

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND EARLY DIGITAL EXPOSURE ON EDUCATION, MORALITY, AND FAMILY DYNAMICS IN THE MODERN ERA: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of early digital exposure and social media use on adolescents' psychological well-being, academic performance, moral development, and family dynamics, particularly in the Pakistani context. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 300 student-parent pairs along with interviews and focus group discussions. The findings indicate that increased screen time is negatively associated with academic achievement, moral reasoning, and family cohesion. Key psychological factors such as social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and online validation contribute to anxiety, depression, and addictive behaviors among youth.

The research also highlights the growing influence of family vlogging and digital content creation, which often commodifies private life and affects child development and parent-child relationships. Social media is shown to reshape social norms, promote unrealistic lifestyles, and normalize performative or aggressive behaviors. Qualitative results reveal reduced family interaction, emotional disconnection, and increased dependence on virtual approval among adolescents.

The study concludes that while social media offers opportunities for communication and self-expression, its excessive and unregulated use poses significant risks. It emphasizes the importance of digital literacy, parental supervision, and policy interventions to promote healthier digital engagement.

1. Introduction

The rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X), TikTok, and Snapchat has transformed global communication, socialization, and access to information. According to Statista, there are now over 4.9 billion active users of social media in 2024, so it plays a key role in the lives of people, especially young ones. The digital revolution has changed the way people communicate and form their identities. Social media has helped more people connect, has given everyone access to information and allows for more self-expression, but it has propelled many worries about its mental health effects. Because of more depression, anxiety, loneliness, cyberbullying and feelings of disliking one's body on social media, researchers and mental health experts are now exploring the impacts of using social media platforms.

1.1 Psychological Mechanisms Linking Social Media Use

A lot of researchers are uncovering how social media can influence people's mental health. Focusing on social comparison, the use of reinforcement and how people's attention is affected is essential in this study. To engage users, social media platforms rely on algorithms that can make users addicted to them (Lane et al., 2025). Because people often see idealized versions of others' lives, successes and appearances on social media, they may start comparing their own lives to others, leading to a drop in self-esteem (Rizzo et al., 2025). Besides, the release of dopamine in our brains through "likes," "comments," and "shares" increases the chance of us staying on social media and forming unhealthy habits (Shahzad et al., 2019). It relates to behavioral addiction since spending a lot of time online may cause stress and difficulty in both

sleeping and dealing with emotions. Because competition among teenagers can greatly influence their mental health, adolescents are more likely to become vulnerable to mood disorders because of this pressure (Maxwell et al., 2025).

Moreover, researchers have found that fear of missing out (FOMO) is connected to feelings of depression and a lower quality of life (Soraci et al., 2025). The evidence reveals the effect social media has on mental health is linked to changes in behaviors and thinking at the level of each person and of society as a whole. It affects people not only casually but also in serious and significant ways. Recent research is drawing connections between frequent and passive involvement in social media and the development of various mental illnesses. What happens is not unpredictable, as it is influenced by the functions of social comparison, cyberbullying, FOMO, online validation and too much information. They operate together with parts of the brain and mental states to bring about disorders that can be diagnosed. Social media often leads to major depressive disorder (MDD) in adolescents and young adults. Many times, social media-related depression is linked to comparing oneself negatively with others and their often altered social media profiles. By constantly judging themselves against others, many people tend to feel insufficient, hopeless and not very important. Symptoms of low mood and a dissatisfying life have been detected among those who watch television or spend time on the internet and barely or rarely interact (Vos et al., 2025).

Excessive use of social media by teenagers is often connected to anxiety, depression, sleep complications, body image worries and addiction to various behaviors. Many longitudinal studies have discovered a strong link between too much screen time and signs of depression and anxiety which result largely from FOMO and trying to maintain perfect social media images. In addition, poor sleep, being critical of their own bodies as a result of the ideal image found online and compulsive use of social media all add to the negative effects these apps have. Because of this, cyberbullying may have long-lasting effects that are similar to those of post-traumatic stress disorder for youth. According to recent studies, high levels of online use in adolescents may result in more emotional issues and lead to internalizing disorders that require immediate attention from professionals and educators (Kim & Lee, 2025; Robinson et al., 2025).

