ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

The Impact of Social Networking Sites on Teenagers' Behavior and Their Influence on Pakistani Culture

Abdul Basit [1], Kamal Ud Deen Ali Shah [2], Muhammad Kashif [3] *, Kardar Ali [4], Sayam Akhtar[5]

[1,2] Higher School of Economics, Moscow

[3] National Research University (HSE), Moscow, Russia

[4] Indus University, Karachi, Pakistan

[5] Tzu Chi University, Taiwan

Abstract— The growing use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) has a great influence on the behavior of Teenagers worldwide. SNS has specific influence on cultural dynamics in countries like Pakistan. This study explores that how SNS (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Tok-tok) influence psychological wellbeing, identity formation and social behavior of Pakistani teenagers. Here we can examine influence of SNS on Pakistani culture, by checking the shifting values, norms and social perception. Data collected from teenagers (through semi structured in depth interviews from 30 teenagers in two phases over a period of six months) in major Pakistani cities highlight the changing dynamics in behavior and cultural identity of Pakistani youth. This article shed light on Positive and negative effects of social media usage among Pakistani teenagers and uncover the emerging themes related to self-perception, social norms, mental health and cultural shifts. Results indicate a strong relationship between use of social media and cultural transformation in Pakistan. Theory of social influence and uses and gratifications theory confirm the results of this study. There are also some limitations of this study, which includes regional scope. Future research direction led to check the impact of SNS across various demographics. Moreover, qualitative research is basically subjective in nature, as a result it could be affected by the bias of researchers. So, quantitative research study can be conducted in future in order to validate the findings.

Index Terms— Social networking sites, Pakistani teenagers, Cultural transformation, Identity, Social media behavior, Social influence
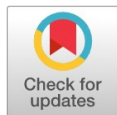
Introduction

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) application which are based on web, which allow its users for creating a personal profile enables the users to create a personal profile on the particular site. All users of the specific site can see profile and connection list of each other (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). SNS is an online web place, which allow its users to create their own social network (Obar & Wildman, 2015).

Over the past two decades, the increasing use of SNS has had a great influence on individuals, especially teenagers, and how they interact with each other and communicate with the world around them. SNS has become a staple of youth life, affecting their self-esteem,

*Email: kashifchudary@gmail.com

social lives, and overall behavior. Pakistan is a country where social norms and traditional values have special importance, so here, the impact of SNS has raised concerns related to changing social values among teenagers.

Significance of the study

Most of the research on the impact of social networking sites focuses on global trends. Existing studies in Pakistan mostly concentrate on technology adaptation, internet usage, etc., but there is not sufficient material on its subjective side, i.e., how SNS affects values, cultural identity, cultural integration of social media trends, perception, behavior, and psychological effects, of teenagers in Pakistan. In fact, it has been highlighted in international research that internet-using behaviors could be easy to understand when the sociocultural and digital environment in which the problematic behaviors have evolved and take place are taken into consideration (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). This study seeks to fill a gap in existing literature by focusing on Pakistani teenagers and by analyzing both positive and negative influence of SNS.

This article explores the effect of SNS on Pakistani teenagers' behavior by focusing on the positive and negative outcomes of their usage. This study highlights how SNS create a cultural change by changing attitudes of Pakistani youth towards identity, family and socialization. Moreover, it will investigate whether social media act as a medium either for the promotion of Pakistani culture or for the adaptation of western culture.

The findings will have implications understanding the effect of merger of international trends and local cultural practices, which will in turn contributes in analyzing the role of social media in reshaping the cultural values in non-Western countries like Pakistan.

Research question

"How SNS influence the behavior and cultural values of Pakistani teenagers."

