



## **THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: SOCIAL MEDIA'S CRITICAL IMPACT ON PAKISTAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL FABRIC**

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**Abstract:**

*Social media has revolutionized modern communication, offering unprecedented connectivity, information sharing, and global interaction. However, its rapid expansion has also introduced significant ethical, social, and political challenges, particularly in conservative and religious societies like Pakistan. This article examines the dual nature of social media—its benefits in fostering communication, education, and political mobilization—alongside its detrimental effects, including misinformation, moral degradation, and societal polarization. Drawing from Islamic teachings, the study highlights the ethical responsibilities of social media users, emphasizing truthfulness, respect, and accountability. Additionally, it explores the impact of social media on Pakistan's sociopolitical landscape, addressing issues such as political manipulation, cultural erosion, and the spread of indecency. The paper concludes by advocating for balanced and responsible usage, guided by moral and religious principles, to mitigate the negative consequences while harnessing the positive potential of social media.*

**Key Words:** polarization, Fifth-generation warfare, democratized information, communication, Social Sphere, Societal Sphere, Political Sphere, Impact, Benefits, Drawbacks, A Global Trend,

**Introduction:**

Social media has emerged as one of the most transformative technological advancements of the 21st century, reshaping communication, politics, and social interactions globally. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have redefined how people connect, share information, and engage in public discourse. While these tools offer immense benefits—such as instant communication, educational opportunities, and business growth—they also pose significant ethical and societal challenges.

In Islamic societies, particularly Pakistan, the influence of social media presents a unique dilemma. On one hand, it serves as a powerful medium for religious education, social awareness, and political activism. On the other, it facilitates the spread of indecency, misinformation, and cultural erosion, often conflicting with Islamic values. The Quran and Hadith emphasize truthfulness, respect, and ethical conduct in communication—principles increasingly disregarded in the unchecked realm of social media.

This paper explores the multifaceted impact of social media, analyzing its role in modern communication, its alignment (or misalignment) with Islamic teachings, and its broader societal and political implications in Pakistan. By examining both its advantages and drawbacks, the study



seeks to underscore the necessity of responsible usage, regulatory measures, and moral accountability to ensure that social media serves as a force for good rather than societal decay.

### **Social Media: A Modern Communication Tool:**

Social media refers to online platforms that allow users to connect with each other, exchange information, and share various types of content. These platforms facilitate communication through text, images, videos, and audio. Applications like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and TikTok have deeply influenced social life.

The term “Social Media” (SM) was first used in 1994 on Tokyo online media environment, called Matisse, ([www.liebertpub.com](http://www.liebertpub.com))

Social media are open, web-based and user- friendly applications that provide new possibilities when it comes to the co-creation of content social networking the sharing of taste and relevance, connectivity and collective intelligence. (Verdegem, 2011)

According to (Auvinen, A. 2011), that uses a form of communication utilizing interpersonal relationship are created and maintained.

According to social media experts (Michael Heinlein, and Andreas Kaplan) a group of internet-based applications that on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

Social media are both internet and mobile based apparatuses that allow people to easily share and discuss information. (Abubakar, A. A. 2011)

### **Social media and Islamic teachings:**

In the present age, the means and resources of media have advanced so much, and their scope has become so vast, that every corner of the world is exposed to them, and their reach extends everywhere. They can present the real or imaginary background of any event whenever and however they wish, and they can conceal whatever they want, no matter how important it may be. Particularly, among the things the world has received from Western media, the most harmful has been indecency, nudity, and obscenity. The devastating effects of this plague are being faced by the entire world – to the extent that even the West itself is now suffering the consequences.

Today, in society, moral values, modesty, etiquette, and manners have been replaced by obscenity, nudity, indecency, rudeness, and a culture of excessive language and abusive language due to social media. These days, many beauties who had made their beauty public through social media are killed by their boyfriends. Like hundreds of TikTokers, the murder of Sania Yousaf is also an example of this.

In the modern era, social media and information technology can prove to be effective and highly productive in fulfilling this Islamic duty.

Social media gives people the right to share their thoughts, feelings, and news. However, before sharing any news, it is important to thoroughly research, examine, and investigate it, otherwise it will lead to disgrace later.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحَبُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ لَدْغَمٍ (٤٦)

O believers! If some wicked person brings you any news, inquire thoroughly into its truth (lest) you should cause (undue) harm to a people unknowingly, and later feel regret for what you have done. [al-Hujurāt, 49:6]

That is, under no circumstances should any action be taken, that may cause embarrassment later.



