



Guest Editorial

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Increasing use of social media among youth: digital detox is essential for mental health and social well-being

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The use of smartphones, social networking sites, prolonged engagement with social apps, and instant messaging can impair mental health and social well-being in various ways. These factors may lead to serious health and social issues, such as depression, substance abuse, conflict, and many more. There are 5.66 billion social media (SM) users worldwide, which accounts for 68.7% of the total population. The number of internet users is 6.04 billion, representing 73.2% of the global population^[1].

At the start of 2024, Pakistan had 111.0 million internet users, accounting for 45.7% of the population. Meanwhile, the number of SM users was 71.7 million, 29.5% of the country's population. Moreover, active cellular mobile connections reached 188.9 million, accounting for 77.8% of the total population^[2]. It shows the widespread use of the internet and SM among the Pakistani Population.

A Pakistani study showed a link between excessive SM use and increased stress, anxiety, and depression among university students^[3]. Recent work has suggested that restricting SM use to about 30 minutes/day could lead to considerable improvements in a person's well-being^[4].

The digital literacy rate in Pakistan, especially in remote regions, is relatively low. Consequently, harmful SM usage is becoming common among the youth. SM addiction has notably increased among young people in recent times. As a result of this addiction, several social issues have emerged^[5], including abuse, social blaming, scamming, fake relationships, fighting, and even violence in the name of honor. There is a need to reduce the negative impact of smartphones and excessive SM use; digital detox interventions have been recommended to enhance social relationships and overall well-being.

Among the younger generation, SM has become part and parcel of their routine life. It is also considered a source of income or a path to becoming an SM star or influencer. On the other hand, it causes serious mental and social challenges. Globally, incidents related to SM use are increasing. A study

described that India had the highest number of selfie-related fatalities (n=76), followed by Pakistan (n=9), the United States (n=8), Russia (n=6), China (n=4), the Philippines (n=4), and Spain (n=3)^[6].

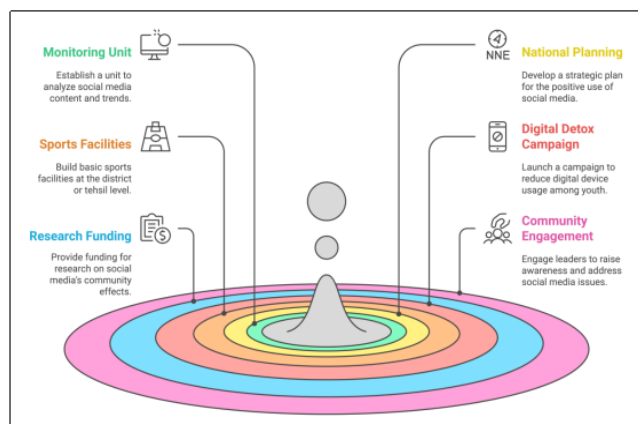
An updated analysis pointed out that a total of 379 people lost their lives while taking selfies, with the highest rate described in India (n = 100, 26.4%), followed by the USA (n = 39, 10.3%) and Russia (n = 33, 8.7%)^[7]. A long-duration Canadian study among students in grades 7 to 12 (n=6,364) stated a correlation between hours spent on SM and mental health. Furthermore, these students reported suicidal ideation compared to those who spent less time on SM or none at all^[8].

The present SM trend involving reels, video creation, posting, likes, and comments is linked to many life-threatening situations and fatalities. Recently, there have been reports from India and Pakistan of young people losing their lives while using SM. In one case from India, a young girl filming a reel for her Instagram account tragically lost her life^[9]. In the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, a young boy was recording a video for TikTok while pretending to shoot himself, which led to his untimely death^[10]. Many SM-related incidents have occurred in remote areas of Pakistan, but those cases have not been officially documented.

A famous study conducted in 2016 with 1,787 adults (aged 19 to 32 years) to identify the association between SM and depression. It observed a substantial link between the use of social media and depression^[3]. It seems that Government restrictions on SM will not be very effective, as people can use VPNs as an alternative. In our view, "self-regulation" would bring better results. It is imperative to increase awareness among the people about the positive and ethical use of SM in Pakistan. It is required to stress the negative consequences of SM and its harmful effects on users' social lives, mental health, and behavior. It is vital to inform students about SM's harmful effects on academic performance.

The government of Pakistan needs to consider the initiatives outlined in the Figure.

Figure-I: Social media management strategies at the national level .



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