Literature Review

Social Media has become an important element of everyone's life worldwide. According to Auxier, Anderson, et al. (2021) in United States, 95% teenagers have a smart phone and spend most of their free time on social media platforms. Since with the arrival of the internet in the early 1990s, the use of social networking was elevated globally in Pakistan. In the year 2001, the percentage of internet consumers was 1.3%, in 2006 it increased more and reached to 6.5%, the percentage of internet users has become 10% in 2012 and at present the percentage of broadband internet users stood at 18.8%, the results indicate that more than 32 million people are using the internet now. The potential reach of the internet is further accelerated by the widespread deployment of mobile broadband 3G and 4G. Various social media sites are working in Pakistan including SNSs like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, Line, Skype, Viber, IMO and Tango. The reasons for using social media by teenagers are multifaceted. Social media become a place for peer connection, self-expression, and access to information (DISA, 2020). As far as Pakistan is concerned, social media become a place where teenagers can express their opinions, explore new ideas, and form virtual communities that could reshape local boundaries (Ali, 2016). The rapid increase in social media usage has a great effect on teenagers' behavior, especially in terms of mental health issues, social media addiction, and adaptation to negative social norms (Shahid, Bashir, & Fatima, 2024). Economic growth, high inflation, unemployment, terrorist activities, and above all, deep-seated psychological constipation have penetrated the ordinary life of most Pakistanis, who are now being embattled by the butchering of their mental health and adverse afflictions. Pakistanis faced negative influences like terrorism; these malicious activities resulted in an increasing level of insecurity. This insecurity could cause several psychological problems, like stress, anxiety, and depression. (Khan, 2016).

Theoretical framework

Influence of SNS on teenagers' behavior

A wealth of literature is available that focuses on the effect of social media on teenagers' social behavior, mental health, and identity development. According to Kuss and Griffiths (2017), SNS can have both positive and negative influences on youth by influencing their emotional well-being, social interactions, and self-image. The Positive impact of SNS on teenagers includes social connection and communication, access to educational resources, encourage self-expression and creativity, and exposure to diverse cultures, etc. social media can bring up a sense of belonging and a supportive network for youth, especially for those who feel their selves as marginalized in traditional social settings. Jiang, Cheng, Yang, and Gao (2022), Negative impacts of SNS are addiction and excessive use, unrealistic beauty standards, distorted body image, social isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, online harassment, and cyberbullying, etc. Social media has a great influence on how people interact with each other and how they perceive about their personalities. Constant comparisons with ideal

personalities and lifestyles result in social isolation, identity confusion, and anxiety. Excess usage of social media has a connection with depression, anxiety, and loneliness in youth (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Mostly youth of both developed and developing nations do not use the positive aspects of social media as compare to negative aspects (Wickramanayake, 2022).

Social media changes the ways of personal interaction among people; it brings a great change in attitudes and beliefs of people and even changes almost every aspect of human life. Valkenburg and Peter (2013), suggest that social media can influence the self-esteem of teenagers because they watch idealized images and lifestyles on an almost daily basis. This exposure may result in a negative body image and unrealistic comparisons because teenagers want to adopt the glamorous online portrayals. Beauty standards are mostly influenced by Western and traditional ideals in Pakistan, so the result of this idealized representation is mostly pronounced (Ahmed, Qazi, Hussain, & Ahmed, 2019). So, Pakistani teenagers often experience a conflict between their cultural identity and worldwide values, which are presented on social media.

Role of SNS in social well-being

Some studies have suggested that SNS plays a vital role in mental health (e.g., Pittman and Reich, 2016, Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009), it is also proved by research that there is a negative influence on human physical and psychological well-being (Verduyn, Ybarra, Résibois, Jonides, & Kross, 2017). Use of SNS has also a relationship with lower self-esteem (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011), higher levels of anxiety, depression and stress (Donnelly & Kuss, 2016; Lup, Trub, & Rosenthal, 2015; Rosen, Whaling, Rab, Carrier, & Cheever, 2013; Shensa et al., 2017; Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014; Tandoc Jr, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2015; Wright et al., 2013), lead to higher levels of loneliness and social comparison in a negative way (Chou & Edge, 2012; Song et al., 2014; Tandoc Jr et al., 2015; Verduyn et al., 2017). Other research studies indicate that there is no sufficient association between the use of SM and mental well-being (Berryman, Ferguson, & Negy, 2018; Coyne, Rogers, Zurcher, Stockdale, & Booth, 2020; O'Day & Heimberg, 2021). Some of the research studies prove that there is no significant relationship between psychological well-being and SMU. When the researchers investigated the relationship between depression, anxiety, stress, and the use of SMSs, the results indicated that more social comparisons and negative interactions on social media have a relationship with more depression, stress, and anxiety; in contrast, the more social support, positive relationships, and feelings of connectedness with people on social media resulted in less depression, stress, and anxiety, (Seabrook, Kern, & Rickard, 2016). People use social media, especially smartphones, to preserve their daily interactional patterns (Li & Noor, 2022).