In the new digital environment of Pakistan, the rise of the term family vlogging has taken place in such a way, that would place empirical narrative in check. Now YouTube and TikTok are seen as mirrors where the life of people living in their own country can find an opportunity to show the world how they celebrate their holidays, play tricks, go on a trip, or even argue. Some of the most visible ones include Ducky Bhai (Saad ur Rehman) and Shaam Idrees whose works have been generating hundreds of millions of views and fetch a substantial amount of money through advertisement, brand promotions, and direct fan interaction. This genre on the surface appears to be hapless, light hearted and positive. However, there is a prominent psychological trend behind the phenomenon that of commercialization of childhood. In the work of Shaam Idrees, as an example, one will regularly observe his daughter and his tiny boy being included in storytelling modules, product advertising, and even supposedly moving domestic scenes. Viewers are likely to record such images as healthy involvement; however, child development experts oppose such images. Repetition of photographic documentation reorganizes parent child interaction as a content driven business. Instead of being given privacy and autonomy, these children take the position of actors to an audience that they cannot entirely understand.

This dilemma can be shed some light through the psycho social framework by Erikson. Children are not more developing a consistent personal identity when their behavior is cut to fit the online plotlines or when their responses are staged so as to be amusing, but rather are being trained how to become popular. The psychic field narrows down between exploration

zone and theater. The disjunction can turn into doubt, anxiety and the need to be affirmed by others as late as adolescence. The attachment theory by Bowlby adds more to the confusion. By turning family life into a product to be sold privatized parents are diverted to more subtle ways of neglecting the primary emotional needs of their child. The sight of eyes is replaced by camera angle, and only after a quality take is achieved, consolation will take place. Such periodical disruption of the initial contacts has the potential to weaken the development of secure attachment relations, which increases chances of developmental susceptibility to emotional impairment or lack of trust between people.

Ducky Bhai oeuvre is less explicit family-oriented but depicts a contrasting but no less disturbing aspect. His attitude and the use of aggressive humor and sarcastic irony (which have become a constant in YouTube popular culture) normalizes such actions as being part of the cultural teenage spaces in Pakistan. His following wholeheartedly exceeds three million subscribers, extending far beyond the boundaries of spectrums and entertainment, often as a starter role model to those aspiring to become an influencer who follows in his footsteps relying on the same tone, character, and plot lines to attract an audience. The soporific effect of these constant messages of certain forms of behavior, public ridicule, peer criticisms, and the entertainment-encrusted debate, with the help of the principle of social learning, elaborated by Bandura, can be internalized especially by being propagated through the lips of charismatic personalities.

At a collective level, it is disturbing to note that these digital designers are not only entertainers, but they are the unwitting teachers. Their videos spread the teaching on how to perform, how to behave gender-wise, on how to handle conflicts (or rather not handle); on how to live up to the life hope. In absence of strong parental controls or proper media literacy education, the adolescent consumers do not question such teachings by critically analyzing them, but instead internalize them as part of their own thinking and actions. Baudrillard concept of hyperreality increases this problem. The families providing vlogs sanitize and create an ideal, utopian image of home life and present it in the most aesthetically pleasing ways possible interiors and charming young children or saccharine romantic overtures, which are clearly staged to capture the ideal image. Not only do such hyperreal representations imply being deceptive, but they can be psychologically dangerous too. They spread jealousy, discontent and unreasonable sociocultural demands especially to the teenagers who can internalise their upbringing and find their own families lacking in comparison.

A digital childhood in and of itself is not inherently harmful, but with no structure, preparation, and moral guidance, it may turn into the source of identity disorder and emotional instability. With the expanded number of Pakistani families turning to the influencer economy, there are a few sharp questions that require academic and civic attention: Who protects the children represented? What are the psychological expenses of constant exposure to the public? How are we going to define informed consent given that the subject is not able to express informed assent yet? These questions demand reasoned responses, pedagogical as well as legal, as the age of digital technologies is unfolding.

