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## **The Impact of Social Media on Juvenile Delinquency: A Mixed-Methods Approach to Understanding the Role of Online Social Networks in Shaping Youth Behavior**

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### **Abstract**

The nature and association between social media and juvenile delinquency is an area of interest in this research, with a specific interest in the effects that new media has on youths. Combined, the study employs a mixed research methodology whereby questionnaires administered to youths are complemented by interviews with caregivers, educators, and legally mandated adults. Research highlights show that youth who use social media engage in more deviant behaviours such as bullying, sharing dangerous dares, and viewing nasty content. These phenomena are boosted by the low level of digital literacy and socioeconomic status, peer pressure and the desire to adhere to the trends that are visible on the Internet. The study examines the importance of social media as a positive force and also the arena for harmful activity. Future recommendations should include the promotion of further digital competence, a more profound regulation of content moderation, and activities that involve cooperation between politicians, teachers, and social media providers. This research also falls in inter discipline in confirming the need to act in anticipating the negative impacts of social media on youths to create safer social media platforms and promote responsible social media conduct.

**Keywords:** *Juvenile delinquency, Social Media, Youth Behavior, Cyberbullying, and Digital Literacy*

## **1- Introduction**

### **1.1. Background and Context**

Juvenile delinquency, or misconduct by individuals who are under eighteen years of age in criminal or otherwise prohibited behavior, is still prevalent in most societies. Studies preceding the present work have focused on factors like family genealogy, social and economic position, and juvenile education systems. However, there are serious problems with the shift to the latest technological social networking systems, forming another challenge to defining youths' behavior. Mass social media applications, including Instagram and TikTok Snapchat, have already become hallmarks for adolescents who carry out interpersonal communications and self-promotion and are looking for validation.

These platforms represent potential ways to connect and share knowledge, but they also represent threats. Research that has been carried out by Abbasi et al., (2020) on youth involvement in violence is a study in the Pakistani context to show how social media fuels youth violence (Abbasi et a., 2020). These platforms can be viewed as catalysts for influence and dispersion of peer pressure, access to and desensitization to violent material and behaviours. Vicente (2023) has further stated that, generally, online networks mirror offline relationships, and the conditions required for positive and negative reinforcement are apparent (Vicente., 2023). To prevent juvenile delinquency, it is important to know how social media works with traditional factors about the matter.

## **1.2. Research Rationale and Objectives**

Social media is a double-edged sword. It enables prosocial use and interpersonal relations skills, but at the same time, it compounds dangers seen in cyberbullying, exposure to unethical content, and the manifestation of risky challenges. According to Abel et al., (2021), it is crucial to acknowledge the underlying routines that develop electronically, bearing in mind that such behaviours are recognized offline as well.

The primary objectives of this study are threefold:

- ✓ To analyze the frequency of juveniles' social media use and its possible relation to delinquency.
- ✓ This research aims to establish the vulnerability factors and preventive strategies for developing risks in the interface of social media and youth misconduct.
- ✓ To ensure that the recommendations are practical for parents, educators, and policymakers, present the effects below in a format that will enable the programming of appropriate strategies.

## **1.3. Research Questions**

- ✓ In what respects does social media impact juvenile delinquency, and how does the use of social media increase the rate and intensity of delinquent acts?
- ✓ Besides the impact this has on young people, what legal and social consequences does social media have on youth behaviour?

- ✓ Which strategies can be used to minister the adverse impact of social media on the youth?

The series of questions below is designed to fill the gaps in the current literature and offer a thorough analysis of the problem from the perspectives of social sciences, law, and technology.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

The contribution of this study is in its multidisciplinary focus, where social, legal and technology studies are used to provide an analysis of a major problem. Social media is now an influential force in youth behaviour and is known for its role and implication on juvenile delinquency. Similarly, McAlpine (2021) and Wittne et al., (2023) all suggest the appropriateness of mixed-methods approach in studying social phenomena. Thus, unlike other studies, it defines characteristics and potential threats and offers numerous suggestions to stakeholders. Efforts to combat social media's impact on juvenile delinquency are useful because they let juveniles be safer online and facilitate the creation of safer spaces for young people. This research aims to add to the existing body of literature that would help policymakers and developers optimize social media platforms and minimize future harm that this technology could bring.