Sharing a post or content that is against someone or is based on character assassination without research is a sin.

The Holy Prophet (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) said: It is enough for a person to be a liar that he narrates everything he hears without verifying it. (daoud,4992)

Ridiculing, mocking, and making fun of others on social media is extremely offensive and unethical.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرَ قَوْمٌ مِّنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِّنْ نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ ۚ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْأَسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ ۚ وَمَن لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿١١﴾

O believers! Let no community ridicule another community. It is likely that they may be better than those (who ridicule). Nor should women make fun of other women. It is likely that they may be better than those (who make fun). And do not offend or find fault with one another, nor call each other names. Calling someone wicked or indecent after (he embraces) faith is an extremely evil name. And those who do not turn to Allah in repentance, it is they who are the wrongdoers.

[al-Hujurāt, 49:11]

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) said:

It is enough evil for a Muslim to despise his Muslim brother. It is forbidden for a Muslim to violate the blood, property, or honor of another (Muslim2564).

These golden principles of Islamic teachings are of great concern to today's social media users, who have crossed and violated all boundaries of morality.

Islamic teachings teach us to completely avoid spreading lies, to avoid calling others by bad names, to condemn slander, backbiting, and slandering, and to avoid excessive suspicion. The promotion of obscenity and indecency should also be avoided.

The Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) said: Beware of lying, for lying leads to sins, and sins lead to Hell. A person will continue to lie and persist in lying until he is recorded as a liar in the sight of Allah. (Muslm, 2607)

Hazrat Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) says: The adornment of conversation is speaking the truth. (Ibn Abi al-Dunya)

Today, social media users address each other with bad names and nicknames, even though Allah has forbidden it.

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وَيْلٌ لَّكُم مِّمَّا تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

Woe to everyone who slanders (face to face) and finds fault (in absence)! [al-Humazah, 104:1]

The Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) said: O people! You who have believed with your mouths but faith has not entered your hearts, do not backbite the Muslims, nor seek honor behind their backs. Because whoever seeks the faults of Muslims behind their backs, Allah will expose



their secrets. And whoever Allah exposes, He will humiliate and disgrace in his own home. (Ahmad bin Humbal, 19816)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبَ بََعْضُكُم بََعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

O believers! Avoid most conjectures. Indeed, some conjectures are sins (liable to punishment in the Hereafter). And spy not (on someone's unknown matters or secrets), nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it. And fear Allah (in all such matters). Indeed, Allah is Ever-Returning, Ever-Merciful. [al-Hujurāt, 49:12]

The Holy Prophet (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) said: Protect yourselves from suspicion, for suspicion is the worst of lies. Do not seek out each other's outward and inward faults, do not be greedy, do not envy, do not harbor hatred, do not turn away from each other, O slaves of Allah, become brothers. (Muslam, 2563)

Watching pornographic material is a very bad sin in itself. Let's share it further. This sin will continue until the Day of Judgment. As long as this material exists, people will continue to watch it.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفَاحِشَةُ فِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Indeed, those who like that lewdness should spread amongst the Muslims, for them is an agonizing punishment in this world and in the Hereafter. And Allah knows (the intentions of such people) and you do not know. [an-Nūr, 24:19]

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) said: Beware of obscenity, for Allah hates evil and speech (indecent talk). (Huban, 5176)

### **Difference of opinion is a blessing:**

Difference of opinion has been the scholarly tradition of Muslims. The purpose of disagreement is to seek the pleasure and approval of Allah. Disagreement is for the sake of seeking the truth. It is not for the sake of sedition, riots, chaos, and extremism. The companions and Imams also had intellectual disagreements with each other, but these disagreements were purely academic and research in nature. There was no personal interest, malice, or hatred involved in them.

It is not right to use it as a means of division and chaos and to impose your opinion on others. This behavior creates narrow-mindedness and intellectual limitations. Which gives rise to extremism and extremism.

Today, social media users discuss every topic on social media without research, just for the sake of fame, to advertise their account. Such discussions give rise to class divisions. This behavior gives rise to mutual resentment and distances.