According to research, the ways of using SNSs can be divided into two main categories. first one is active use and second one is passive use. Active use consist of any activity on SMS which helps in direct relationship with the other users, like communicating directly (e.g. one-to-one messaging, sharing links etc.), on the other side, passive use means indirect engagement, like just watching the lives of other people (e.g. just watching videos, update and profiles of the other users), (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011; Verduyn et al., 2017). Verduyn et al. (2017), argued in his cross sectional research work in this way, "active use is associated with greater psychological well-being and passive use is associated with poorer psychological well-being." Moreover Seabrook et al. (2016), claimed that the people who actively on social media feel more positively, more supported, and more socially connected, it can result in less depression and anxiety. On the other side, passive use of SMSs may lead to comparisons and competition among people, it can result in more risk of depression and anxiety.

Role of SNS in cultural dynamics

SNS has a great impact on cultural dynamics in Pakistan because it started a war between modern and traditional culture. Global culture penetrates in Pakistani culture through SNSs. It results in changing perceptions of youth about traditional values, like family life norms, social acceptable behavior and even religion. Social media is becoming a major cause of creating a gap between young and older generation because of their views about fashion choices and gender roles etc. Social Media Platforms creates a shift from traditional collective values of Pakistani cultures to a more individualistic approach. Here is Table 1 which show the impact of social media on Pakistani culture.

Table I

Impact of social media on Pakistani culture

Cultural Aspects	Influence of Social Media
Family Values	Teenagers exhibit less respect for traditional family structure.
Religious Practices	Content of different religions create a confusion among youth.
Gender Roles	More awareness challenges traditional gender role values.
Social Etiquette	Creates a shift from formal to casual and informal social relations.
Peer Pressure	Teenagers often imitate peer-led groups and social sites.
Consumer Culture	Young generation adopt the influence of ads and viral content.

Social media and relationship with family and friends

SMSs may offer a place can to the members of a family for staying in touch with each other and to share information and experiences with each other (Helsper & Eynon, 2010). On contrary, on some other research studies proved a negative relationship between SMSs and family relations. We can take the example of research study of Nabi and Keblusek (2014), it emphasizes that there is a positive relationship between the excessive use of social media and conflicts and dissatisfaction among the members of a family. Subrahmanyam, Šmahel, et al. (2011), support the same view by providing some cases, in which misunderstandings lead to conflicts as a result of posts sharing and quick commenting. The use of SNSs can lead to less face-to-face interactions which may result in less emotional connectivity members of a family (Chou & Edge, 2012). A research claimed that parents and old age relatives feel that they have a less or no privacy whenever they communicate with each other through SMSs. This situation provoked disputes among family members (Madden, Cortesi, Gasser, Lenhart, & Duggan, 2012). On the other hand, Valkenburg and Peter (2013), claimed in their research study family members not only can retain, but also can deepen their relationships by using SMSs. They argued that families can strengthen their relations by engaging SMSs.) A research study depicts the ways in which families construct online collective identities, leaving a 'digital footprint' that cannot only unite family members but also lead to arguments about representations (Marwick & Boyd, 2014). Livingstone (2008) emphasized on the generation gap caused by different levels of digital literacy, discovering that parents and children can may feel isolated because of different levels of knowledge of SMSs and skills.

Methodology

Qualitative research design is used to investigate the topic. This approach is chosen because it aims to understand the complexities of human nature, behavior, experiences, and social processes. This approach enables us to explore subjective experiences and perceptions of the participants, which can provide us numerous ways to check influence of social media on teenagers' cultural identity and behavior. Qualitative research methods are proved to be the solution for achieving immersion in the everyday experiences of the study participants, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the impact of influencers on their daily lives (Silverstone, 2005). A qualitative research method would be useful for in-depth exploration of the phenomena because this method is flexible and support to understand evolving cultural landscape of Pakistan.