## **2- Literature Review**

### **2.1. Theoretical Frameworks**

The link between social media and juvenile delinquency has to be explained concerning the fundamental sociological concepts. Among the two theories of social learning theory and strain theory, the latter offers a proper perspective of how online behaviour affects the youth. The premise of social learning theory is that people are involved in learner and model interactions in

learning new behaviours. In this sense, social media increases this process since individuals are always in contact with peers and other influential roles whose conduct promotes delinquency. Hsiao et al., (2023) showed how gang members engage in social media to continue the conflict patterns observed offline, proving how social media sites serve as training grounds for aggression (Hsiao et al., 2023). Peer actions that youths witness encourage deviant actions on social media and other related forms of broadcast media, promote imitation of these behaviours, and thereby enhance the delinquency cycle.

Strain argues that delinquency results from stress from pursuing conventional aspirations with suitable instruments. This pressure is exacerbated by social media, which keeps posting expectations of success and quality lifestyles that a young person must lead. This pressure causes a stir psychologically, hence leading one to engage in one form of risk-taking behaviour or the other, such as cyberbullying or engaging in other unlawful activities. In the same context with social pressures leading to critical belief, Wegemer (2022) pointed out how peer influences within social networking affect behaviour outcomes among young persons.

## **2.2. Social Media and Youth Behavior**

Social media can positively shape youths' development but can also hurt the same youths. Such Websites promote and enable communication and access to resources, as well as unhealthy content, bullying, and pressure. Twitter, for instance, can enhance youth skills acquisition, education participation, and social relationships. Matenda et al., (2020) showed that young people in South Africa employed social media and networking sites to create networks to acquire resources and opportunities (Matenda et al., 2020). They can promote growth to other personal and communal levels. Likewise, R. Harrison et al. (2021) also underlined that social networks

are the means to increase inclusiveness for people with ID and to promote positive social change through online platforms.

However, the research is evidence that social media offers numerous hazards. They included cyberbullying, exposure to improper content and peer pressure, among others. For example, Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2021) analyzed how social media generates a common cultural pop code to get youth involved in a collective political expression, which dramatically may degenerate into polarized and aggressive discourses (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik., 2021). Furthermore, Glencross et al. (2021) also pointed out the gaps, some youths are at higher risk due to digital literacy deficits or lack of supervision. Such risks make adolescents engage in risky behaviour, including harassment through the Internet or involvement in viral menacing activities that lead to delinquency.

### **2.3. Juvenile Delinquency: Trends and Contributing Factors**

Delinquency in youths has always been defined by socioeconomic status, the families in which the youths come from, and their level of education. For instance, poor family backgrounds and restricted opportunities for a good education are known precursors of deviance. In their systematic review, Baird et al. (2021) look at the lives of marginalized adolescents in low- and middle-income countries to point out how marginalized adolescents are in such settings.

Social media is an addition to certain elements of risk that occur in the traditional sense. Instagram and TikTok give youth an acceptable standard of living and allow them to interact anonymously, leading them to deviant behaviours. Adjei et al. (2020) reviewed the findings about the way the management of digital identities affects the disclosure of personal information and the interactions that result are often risky (Adjei et al., 2020). The same authors, Bray et al.

(2022), confirmed that behavioural health complications like eating disorders are associated with social media and delinquent behaviour like substance abuse or theft. The remaining impact of these dynamics can be observed in the communities in which the media superpose threats. Hitchens (2023) described how the trauma that street-identified women and girls experience due to gun violence increased due to digital engagements, pointing at social media as a factor in cycle continuation.

#### **2.4. Gaps in Existing Research**

Despite the progress in research linking social media to youth behaviour, deficiencies exist. The convergence does justice in capturing the complexity of the social phenomenon, especially through a mixed-methods approach. While Froehlich et al., (2020) discussed the possibility of effectively including quantitative and qualitative measurements in social network analysis, this methodology has not been applied effectively in juvenile delinquency studies (Froehlich et al., 2020). Complicated mixed methods studies can reveal more quantitative data and investigate the psychological aspects of issues not seen by simple quantitative or qualitative approaches.