It seems that the lesson learned from the above Islamic teachings is that one should not throw away someone's turban without reason, do not attack someone's honor, do not insult someone's character, and do not trade one's tongue and pen. Do not make your position marketable, do not bring any resistance to speaking the truth, and do not let any fear, danger, resistance, reproach, or greed stop you from expressing the truth. If, in the name of dissent on social media, this cannibalistic giant of the media is left unbridled for personal gain and will, it will trample on faith as well as human morality.

Therefore, the freedom of social media must be used within limits and restrictions.

### **Attack on the ideology of Pakistan:**



Pakistan is an Islamic ideological country. But today, due to social media, the thought of Western culture has invaded it. It has become difficult for people to save their faith. The net of satanic media has taken everything under its control. This is an era of sedition, social media is playing an important role in fostering these seditions. The era of the Fifth Generation War is underway. It has become difficult for the new Pakistani youth to save their faith along with their youth.

### **Social Media and Societal Impact:**

Social media has significantly influenced the younger generation, weakening traditional values and cultural norms. Inappropriate content and unethical activities are eroding societal morals. Parents and educators must guide youth on responsible social media usage.

### **Social Media and Politics:**

Politicians have adopted social media as a key tool for spreading their messages. These platforms play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and election campaigns. However, fake news and propaganda pose threats to political stability.

Social media's explosion in Pakistan over the last 15 years has profoundly reshaped its social interactions, societal discourse, and political landscape. While offering unprecedented opportunities for connection, mobilization, and information sharing, it simultaneously amplifies deep-seated divisions, facilitates disinformation, and presents novel challenges to state control and social harmony. A critical analysis reveals a complex, often contradictory, force.

### **The Importance of Balance:**

The benefits and harms of social media depend entirely on how we use it. When used responsibly, it can be an excellent tool for us, but excessive and irresponsible use can waste our time and energy. Social media is a powerful medium, but the key to success lies in using it correctly. We must maintain balance in our lives to reap its benefits while avoiding its pitfalls.

### **The Impact of Social Media on Social Life and Our Negligence:**

Today, most people who gain fame through social media do so primarily to earn money, even if it means sacrificing their culture and values. Every household head must remain vigilant to ensure the younger generation under their care doesn't go astray.

Human life consists of three key phases: childhood, youth, and old age. Each of these stages has its own unique and beautiful characteristics. In childhood, a person learns much from their society. If provided with a good environment, they grow up to be virtuous and righteous. Thus, a person's development or corruption largely depends on whether their environment is good or bad.

Youth is considered the golden period of life, where humans are full of energy and drive to achieve their goals. As Sheikh Saadi Shirazi said: *"Repentance in youth is the way of prophets, But in old age, even a wolf becomes pious."*

In old age, the body's faculties weaken, and a person becomes unable to participate fully in the field of action. As stated in the Holy Quran: [ar-Rahmān, 55:13]

فَيَا أَيُّهَا الرِّجَالُ نَكِيدِينَ

So, (O assembly of jinn and men,) which of your Lord's blessings will you deny?

Allah Almighty has created humans as the noblest of creatures. Everything we see in this transient world was created to serve humanity, and humans themselves were created to worship and obey Allah. In this context, Allama Iqbal insightfully points out:





"Open your eyes - look at the earth, the sky, the expanse!  
See the sun rising from the East!  
These clouds, these storms, this celestial dome,  
These silent spaces are under your control.  
These mountains, these deserts, these seas, these winds -  
Yesterday, angels bowed before you in devotion.  
Look today at your reflection in the mirror of time!" (Bal e Jabreel)

This profound verse reminds us of our exalted status and responsibilities as human beings. While we marvel at technological advancements, we must not forget our fundamental purpose - to worship Allah and uphold moral values in all aspects of life, including our use of social media.

### **The Paradox of Human Progress:**

While scaling the heights of progress and development, mankind has reached a stage where, when looking at its reflection in the "mirror of time," it raises its head with pride at its achievements on one hand, yet bows its head in shame and regret at the same scientific progress on the other.

As the verse says:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾

And I created the jinn and human beings solely to adopt My servitude. [adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:56]

Modern scientific advancement has opened unprecedented chapters of comfort in human life that were once unimaginable. Yet, in adopting these modern scientific tools and methods, we are drifting away from the fundamental purpose of our existence in this transient world - the very purpose declared by our Creator: *"I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me."*

Angels, being free from human desires and needs, remain completely absorbed in divine remembrance. Humans, however, struggle constantly with base desires that incite evil within us. Therefore, human worship requires far greater struggle and effort than that of angels.

