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# Social Media Challenge Joint Family System in Muslim Society of Pakistan

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*This study aims to explore the factors behind the challenging joint family system in the Muslim society of Pakistan in wake of massive usage of social media. Joint family system in Pakistan, especially in rural areas of different provinces of the country, provides a workable solution to various socio-economic, cultural and political problems. This study employ the exploratory research method to explore the role of social media in establishing new social trends by strengthening or weakening the already existent social bonds in the Muslim society of Pakistan.. Results reveal that excessive usage of four main social media platforms i.e., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube have heavily affected the joint family system in Pakistani Muslim society. Almost all the members in a joint family having cell phones with internet connectivity prefer to use mobile phones instead of taking part in family discussions about social, cultural, political or religious affairs. The study concluded that social media has emerged as a modern form of television sets placed inside all living rooms in a joint family system where all the members like to watch television in separate rooms instead of enjoying collective entertainment in a family in main TV lounge. Findings showed that the social media was disrupting the social structure and Islamic patterns of living in a family. The study recommends that social welfare departments, health departments of the governments and psychology departments as well as private sector universities step forward and jointly develop a socio-psychological development mechanism to safeguard the joint family system in Pakistan.*

**Key Words:** Family Relations, Joint Family System, Social Media, Social Connectivity, Socio-Psychological Development, South Punjab

## **Introduction**

Social media has become dominant media with massive outreach of message, transfer of information and propagation across the globe (Johnson 2017). Social media is believed to be the outpouring mouthpiece for freedom of speech, and expression of opinion in all the democratic countries. Social media intertwined almost every sphere of human life, as we know the society behaves in the same direction the members of the society communicate (Lindgren 2021). In fact, social media has introduced a new way of living to society. It is an addiction for its every user. Earlier, traditional media i.e., all formats of print and electronic media, was considered a powerful source of spreading message in a society (Jang and Baek 2019; Adeola, Hinson, and Evans 2020). For instance, mass media was envisioned as a dominant paradigm wherein a message of media aired or broadcasted from any medium of the mass media contained an effect of bullet pierced into the mind. Dominant paradigm of media originated a Magic Bullet Theory, which was criticized from different research scholars and social scientists (Brandt 2020). In today's modern era, social media has changed the entire landscape of sharing information, spreading message and propagation of any opinion or a thought in a society within short span of time (Jain, Sahoo, and Kaubiyal 2021). Television media contained one-way communication from sender to receiver without any element of providing feedback to the sender. However, social media has empowered every person holding a cell phone in hand to participate in any sort of discussion or debate generated on the basis of a social or a political problem (Hjorth and Hinton 2019). Social media contained a swift feedback system wherein a sender sends [posts] a message through any platform of social media and within seconds, a receiver can provide his/ her feedback. A receiver can promptly reply or correct the post or the message of the sender by including his/ her input. For instance, PTI Chairman had successfully developed assertions about his pre-Islamic approach to transform Pakistani society into an Islamic society while using different platforms of mass media including television, radio, newspapers, magazines and social media e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter and others (Waseem 2022). The viewers of electronic and readers of print media remained unable to negate the claims made by the PTI Chairman in absence of feedback system. However, a study revealed the social media users quickly responded to the tweets, or Instagram or Facebook Posts uploaded by the PTI Chief or his fellow politicians by commenting or replying within seconds. Therefore, it can be argued the social media have provided the opportunity to its users to

express their opinion without any hesitation about any moral, legal, social, political or religious issue(Husni 2019).

Besides positive features, there are certain negative variables and factors associated with the existence of social media (Abbas et al. 2019; Zhao et al. 2020). For instance, the government authorities have yet to chalk out any laws and rules for the regulations of social media especially in the third world countries where democratic societies are in transition phase. Social media function without any government binding in developing countries including Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Pakistan and Nepal(Bhandari and Bhattarai 2017). The governments of these states have not made any serious efforts to introduce and enact laws for the regulation, positive and meaningful use of the social media. Mass media function in accordance with certain laws, rules and regulations in different countries including Pakistan(Abbasi 2019). For example, after emergence of electronic media in Pakistan after 2000, the federal government of Pakistan promulgated PEMRA Ordinance 2002 for smooth regulation of the electronic media(Farooq and Jabeen 2021).Even before arrival of electronic media, the print media also worked under some laws and rules and different public departments were established to regulate and assist functioning of the print media.

