongly disagree | 27 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 270 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Interpretation

According to the result 13.3 strongly agreed, 48.8% simply agreed; whereas, 11.9 were neutral about getting appeal from celebrities' when they smoke or drink on their social media posts; whereas, 15.9 % disagreed, and 10% strongly disagreed with this. Not to mention, the depiction of these substances is not solely limited to ones' own friends; instead, many influential people – particularly social media celebrities – also post videos/images of them while smoking and drinking with their peers. This makes drinking and drug usage sound like a common practice – something that everyone must try once in their life.

Table 4: *Do you think youngsters feel pressured when they see their friends' doing drugs on social media?*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly agree | 44 | 16.3 | 16.3 | 16.3 |
| | Agree | 165 | 61.1 | 61.1 | 77.4 |
| | Neutral | 36 | 13.3 | 13.3 | 90.7 |
| | Disagree | 19 | 7.0 | 7.0 | 97.8 |
| | Strongly disagree | 6 | 2.2 | 2.2 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 270 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Interpretation

According to the result, 16.3% strongly agreed, 61.1 % simply agreed; whereas, 13.3% were neutral; whereas, 7% disagreed, and 2.2% strongly disagreed as they believed the drug posts of their social circle influences their perception in no way at all. Since 77% agreed that they feel pressured while seeing their friends involved in drugs, one cannot sideline the effective role of social media.

Youngsters are attracted and pressures by the lifestyles or behavior of celebrities and their friends on social media. Young people commonly experience pressure to fit in. They may behave or make a decision based on what would help them get validation from their social circle. Youngsters get involved in drug activities only because they believe that it will earn them respect from their peers. When they see photos of their friends smoking, they start developing a soft corner for this merely because it will make them look “cool”. When all their friends are using addictive drugs and they aren't, they might feel left out and find it really difficult to relate to or discuss it because they haven't used it themselves. This makes drinking and drug usage sound like a common practice – something that everyone must try once in their life

Conclusion

Although social media serve as a strong force that contributes to informing, learning, spreading awareness, entertainment, and education; nevertheless, one cannot sideline its adverse impacts. It has an effective contribution in the cognitive behavior of youngsters – active social media users. In the light of incidental exposure framework (Earp et al., 2013) and the risk perception of health behavior, this model examines how incidental exposure to drug-related content on social media platforms influences youths' risk perceptions and subsequent behavioral intentions regarding drug usage. Nevertheless, it is discreetly encouraged on social media in a number of ways that lead young people to believe that it is an acceptable thing in our traditional society. Not to mention, the depiction of these substances is not solely limited to ones' own friends; instead, many influential people – particularly social media celebrities – also post videos/images of them while smoking and drinking with their peers. This

makes drinking and drug usage sound like a common practice — something that everyone must try once in their life.

The findings of this study align with previous research (Moreno et al., 2009; Alpert et al., 2021; Asur & Huberman, 2010; Cao & Yu, 2019; Lerma et al., 2021) highlighting the influential role of social media in shaping youths' perceptions of drug use. This study underscores the need for further exploration of the mechanisms through which social media platforms influence attitudes and behaviors related to drug consumption. Before the rise of social media, drugs were typically sold by some limited people, but now it has become possibly convenient to purchase drugs online. The reason why the social media glamorization of drugs lead to its normalization is that when their friends post on social media about the kind of fun they are having while taking drugs, it gives a birth to an impulsive nerve in the viewers who wants to give it a try — although just for the sake of fun. Youngsters spend a lot of their time on social media; hence they are the easy target of social media influence. When all of their friends are using addictive drugs and they aren't, they might feel left out and find it really difficult to relate to or discuss it because they haven't used it themselves.

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