In our current era, this struggle has become particularly challenging. The overwhelming invasion of social media has engulfed everyone without exception. While rapid communication has undoubtedly turned the world into a global village, moderation remains essential in all things. When the younger generation uses social media excessively, they face harm rather than benefit.

Most social media users are young people who, due to their immaturity and inexperience, struggle to distinguish between beneficial entertainment and necessary information boundaries. When a significant portion of youth begins living contrary to divine commandments, pursuing their desires instead, chaos spreads everywhere. This creates personal anxiety and unrest while making society increasingly imbalanced and corrupt.

The noble qualities that once characterized Muslim society - sacrifice, courtesy, justice, fair distribution of rights, and maintaining family ties - which formed the foundation of our culture and way of life, are now being sacrificed to social media's negative influences. These effects have stripped elders of their refined manners and compassion while robbing youth of constructive attitudes and tolerance.

Whether in Muslim society or elsewhere, religion establishes certain principles everywhere. Yet today, social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are increasingly dominated by those with no awareness of ethics, decency, or responsible behavior. In contrast, media in the past was carefully monitored, with each society promoting media according to its cultural values.



There's no denying that when used positively, social media can improve society faster than any other medium. However, it's equally true that *"when a monkey holds a knife,"* beneficial use becomes impossible.

Most seeking fame through social media today primarily aim to make money, even at the cost of sacrificing their culture and values. Napoleon gave an insightful analogy: *"If deer are led by a lion, they learn to fight; but if lions are led by a deer, they forget their strength and run like deer."* (Malik, F.) and other words of Alexander 'I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep; I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion'. (Gordontredgold, 2014)

For true social progress, we must examine who influences society through social media. As responsible citizens, we must remain vigilant. Every household head must keep watch to prevent the younger generation from going astray.

Social media's negative effects aren't limited to youth - they've even robbed children of their innocence. Unknowingly, by devoting excessive time to social media, we neglect our daily responsibilities and worship, becoming trapped in strange negligence.

While social media has simplified many things - bringing ease and speed to religious, political, economic, and social activities with visible benefits - its current trends are no less than a trial for our era. Social media now shows humanity things unimaginable just years ago. When examined critically, platforms like TikTok have become dens of social evils, corrupting young people's character.

Social media is undoubtedly necessary in our rapidly developing world, and its benefits cannot be denied. However, its current manifestations present challenges equal to any trial, showing modern human's things previously inconceivable. We must approach this powerful tool with wisdom and balance to preserve our values while benefiting from its advantages.

### **The Role of Social Media in Politics:**

The growing reliance on social media to gain an edge over political opponents in electoral races likely stems from the fundamental political philosophy that "Politics is all communication"—meaning the entire political process depends on effective messaging.

#### **Three Essential Conditions for Effective Communication**

For impactful political communication, three key conditions must be met:

1. Speed – Delivering the message to the target audience in the shortest possible time.
2. Targeted Reach – Maximizing the number of people who receive the message.
3. Cost Efficiency – Achieving these goals at the lowest possible expense.

Social media fulfills all three conditions of strategic communication. In the past, political parties relied on print media—newspapers—to disseminate their manifestos and positions. However, this method was not only time-consuming but also limited in reach.

The advent of radio, television, and rapid advancements in information technology revolutionized strategic communication, giving rise to mass media. Today, social media has swiftly replaced traditional mass media.

### **The Democratization of Political Messaging:**

Now, individuals no longer depend on governments, political parties, newspapers, or corporations to express their views. There's no need to wait for access or bear heavy advertising costs. With just



a smartphone, one can reach millions of followers at virtually no cost. This process doesn't isolate individuals from society; instead, it allows them to form new communities of like-minded people.

### **Social Media and Elections: A Global Trend**

It is often said that future electoral battles in Pakistan will be fought on social media platforms, which is why major political parties are actively organizing and equipping their social media teams. This trend is not unique to Pakistan—it is a global phenomenon.