| Disorder | Key Psychological Mechanism | Population Most Affected |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) | Negative social comparison, isolation | Adolescents and young adults |
| Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) | FOMO, online stress, performance anxiety | Adolescents, university students |
| Social Anxiety Disorder | Fear of judgment, performance | Teens and young adults |
| Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) | Unrealistic beauty standards | Primarily females, age 13–25 |



| Disorder | Key Psychological Mechanism | Population Most Affected |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Eating Disorders (Anorexia, Bulimia) | Exposure to idealized body content | Teenage girls, some boys |
| Sleep Disorders | Nighttime usage, blue light exposure | Children, teens, all age groups |
| ADHD-like Symptoms | Short-form content, fragmented focus | Children, digital natives |
| Social Media Addiction | Dopamine-driven reinforcement loops | Adolescents, adults |
| PTSD (from Cyberbullying) | Online harassment, public shaming | Teens, + youth |

Table 1.1 Disorders Medically Linked to Social Media Use

1.2 Views of Social Media and its Impacts on Society

Across 19 countries, a median of 57% of respondents surveyed say social media is beneficial for democracy in their nation. Nearly half or more people say this in practically every nation, with Singapore having the highest percentage of people who think social media is beneficial to their nation's democracy at about three-quarters. But almost four out of ten people in France and the Netherlands concur. Furthermore, only about one-third of Americans believe social media promotes democracy, which is the lowest percentage of any of the 19 nations polled. In eight nations, people are more likely to claim that social media is beneficial for democracy if they think that their nation's political system gives them the ability to influence politics. This disparity is most noticeable in Belgium, where 62% of people who believe they have some influence over politics also believe social media is beneficial to their nation's democracy, compared to 44% of people who believe they have little influence over politics.

Individuals who feel that disinformation spreads online is very dangerous are less likely than others to consider social media as a help to democracy. The difference is most noticeable in the Netherlands, since out of those who consider online misinformation to be serious, just over a third (39%) believe social media has helped promote democracy, in comparison to 57% who do not believe the same. Many of those who replied to the survey believe social media and the internet are altering our society. Out of the six projects, people rarely state that their communities have remained unchanged because of more connectivity. The largest number of Russians, 84%, believe technology makes people more vulnerable to false news and rumors. Even so, the majority of people stated that they are better informed about news at home and abroad. Indeed, people in most countries are divided: the ones who believe social media spreads untrue information and rumors are also the ones who think social media helps people get news and information. Regarding politics, most people think social media and the internet are disruptive and a median of 65% believe this has divided society's views into different camps. It could also be connected to the belief by a median of 44% across the countries that online discussions and social media have led people to engage in uncivil discussions about political matters. Despite this, slightly more people (a median of 45%) still say connectivity has made people more accepting of people from different ethnic groups, religions and races than say it has made people less accepting (22%) or had no effect (29%).

Social media has become one of the most transformative forces of the 21st century, reshaping the ways individuals communicate, share information, form identities, and perceive the world around them. As it has woven itself into the fabric of everyday life, scholarly and public perspectives on its societal impact have become increasingly diverse and, at times, polarized. On one hand, social media is lauded as a powerful democratizing tool that enables greater civic participation, community engagement, and social awareness. . Alternatively, it sometimes comes under fire for making differences more prominent, providing information

that is not always correct and playing a part in mental health issues. Building new connections and uniting people for a common goal are considered some of social media's strongest positive effects on society. #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter and other movements for climate justice have been pushed forward in large part due to platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. On these websites, people from underrepresented communities can air their views, share examples of injustice and set up local actions. During the Arab Spring, people used social media to trigger uprisings and keep others informed about them, as most traditional outlets had difficulties covering things so quickly. The reason for this is called a "participatory culture," which lets every user take part in public debates by challenging people who control what we see and hear on the Internet.

Even so, this development has led to many problems, specifically when it comes to truth, trust and the separation of facts. The rise of viral content may come at the cost of accuracy, especially since algorithms prefer to recommend eye-catching information. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people spread fake news about the virus, its treatment and vaccines on the internet, some of which caused serious consequences. Because so much unreliable and incorrect information was being spread, the World Health Organization created the term "infodemic." Being exposed mainly to posts and videos in agreement with their views on social media has increased divisions in politics and society.