Nowadays, Press Information Department, Directorate General of Public Relations and the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority assist and regulate functions of mass media in Pakistan. Besides these public departments, different journalistic associations i.e., Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA), Press Council of Pakistan (PCP), Pakistan Journalist Association (PJA), Council of Pakistan Newspapers Association (CPNE), All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS) and some others also assist traditional mass media formats i.e., Print and Electronic Media, in performing its functions under the law. However, there is no such journalist body or public sector department to assist in performing, usage and functioning of social media in Pakistan. Critics believed that all the above-mentioned journalistic organizations were protecting the vested interests of the owners of news channels and other media outlets instead of working for the socio-psychological wellbeing of the society. Accordingly, none of the journalistic bodies have ever tabled the agenda for chalking out guidelines, proposing laws or rules and regulations for the regulation of the society media(Chapman and Oermann 2020; Hlatshwayo 2017).

## **1.1 Existing Body of Literature**

Massive literature is available examining various functions of mass media in Pakistan as well as in other countries. Previous studies indicated that a significant transition from physical real-life to online social interaction has been observed with the arrival of social media in developing countries (Firth et al. 2019). Social networking sites have become strong platforms for virtual interactions between friends and peers. A study indicated that a dramatic increase in spending long hours on online interaction and internet usage has been observed during the past years since the electronic media gadgets have jumped into the life of human beings (Lin and Lu 2011; Van et al. 2020). Previous studies revealed that overwhelming usage of SNS have dragged away the social media users from their involvement in natural social settings, participation in public gatherings, neighborhoods, visiting public spaces and voluntary associations. Results revealed interpersonal connections among the members of the family system are changing day by day contrary to the emotional face-to-face communication held in recent past (Lee et al. 2011). Consumption of social media has also led towards bringing changes in behavioral abilities among the individuals (Habes et al. 2020). Anecdotal evidence indicated that excessive usage of social media has developed psychological and behavior problems among the youngsters using Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms (Giustini et al. 2018).

According to a study, the growth of social media has been observed undeniably during the last decade all over the world (Selwyn 2012). A study revealed Wikipedia emerged in 2001 now contained around 13 million articles in over 200 languages in its repository (Consonni, Laniado, and Montresor 2019). Accordingly, over 300 million users [4<sup>th</sup> country in size in terms of population] have been interacting with each other and expressing their thoughts on Facebook since 2004 (Karamat and Farooq 2020). Twitter has also witnessed increase of 1400 percent in its growth rate. The study maintained that social media has witnessed exponential growth in developing nations including India and Pakistan. According to a study, Pakistan's population has touched the figure of 200 million out of which 121 million people use mobile phones; and around 50 million people are active users of social media platforms (Sikandar and Ahmed 2019). Facebook users are with the highest numbers in Pakistan followed by Twitter and Instagram. According to a report released by Express Tribune, a growing trend of social media usage has been witnessed in Pakistan in recent years, which is growing day by day especially the youngsters

including male and female students have fallen victims to the addiction of social media. Social networking sites (SNS) indicated rapidly growing trend of social media usage thus contributing heavily in academic literature (van Tubergen et al. 2021). The study further revealed that social media have significant effects in changing family relations in contemporary era of Pakistan. A study indicated social media users were experiencing alienation rather isolation from friends and relatives even in joint family system. According to the results, isolation emerging from social media usage was producing introvert personalities. The study further concluded that social media users were losing social bonding with family members and relatives (Kim, Hsu, and de Zúñiga 2013; Subrahmanyam et al. 2008).

