# Social Media and Youth in Pakistan: Implications on Family Relations

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## Abstract

Social Networking Sites (SNS) are increasingly becoming a focus of discussion in the academic literature across the globe. The current research was conducted to explore the effects of social media on youth in contemporary Pakistan especially focusing on the change in family relations. Under the paradigm of quantitative research methodology the researchers used survey method to collect data. Data was collected through structured questionnaire from 175 Masters level students from the International Islamic University Islamabad who were excessively using SNS. The respondents were selected by using Random sampling technique and stratified sampling technique. The findings show that the majority (94%) of the respondents acknowledged that excessive use of social media affects family relationships negatively. They reported to have experienced being isolated and alienated from relatives, friends and from themselves. This in turn was reported to lead to introvert personalities. In the light of the findings it can be concluded that the use of SNS among youth is reducing the bonding of the youth with their family and is changing the value system.

**Keywords:** Socialmedia; Family relations; Technological sociology; Socio-cultural values; Pakistan

## Introduction

In the modern era internet has grown to be one of the most powerful sources to connect people [1]. With the advancement of internet Social Networking Sites (SNS) are increasingly becoming popular [2] and have become the most up to date and attractive tools for connecting people across the world [3]. These sites have created transnational, international and national spaces where strangers meet and tie in social relations. Some of the most popular SNS include MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Viber and what Sapp. These have made it possible to easily connect with the world and these applications have attracted millions of users, plenty of whom have integrated these in to their every day practices. The social network sites have thus changed the way people connect across the world [4].

When it comes to the popularity of SNS developing countries too are at the forefront. In the context of Pakistan social media is getting distinction day by day [5]. Thirty million people in Pakistan have been reported to be online everyday and the number is growing quickly. Likewise there are 120 million versatile endorsers in Pakistan that make it the fifth biggest cellular telephone showcase in Asia [6]. Face book is presently the most broadly utilized social media site in Pakistan with nine million clients in the nation. It has been reported that face book has over one million supporters a month and 44 thousand new clients joining the site consistently. Pakistan's face book audience has been reported to be 70% male, 30% female as of April 2013 [7]. Face book has turned into one of the fundamental channels of correspondence between evacuee Pakistanis living in the Gulf States, European nations and the US and their families back home [8].

Scholarship on the use of SNS is huge. Research on SNS offers detailed account of its association with multiple aspects including violence among youth and issues related with harassment resulting from excessive use of social media. The role of social media in creating activism has been researched in various contexts [9], the connection of social media with social capital has been debated [10,11], and the association of social media with identity construction has been discussed [12]. Previous

research has also highlighted the challenges and opportunities related to SNS across the world [13].

The association between SNS and family relationship is also an area which has been researched widely across the globe. In this regards a growing concern related with SNS has been reported to be the increasing change in the behavior and interests of people towards their relatives. There was a time when people around the world were conscious about relationships, family matters and their friends circle but the scenario has changed in the recent past. People who used to give plenty of time to their families and their social circle spent hours and hours on surfing internet or other futile activities. It has been argued that because of this plenty of families are now lacking the close emotional pledges that build when they have close social contact [14].

This indicates that SNS have influenced the family connections. Excessive use of SNS has been reported to lead to the isolation of individuals because they restrict themselves to their rooms and neglect the family gatherings. Individuals who become accustomed to the use of internet do not realize the wastage of time. Hence, in Pakistan as well as in the rest of the world excessive use of SNS is turning to be a threat for the youth.

In the light of the above discussion and considering the extremely high usage of SNS in Pakistan the current study was conducted to explore the relation between social media youth and family relations.

## Research Objectives

1. To investigate the reasons for the excessive use of social media among youth.
2. To explore the effects of excessive use of social media on family relations.

## Literature Review

Previous studies show that adolescents make a great transition from a focus on parents to a focus on peers. In adolescence peers become increasingly important and forming and maintaining friendships becomes one of the main challenges. Until now most research on social development of adolescence had focused on in-person interactions. In the contemporary world a shift has occurred from real-life social interactions with peers to online social interaction on SNS [15,16].