Apart from politics and news, social media has played a big role in shaping our attitudes toward cultural practices and the ways we communicate with each other. It has made people see themselves, communicate with others and measure success differently. Nowadays, being an influencer and promoting yourself online makes performing your lifestyle normal and people are judged more by their followers, photos and level of response online. Younger generations have found it especially important, since TikTok and Instagram play a big role in their search for social approval. At the same moment, social media aids in bringing together various cultures and encourages everyone to work together more. Because of memes, trends and global challenges, people are united online to create new styles of digital culture. Perspectives on social media change based on people's backgrounds, income, learning and where they live. Even though it provides people with many opportunities, it endangers their mental well-being, community ties and democracy. The challenge for society moving forward lies not in rejecting social media outright but in developing ethical, inclusive, and evidence-based approaches to its governance, design, and usage.

Overall, in the past few years, Pakistan has experienced a digital boom which has completely changed the way people interact with one another besides how families communicate, the upbringing of children besides the establishment of morals. Social media has invaded the psychological and social aspects of daily living with the burst of smartphones, cheap data connection, and media such as YouTube, Tik-Tok, and Instagram. The children, teens, and even babies are now born in a world of the recorded generation and they have grown to their ages before the cameras instead of growing inside those confines of a family love.

On the one hand, this digital growth helps people gain more visibility, launch a business, and be creative, and on the other hand, it poses advanced psychological problems. These are identity confusion, emotional wear-out, desensitization to violence, exploitation that are on a gender basis and commodification of intimate times within families. What is more threatening, studying the intimate daily life of minors is a large-scale practice where, under the guise of family vlogging, curated and performative content is quite common, raising questions about explicit and implicit consent, emotional well-being, and the overall impact on development and the state of mind. In this research, the effects of early digital exposure on education, morality and family dynamics in the Pakistani setting are also explored with reference to real life cases involving famous digital stars like Ducky Bhai, Shaam Idrees, Rajab

Butt and high profile accidental deaths of Sana Yousaf and Humaira Asghar Ali. Using some of the basic theories in psychology this paper exposes how social media has transformed into becoming a mirror and a magnifier of cultural values thus distorting them in a manner that has a psychological and social ramification on the society. With the influx of social media apps and the emergence of digital content creation, family relationships have changed in a significant way. The visible result of such development is the mass normalization of violence as an overt entertainment. In the Pakistani online environment, the rise of family and couple content creators has given rise to the genre of conflicts and insults being deliberately represented to an active audience. A shining example of the potential of social media to sell a binary, toxic version of conjugal conflict and uphold gender distinctions more deeply in this respect is Rajab Butt, a widely known YouTuber who excels in emotional and occasionally political couple content.

In a variety of his most popular videos, Rajab Butt has been shown insulting, slandering and emotionally humiliating his wife, mostly in the name of jokes or reality. These encounters are not chance occurrences but form an essential part of the content strategy of his channel. Be it by suspecting her intelligence, yelling at her in some small disagreement, or capturing emotionally charged confrontations without her permission, the underlying message herein is obvious: domination through the staging of drama is fine-nay beneficial-when it brings the attention. It is especially dangerous since this is not merely an action but rather a performative act, which sends a message to the millions of audience (a significant proportion of which consists of the adolescents and young adults) that such behavior can be tolerated, even welcome, in a romantic relationship.

According to the Social Learning Theory (1977) announced by Bandura, such behavior towards disrespect is an effective pedagogical example. The audience will see in the actions of Rajab Butt a confirmation that masculinity involves dominance, violence, and the demonstration of superiority in rituals. At the same time, they are discreetly conditioned that humiliation can be accompanied with love, that dissolution of boundaries is no big deal, and that any emotional mistreatment is simply an enjoyment. Such implications are not only theoretical. Such contents support the negative social trends in a nation where levels of domestic violence, honor based abuse, and gender inequality are already high. It lets the viewers know that such humiliation of a woman is a good cost of online activity and that the abuser is someone relatable and someone to be aspired to. In even worse news, the problem is amplified by digital algorithmic processes assigning the conflict-centered content with greater visibility due to longer watch time, commenting, and sharing.