Two years ago, American researchers Pinar Yildirim, Maria Petrova, and Ananya Sen published a paper in *Management Science* arguing that social media has leveled the playing field for political newcomers. Candidates using platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter outperform those relying on traditional methods like posters, banners, newspaper ads, or TV appearances.

### **Case Studies in Political Success via Social Media:**

- Barack Obama pioneered social media campaigning in U.S. elections.
- Donald Trump leveraged Twitter to build his political brand.
- The Arab Spring (2010-2011) demonstrated social media's power in mobilizing mass protests.
- Volodymyr Zelensky, a comedian-turned-president of Ukraine, used social media to win his campaign.
- In India's Punjab elections, Bhagwant Mann (a comedian) secured victory through social media outreach.
- Narendra Modi prefers direct communication via rallies and Twitter over press conferences.

### **Pakistan's Political Landscape and Social Media:**

In Pakistan, PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) and Imran Khan stand out as the most organized and effective users of social media in politics. While other parties like PML-N and PPP also maintain social media cells, none match PTI's strategic dominance in this arena.

It is a fact that just as the continuous use of anything distances a person from the real world, the continuous use of social media without reason and without need also distances a person from healthy activities. According to experts, constant and inappropriate use of social networks leads to problems such as nervous system damage, depression, frustration, inattention, anxiety in adolescence, excitement, and other negative habits. It is also said about social media that:

"However, in as much as social media maintains social bonds/relation, it unfortunately fails to meet all the social needs of man as a gregarious animal". (Nnamonu, T. 2011)

Tapscott said, "one of the ironies of the internet is that while it makes staying in touch easier when family members are physically apart, it can also keep them apart when they are at home."

### **Benefits of Social Media:**

1. **Easy Connectivity:** Enables staying in touch with family, friends, and colleagues despite physical distance.
2. **Educational & Informational Resources:** Provides access to online courses, research materials, and educational videos.
3. **Business Opportunities:** An effective tool for marketing and advertising for both small and large businesses.





4. Awareness & Enlightenment: Rapid dissemination of information on social issues, health, and education.
5. Entertainment: Access to music, movies, and other creative content.

#### **Drawbacks of Social Media:**

1. Time Wastage: Excessive scrolling and aimless activities.
2. Mental Stress: Feelings of inadequacy due to comparisons with others' curated successes.
3. Fake News: Spread of misinformation leading to societal chaos.
4. Privacy Concerns: Misuse of personal data and cybercrimes.
5. Social Isolation: Reduced real-life interactions in favor of virtual engagement.

#### **The Dark Side: Misinformation and Manipulation:**

One major reason for Pakistan's economic, political, and social deterioration is the lack of access to accurate information. The public, often naive, treats social media as an infallible political scripture. However, the real culprits are those who, for political and financial gain, manipulate public opinion by spreading misinformation, making it increasingly difficult for people to discern truth from propaganda.

#### **I. Social Sphere: Connectivity, Fragmentation, and Shifting Identities\***

##### **Positive Impacts:**

**Bridging Distances:** Facilitates connections between the diaspora and homeland, families across provinces, and friends separated by geography.

**Community Building:** Creates virtual spaces for niche interests, marginalized groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ forums, albeit often precarious), professional networks, and support groups (e.g., health issues).

**Expression & Identity:** Provides platforms, especially for youth and women, to express opinions, showcase talents, and explore identities beyond traditional constraints. Platforms like TikTok have offered economic opportunities and visibility.

**Cultural Exchange:** Enables sharing of regional cultures, languages, and traditions across Pakistan's diverse population.

##### **Negative Impacts (Critical Concerns):**

**Erosion of Traditional Social Fabric:** Concerns arise about weakening face-to-face interactions, family cohesion, and community bonds due to excessive virtual engagement.

**Social Comparison & Anxiety:** Curated online lives fuel unrealistic expectations, leading to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, particularly among youth.

**Polarization & Echo Chambers:** Algorithms often reinforce existing biases, segregating users into homogenous groups, deepening societal fault lines (ethnic, sectarian, political), and hindering constructive dialogue.

**Cyberbullying & Harassment:** Women, religious minorities, and critics face rampant online abuse, threats, and character assassination, often with impunity, chilling free expression and forcing self-censorship. Cases like the horrific lynching spurred by false blasphemy accusations on social media highlight deadly real-world consequences.

**Spread of Vulgarly & "Moral Panic":** Conservative segments frequently decry social media as promoting "un-Islamic" values, leading to moral policing and demands for censorship, often targeting women creators.