Sampling technique

We chose purposive sampling technique, Welman and Kruger (1999) considered it as the most important type of non-probability sampling in order to choose informants of the study. I have decided to select the sample based on my judgement and the purpose of the research (Greig, 2007; Rubin & Babbie, 2007). These informants are the basic unit of analysis, as the Bless, Higson-Smith, and Kagee (2000) already suggest. I took the informed consent of all of the participants of the as suggested by Bailey (1996), Arksey and Knight (1999) and Street (1998). Another purpose of using informed consent is to ensure ethical research (Holloway, 1997; Kvale, 1996). Bailey (1996), cautions that deception may be counter-productive.

    We have developed a semi structured interview protocol with specific informed consent agreement, in order to gain the informed consent from participants. Informed consent includes:

- Purpose of the study
- Procedures of the study
- Voluntary nature of participation in the research
- Name the procedure is adopted to protect confidentiality Kvale (1996), Street (1998), Arksey and Knight (1999) and Bless et al. (2000).

    Bailey (1996), prove that misinformation may lead to concealment of information, but clear and honest statement of confidentiality can lead to lesser suspicion and more real responses. At the start of each interview, I explained the "informant Consent Agreement" to the informant in detail. All of the participants give their consent, to participate in the research study clearly, by signing the agreement.

    My central research question was: "How SNS influence the behavior and cultural values of Pakistani teenagers". 28 teenagers (aged 13-19) were selected as sample from three major cities of Pakistan (Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad) in order to ensure the variety of socio-economic levels. I use purposive sample technique and select the people who are educated and used social media on daily basis. I conduct in depth, semi structured interviews with the individuals both in person and through zoom. First of all 24 interviews were conducted and after that the researcher feel that no more themes were emerging. But in order to confirm data saturation, 4 more interviews were conducted. After that, it was confirmed that the data is saturated. I also use the bracketing techniques in order to set aside his pre-conceived notions. Data was collected over 6 six months, from January to June, 2024.

    My questions were "directed to the participant's experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question", as is suggested by Welman and Kruger (1999).

Bracketing (Caelli, 2001; Davidson, 2000; Kruger & Aiple, 1988; Kvale, 1996), in this study entailed asking the informants to set aside their experiences and to share their reflection on the topic of the study. Information was collected about feelings and thinking of the informants in a direct way (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). The second type of bracketing is also there, which, according to Miller and Crabtree (1992, p.24), is about the researcher that he should "bracket" her/his own preconceptions too and enter into the individual's lifeworld and use the self as an experiencing interpreter". Moustakas (1994) points out that "Husserl called the freedom from suppositions the epoch, a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain". According to Bailey (1996), the "informal interview is a conscious attempt by the researcher to find out more information about the setting of the person". The interview is reciprocal: both researcher and research subject are engaged in the dialogue. I experienced that the duration of interviews and the number of questions varied from one participant to the other. Kvale (1996), remarks with regard to data capturing during the qualitative interview that it "is literally an interview, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest," where researcher attempts to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold meaning of peoples' experiences" (pp. 1-2).

Memoing (Miles & Huberman, 1984) is another important data source in qualitative research that I used in this study. It is the researcher's field notes recording what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the process. Researchers are easily absorbed in the data-collection process and may fail to reflect on what is happening. However, it is important that the researcher maintain a balance between descriptive notes and reflective notes, such as hunches, impressions, feelings, and so on. Miles and Huberman (1984), emphasize that memos (or field notes) must be dated so that the researcher can later correlate them with the data.

I audio-recorded, with the permission of interviewees, all interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bailey, 1996). Each interview was assigned a code, for example "Participant, 2 dec 2024." Where more than one interview took place on a specific date, the different interviews were identified by an alphabet character, (Participant-B, 2 dec. 2024). I recorded each interview on a separate cassette. I labelled each cassette with the especially assigned interview code. After each interview, I listened to the recording as early as possible and made notes. I transcribed key words, phrases and statements in order to highlight the voices of research informants.

The words of caution by Easton, McComish, and Greenberg (2000), that equipment failure and environmental conditions might seriously threaten the research undertaken, was borne in mind. They advise that the researcher must always ensure that recording equipment work well and spare batteries, tapes etc., are available. There should be no background voices and interruptions in the interview settings.