The issue is also worsened by the lack of gender-sensitive education and weak digital literacy in Pakistan. Not being able to critically construct a distinction between dramatization and abuse or content strategy and mental manipulation, a variety of viewers simply reproduces the surface of such relations: organizes pranks, social experiments, argued controversies that are films staged disputes, primarily because they overlook the emotional violence that such a practice perpetrates. Besides, the masculine execution of performances and domination echoes the concept of hyperreality put forward by Baudrillard. Being portrayed in the videos of Rajab Butt, a relationship is turned into some sort of a perverted simulation: not fiction but not truly love, but a stylized mash of emotional convulsions aimed at consumption. The transaction of conflict becomes the medium of exchange in this hyperreal marriage, and exposure and humiliation is disguised into intimacy. However, the actual price is paid off-screen by partners and children, who could potentially use this model as one of the valid forms of relationships.

The danger is not only the peril of individual families. With such actions becoming viral, the audiences are naturally becoming immune to verbal abuse, stereotyping of gender roles, and being emotionally manipulated. In the long term, the society can just laugh instead

of questioning the reasons why a husband is shouting to his wife on the camera or why a partner who does not consent to the recording is crying after being videoed. Psychologically, this effect cultivates moral disengagement, which is the way people justify the bad actions and make them look good, funny, or unimportant. When abusive behaviors are compensated with subscribers, fans and monetary success, the values inherent in these behaviors become adopted by creators and audiences. Overall, the digital space supports a space where patriarchy is acted out in HD clarity, practiced, capitalized and institutionalized..

1.3 Disrupted Family Structures

The modern domestic space: smartphones, ring lights, and the ideology of monetized attention transformed is used to be a intimate and personal place to constant video filming, editing, and uploading an audiovisual text. In a country such as Pakistan, whose culture long before social media encouraged family life to be centered on affective intimacy, deference to senior generations and the intergenerational distance carefully marked, social media has now forced considerations on those social constructs into bizarre, and oftentimes deeply uncomfortable, precariousnesses. The traditional family, which was a source of care and ethics, has transformed to become a virtual brand with logos, slogans, products and even subscribers. It is not a mere adjustment of culture, other than essential psychological. The coming out of the so-called content family, the one that documents every round of the day, be it birthday celebrations or bedtime, spawns a situation where being a parent, regulating relationships and even disciplining becomes a performative phenomenon. It is no longer just raising of children but filming of the same process of raising the child, their falls and successes commoditized. Be it in laughter, tears, naughtiness, or worse they are scolded, it is all viral.

In a psychoanalytic perspective, this constant exposure is likely to mutilate the emotional security as well as independent authority of the child. Attachment Theory proposed by Bowlby affirms that, any relationship during the early pattern forming relationships must consist of consistency, warmth, and privacy to foster secure attachments. When such dynamics are filtered through a camera lens and are exposed to editorial mediation, the child turns into an actor who does not know he/she is also simultaneously a participant in the television reality show. Such ability to differentiate between true love and performance support is therefore undermined.

At the same time, the parent and the content producer divide is becoming increasingly blurred. When the moment of an outburst in a child is repackaged into a funny clip or a family quarrel is staged as an episode on a vlog, empathetic approach turns into calculating distance. Traditional parents can end up prioritizing engagement statistics above sense of emotion, seeing their children as producers of content rather than deep eudaimonic beings. The given phenomenon is not purely speculative, as we can observe a similar development on the part of multiple influencers in Pakistan, who often resort to pranks, shame strategies, and scolding people in public as signs of increasing moral desensitization in digital families. Prank culture is most telling. Kids are frightened, deceived, or put in counterfeit in order to amuse. Often they are done by their parents themselves. Such videos normally feature the child with tears and the adults and siblings laughing and promising the child: It is just a prank. The hidden curriculum is creepy: the feelings matter only when they can entertain a person. The repetition of this story can lead to hypervigilance or repression, which will make the child either very protective and defensive or averse to any humiliating experiences.

The loss of edge also undermines the respect across the generations. Traditional Pakistani culture assigned respect to the parents and the elder generation and problems within households were kept in house. However, in the online environment they are progressively forced to serve in misleading comedic skits, counterarguments and fashion-wise posts without particular understanding of the consequences. Their confusion is part of the comedy and their

authority, though still present legally offline, is being slowly self-destructed. The culture conflict that arises between a respect based on institutionalization and a hate that stems on the internet is that the elders have to be respected in real life and ridiculed to get likes on the internet. The desensitization related to morals trickles down to the viewers. Repeated viewing of the videos in which the parents yell at the children to make them laugh or in which the children misbehave with the elders in extreme situations will decrease the emotional arousal in the long run as is the case with video games. Much of accepted behavioral standards can be recalibrated through the process of habituation, the desensitization to routine stimuli; what began to seem like something of an objection is no longer ostracizing, but now entertaining and eventually, something to aspire towards.