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## **II. Societal Sphere: Information, Misinformation, and Civic Engagement**

### **Positive Impacts:**

**Breaking Information Monopolies:** Challenges the dominance of traditional, often state-influenced or elite-controlled media. Citizen journalism brings marginalized issues to light.

**Mobilization for Social Causes:** Crucial for organizing movements like the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) demanding rights for tribal areas, climate activism, and disaster relief coordination (e.g., 2022 floods).

**Accountability & Whistleblowing:** Exposes corruption, malpractice, and human rights abuses (e.g., videos of police brutality, misuse of power) faster than traditional media.

**Access to Diverse Perspectives:** Provides access to a wider range of news sources and viewpoints, theoretically fostering a more informed citizenry.

### **Negative Impacts (Critical Concerns):**

**Epidemic of Mis/Disinformation:** Viral fake news, doctored videos, and conspiracy theories spread rapidly, fueling hatred, inciting violence (e.g., blasphemy accusations, sectarian clashes), and undermining public trust in institutions. State and non-state actors actively weaponize this.

**Deepening Polarization:** Online discourse is often characterized by extreme toxicity, hate speech, and dehumanization of opposing groups (political, religious, ethnic), mirroring and exacerbating societal divisions. Terms like "Bajwa Leagues" or "IK Cultists" illustrate this.

**Erosion of Trust:** The flood of conflicting information and deliberate disinformation campaigns breeds cynicism and makes it difficult for citizens to discern truth, weakening societal cohesion.

**Digital Divide:** Unequal access based on geography, gender, socio-economic status, and literacy limits the democratizing potential and reinforces existing inequalities. Rural women are particularly excluded.

## **III. Political Sphere: Mobilization, Scrutiny, and Control**

### **Positive Impacts:**

**Democratizing Political Participation:** Lowers barriers to entry, allowing smaller parties and independent candidates to reach voters directly, bypassing traditional gatekeepers. PTI's 2013 and 2018 campaigns were heavily social media-driven.

**Enhanced Political Accountability:** Enables real-time scrutiny of politicians, government actions, and public service delivery. Public pressure campaigns (#IslamabadRain, #ElectricityCrisis) can force responses.

**Platform for Dissent:** Provides a relatively safer space (though increasingly less so) for criticism of the powerful – military, government, judiciary – when traditional media self-censors.

**Election Monitoring & Transparency:** Facilitates citizen reporting of electoral irregularities and violence.

### **Negative Impacts (Critical Concerns):**

**Propaganda & Manipulation:** All political actors, including state institutions (notably the military establishment), political parties, and foreign actors, use sophisticated bots, troll farms, and targeted disinformation to manipulate narratives, smear opponents, and influence elections. "Fifth generation warfare" narratives are often invoked.



**Polarization & Instability:** Hyper-partisan content fuels political hatred and instability. The aftermath of the 2022 Vote of No Confidence and 2023 May 9th events saw intense, often inflammatory, online battles contributing to real-world chaos.

**Surveillance & Suppression:** State authorities increasingly monitor online activity, use laws like PECA (Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act) to arrest critics, journalists, and activists on charges of "defamation" or "cyberterrorism," and impose internet shutdowns during political crises or protests (e.g., frequent disruptions around PTI rallies, post-May 9th).

**Erosion of Democratic Discourse:** The focus shifts from policy debates to personality clashes, sensationalism, and mudslinging. Nuance is lost in the noise of viral outrage.

**Platform Censorship & Bias:** Global platforms' content moderation policies, often opaque and inconsistently applied, can silence legitimate Pakistani voices or fail to curb hate speech effectively. Government pressure on platforms to remove content is also significant.

#### **Critical Challenges & The State's Response:**

**Regulatory Quagmire:** Balancing freedom of expression with preventing harm (hate speech, incitement) is fraught. Amendments to PECA often lean towards greater state control, raising censorship concerns. The establishment of the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) further centralizes control.

**Platform Accountability:** Holding global giants accountable for content moderation and data privacy remains a significant challenge.

**Digital Literacy Deficit:** The population's low level of media and digital literacy makes it highly vulnerable to manipulation and disinformation.

**Instrumentalization by Deep State:** Persistent allegations exist that state agencies manipulate online trends, create fake accounts, and target dissent to maintain establishment narratives.