Social Networking Sites have been known as a platform to build social relations among individuals. This has especially been so for individuals who for example, share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. However, recently the excessive use of SNS among youth has been reported due to access to internet. The amount of time spent on social media has dramatically increased over the last few years since electronics have become popular in our everyday lives [16,17].

The excessive use of SNS in turn has been reported to affect the performance of individuals in real life [5]. The new generation of kids and teens are growing up with social media as an integral part of their lives. It is changing how they interact with peers, parents and how they use technology [18]. Individuals who use SNS excessively have reported to feel unproductive and distracted

in school, at work and from relationships [5]. Instead of focusing on work, school and family, the youth today spend majority of time online. As a consequent of spending time on SNS youth tend to neglect obligations. This has been reported to negatively impact the lives of the youth and their relationships with families.

Research shows that the overwhelming submission to the SNS has pulled people away from traditional social settings, neighborhoods, voluntary associations, and public spaces that have been associated with large and diverse core networks [19]. The impact of social media utilization on interpersonal connections is changing the way individuals interact in face to face communications. It is also believed to have diminished the social and behavioral abilities of humans. The SNS have changed the conduct and hobbies of the individuals towards their relatives and have been reported to have weakened family ties [14]. This is because when individuals communicate online they don't feel personally connected to the people at the as they do when during face-to-face conversations. Hence, though people may be communicating more on the internet but they may not necessarily be building strong relationships [6].

This is especially true for the youth who spend hours on the SNS completely ignoring real relations. According to research conducted in the context of USA has Americans in the last few decades have become isolated socially. The social groups of people in America have been reported to have decreased. In particular, Americans are believed to have fewer close ties to those from their neighborhoods and from voluntary associations [19].

One reason for weakening of ties has been reported that youth spend more time with peers on line than they spend with their families [20] in their research have explained that use of SNS among youth has affected family life. Nearly one in three parents in their study had such feelings. Rosen and his colleagues also found that teens who spent a great time on Myspace believed that they lacked support support from their parents. In addition, research indicates that the excessive usage of social media increases level of loneliness and isolation and reduces bonding among intimate relations. As they become attached to their computers and smart phones individuals tend to show less concern towards family matters and families are now lacking the close emotional pledges [13].

Social Networking Sites have also been reported to affect the academic performance of the students. It has been found that the spending of unnecessary time on the internet can have serious implications for the performance of students at academic institutions. Hence, though the SNS may be a great means for enjoying yet the problem arises when individuals subtly substitute electronic relationships for physical ones. Though people may feel connected to peers via the Internet, yet this relation paradoxically engenders a sense of social isolation.

Likewise, qualitative evidence adds that social networking sites such as Myspace can also result in serious conflict among parents and children leading to reduced control of parents over their children [21]. However some researchers have argued that internet may not be a problem when sufficient supervision was

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available and when it was ensured that they used it properly. A study by Gustavo Mesch found that family time was not affected when adolescents used the computer for educational purposes only if they used it for social purposes then there will be negative effect on family interaction [22]. So, it is imperative that parents should be able to keep check on how their children use the internet by placing a time limit on long they can spend on the computer [23].

However, in majority of the cases it has been reported that parents may not know much about their teen's online activities. There is gap in the existing literature on parents knowledge of their children use of social media. Often parents are not aware of their online friends and what information o they have access to. For example parents are reported to be unaware about the time teens spend on Myspace [20]. In such cases parents may not be effective at setting limits and monitoring the activities of the children. For being able to reduce the gap between parents and children the parents also need to be educated about social media.

Due to the above reasons and others the limitations of SNS are also being debated across the world. Some scholars have considered the excessive use of SNS as a threat and danger to families and society. However, people who explicitly emphasize the drawbacks of social media are not entirely against the idea of networking. Yet they are of the opinion that the replicated relationships become dominant in the lives of excessive media users than those of their real relationships. This is how social networking becomes a threat to our families and societies [24].