Legal solutions regarding the fight against digital delinquency are still inconsistent. Currently, most jurisdictions have insufficient standards for addressing the culpability of social media platforms in promoting ill-intentioned media content. Functional regulation of relations outlined by Amiruddin et al. (2024) in educational and institutional contexts can also be applied to this case while rewarding the mainstreaming of social responsibility (Amiruddin et al., 2024). However, there is light on how extant laws could be further best suited to effectively address the needs of digital delinquency. The examined gaps indicate the necessity of developing interdisciplinary research combining legal, psychological and technological approaches. This

resilience can be expanded to understand rural youths' educational problems through a participatory approach endorsed by Means et al. (2024), which could also capture online delinquency. Furthermore, research can give valuable suggestions for analyzing comparative samples linked to geography or cultures, such as the research of Baird et al., 2021.

### **3- Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This led the current study to use quantitative and qualitative research methods to establish the relationship between social media usage and juvenile delinquency. The research employs quantitative and qualitative paradigms and measures statistical tendencies and context-rich qualitative data equally. This is because mixed-method research closes the gaps witnessed with single-method research approaches to adequately explain the interaction between social media and youth behaviour.

#### **3.2 Data Collection Methods**

There are two major ways that the study gathers information. Quantitative data is collected through questionnaires completed by youth aged between 12 and 18 concerning their use of social networks, contacts, and relations with delinquency. These surveys are meant for research purposes to establish relationships and patterns in people's behaviour. Categorical data is collected by interviews with youths and their caregivers, educators, and the legal fraternity. They give important qualitative data on the impact of social media on young people, and the findings of this paper reveal important qualitative pictures.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

This procedure comprises the perception and sizing of quantitative and qualitative factors and introduces an analytical conclusion. Survey data is quantitatively analyzed using statistics to assess the relationships between social media usage and the incidence of delinquent behaviour. Regression analysis and frequency distribution are used to validate the findings. Primary data collected through the interviews are analyzed, and textual data are analyzed through thematic coding, which helps in thinking about the textual data in terms of the themes that are organizing it. Such an approach guarantees that statistical outliers and people's experiences are covered sufficiently enough to form the basis for conclusions made at the end of the study.

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

To address the issue of participant rights and data thematically, the study complies with rigorous ethical standards. Cohort identification is maintained by assigning identification numbers to the participants to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of responses given. In the case of the participants below the age of majority, consent is sought from both the participant and the legal guardian. It conforms with research ethics, so approval from an appropriate institutional review board is sought. As a result, the approach guarantees the strict and ethical treatment of the topic under consideration, which creates the foundation for gaining valuable insights into the relationship between social networks and juvenile delinquency and provides key practice recommendations.

## **4- Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Quantitative Findings**

The analysis of survey data provided important trends regarding the use of social media by juveniles and its connection with delinquency. The results show that a higher percentage of learners, especially those in their early teens, spend between 3 to 5 hours in the day on social media. These include Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat in particular, and they play a central role as places of interactions with peers and outlets of self-exploration. Teenage social media use has been associated with behaviors considered to be in conflict with the law, including cyber bullying, teasing, and agreeing to take part in risk inviting viral challenges. Conducting regression analysis, it was discovered that juveniles who claimed to be either victims or perpetrators of online aggression more often claimed to be involved in offline delinquent behaviours such as vandalism or truancy. This finding supports the postulates advanced in prior studies that improper Internet content desensitizes those behaviours in easily influenced teenagers. Socioeconomic status also made its way into the list of variables, as youngsters who belong to poor families often encounter information and make limited use of digital literacy material. This group also had a high prevalence in cases of online swindling or spoken abuse, reflecting a risk that was further magnified by scarce oversight or knowledge.

### **4.2 Qualitative Insights**

Surveying juveniles, parents, school staff, and legal experts facilitated the understanding of key issues in the study. In this study, Juveniles often reported a sense of expected behaviour based on

interacting with peers via computer and the Internet, leading to practising negative behaviour to fit into the expected online norm. For example, the issues of cyberbullying frequently appeared as respondents cited that slanderous messages became common practice and peers encouraged cyberharassment to enjoy targeting others. Illegal content is featured, too, with juveniles sharing stories of interactions with drugs and narcotics, hate speech, and pornography on sites with low content moderation. These interactions not only shape the perception of delinquent behaviour but also socially desensitized youth to discussions of unlawfulness.