The kids who have grown up in such settings are often seen struggling with impoverished morality. The steps of moral reasoning presented by Kohlberg mean that early moral thinking is determined by the desire to reward and punishment evasion. In cyberspace based families, good behavior becomes defined as that which will not cause negative reactions like rejection or condemnations by online viewers on the one hand and on the other, bad behavior is labeled as one that will cause such negative reactions. This ethic focused on algorithms skirts around the intrinsic reasoning system and locates moralizing in tonal visibility that will warp the moral landscape of the child. The repercussions spread out to succeeding generations. Children brought up in the performative families can be exposed to several developments:

Affect instability (challenges in handling and demonstrating affect)

Conditional love and social assessment-based low self-esteem

Slow progression of morals given by externally imposed rules

Due to inconsistency in care giving and aesthetic intimacy, attachment insecurity ensues.

In the process of this culture going out of control, it puts increasing pressure on more families. Users that initially were reluctant to publish are exposed to three incentives of income, attention, and social capital which force the users to engage even though they have moral concerns. Fundamentally, the fact that the family has now become a content-creating entity challenges the very principles that Pakistan itself has always worshiped to be privacy, honor, respect, and emotional depth. No longer a device of remembrance, the camera is essentially a judge who takes, takes everywhere, who mimes all the time.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does early digital exposure through social media affect the cognitive, moral, and academic development of children and adolescents?
2. What are the perceived changes in family dynamics and intergenerational relationships resulting from pervasive social media use in the household?

1.5 Research Objectives

- To analyze the impact of social media usage across age groups within families, exploring how digital communication, screen time, and online behavior alter parent-child relationships, familial authority, and shared moral values.
- To examine the psychological and educational effects of early and prolonged social media use among children and adolescents, with a focus on its influence on attention span, academic performance, moral reasoning, and critical thinking.

2. Literature Review

Many mental health professionals and researchers are concerned about the rising use of social media by adolescents. Within the last two years, studies show that people who use social media for a long time may develop depression, anxiety, sleep troubles, concern about their body image and be victims of cyberbullying. According to a study by Azem et al., teens who use social

media a lot often report more depressive symptoms, but another study by Hussain et al. found that spending over three hours daily on social media platforms may lead teenagers to feel less self-confident and depressed. The effects are especially seen in females, as Oxford University found in 2024 that more than 60% of girls in the same age group reported serious mental health issues because they use social media for a long time (Financial Times, 2024). Studies suggest that lack of sleep or its disturbance is a common result of lifelong learning. Khan et al. (2024) investigated the effects of social media on over 212,000 adolescents and found that social media use at night leads to staying up later and decreases total sleep time. Because of increased stimulation from the mind and the blue light from screens, people experience interrupted sleeping patterns. A recent cross-cultural study of over 86,000 adolescents found that heavy social media use relates to having poor sleep quality (PubMed, 2023). A lack of sleep for teens is related to mood swings, irritability and a greater chance of experiencing stress and anxiety. Recent studies also focus on the problems of body image and self-esteem. Akram et al. found that 62% of urban adolescents in Pakistan experienced a loss in self-worth because of what they see about beauty on social media and 58% became unhappy with how their bodies look.