According to findings of a study, Facebook, Skype, Twitter, MySpace, WhatsApp and Viber have become the most popular SNS with attraction of tens of millions of users. Heavy social media usage has massively affected the family connections even in pure Islamic families. According to a study, around 30 million users are online every day in Pakistan using various platforms of social media. Results revealed 13 million Facebook users are broadly using this networking site on daily basis. A significant change in interests and behaviors among the SNS users towards their relatives have been observed and proved through a lot number of academic research studies (Amin and Sheikh 2021; Kanwal et al. 2019). Before influx of social media, members of a family were quite conscious in a strong joint family system. Everyone used to ask and take care of others through frequent meet ups, discussions and joint visits of recreational places before emergence of social media. Members of a family used to spend a plenty of time in hour long discussion in recent past, however, with the emergence of social media, the SNS users have been observed spending hours and hours on futile activities and on surfing internet (Siddiqui and Singh 2016). The study revealed that such spending of long hours on social media was weakening the social contract amongst family members and relatives. Excessive usage of social media has led towards isolation among the members of a joint family system, thus weakening the Islamic values and social setups in a Muslim society like Pakistan. Results indicated SNS users have restricted themselves towards their rooms while neglecting social connectivity and family gatherings. The study concluded that SNS users cannot realize the wastage of time on excessive usage on social media and internet surfing which is genuinely posing serious threats to a Muslim society (Sangi and Mahsud 2015; Alhabash and Ma 2017).

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

**RO1:** To explore the causes of unwarranted social media usage among family members

**RO2:** To recommend a strategy for social media policy for social contract

## **1.3 Theoretical Background for Social Media Usage**

The current study employed Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and its extended approach for cognitive-affective-behavioral model to describe and explain the social media dependence approach as widely adopted by the social media users nowadays (Gentina and Rowe 2020). In clinical psychology the term 'dependence' has been used as addiction. For instance, the current study employed cognitive approach by discussing dependency and addiction in terms of media dependency as media addiction, psychological dependence as psychological addiction, and technological dependence as technological addiction. Although, there is a thin line between dependence and addiction, but social media dependence with the lens of uses and gratification has been used in this study to explain the causes of social media and their effects on changing social behavior and social contract in a joint family system (Hossain 2019). The cognitive-affective-behavioral model as adopted in this study discussed the causes behind social media dependence of the family members, which have emerged in term of negative habits. Therefore, this has been hypothesized that the negative habitual activities of users on social media have led to breakdown of norms, values and moral systems as envisioned by Islam for a pure Muslim society. It can be explained further that harmful effects emerge in wake negative habitual behavior of the social media users through excessive usage of social media without any restraint or regulatory mechanism (Jaiswal, Deshmukh, and Thaichon 2022).

## **2. Methods and Materials**

The incumbent study employed the qualitative approach with emphasis on subjective understanding of social media users and subsequent change in behavior and social patterns in a Muslim family system of a Pakistani society (Thaler 2017). Although, using social media is a general phenomenon leading towards empirical research fetching quantifying results but a specific phenomenon of behavioral change has been chosen for this study (Knoll 2016) thus employing qualitative approach.

## **2.1 Sampling**

This research employed purposive sampling technique as only relevant respondents were interviewed by the researchers. The purposively selected respondents supplied suitable answers to the research items containing essence of usage of social media and its impact on the joint family system in Pakistan.

## **2.2 Sample Size**

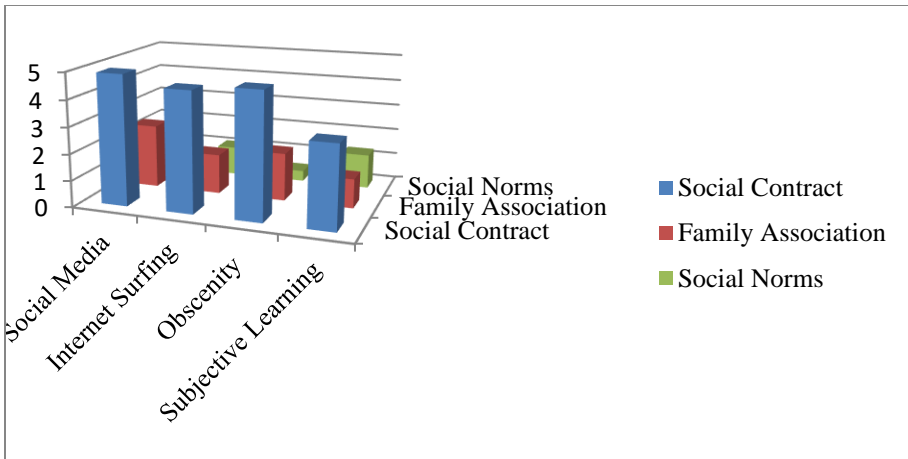
The researchers chosen sample of 200 respondents from 10 districts of the Southern Punjab. The district included Multan, Lodhran, Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Rahim Yar Khan, Muzaffargarh, Layyah, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur and Jhang. Furthermore, purposively 20 respondents per district residing in a joint family system in rural parts of the respective districts were interviewed pertaining to social media usage.

