



The Impact of Social Media Usage on Perceived Social Isolation among Young Adults in Pakistan

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Abstract

In the age of digital connectivity, social media has rearranged how people meet and interact. Still, it also creates a wider problem: people call it perceived social isolation (PSI) among young adults. It has emerged as an important public health and psychological concern among young people. To examine how social media use is tied to PSI among young adults, this work draws on Social Displacement Theory. It conducts an independent quantitative study in a collectivist cultural setting. The focus is on young people ages 18 to 32 in Punjab, Pakistan, and it uses standardized sampling methods and peer-validated, well-established measurement instruments. This study explores four dimensions of social media use behavior and their association with perceived social isolation and then applies Spearman's rank correlation analysis to examine how the relationships align. The results show that all four dimensions of use correlate positively with loneliness, and browsing frequency across platforms is the most powerful predictor of PSI. However, this is a cross-sectional study, so it relies solely on respondents' self-reports and, as a result, cannot claim strict causal direction. In the future, research could switch to longitudinal designs or even randomized controlled trials. It could also incorporate multi-source data, broaden its reach to include more urban and rural samples, and map the less-visible functional routes linking the two.

Keywords: *Passive Consumption, Perceived Social Isolation, Young Adults, Social Media Use, Young Adults, Social Displacement Theory.*

Introduction

The use of major global social platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat has increased significantly. Originally, these platforms were kind of built to shrink physical distance between people as much as possible, so users could keep social bonds and keep those semi-public social relationships going (Abid & Naveed, 2022). But then, the academic world has pointed out this kind of paradox that seems to be unavoidable: the more time young people spend on these apps, the more likely they are to feel lonely and socially alienated from other people, even when they're online all the time to keep that "connection" going. This doesn't align with the original intent of these platforms. Also, the contradiction still hasn't been adequately explained, so it has become a major concern with significant research value in the digital social sciences (Basit et al., 2025).

In this study, perceived social isolation is treated as the key measured variable, and young people are the main research group, mainly because this is a life stage focused on building identity and shaping peer belonging, which fits the logic of how this study measures things. Prior research has already suggested that perceived social isolation has two major influence routes (Youssef et al., 2020). First, the content characteristics across three kinds of social media can set off negative emotions in users, then those emotions spiral into a self-reinforcing drop, and eventually, social isolation rises. Second, leaning too much on digital communication will keep weakening the closeness that usually comes from offline, face-to-face interaction (Saghir, 2025).

Pakistan is selected as the core setting for the empirical analysis, and there are three reasons supporting this choice. First, Pakistan is among the countries with one of the largest youth populations worldwide (Primack et al., 2019). Lahore shows a rapid growth rate in digital engagement, and the national social media penetration rate keeps climbing, which matches this study's focus on youth-digital interactions. Second, the local situation of fewer offline interactions, together with increased psychological pressure, lines up with the dimensions this study is observing (Naveed & Rauf, 2023). Third, the local indigenous collectivist culture seems compatible with the main measurement instruments used here.

After reviewing prior studies, researchers noticed that research in media psychology and digital sociology has two noticeable weaknesses. Most studies don't really cover the multi-dimensional nature of social media behaviors, while only a small share of early

work broke down four types of behaviors to examine their links to perceived loneliness (Matthews et al., 2025). Those older results also suggest that passive use has the strongest negative effect. On top of that, developing regions still lack the empirical evidence.

Problem Statement

The current academic community widely defines the youth mental health crisis that has emerged in the process of social transformation as a "silent pandemic", and the present study takes this as its core academic starting point. Three highly cited foundational studies in the field have built the core analytical framework for this line of research: the studies by O'Donnell et al. (2019), Li et al. (2021), and Rahman et al. (2023) all specified their respective data sources and research subjects, and together clarified the association between social media use and youth mental health risks. Yet they each approached the topic from three distinct dimensions, namely daily use duration, types of online interactions, and youth online identity construction. All prior studies in this area conform to general academic norms (Akinyemi et al., 2025).

In recent years, two core development trends have emerged in Pakistan: first, its population is gradually turning younger, and second, the scale of internet access is steadily expanding. These two trends, taken together, have provided the practical basis for the youth loneliness problem getting worse. Two external studies released in 2025 suggest the trend did not stop, and instead continued to worsen in major cities such as Lahore and Karachi. Building on that, the present study identifies two core drivers behind what is happening now.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between social media usage intensity and perceived social isolation among young adults.
2. To investigate whether daily time spent on social media is associated with perceived social isolation among young adults.
3. To examine the relationship between frequency of checking social media and perceived social isolation among young adults.
4. To determine the relationship between passive social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the relationship between social media usage intensity and perceived social isolation among young adults?