## Methodology

The current study was conducted by using a quantitative approach that emphasizes on objective measurements and numerical analysis of collected data. It relies on statistical approaches to generate valid and empirical results. The tool for current research was survey. Research instrument for current research data collection was questionnaire.

The area/locale of current research was International Islamic University Islamabad. The target population was the female students enrolled in Masters programmes in various departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences belonging to age group 20-26 who reported to be using SNS excessively. Since the aim of this study was to focus on the excessive usage of SNS and its effects hence those students who reported to use SNS excessively were selected purposively. By using stratified sampling technique 175 students were selected for the interviews.

In the first phase of the study pretesting was carried out by distributing 30 questionnaires in order to check the reliability of the instrument. For the analysis of quantitative data, statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used which facilitates the researcher in more than one way such as time saving and reduction of large amount data to basic pattern etc. Univariate analysis has been done to interpret the data.

## Results and Discussion

The selected respondents belonged to various departments in the faculty of Social Sciences including Sociology (32%), Psychology (24.57%) and Education (43.42%). The majority of the respondents

(94.3%) were single and unemployed (87.42%). The respondents belonged to different types of family systems i.e. 54.3% were living in joint family system, 43.4% living in nuclear family system and 2.3% respondents were living in extended family system. The data shows that the majority (55.7%) respondents spent 6-10 hours on SNS per day using different apps and visiting different sites **(Table 1)**.

The availability of applications is the first thing which attracts youngsters to SNS. The data shows that the majority of the respondents 38.9% used four plus apps on the SNS.

According to the data from this study the most popular SNS was twitter as evidenced from the fact that 33.7% respondents were using it. Face book was reported to be used by 20.6%, whatsapp was used by 19.4% respondents, viber was used by 7.4% respondents, youtube was used by 6.9% respondents, tango was used by 9.1% respondents, and skype was reported to be used by 2.3% respondents **(Table 2)**.

The respondents were asked about the daily activities they performed during free time **(Table 2)**. When asked if they would prefer to spend time with family members instead of being on social media 88% responded that they would sometimes prefer it and 8.6% responded that they would always prefer it. This shows that social networking sites reduce the actual human contact and those who are active on social sites appear not to have time for the actual life interactions.

The respondents were also inquired if they helped their parents in free time. According to the data, 70.9% respondents said sometimes, 27.84% respondents said always and 1.7% respondents said never. In response to the question if they liked being on the SNS sites the responses were 36.0% said sometimes, 59.4% said always and very few like 4.6% said never **(Table 3)**.

Previous research shows that teenagers use SNS for a number of reasons. One of such reasons has been reported to make new friends and to stay in touch with existing friends. It has been found that social media users under the age of 50 are especially likely to say that these tools help them keep up with existing friends and reconnect with old ones-roughly seven in ten users under the age of fifty say that staying in touch with current friends is

**Table 1** Applications used by the respondents.

| No. of apps used | Percentage |
|---|---|
| One | 15.4% |
| Two | 20.6% |
| Three | 25.1% |
| Four and above | 38.9% |
| Total | 100% |

**Table 2** Opinion about recreational activities.

| Activities Performed | Sometimes | Always | Never |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sit and chat with family | 88% | 8.6% | 3.4% |
| Help my mother or father | 70.9% | 27.4% | 1.7% |
| Connect with the social sites | 17.1% | 80.6% | 2.3% |
| Love spending more time on social media | 36% | 59.4% | 4.6% |
| Want to do my favorite tasks | 78.9% | 18.9% | 2.3% |

**Table 3** Reasons for using SNS.

| Reasons for using SNS | Sometimes | Always | Never |
|---|---|---|---|
| To make new friends | 76.0% | 10.3% | 13.7% |
| To find old friends | 73.1% | 26.3% | 0.6% |
| To communicate with existing friends | 11.4% | 88.6% | 0 |
| To interact with people with common interests | 69.1% | 17.7% | 13.1% |
| To pass time | 9.7% | 85.7% | 4.6% |

a major reason they use online social platforms, and just over half say that connecting with old friends they've lost touch with is equally important [1]. Research on SNS and youth has also found that girls usage of sites is mainly for the purpose of strengthen pre-existing friendships and for boys it for flirting and making new friends [25].