Data Analysis

I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews both in-person and online using Zoom. Semi-structured interviews are an effective method for gathering testimonies from children and teenagers due to their developed verbal communication skills at this age (Zarouali, Poels, Walrave, & Ponnet, 2019). Interviews offer the advantage of focusing on the interviewee's experiences, enabling exploration of predetermined topics as well as the discovery of unexpected ones, and granting flexibility to access private matters (Rosenblum, 1987). The primary disadvantages are associated with the fact that participants recount their actions based on their interpretation and memory (Berger et al., 1998). Teenagers were encouraged to make certain decisions by using concrete examples, providing a deeper understanding of their attitudes, reactions and decision-making processes when exposed to particular content in order to lessen the effect of this limitation.

The interviews lasted on average 30–35min. To maintain independence in responses and ensure free expression, teenagers were interviewed separately from their respective Parental consent was taken from guardians as well, before participating in the study. I adopted an inductive approach to analyzing data, where researchers always prioritize the participants' language in order to identify recurring themes and to construct an interpretative framework. The process of research was consist on sample selection, data collection through semi structured, in-depth interviews, transcription of interview data and rigorous data analysis. Researchers have to perform a process of coding, pattern identification, and theme development to capture the essence of participants' experiences. I followed the recommended four steps outlined by Smith (2003) and Moustakas (1994), in preparing and analyzing the interview data. These are given below:

Steps of data analysis

- Verbatim transcripts were closely read, and terminologies that provided meaningful insights for similar themes.
- Notes were prepared, and emerging themes were marked.
- Grouping of similar themes. Forming clusters for the themes based on differences and similarities.
- The author describes his theme and supports his theme with the quoted answers of the respondents.

Data coding

Identify key phrases, concepts, and recurring themes to break down the data into manageable parts, which is called initial coding. After that, Similar codes would be grouped into broader categories.

Thematic analysis

Check the major themes that emerge from the data and evaluate how these themes are related to each other.

Contextualization

The findings would be contextualized within the broader literature on the given topic. This step validates the themes identified and situates the research within ongoing academic discussions.

Bracketing

Throughout the analysis, the authors would engage in bracketing to set aside their preconceptions and biases, in order to get better understanding of the participants' thinking.

I started the data analysis just after 1st interview. First of all, I listen the audio tapes and transcribe them. I focus on reading the data again and again in order to get the familiarity with the data. After getting an overall sense of the content, I identify basic ideas for coding. I checked for patterns and similarities across the codes and group them to form broader themes that reflects key aspects of social media's influence on teenagers.

Main Themes and Discussion

After reviewing themes, I labeled names of them. Here are the main themes of the analysis:

Social media usage

Most of the informants face difficulty in managing time because they spend too much time on social media due to its addictive nature. It was proved very difficult to disengage oneself from social media due to constant stream of content. Visual content on Instagram, Facebook and Tok-tok etc. dominates because teenager have greater interest in that.

Respondent 5 said

"I cannot put my phone down due to continuous scrolling on Instagram and Facebook. I send most of my free time on social media and even its hard for me to leave phone even for the time of study." "I can spend hours and hours on Tik-Tok. It's my favorite app. I love the short videos due to the engaging content."

Exposure to cultural content

Most of the informants feel that even though Pakistani culture is portrayed on social media but the content is for the global audience. This creates a problem between traditional and global trends. Teenagers sometimes feel proud of their culture on social media but sometimes they feel that social media portrays superficial content. It is confirmation of the findings of Al-Ansi, Hazaimeh, Hendi, Adwan, et al. (2023).

Respondent 9 said,

"I follow this influencer on Instagram, Facebook and Tik-Tok because she mostly reflects our culture by celebrating our festivals, like Eid etc., she proudly wears cultural dresses, but most of the times she mix them with western styles and also show the western culture too on some occasions. Almost all influencers follow the same criteria to represent themselves as "cool" persons."

Effect of social media features on teenagers

Data Analysis show that Algorithms have a special role in shaping the interests of people. Teenagers started to take more interest in some content after randomly watching it for some time. It replicates the findings of (Wickramanayake, 2022).