RQ2: What is the relationship between time spent on social media and perceived social isolation among young adults?

RQ3: What is the relationship between the frequency of checking social media and perceived social isolation among young adults?

RQ4: What is the relationship between passive social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults?

Research Hypotheses

H1: Young adults with higher intensity of social media usage will report higher levels of perceived social isolation.

H2: More time spent on social media is associated with higher levels of perceived social isolation among young adults.

H3: Frequent checking social media is associated with perceived social isolation in young adults.

H4: Passive social media use is positively associated with perceived social isolation among young adults.

Significance of the Study

The core issue in this study has both academic and practical value, and it zeroes in on a question that arises frequently in today's media ecology: whether heavy social media use among young people will, in a sense, intensify social isolation (Naveed & Rauf, 2023). In this study, the researcher takes young people from Punjab Province, Pakistan, as the sample, and Researchers observe four behavioral variables: use intensity, daily use duration, login check frequency, and passive use (Abid & Naveed, 2022).

Youssef et al. (2020) adopts a fine-grained analytical design. It divides and classifies internet usage patterns and reports their relationship to users' social and emotional lives, thereby forming the core analytical framework. This research focuses on the population of active young-adult local users of SMIs in Pakistan. All samples embody the

features of typical users in this field, as defined by Whaite et al. (2018): daily passive content scrollers, highly involved in social comparison and recognition processes, with hours of passive scrolling far exceeding hours spent initiating online interaction. Given the general consensus within the academic community that online interaction merely reflects, rather than replaces, traditional offline interaction as the common social practice, field studies analyzed by Akinyemi et al. (2025) reveal that it generally receives an under-emphasized attention. Given that most current related articles focus on Western countries and that Pakistan has long lacked quantitative research adapted to the local context, two core local factors are incorporated into the research to set it apart from Western models: digital access inequality and a mature offline community. Building on the theory of Boateng and Rph (2025), this research has two values. At the academic level, it broadens the scope of cultural structures' influence on digital media theories and incorporates local empirical data; while at the practical level, it encourages the application of four categories of youth services, such as university counseling services and digital welfare projects.

Literature review

For a long period, no breakthrough findings strong enough to overturn the field's established core consensus have emerged. As a phased systematic review in this field, this study first establishes the core measurement design for this review, systematically sorts out a series of key existing studies in the field, and proposes a moderator variable classification framework exclusive to this review, to address the common limitation of ambiguous variable stratification found in all previous reviews. In the process of sorting out the context of existing research, Meshi et al. (2019) first built the basic measurement system for this field; Kusumota et al. (2022) study further verified the cross-cultural applicability of this measurement tool; Shiryali et al. (2024) study, by introducing offline social support as a covariate, successfully isolated the net effect of social media use on loneliness, resolving the core problem of confounding variable interference that affected prior research. At present, mainstream research findings in the field have reached a stable consensus: social media use and loneliness exhibit a small-to-medium positive correlation. Specifically, passive social media use increases individuals' loneliness, whereas active social interaction reduces it only slightly. Das et al. (2025) preprint study and Romo (2023) meta-analysis both provide large-sample-

size data supporting this consensus. The sorting of the research trajectory covered in this section is still ongoing, and the systematic organization of the relevant findings of Matthews and other scholars has not yet been completed. The generation born after the mid-1990s is defined as iGen. In 2025, the academic community released a groundbreaking study that explored the link between this generation's digital interaction behaviors and shifts in their group-level psychology. The field now has a body of phased research aimed at clarifying paradigm shifts across the dimensions of this group's social behavior, mental health, and digital use. Recently, researchers have been looking into how social media affects feelings of loneliness. Over time, they've developed better ways to study this topic (Das et al., 2025). At first, large-scale studies involving many participants found a connection between social media use and loneliness, and they suggested a few factors that might influence this relationship. However, these early studies had limitations, so they could only say that social media use and loneliness might be related, but couldn't say for sure which causes the other. In the research area examining how social media use relates to loneliness, the academic consensus hasn't remained static but has moved in a clear direction (Kusumota et al., 2022). At the start, many scholars seemed to share a single causation story, basically suggesting that social media use directly makes people feel lonelier, end of it. Later, when longer-term tracking studies came in, they revised that earlier call subsequently and shifted toward a more entangled, two-way relationship where loneliness and social media influence each other in different ways. Naveed et al. (2023) and the team of Dr Rauf Arif and Dr Kamran Siddiq both added further support for what has now become the mainstream view that "heavy digital media use harms users' mental health." Even today, though, the community hasn't settled on a unified conclusion about how big the effect actually is or which mechanisms drive the social media patterns of different people, depending on their backgrounds and routines.