The data from this study shows that the primary purpose of the SNS for the respondents was to make new friends and to stay in touch with the existing friends. 76.0% responded that they sometimes used SNS to make new friends and stay in touch with old friends while 10.3% stated always used SNS to make new friends and to remain in touch with existing friends. The respondents were also of the view that they often preferred to interact with people with common interests. When asked if they used SNS for finding old friends 73.1% said sometimes and 26.3% said always. When inquired if they used SNS to communicate with existing friends 88.6% replied always. 69.1% responded that they sometimes used SNS to interact with people with common interest and 85.7% respondents replied that they always used SNS to kill time **(Table 4)**.

In order to determine in what ways the SNS had effected family relations the respondents were asked further questions. The responses of the respondents indicate that SNS have often negative effects which lead to change in social relations by decreasing family bonding.

Some of the negative aspects discussed were more connection with online friends than time spent with family reported by 80% (to a great extent), and 14.9% (to some extent) and more reliance on electronic medium reported by 61.1% (to a great extent). Similar findings have been reported in previous studies [7]. Likewise emotional disturbance was reported to be one negative effect of social media. The respondents were asked to give their views as to what extent they were facing emotional disturbance. According to data 88.6% said to some extent, 4.6% said to great extent and 4.0% respondents said not at all. It was also inquired to what extent using social media increases the level of loneliness among the individuals. According to the data 69.1% said to some extent, 28.0% said to great extent, and 2.9% said not at all.

The data also shows that the respondents have less emotional bonding with the family. According to data 65.1% agreed to this said to some extent, 24.6% to great extent, and 7.4% not at all. The fact that the bonding of the respondents with their family members is decreasing is also evident from the fact that the majority of the respondents reported to be leased concerned with family matter. In response the statement 'least concerned

about family matters' 71.4% respondents reported to a great extent while **(Table 5)**.

Despite the negative effects the data shows that social media has some healthy merits as well **(Table 6)**. The respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement that social media is a medium of communication between old friends. According to data 17.7% respondents strongly agreed, 81.7% agreed and .6% were neutral. The respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement that social media is a source of making new friends. According to data 24.6% respondents were strongly agreed, 65.7% respondents were agreed, 8.6% respondents were neutral and 1.1% was disagreed.

Social media is also believed to update about latest fashion trends. The respondent was asked to what extent they agreed with this statement. According to data 70.3% respondents reported to strongly agree, 29.1% respondents agreed, and 0.6% respondents were neutral.

Social media is also a good source for remaining in touch with family members living abroad. It is believed to have allowed migrant families across the world to communicate with ease where communication through occasional letters and phone calls used to be expensive. According to data 90.3% respondents strongly agreed, 6.9% respondents agreed, 2.3% respondents were neutral, 0.6% respondents disagreed.

When the respondents were inquired if they had found their life partner on the SNS the responses were interesting. According to

**Table 4** Negative effects of SNS on personal and family life.

| Negative impacts of SNS | To some extent | To great extent | Not at all |
|---|---|---|---|
| More connection with online friends than home | 14.9% | 80% | 2.3% |
| More reliance on electronic medium | 31.4% | 61.1% | 4.6% |
| Emotional disturbance | 88.6% | 4.6% | 4% |
| Increases level of loneliness | 69.1% | 28% | 2.9% |
| Least concerned with family matters | 27.4% | 71.4% | 1.1% |
| Less emotional bonding with family | 65.1% | 24.6% | 7.4% |