Parents and educators paid much attention to the issue of the absence of supervision concerning the information available to juveniles. Several said that they lacked adequate tools and methods to efficiently supervise or facilitate interactions in social networks, saying there is a generation mismatch when using social networks. One of the main concerns of legal professionals was cited regarding the legal aspects of handling web delinquency problems, the most important of which was the question of jurisdiction and enforcement. They pointed out that existing laws are slow in addressing the dynamic nature of digital platforms to prosecute individuals or companies who organize damaging interactions.

### **4.3 Integration of Findings**

The combination of quantitative and qualitative findings emphasizes the complex association between social media and juvenile delinquency. Where quantitative data contributed the yardsticks of such trends as social media addiction and delinquency, qualitative data offered an understanding of the personal and social conditions occurring with the interaction. For instance, the quantitative data pointed to a strong link between cyber-aggression and real-world delinquency analysis of the qualitative data revealed the factors that propel the aggressors and

the pressures put on the targets. Forums, open access to explicit material, and absence of supervision were discovered as causes, which in the quantitative data are marked as weak digital literacy mainly due to socioeconomic status and unequal opportunities to access technology.

There were also differences in some areas. However, interview-proven females had similar rates of delinquency as male student respondents, though they may not commit the same offences, such as cyberbullying or participating in subversive social media challenges. This has further underscored the need to use multiple data sources that would give a more accurate picture of the problem.

#### **4.4 Implications of Findings**

The research implications cut across parents, educators of learners at various levels, policymakers, and social media companies. From the findings, parents and educators need to keep an eye on the kind of participation that juveniles engage in online. Digital literacy focused and age-appropriate for both youths and their caregivers will help inform families and be better equipped to address the digital environment. Schools can also come in handy to ensure that they teach the students specific topics in social media use, encourage them to think critically and create awareness of the dangers and opportunities of social media usage.

Governments further have a role in creating sensitive legal measures for combating the problems presented by virtual unruly conduct. This has involved promulgating much less ambiguous rules for social media sites to regulate toxic content efficiently and ensure that the platforms are legally liable if they fail to do so. Furthermore, coordination between jurisdictions is also important regarding phenomena present in multiple jurisdictions to guarantee similar treatment and protection of juveniles in every country. The provenance sources are also responsible for

managing the risks inherent in their media platforms. It is about preventing toxic content and applying better identification methods and actions, which is possible in two ways, developing more effective content moderation solutions and strengthening algorithms that can help to avoid toxic/dangerous comments als. The essential issue is to enhance user control of the leaking of personal information of underage individuals. In essence, safer social networking communication and interaction environments will help minimize social media's impact on delinquency.

The study also underscores a need for more interdisciplinary research to try and establish causal relationships between the effects of social media on juveniles' behaviour in the future. Incorporating law, psychology, education, and technology will go a long way in designing better intervention plans and overall human protection for the generations that target youths in the information age. The presented synthesis of findings offers a useful starting point for the following recommendations that will highlight the collective responsibility of families, educators, policymakers, and social media in fighting the proliferation of juvenile delinquency in the Internet age.

## **5- Legal Analysis and Policy Recommendations**

### **5.1 Current Legal Frameworks**

Current laws that seek to prevent or deal with youth offences and cybercriminals usually want to improve their ability to effectively contain social media influence on young people. Precedent laws of juvenile justice are aimed at combating offline crimes, including theft, destruction of property and assault, leaving few provisions for combating cyber trolling, hacking, or online sex tourism. Although there are countries that have enacted cybercrime laws, these are more focused on adult offenders as a different problem of juveniles and their responsibility.

For instance, numerous laws are not specific about defining or proactively sanctioning some behaviours associated with social media, including involvement in fatal memes, participating in dangerous challenges or sharing lewd pictures/ videos. Further, enforcement measures are not adequately advanced, meaning that law enforcement organizations are clueless about how to confront the challenges presented by cybercrimes. However, social media platforms themselves can also be poorly controlled in most cases and contain content that young people should be deprived of in terms of moderation policies. These gaps raised a call for new laws recognizing how social media cases contribute to juvenile delinquency. It remains critical to understand how legal systems can adapt to the part played by new media in promoting deviancy, prevention, and control.