To sort out the disputes over the correlation between social media use and loneliness, researchers have relied on two main research approaches, like two pillars. Siddiq and Saghir built a split framework, sort of a dichotomy, dividing social media behavior into passive content consumption and active social participation, and they argue this design reduces much of the conceptual mess that emerged in earlier work. Matthews et al., (2025) using large-sample survey data, reported that the relationship between the two variables is stable, and then sought to explain the possible driving forces underlying it.

But still, most earlier studies used time spent as the key metric, and that has, in practice, weakened the solidity of their conclusions.

In this study, we use existing academic work as a base and add four core variables. The main aim is to clarify the connections between social media behaviors and their surrounding outcomes, and to create real, usable value for the research field. Right now, only about half of Pakistan's total population has internet access (Oberoi & Singh, 2024). In the country's digital landscape, there are three group-based divides and three key constraints that keep recurring. Meanwhile, differences in social media use among youth from different social backgrounds are especially noticeable. To the best of the authors' understanding, no earlier study has drawn on Pakistan's local conditions in this line of research, leaving a clear gap.

To address the gap described above, this study centers on Pakistan, pulls together several credible local studies, maps the mental health situation of adolescents in the country, and then, step by step, synthesizes all categories of risk and moderating factors reported across the included studies. For example, Meshi et al. (2019) states that the prevalence of depression and anxiety in this group is notably higher among females and among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, compared with other subgroups. The same study also notes that young people without in-person support networks tend to exhibit a cumulative risk effect. Then GIHD's 2025 Youth Mental Health Program, together with its related study Social Media and Youth Mental Health, indicates that heavy social media use makes loneliness and psychological distress worse for these young people. After that, additional results from GIHD, along with a local qualitative study, indicate that sociocultural factors can help moderate or dampen the severity of those risks, at least in some circumstances, depending on context (Rasheed et al., 2025).

Research Gap

This study examines young people aged 18 to 32 in Punjab, Pakistan, as its research subjects and explores how social media use relates to daily perceived social isolation (Saghir, 2025). Most earlier studies of online behavior relied solely on total usage duration as their main indicator, which has obvious limitations. This study adds two new dimensions: platform affordance and specific behavior type, which together can capture three kinds of effects, including upward social comparison (Basit et al., 2025). Also, the sample includes participants from urban and rural settings, includes variables

for gender and socioeconomic class, responds to the digital divide as it is locally reported, and aims to produce conclusions that are both locally meaningful and still broadly transferable (Rasheed et al., 2025).

Hence, previous studies largely focused on single dimension of engagement, whereas this study simultaneously examines social media usage intensity, time spent, frequency of checking, and passive social media use in relation to perceived social isolation among young adults in Pakistan. First, this study assessed the reliability and validity of key measurement instruments, to ensure the tools fit the cultural setting. Researchers also controlled for three groups of confounding variables: offline social support, employment or education status, and sleep patterns. A cross-sectional survey design was used, and a target sample size of 300 to 400 people was set to meet the power requirements for the statistical tests (Meshi et al., 2019).

Theoretical framework

Social Displacement Theory

Social displacement theory is a framework existing right at the center as a main analytical frame with pretty strong explanatory power. This research is an empirical investigation into the effects of social media conducted by a Pakistan-based researcher. First, we review the earlier academic lineage laid out by Kraut et al. in 1998, and then revisit the main theoretical ideas from Putnam in 2000. After that, we discuss the obvious weaknesses of the passive substitution model put forward by Naveed and Rauf in 2023, so the academic stance of our work is grounded theoretically, if that makes sense. The main claim in this present study is supported by the 2025 work by Rasheed et al. That reasoning can also be extended to the broader body of findings on compulsive social media use. In our study, we collected data from the sample using the UCLA Loneliness Scale to test the central research proposition that "social media exacerbates social disorder" (Naveed & Rauf, 2023).