## **2.3 Data Collection Tool**

Data was collected online from family members spending life in a joint family system in a Muslim society in Pakistan and it was examined with the lens of thematic analysis. A coding sheet carrying four themes and categories was developed manually to generate valid results. The tool for this qualitative study was survey carrying four main open ended questions thus having the understanding of online in-depth interviews. The area of current study was based on ten rural districts of the Southern Punjab – Pakistan. Active social media users among the joint family system were taken as a population of the study aged between 18-28 years. Keeping in view the main focus of the study on excessive social media users and effects of SNS usage on the behavior patterns and social contract among the members of the join family system, the active social media users were taken purposively(Chen, Kim, and Rao 2021).

## **3. Results and Discussion**

Results based on thematic patterns emerged from the qualitative data were analyzed with the lens of following graphical model: -



**Theme 1**

**Social Media: Social Contract and Family Association**

Respondents of qualitative data discussed social media was being used excessively by maximum family members in a family setup herein Pakistan particularly in urban and rural areas. Most of the responses carried essence of social contract interlinked with family association. According to a selective respondent, "All members in a family are morally in a social contract of living together with peace, harmony, positive intention, good deeds, and brotherhood. They are bound by this social contract to give time, discuss and resolve social, economic, political and religious problems etc., while utilizing any medium of information sharing. Social media usage is a key factor behind damaging social setups in Islamic society; it needs to be regulated under certain laws."

**Interpretation of Theme:** - All members in a family are always in a relationship e.g., father, mother, brother, sister, wife, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle, niece etc., therefore, they are bound by the family chain to respect each other in accordance with the divine law, law of land, morally and ethically. In traditional setups, the families used to reside with different social patterns. For instance, nomads had different patterns of living, urban populace enjoyed sophisticated and modern means of living and urban people used to enjoy simple life in natural settings. A family confronts to different problems in routine life e.g., social problems, financial issues, political happenings, ethical and religious issues. In urban areas in South Punjab, a family head/ tribe man is supposed to provide the required facilities to all family members with privilege to command as well. Every



family contains a specific system of interaction in urban as well as rural family systems. In today's era, different platforms of social media have become the commonly used entertainment and information sharing podiums within and outside the family systems. A family head is supposed to provide directional support and guidance to family members for effective and meaningful utilization of social media. In an Islamic family setup, religion is a key defining factor for social values; therefore, a family member using social media needs to keep in mind the ethical constraints as well. Excessive usage of social media is absolutely damaging the social systems in Islamic society wherein respect to elders and love for youngsters is weakening day by day. Hence, the theme proved misuse of social media was dwindling respect, modesty, decency and social values within an Islamic system in Southern Punjab.

## **Theme 2      Internet Surfing: Wastage of Time**

Internet surfing a common habit developed among the social media addicts nowadays. Circumstantial evidences indicate that social media mobilizers associated with various political parties, pressure groups and people belonging to other social fabrics set a trend on social media which appears on various social media platforms to the common users. Most of the social media users particularly the illiterate are unaware with the reality or hidden agenda behind most of the content aired or screened on social media. Consequently, social media users spend hours and hours on internet surfing, liking, commenting, replying or posting on different platforms. The time which ought to be used on creative thinking or creative work is wasted on internet surfing. In accordance with the responses from various respondents, a key response reveals as, "internet surfing for positive use is always welcomed. It is a healthy practice in digital world to seek information, learn about new things, latest occurrences in different parts of the world, but wasting long time on internet surfing is turning healthy minds to dull. Unhealthy and unethical content is commonly watched more as compared to the healthy content. There need to be some sort of system to regulate unhealthy content being created and used on social media which is endangering social norms, Islamic values and social patterns of eastern societies including Pakistan."