In the research, a significant issue deals with cyberbullying and the negative impact it has on teens mentally. The 2025 report from King George's Medical University indicated that cyberbullying has contributed to higher rates of anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts among youth in India (Times of India, 2025). The University of the Sunshine Coast discovered that 98 out of every 100 girls between 14 and 19 have become victims of cyberbullying and of the incidents, 62% involved comments about appearance which often caused mental illnesses such as eating problems and symptoms like PTSD (Courier Mail, 2024). Because cyberbullying happens online all of the time, its effects are difficult to escape and tend to stay with a victim for a long time. As a result of these difficulties, several studies have looked into ways to decrease the harmful effects of social media. Introducing mindfulness tools on university students' phones was shown by Sun (2023) to lower their anxiety and loneliness and at the same time improve their emotions. Carefully created technology can be used to support improvement in someone's mental health. These researchers also highlight that helping adolescents learn how to control their emotions can be more effective than setting up social media bans. The study shows that encouraging adolescents to use technology safely and in control can reduce risks to their mental health. In 2023, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry again suggested that there should be cooperation among caregivers, educators and tech companies to guide the use of digital content suitable for children and teens and assist with mental health initiatives for youth.

3. Methodology

Mixed methods have been used in this study to assess how early exposure to digital media and social media usage impacts adolescents and their family. I must use quantitative analysis and qualitative understanding because of the complexities of this subject. All kids and adolescents under the age of 19, their families or caretakers, as well as teachers in schools, are considered part of the target group. The sample included 300 groups of students and parents who were picked from schools in both urban and semi-urban areas by stratified random sampling. Twenty-five to thirty individuals were purposely selected for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Quantitative measures were obtained by using pre structured questionnaires that included the DESY, the AMS, the MFQ and the FES. The analysis was conducted with SPSS and descriptive statistics, regression, Pearson correlation and ANOVA were used to check if there was any relationship between screen time and these results. Data were collected by talking with people through interviews and group sessions to understand how they use social media, adhere to digital patterns, face value clashes and connect within their families. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, researcher looked for common themes

in how kids and teens develop their behavior and moral values while using the internet. Relevant ethical review by the IRB was obtained. Parents gave their consent and kids provided their assent. Both confidentiality and the ability to withdraw were respected all the time. During the pilot testing and analysis, the study was supported by valid and reliable methods such as triangulation and member checking. All things considered, this approach allows for studying various aspects of how digital media and early internet use affect students' learning, their moral decision-making and their relationships at home.

4: Data Analysis

This chapter presents the findings derived from the mixed-methods analysis of 300 student-parent pairs. The data was analyzed using statistical methods and thematic review to evaluate the impact of social media and early digital exposure on academic performance, moral reasoning, and family cohesion. Quantitative data was processed using SPSS and visualized using Python, while qualitative data was examined through thematic content analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

A descriptive overview of the key variables is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Key Variables

| Variable | Mean | Std. Dev | Min | 25% | Median | 75% | Max |
|-------------------------|-------|----------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| Screen Time (hours/day) | 3.99 | 1.47 | 0.00 | 2.98 | 4.09 | 4.94 | 9.78 |
| Academic Performance | 74.77 | 9.56 | 50.28 | 67.96 | 74.81 | 81.16 | 100.0 |
| Moral Reasoning Score | 50.82 | 9.97 | 23.03 | 44.29 | 50.43 | 57.11 | 76.32 |
| Family Cohesion Score | 61.38 | 14.95 | 16.56 | 51.66 | 62.48 | 71.24 | 90.00 |
| FOMO Score | 40.92 | 9.98 | 14.09 | 33.89 | 40.57 | 47.11 | 66.02 |

The average daily screen time among participants was approximately 4 hours, with academic performance averaging 74.8 out of 100. Moral reasoning scores were mid-range, averaging 50.8, while family cohesion scores were relatively high (mean = 61.4). FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) was notable, with a mean score of 40.9.

Correlation Analysis

To understand the relationships between variables, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted.

Key findings include:

- A **negative correlation** between screen time and academic performance ($r \approx -0.42$), indicating that increased screen time tends to be associated with lower academic achievement.
- A **negative relationship** between FOMO and family cohesion ($r \approx -0.38$), suggesting that higher FOMO is linked with weaker family connections.
- Moderate **negative correlations** were also observed between screen time and moral reasoning ($r \approx -0.30$).

Screen Time vs. Academic Performance

The scatter plot below visually confirms a downward trend between screen time and academic performance. The red regression line shows that as screen time increases beyond 4 hours per

day, academic scores decline consistently. This supports existing literature indicating that excessive digital use hampers attention span and cognitive engagement in learning environments.