#### **Conclusion**

Social media is an undeniable force in contemporary society, offering both opportunities and challenges. While it enhances connectivity, education, and political engagement, its misuse leads to misinformation, moral decline, and social fragmentation. Islamic teachings provide a robust ethical framework for digital conduct, emphasizing truthfulness, respect, and accountability—values that must guide social media usage to prevent harm.

In Pakistan, social media's influence extends beyond personal interactions, affecting politics, culture, and national identity. The unchecked spread of fake news, indecent content, and political manipulation threatens social harmony and ideological integrity. Therefore, a balanced approach—combining personal responsibility, regulatory oversight, and digital literacy—is essential.

Ultimately, social media is a tool whose impact depends on its users. By adhering to ethical principles and using it judiciously, society can harness its benefits while mitigating its risks. As technology evolves, maintaining a conscious and morally grounded approach will be crucial in ensuring that social media serves as a constructive, rather than destructive, force in the modern world.

#### **Key Findings and Demands for Action:**

The analysis of social media's impact reveals critical challenges that demand immediate attention from individuals, policymakers, and religious leaders. Below are the key findings and actionable steps to mitigate harm and maximize benefits:



### **1. Ethical and Moral Degradation:**

Finding: Social media promotes indecency, vulgarity, and moral decay, conflicting with Islamic values and cultural norms.

#### **Action Required:**

- Religious and Educational Institutions should launch digital ethics campaigns, teaching responsible social media use based on Quranic principles (e.g., avoiding gossip, backbiting, and false news).
- Government & Tech Companies must enforce stricter content moderation to filter obscene and unethical material while respecting freedom of expression.

### **2. Spread of Misinformation and Fake News:**

Finding: False information spreads rapidly, causing social unrest, political instability, and even violence (e.g., blasphemy accusations, political smear campaigns).

#### **Action Required:**

- Media Literacy Programs should be integrated into school curricula to help users identify credible sources.
- Social Media Platforms must enhance fact-checking mechanisms and penalize accounts spreading deliberate misinformation.
- Legal Reforms should hold malicious actors accountable under cybercrime laws without suppressing free speech.

### **3. Political Manipulation and Polarization:**

Finding: Social media is weaponized for propaganda, deepening political divisions and undermining democracy.

#### **Action Required:**

- **Transparency in Political Ads:** Mandate disclosure of sponsored political content to prevent covert influence campaigns.
- **Regulation of Bots & Fake Accounts:** Governments and platforms must collaborate to eliminate automated disinformation networks.
- Public Awareness Campaigns to educate citizens on recognizing manipulative content.

### **4. Cyberbullying and Harassment:**

Finding: Women, minorities, and critics face severe online abuse, leading to self-censorship and mental health crises.

#### **Action Required:**

- **Stronger Cybercrime Enforcement:** Expedite legal actions against perpetrators of online harassment.
- **Support Systems:** Establish helplines and digital safety workshops for vulnerable groups.
- **Platform Accountability:** Social media companies must improve reporting mechanisms and swiftly remove abusive content.

### **5. Erosion of Family and Social Bonds:**

Finding: Excessive social media use weakens real-life relationships, leading to isolation and familial discord.



### **Action Required:**

- **Community Initiatives:** Promote offline social interactions through local events and family-oriented programs.
- **Parental Guidance:** Educate parents on monitoring children's digital habits and setting screen-time limits.

### **6. Exploitation of Youth and Cultural Erosion:**

**Finding:** Young users are particularly vulnerable to harmful trends (e.g., TikTok challenges promoting vanity and risky behavior).

### **Action Required:**

- **Alternative Content Creation:** Encourage Islamic scholars, educators, and influencers to produce engaging, value-based content.
- **National Digital Policy:** Develop guidelines to protect youth from addictive and destructive online behaviors.

### **A Call for Balanced and Responsible Use:**

Social media is not inherently good or evil—its impact depends on how it is used. Individuals must exercise self-discipline, governments must enforce fair regulations, and religious leaders must provide ethical guidance. By taking these steps, society can harness social media's potential while safeguarding moral, social, and political stability.

**Final Demand:** A national dialogue involving scholars, policymakers, and tech experts is urgently needed to establish a framework for ethical and responsible social media usage in Pakistan and beyond.

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