**Interpretation of Theme:** - Internet was widely welcomed by all factions of the society when it emerged. For instance, one cannot deny the importance of Wikipedia or Google, which has changed the library systems altogether. Now, everyone sitting in any part of the world can seek latest

information by simply surfing on internet. Social media provide latest information about political development, religious discussion, new lifestyles, culture of different civilizations, cultural values of multiple societies and everything ranging from information to knowledge is available on internet and social media. For instance, YouTube is a digital database of videos, films and documentaries, which can be utilized by all the members of social media family in any language, anytime and everywhere with a simple and single guarantee of availability of internet. Social media itself is not bad; rather it is dependent on the user's intention. Social media can be a blessing if used for positive goals and it can be dangerous if used negatively. Social media poses serious threats to Islamic as well as to other families if it is not used properly with positive intention. Necessary education and awareness for social media users is need of the hour to create a healthy and social society.

### **Theme 3      Obscenity: Objectionable Content**

Different platforms of social media have become the massive databases for digital video content. Facebook provides prompt interaction opportunities to its users. Instagram provides seeable pictorial content to its users whereas YouTube is a video database wherein the users can easily access to likeminded content available 24/7. However, responses strengthen the hypothesis that several social media managers or the users especially residing in rural areas are habitual of watching objectionable content. Nude and naked videos of famous actresses, scandalous stories, unethical dance and discussion about romantic videography have become the commonly used content by today's social media users. Lectures on religious affairs, spiritualism, ethics, moral and social values, knowledge of natural and social science, seas, oceans, skies, pyramids, nature, rocks, flowers, fishes etc., everything is available on social plinth. Today's generation is confronting to lack of forceful directional guidance for positive use of social media. According to a selective response, "Social media contain all forms of content. Even social media databases contain the videos of education and awareness for positive social media usage. Internet surfing is a common habit but what should be watched or read is a subject interlinked with family, parents, teachers, peer groups and friends"

**Interpretation of Theme:** - Social media can be used positively with good intention of education or seeking education. Learning behavior on the part of social media users is required for accepting positive awareness. Internet itself is not a teacher but it can educate the social media users. Family

members especially the head of the family e.g., father or elder brother should take responsibility of education, guidance and develop positive habits among the family members to use social media positively. Teachers in schools, colleges and universities can also guide their pupils, sincere friends, and people in peer groups can also assist their social media using friends to adopt positive habits and develop healthy understanding. In today's era, the youngsters are earning millions of rupees from directional use of social media while sitting inside their homes. Therefore, positive direction from any side is mandatory for the social media users inside the family systems with broader goals of learning and earning.

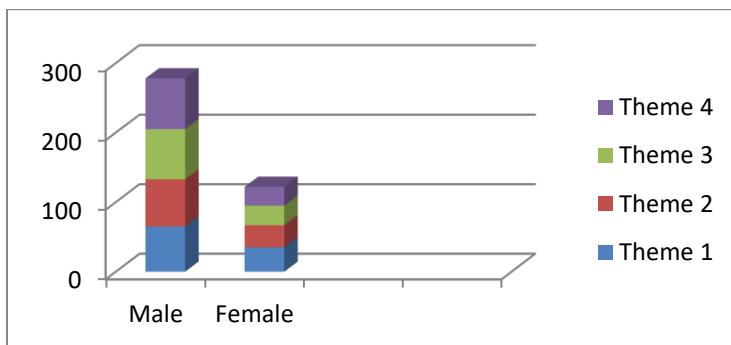
#### **Theme 4 Subjective Learning: Feedback System**

Social media provide an ample opportunity to its users for subjective understanding about the happenings around them. Social media users can develop their understanding thus build their individual as well as collective opinion about any societal issue. Social media contain a feedback system, which is a unique feature, contrary to the other mediums of mass media. Feedback system in social media provides opportunity to social media users to identify, correct and modify their information shared on social media platforms. A selective response says, "Social media users have the unique opportunity of subjective learning through feedback system in social media. Family members sitting in different rooms can interact through social media, instead of visiting each other physically; they can correct each other while they are online on any social media platform. Social media can spread knowledge and authentic information through its different applications".