## **5.2 Comparative Legal Perspectives**

Implications of best practices may be made from other areas of the world that have enhanced legal frameworks in the regulation of social media, indicating how best to handle the high risk caused by online delinquency. For instance, the GDPR of the European Union contains measures for protecting children's online privacy since the users who give their data must be over sixteen years old. The GDPR focuses mostly on data protection, but stopping inadequate information dissemination affects juvenile delinquency. Germany and France have moved a little further and set an age limit, providing parents with special tools to limit children's access to social networks.

In the USA, there are regulations concerning the collection of information from children under thirteen years of age, such as the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, commonly known as COPPA. However, besides data protection, COPPA requires those platforms to incorporate processes to ensure kids cannot gain access to materials that harm them or fall prey to them.

Moreover, some states especially California, have attempted to increase young users' protection through other laws, such as the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA). Such examples provide important information on how state and federal laws that grant legal assistance may help solve the problems of online delinquency. However, its relevance may differ across cultures and laws country-specific, and that may also depend on the technology and regulations in a different country. For such frameworks to be effective for other regions, adapting and customizing them has been necessary.

### **5.3 Policy Recommendations**

Thus, it is necessary to develop a complex of measures to eliminate the deficiencies in the current legislation and reduce the potential threat of social networking to youthful conduct. Teaching young people about the rewards and liabilities of social networks is essential. Schools should use the curriculum to teach students about the safe use of social media and how to find friends without exposing themselves to negativity and paedophilia. Parental workshops can go hand in hand with such attempts, so the families will be provided with all the needed information and tools to navigate their children's interactions with the help of the Internet.

Schools, churches, and other community-based organizations greatly contributed to curtailing online delinquency. Components stressing cyberbullying and the consequences of negative behaviours regarding fellow human beings should be included in Anti-bullying measures. The programs for choosing a positive role model or mentor for a young person can also act as stimuli against the background of social networks. Communities should provide special grounds to stop youth from sharing their online experiences and support each other. Local governments should

collaborate with nonprofit organizations and technology firms with advertisements regarding the implications of online truancy and proper online citizenship.

Legal systems must invest in effective laws dealing with juvenile-related cyber offences. These provisions should distinguish between adults and juveniles because the youth have different developmental and cognitive capacities. Sanctions for juvenile offenders need to be predominately punitive, with the overall goal of correction achieved through community service, counselling, and computer literacy. Moreover, laws should penalize organizations that run social media platforms and fail to protect the young ones. This encompasses states' liability for promoting and failing to regulate the circulation of toxic content, clear policies guiding content moderation, and state policing partnerships that fight online delinquency. Sites should also be equipped with age verification provisions and parental controls for children. Since these social platforms are globally used, there is a need to form international partnerships when dealing with juvenile delinquency. Governments must collaboratively agree on regulating social media platforms to have the same level of protection for children worldwide. It is also necessary to advance with the definition of synergies that can lead to the sharing of knowledge and the elaboration of good practices that improve the response to the problems generated by social media.

## **6- Conclusion**

This research has highlighted the interaction between social media and juvenile delinquency, bringing a clear understanding of how youths behave online. The study showed that students who spend a lot of time on social networks are greatly connected with different sorts of violent behaviour in the Internet space, participation in dangerous stunts and viewing of unsafe

materials. Finally, quantitative and qualitative results pointed to the interactive effects of peer influence, media exposure, and SES, which, to a certain extent, calls for timely intervention in raising awareness. Based on these coordinated findings, several theoretical and practical implications have highlighted the necessity of parents, educators, policymakers and social media products to take joint responsibility to counter the dangers arising from technology-driven environments. However, the presented study is not without limitations. It is possible that the challenges that present themselves in the data gathering stage, including gaining credible self-reported data from juveniles and sampling an ethnically diverse sample, will pose a problem to the ability to generalize the findings. It is recommended that future research be longitudinal in track to evaluate, over time, the enduring effects of consistent use of social media on juvenile behaviour. Furthermore, the cultural and regional factors in the use of social media were not explored, thereby providing some opportunities for a deeper examination of more complex cultural variations.

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