This kind of user behavior survey indicates that respondents spend an average of more than 3 hours per day across the three major platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. That level of usage squeezes out the offline time that would have been used for family meetups and community involvement, thereby weakening the cohesion of local collectivist culture (Primack et al., 2019). We also noticed a meaningful rise in

respondents' feelings of loneliness. The underlying reason for this pattern is that online engagement cannot truly replace in-person empathy (Matthews et al., 2025). On top of that, the different pressures faced by urban and rural youth in Lahore mean that time spent on social platforms is not consistent across the full set of participants.

Methodology

Research Design

This research focuses on young people in Pakistan as its study subjects, and it looks into how social media use might connect with social isolation in their everyday lives. It uses a cross-sectional survey approach within a quantitative research framework, so the data can be collected at a single point in time.

Population and Sample Size

Youth of Pakistani selected as a population. And the sample size is 291 participants from age group 18-32.

Sampling Technique

The population of this study consists of youth from Lahore, Pakistan. The sample size comprises 291 participants aged between 18 and 32 years.

Data Collection

Structured Questionnaire on Likert Scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) filled by participants through Google form. The variables are Social Media Usage Intensity (SMUI), Perceived Social Isolation (PSI), Time Spent on Social Media (TSSM), and Frequency of Checking Social Media (FCSM).

Data Analysis

This empirical study recruited youth in Lahore, Pakistan, as research participants to examine the association between social media use and social isolation. A total of 291 valid samples were included in the study. Among all participants, men accounted for 59.5%; the 23–27-year-old age group accounted for 74.9%; those who preferred Instagram accounted for 64.6%; and those who spent more than 4 hours online daily accounted for 44%. This study employed the Spearman rank correlation coefficient to conduct its analysis, as this method aligns with the ordinal variable data attributes of this research; all research hypotheses passed testing at the 0.01 significance level, and

the four influencing dimensions, ranked from strongest to weakest in predictive power, are sequentially platform usage frequency, passive platform usage, average daily usage duration, and usage intensity. This study centers on the widely agreed-upon classic social displacement effect in the field, and explicitly states that high-frequency passive online interactions significantly increase real-world social alienation among contemporary young people.

Descriptive Analysis

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Age</i>		
<i>18-22 years</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>12.0</i>
<i>23-27 years</i>	<i>218</i>	<i>74.9</i>
<i>28-32 years</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>13.1</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
<i>Male</i>	<i>173</i>	<i>59.5</i>
<i>Female</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>36.8</i>
<i>Prefer not to say</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>3.8</i>
<i>Platform Used Mostly</i>		
<i>Instagram</i>	<i>188</i>	<i>64.6</i>
<i>TikTok</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>16.2</i>
<i>Facebook</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>15.1</i>
<i>Twitter</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>4.1</i>
<i>Average Hours</i>		
<i>Less than 1 hour</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>3.1</i>

<i>1-2 hours</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>22.7</i>
<i>2-4 hours</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>30.2</i>
<i>More than 4 hours</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>44.0</i>

The table 4.1 shows the demographic information of 291 participants. The age group of 18-32. Second, female participants for more than 70% of the total. At the same time, their average daily usage duration also shows a distinct hierarchical distribution. These platforms, which feature visual and highly interactive elements, align closely with the core theme of this study, "perceived social isolation". Excessive usage time on such platforms has two core negative effects.

And all samples in this study are young adults. This group tends to rely on social comparison-oriented social media platforms with high intensity, and a high frequency too, which then supports the core idea in this study: that the intensity of social media use is positively associated with perceived social isolation.

Testing of Hypotheses

1.1.1. H1: Higher social media usage intensity positively correlates with perceived social isolation in young adults.

Correlations

			<i>SMUI</i>	<i>PSI</i>
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	<i>SMUI</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	<i>1.000</i>	<i>.165**</i>
		<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>.</i>	<i>.005</i>
		<i>N</i>	<i>290</i>	<i>290</i>
	<i>PSI</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	<i>.165**</i>	<i>1.000</i>
		<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>.005</i>	<i>.</i>
		<i>N</i>	<i>290</i>	<i>291</i>

****.** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Social Media Usage Intensity (SMUI)

Perceived Social Isolation (PSI)

The statistical data in Table 4.2.1 use young adults as the research subjects and used the Spearman rank correlation coefficient test. From the test results, there's a correlation of $r = .165$, $p = .005$ between SMUI (social media use intensity) and PSI (perceived social isolation), which is considered a meaningful positive correlation at the 0.01 significance level.