**Interpretation of Theme:** - Feedback system was non-existent in SMCR-Model of David Berlo, posing threat to mass media mechanism. Feedback system provides its senders, listeners and viewers an opportunity for practical learning through two-way communication starting from sender-to-receiver and from receiver-to-sender. Although, social media have separated family members in a joint family system from each other but social media have also provided them an ample opportunity to interacting online instead of visiting physically. Moreover, social media have subjective learning mode for its users, who can develop their deep down understanding about any issue instead of having to-the-point objective responses. This theme provides workable solutions for social, economic, political, religious and cultural problems through effective usage of social media. They can make new friends through social media without losing the already friends on list.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The main aim of the study was to examine causes and effects of social media usage on family relationships in a Muslim family setup in a Pakistani society.



The study concluded that notwithstanding the social media contribute exponentially for social development but negative usage of social media was disturbing family relations with significant deteriorating in Islamic society of Pakistan. Beyond the sectarian affiliations, an Islamic society always believes in religious faith of ‘oneness of Allah, belief in Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] as the last holy Prophet in this universe, belief in Angels and belief in Doomsday, norms, rituals and cultural indicators set by the Prophet [PBUH] himself during the State of Medina. So, the findings revealed the negative use of social media was affecting these norms thus leading to users towards negative social tendency. The above-said graph revealed 71 percent males and 31 percent females were using social media in joint family system in rural areas of the southern Punjab. Although the ratio of the female using social media application was considerably low as compared to the male users but the findings revealed both genders were heavily using social media without having positive as well as negative aspects and effects on cultural and social norms of the Muslim society.

The study concluded that the negative use of social media was endangering joint family system this causing divide and disintegration in joint family system. It further concluded social media have separated all the family members and restricted them to their rooms instead of engaging in family gossips and collective discussion to resolve individuals, family and general relations. Anecdotal evidences affirmed the conclusion that social media was causing creation of gap among family members restricting their collective life to individual life same in the pattern of American social life.

The study concluded that youngsters indulged in social media usage inside family system were detaching themselves from their families and friends especially they are parting ways from their elders in a joint family system. Besides its positive use, social media have posed serious implications to social, economic, cultural, political, religious and ethical setups in a joint family system in Pakistan.

The research further concluded that social media has significantly reduced face-to-face communication and interactions within the family setups even in rural Punjab, thus emerging loneliness and promoting the concept of individual life with less emotional bonding. Results conclude that joint family system is lacking close emotional ties between their offspring as social media have changed their lifestyle and interests towards their elders and relatives. Results further concluded that excessive usage of social media by the family members have caused emergence of depression, tensions and social issues which required discussion, patronage and guidance of the elders to resolve them. The study also concluded that parents have identified that misuse and excessive suave of social media have also badly affected academic performance of the students. The study achieved the both objectives with additional support of the theoretical framework under realm of uses and gratification theory.

#### **4.1 Recommendations**

The study recommends that the governments at federal and provincial level in Pakistan need to chalk out a Social Media Public Policy immediately to rebuke negative use of social media and to preserve values and social norms in Pakistani society. This study based on subjective responses of the respondents also recommends that the social media users go through the social guidelines chalked out by the developed nations before using various applications of the social media especially Facebook, YouTube, Snack Video and TikTok. The study further recommends the public sector institutions and lawful bodies chalk out social media usage guidelines in accordance with the native culture and social norms especially in Muslim countries to adopt a moderate approach in devising such mechanisms to safeguard the social boundaries of a Muslim society in the wake of the needs of the modern world.

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