Respondent 21 said,

"Once my mood was to watch dances, after that I continuously found dance shorts and dance challenges on Tik-Tok for weeks. I think the app is following me and know whatever I am watching on it."

SNS and behavior of teenagers

Social media has replaced the habits of reading books, playing physical games with friends, spending time with family etc. it leads to spending more time online and leaving physical and emotional connection. Comparisons and missing out are common themes of the study. This is supported by previous studies (Fioravanti et al., 2021),

Respondent 7 said:

"I spend a lot of time on Facebook. I watch a video of a party which was thrown by my close friend. I see 4 of our common friends there but I was not even invited. I feel that I am not very important for my friends."

Respondent 19 said

When I don't start using social media, I spend a lot of time in playing cricket with my brother and friends. It was a great fun for all of us. But now all of us are connected through Facebook and Instagram only."

Influence of SNS on local culture

Many respondents feel that western culture is promoted a lot on social media. This can creat a generation gap between teenagers and their parents because teenagers are not ready to follow traditional norms of their parents.

Respondent 22 said

"I saw on Instagram that wearing ripped jeans is so cool. I also want to follow the trend, but my parents don't like this trend. It caused a lot of arguments between us mostly. I don't want to disobey my parents, but I want to look trendy at the same time."

Relationship with family and friends

Different themes emerge on misunderstanding due to lack of communication between family and friends. Now online communication replaced face to face interactions. It could result in feeling being neglected and less quality time. This is confirmation of Aksar, Firdaus, Gong, and Anwar Pasha (2024).

Respondent 15 said

"My friends and parents are complaining that I am not giving them time and don't even answer their messages. But I feel myself helpless because I spend so much time on just scrolling and don't know how to get rid of it."

Findings

- Teenagers cannot manage their time due to addiction to social media. They spend most of their time on Instagram, Facebook and Tik-Tok etc.
- Many respondents feel that our culture representation on social media is not pure. It is mostly influenced by western culture.
- Pressure to confirm the social media trends is quite common.
- Algorithms expose teenagers to the trends which they normally don't follow previously.
- Social media changed the daily routine of teenagers to that extant that they cannot spend quality time with family and friends.
- Social media create confusion by merging western culture with traditional one.
- Face-to-face communication is replaced by online interaction.

Practical implication

For Parents

Try to spend more time with kids and try to create an open discussion on the pros and cones of social media. Encourage the positive use of social media and promote digital literacy for teenagers.

For Policy Makers

Develop some policies for the presentation of authentic cultural content. Create policies to run awareness programs about social media in order to educate youth of Pakistan.

For Social Media platforms

Try to adopt the ways to encourage the healthy use of social media (e.g. content filter, screen time reminders). Promote only authentic content in order to eliminate the confusion of teenagers.

Limitations and research gap

There are certain limitations of this study which could lead to future research directions. The data is taken from the teenagers of three cities (Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad). So, it has limited generalizability to rural areas. Moreover, the findings could not be generalized globally. Here the research explores all mediums of social media collectively, it could be investigated comparatively (platform-specific analysis e.g., comparing Instagram vs. Tok-tok) that how these sites can influence the behavior of teenagers. Qualitative research is basically subjective in nature, as a result it could be affected by the bias of researchers. So, quantitative research study, with a broader sample, can be conducted in future in order to validate the findings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Social media has a great effect on the behavior of Pakistani teenagers and their perception of culture. SNS provide a common place for cultural representation on one hand, but on the other hand it promotes western culture, create confusion and generation gap at the same time. Moreover, SNS have a strong impact on the behavior of teenagers in Pakistan, because they provide valuable tools for connection and expression, they also present risks in terms of mental health, social communication, and cultural identity. The challenge for Pakistani society is to find a balance between accepting the benefits of digital communication and maintaining cultural integrity.

There are some recommendations at the end. Integrating digital literacy programs into schools to teach responsible social media use and its potential risks, especially for mental health and cultural identity. Encourage open communication between parents and teenagers about the impact of social media and its role in shaping identity, behavior, and norms and culture. Encourage the creation of social media content that reflects Pakistani values and provides role models for teenagers to follow in a positive, culturally relevant manner.

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