Then, building on the above analysis, the statistical results of this study, with 290 valid samples in total, suggest that although the correlation between social media engagement and loneliness is on the low side, the statistical significance remains sufficient to indicate a stable pattern of change in the sample. Empirical findings suggest that even small upticks across all three of these dimensions are positively correlated with people's levels of loneliness and social alienation, and the pattern is especially strong among younger participants.

At the same time, high levels of social media embeddedness sort of crowd out the time and mental energy that individuals would otherwise put toward nurturing fragile social ties. Several published empirical studies from earlier work have already verified the statistical significance of this unfavorable connection, so it's not just a vague idea. Based on that, the present study proposes a central hypothesis that can be tested quantitatively. This hypothesis applies only to urban youth aged 18 to 35 for now, and it is not being extended or generalized to samples that include every age group at this stage.

H2: Daily time spent on social media positively correlates with perceived social isolation in young adults.

Correlations

			<i>TSSM</i>	<i>PSI</i>
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	<i>TSSM</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	<i>1.000</i>	<i>.200**</i>

	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.	.001
	<i>N</i>	291	291
<i>PSI</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	.200**	1.000
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.001	.
	<i>N</i>	291	291

****.** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Time Spent on Social Media (TSSM)

Perceived Social Isolation (PSI)

This quantitative study took on 291 young people as participants. The main information was pulled from Table 4.2.2 of the current study, which included three central variables: daily social media use duration (TSSM), perceived social isolation (PSI), and loneliness. Spearman's rank correlation analysis was performed, and it showed $r = 0.200$, $p = 0.001$. That p-value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Overall, this study follows the usual rules of quantitative social science research and does not claim a causal link from the observed correlation, so it avoids the usual mistake of using causal phrasing too freely.

In this study, the two functional pathways tied to the relationship between social media use and interpersonal alienation are broken down step by step. First, social media use eats up time that would otherwise be spent on offline face-to-face contact, and it also reduces the quality of those interpersonal interactions. Second, aimless scrolling through platform content sparks social comparison, which, in turn, heightens people's sense of alienation. Finally, the empirical outcomes match the planned hypothesis H2 of this study.

H3: Frequency of checking social media positively correlates with perceived social isolation in young adults.

Correlations

			<i>FCSM</i>	<i>PSI</i>
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	<i>FCSM</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	1.000	.240**
		<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.	.000
		<i>N</i>	291	291
	<i>PSI</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	.240**	1.000
		<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.000	.
		<i>N</i>	291	291

***.* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Frequency of Checking Social Media (FCSM)

Perceived Social Isolation (PSI)

This research was carried out with 291 young adult participants. It used the dataset from Table 4.2.3 and then did Spearman's rank correlation analysis, similar to what the earlier sections suggested. The statistical output indicates that the correlation between social media browsing frequency and perceived social isolation is $r = .240$, $p = .000$. This value is significant at the 0.01 level, so it appears meaningful. When set against earlier studies, this work still offers incremental academic value.

Also, the study goes a step further by delving into the internal mechanisms underlying the earlier-identified link between inappropriate social media use and user alienation. It then gradually teases out an influence process along two main pathways. First, there is compulsive "nominal use", which lacks real substantive interaction, and then it nudges users toward negative self-perceptions and exclusion feelings via three routes: seeing overly polished social content, getting social comparison activated, and finally, the emergence of FOMO. Second, prolonged online browsing fragments attention, so people end up unable to step away from that online mode even while engaging in face-to-face social activities. As a result, their interpersonal relationship quality declines, and their feelings of alienation intensify.

Overall, the study supports the pre-set hypothesis H3, confirming that the core determinants of users' psychological outcomes are the duration and mode of social media use. At the same time, it supplements prior research by verifying that, among adolescents, frequent social media use is positively associated with perceived social loneliness. Future impact assessments of similar kinds should include two dimensions: habitual use and overall usage level.

H4: Passive social media use positively correlates with perceived social isolation in young adults (controlling for total time).

Correlations

			<i>PU</i>	<i>PSI</i>
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	<i>PU</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	1.000	.202**
		<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.	.001
		<i>N</i>	291	291
	<i>PSI</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	.202**	1.000
		<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.001	.
		<i>N</i>	291	291

*****.*** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Platform Usage (PU)

Perceived Social Isolation (PSI)

This study conducts an empirical analysis based on the statistical data in Table 4.2.4; it primarily examines the association between social media usage patterns and users' perceived social isolation to test the main hypothesis H4. There are 291 young adult respondents. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is used to assess the strength of the association between the key variables, and this paper will present the initial statistical results first to give readers a clear baseline.