**Table 5** Positive effects of SNS.

| Positive effects of SNS | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Medium of communication between old friends | 17.7% | 81.7% | 0.6% | 0 | 0 |
| Medium of communication between new friends | 24.6% | 65.7% | 8.6% | 1.1% | 0 |
| Updates about latest fashion trends | 70.3% | 29.1% | 0.6% | 0 | 0 |
| Easily stay in touch with the family abroad | 90.3% | 16.9% | 42.3% | 0.6% | 0 |
| Can find a life partner | 1.7% | 25.7% | 14.3% | 30.3% | 27.4% |
| It has been a great way to enjoy my leisure | 53.1% | 36.0% | 19.7% | 0.6% | 0.6% |
| Got awareness about global scenario | 42.9% | 46.9% | 0.3% | 0 | 0 |

**Table 6** SNS and family relationships.

| SNS and family relationships | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Using social media is becoming a trend nowadays | 83.4% | 16.6%) | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| Less face to face interaction | 70.9% | 25.1% | 1.1% | 2.3% | 0.6% |
| Make relations nonexistent | 42.3% | 43.4% | 8.6% | 4% | 1.7% |
| Pays less attention to the siblings | 46.3% | 44.6% | 7.4% | 1.1% | 0.6% |
| Lacking the close emotional pledges | 49.1% | 42.3% | 6.9% | 1.1% | 0.6% |

the data 1.7% strongly agreed, 25.7% agreed to the statement, 14.3% were neutral, 31.4% disagreed and 26.9% strongly disagreed. Previous research shows that very few social media users say that finding potential romantic partners or people to date plays a role in their use of these sites [1].

The respondents were asked that they found social media a great way to enjoy leisure or when alone. According to the data 53.1% strongly agreed, 36.0% agreed, 9.7% were neutral, 0.6% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed. The respondents were asked if they had got awareness about global scenario. According to the data 42.9% strongly agreed, 46.9% agreed and 10.3% were neutral. Source: survey.

The negative effects of SNS discussed above clearly indicate its influence on family relations. It is clear that as a result of access to electronic the respondents reported to connected with their online friends. This resulted in emotional disturbance and loneliness on one hand and importantly the respondents acknowledged having least concern with family matters and less emotional bonding with the family. In order to determine in what particular ways family relations are being affected by the use of SNS further questions were asked from the respondents. In response to the statement if the use of social media has become a trend 83.4% strongly agreed and 16.6% agreed.

In response to the question if SNS had reduced face to face interaction 70% strongly agreed. When asked if social media makes family relations nonexistent 42.3% respondents strongly agreed, 43.4% were agreed, 8.6% were neutral, 4.0% were disagreed and 1.7% strongly disagreed. Previous research has suggested that internet communication had a negative impact on the individual by reducing face-to-face interactions and increasing level of loneliness [26]. Research has also found that teens use media and instant messaging as a substitute for face to face interaction with friends [27].

In order to determine how use of SNS affects social relations the respondents were asked if addiction to social media detaches individuals from siblings. To this question 46.3% respondents strongly agreed, 44.6% agreed, 7.4% were neutral, 1.1% was disagreed and 0.6% strongly disagreed.

The respondents were asked if families are now lacking the close emotional pledges because of excessive usage of social media. According to data 49.1% strongly agreed, 42.3% agreed, 6.9% were neutral, 1.1% was disagreed and 0.6% strongly disagreed to the statement. This has also been reported in previous studies that families are now lacking the close emotional pledges with their offspring and that SNS have changed the behavior & interests of the people towards their relatives [28-30].

## Conclusion

The aim of the study was to find out how social networking sites are affecting family relationships in Pakistani society. The data shows that SNS are contributing in many ways and there are many positive attributes associated with the use of the SNS. Yet negative effects of SNS cannot be ignored. Importantly, the data shows that the use of SNS is deeply associated with family relationships. Excessive usage of SNS is alienating the youth and making them isolated. While doing this the social media is creating gap between the family and youth. The youth in contemporary Pakistan are being detached from their families and friends as a result of the time they spend online. This has serious implications on the cultural values of the Pakistani society. This indicates that notwithstanding the fact that access to SNS has changed the way individuals think, how they interact, the way they experience life, the way they share opinions, and make friends and importantly the way they exercise their right to vote. However, it's time to reconsider the use of SNS to keep a balance between the changing global world and the values and norms of the society.

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