Qualitative Analysis

Semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and educators revealed four emergent themes:

1. **Digital Displacement in Learning:** Students admitted preferring social platforms over educational content, often multitasking or procrastinating school tasks.
2. **Moral Confusion and Social Validation:** Parents expressed concern that online content including pranks, influencer culture, and viral trends was shaping their children’s sense of right and wrong.
3. **Erosion of Family Communication:** Families reported fewer face-to-face conversations and emotional disconnection due to individual screen immersion.
4. **Peer Comparison and FOMO:** Adolescents cited pressure to maintain an idealized online image and fear of exclusion, which led to stress, low self-esteem, and even sleep disruption.

These qualitative insights complement the quantitative results, particularly regarding the psychological strain caused by online social validation, and the emotional fragmentation within families.

Triangulation of Data

The mixed-methods analysis reinforces the central argument: early and excessive digital exposure significantly affects multiple dimensions of adolescent development. Quantitative trends showed measurable declines in academic performance and family cohesion with increased screen use, while qualitative narratives revealed deeper emotional and ethical disruptions tied to digital culture.

Conceptual Diagram: Impact of Digital Exposure on Adolescents

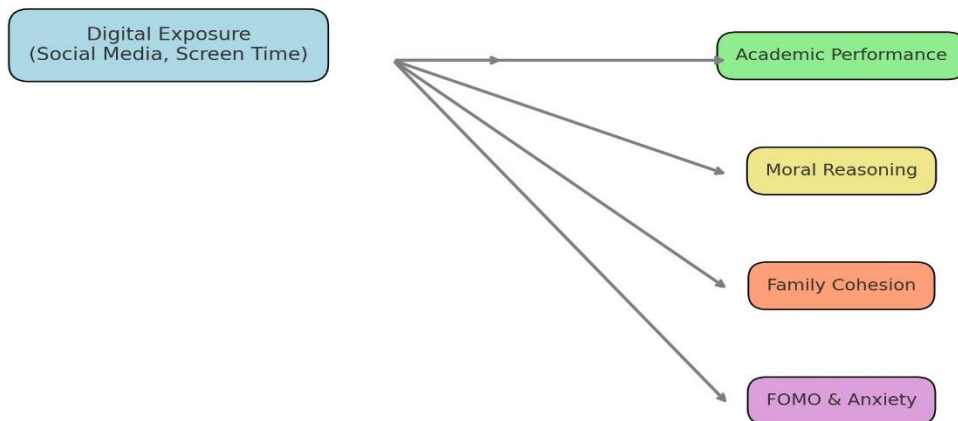


Fig 1.1

5: Discussion of Results

The study shows that being exposed to the internet early on connects to how teens perform academically, morally and at home. According to the data, students who used screens for more than 4 hours per day seemed to do poorly in school. Earlier research suggested that using social media rapidly and for short spurts often affects a person’s memory and ability to pay attention. The problem is more significant for young people because a young brain can become

excessively stimulated by internet use. Adolescents with more time online were found to have weaker moral reasoning skills and from what was observed, social media often showed examples of aggressive behavior, shaming from followers or incorrect information that was accepted. It seems that school and family may no longer control students' standards of behavior, as parents and teachers are often outmatched by online activities and how young people express themselves there. Families are no longer operating in the same way as before. Adolescents who were very concerned about missing out had less close family relationships and parents said their children preferred watching TV rather than communicating with them. It appears that frequent use of screens among family members creates emotional distance, especially if the family has no set rules about being online or offline together. This backs concepts that families today rely on technology to communicate and perceive roles differently. There was a link between using social media and anxiety, trouble sleeping and problems with self-esteem. Adolescents were under pressure to create the perfect person online which often made them feel uncomfortable about their real and virtual selves. Experiencing pressure for likes and comments often caused girls lots of pressure, since everyone was trying to meet unrealistic beauty standards. As a result, many people are becoming more concerned about the role social media plays in shaping the emotions of teenagers. Results of the study suggest that exposure to digital media can affect a person's academics, morals, family relationships and mental health at the same time. The consistency between quantitative and qualitative findings confirms the need for structured digital education, parental mediation, and further research into long-term developmental effects. Without strategic intervention, the benefits of digital connectivity may continue to be overshadowed by the psychological and social costs among youth.

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