In other words, this study first makes the definitions more explicit for the two core variables: PU, meaning passive social media use. This study starts by clarifying the operational definitions of the core variables to reduce, or at least minimize, interpretation bias. For example, social media use encompasses the cumulative daily active time spent on mainstream social platforms, as well as the frequency of what researchers might call effective interactions.

291 participants selected from the age group (18-32). They're recruited across nationwide regions, so the data isn't just coming from one corner. The goal is to address what prior similar studies didn't cover well: the heterogeneity analysis of youth subgroups. The findings show that the correlation strength between the variables in the heavy user group is about 1.7 times that in the light user group. Overall, the stable positive relationship observed between the two variables can serve as a dependable empirical basis for subsequent follow-up social intervention research or social action studies.

Discussion and Limitations

Conclusion

In this study, 291 young adults were recruited, and valid samples were collected to examine how four dimensions of social media use are associated with perceived social loneliness. The statistical results indicate that all four dimensions correlate positively with loneliness, and the link between platform viewing frequency and loneliness is, statistically speaking, the strongest. This kind of broken-up, almost automatic use can still carry hidden harms, which are believed to work through a dual pathway shaped primarily by use volume and type. On the one hand, long-term passive use tends to thin out the depth of offline ties; on the other hand, it can nudge social comparison upward, spark fear of missing out, and generate a sense of being left out.

The findings here also have practical value. When doing intervention work aimed at reducing social isolation among adolescents, the old idea of cutting down screen time alone should be discarded. Rather than that, the focus should shift to the digital use behavior patterns of the subjects in this study, and also promote education alongside mental health services in a coordinated way. Each part should not be executed as a separate task, because the components probably need to move in sync. In this sample,

most participants are using Instagram, and the platform's carefully curated visual feeds are more likely to nudge social comparison. And the sample of 23-27 age group are mostly involved in social media usage and isolated.

Limitations

This study uses a cross-sectional research design. But because of the built-in limitations of that approach, researchers cannot conclude that there is a causal link between the two variables being examined here.

Also, the self-report method in this study introduces two potential biases: recall bias and the social desirability effect, which can nudge participants to respond in a more "acceptable" way.

The sampling was purposive, and the research was done only in the urban areas of Punjab Province. Because of that, what researchers conclude here should not be stretched to rural areas that were not part of the study.

On top of that, the sample itself has a lopsided distribution of age and gender, so, in practical terms, it does not have the necessary representativeness.

Another issue is that the study relies solely on Instagram as its research sample. That weakens reliability and generalizability, and it may also shift how the conclusions should be interpreted.

This study measures users' active and passive usage behaviors using self-reports. Still, this approach really catches subtle, fine-grained differences in behavior. One way to address that shortcoming is to pair it with digital tracking data rather than relying solely on answers.

Meanwhile, the quantitative observational study being evaluated has unmeasured confounding factors, which can bias the associations between variables and pose hidden threats to internal validity.

It also collected the predictor and outcome variables at the same time using the same research instrument, so there is a risk of common method bias, and that is a real concern.

A supplementary finding is that if locally adapted scales are not psychometrically validated, measurement validity will be undermined, thereby affecting the trustworthiness of the results.

The sample size is only adequate for correlational analysis and does not provide sufficient statistical power for two advanced lines of study.

Future Recommendations and Practical Implication

This study presents its main research findings right at the beginning, launching a hands-on intervention program that eases loneliness among young people linked to social media use, while also preserving the helpful connections social media can enable as a medium. Metrics and measures are mapped to specific responsible implementing entities. Then, five practical recommendations are described, roughly under one shared scaffold: “implementing entity + concrete action + intervention target”. First, universities partner with mental health service institutions to add modules on digital literacy and habit management, teach mindful use habits, and provide short-term support for groups who compulsively scroll their phones. Second, public outreach agencies team up with educators to raise awareness of the harms of social comparison and fear of missing out (FOMO), and to promote skills for more critical engagement with online content. Third, social media platforms should roll out default health-friendly settings that reduce the momentum of material that triggers the social comparison effect. Fourth, communities and campuses adapt to local rules governing gender fluidity to expand in-person activities and restore genuine interpersonal connections. Fifth, policymakers work with researchers to back pilot programs that come with matching evaluation frameworks, so you can spot higher-quality programs early, then scale their promotion and coverage.

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