

The Need for Interventions to Reduce Time Spent on Social Media and Strengthening of Family Relationships in University Students

Abstract: *Pakistan is known for its strong family bonds. University students need strong support from their families for the maintenance of ethics, health and production. However, there is fear that greater use of social media is contributing to the weakening of family relations. This research aims to identify the relationship between time spent on social media and the quality of family relationships of university students. A total of 200 students were sampled. Welch ANOVA showed that the mean difference of family relations to social media usage was statistically significant, $F_w(3,92.91) = 8.258, p < 0.01$ and the Games Howell post hoc test reveals that the quality of family relations was significantly lower when social media usage is more than 5 hours (21.8 ± 11.1). The paper discusses possible interventions to reduce social media usage and improve family quality time, which can be helpful for policymakers, psychologists, social workers, and social welfare officers.*

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Key Words: Social media, family relations, University students, Pakistan.

Introduction

Pakistani society, pre and post-independence from colonial rule, has always been known for its strong family and kinship bonds (Zaman et al., 2006). With rising urbanization, nuclear families have started to replace large extended families, but the cultural and traditional ethic of family unity and solidarity is still a part of the nation's fabric. There are multiple benefits of having strong family relations, which extend to the individual, community, and nation. Individuals gain confidence and self-esteem and learn socialization skills from the family (Staub, 1992).

Having strong family bonds benefits the community by creating a moral order and social solidarity (Grevenstein et al., 2019). The nation and economy benefit too through the efforts of the family in the financial and emotional support of individuals, especially youth (Carmichael et al., 2016). In fact, literature from the West shows that where family bonds are weak, the state has to play a wider role in financial support, day-care services, and law and order maintenance (Björnberg & Latta, 2007).

Contemporary times are characterized by the technological revolution, which includes the

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excessive use of social media applications ([Dubose, 2011](#)). Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking are known as social media. Social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram are very popular social applications for the youth and university students of our country. Pakistan has an approximate population of 223 million people, of which 46 million are using social media (Digital Portal, 2022). Some reports estimate that, on average, a Pakistani spends an average of one hour per day using social media, which converts to around three and a half years of an individual's life ([World Times, 2022](#)).

Time spent on social media, as described by [Verduyn and colleagues \(2017\)](#), refers to the number of hours spent on social media, engaging in 'direct exchanges' with other users, such as likes, comments, notifications, and other forms of interaction. Many agree that social media applications have replaced family bonding time within the house and outside it. The more people spend time on social media applications, the less time they have for family interaction and communication, weakening the parents-child and sibling relationship ([Siddiqui & Singh, 2016](#)). Excessive use of social media also prevents learning through social consultation, interpersonal skills, and face-to-face communication. Some argue that excess social media usage can rob families of an emotional connection, care instinct, and also a sense of security ([Zheng & Lee, 2016](#)). Excessive social media usage has also been shown to have a negative impact on families as it reduces the time for sharing values and ethics. Scholars have suggested that people may feel connected to social media, but it takes away their abilities to hear and see voiceless messages, which are important for family harmony, kinship networks, and community solidarity ([O'Keeffe et al., 2011](#)).

The use of social media and its impact on family relationships is a topic that affects people of all ages. One study concludes that youth who spend a lot of time using technology and who remain in front of a screen most of the day have more difficulty than their peers in understanding emotions and building relationships ([George & Odgers, 2015](#)). Studies report that the youth are

now less concerned with family matters and the challenges siblings and parents face as they become more engrossed in their computers and mobile phones, weakening the support that family used to traditionally provide ([Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009](#)). University students across the world and in Pakistan have been found to spend most of their time on social media, which results in changing personality habits and cultural values ([Junejo et al., 2022](#)). Excessive use of social media applications in university students is known to become a cause of estrangement with parents, siblings, and other significant family members, such as grandparents ([Siddiqui & Singh, 2016](#)). It can also contribute to other problems such as involvement in deviant activities ([Lim, 2013](#)); uptake of drugs and intoxicants ([Gutierrez & Cooper, 2016](#)); involvement in extremism and violence ([Alava et al., 2017](#)); and loss of self-esteem and identity crisis ([Jan 2017](#)).

It is also true that in today's world, university students are unable to leave social media as it is connected to their learning and both academic and professional advancement ([Taylor et al., 2012](#)). Pakistan has 186 universities, with a total student enrolment of 1.6 million ([Government of Pakistan, 2022](#)). Post the coronavirus pandemic, and social media usage has increased even more in the country, both due to social distancing and lockdown and also because learning and teaching have transferred online or become hybrid. Local studies report that the excessive use of social media platforms by students has endangered their family relations in terms of creating separation and lack of communication ([Ali, 2016](#)). Youth now do not seek assistance from family but look to their friends and peers, which places them at risk of harm and betrayal. Local research by [Shabir and colleagues \(2014\)](#) reports that high involvement with social media can contribute to community instability and even crime rates.

According to another study, the more time you spend on social media, the more loneliness you can face ([Yavick et al., 2019](#)). A few studies highlight that excessive social media usage creates problems in relationship-building and can even lead to relationship conflict and permanent separation ([Clayton et al., 2013](#); [Valenzuela et al., 2014](#)). A [Pew Research \(2022\)](#) study found that nearly thirty-five per cent of individuals felt that

online media affected their relationships negatively yet were unable to stop using it. In another research, it was reported that technology causes 'interruption' between relationships preventing the normal course of relationship-building and person-to-person interaction ([McDaniel, 2015](#)). Yet another study suggests that technology can divide people, create isolation, and push individuals to spend more and more time with technology than with their families ([Shahar, 2020](#)).

According to studies, the overwhelming use of social media has pushed people away from conventional social environments, volunteer organizations, and pure relationships ([Hampton et al., 2011](#)). Furthermore, research shows that heavy use of social media increases alienation and isolation while reducing bonding between interpersonal relationships, which is also contributing to a decline in marriages ([Groat, 2009](#)). The dynamics and importance of relationships have changed as a result of social media. Youth now use social media to communicate their emotions, feelings, and difficulties with their peers without telling their parents about their concerns and challenges. This is dangerous, as a family is more proactive in getting individuals the help that they may need, for example, for mental health counselling or tuition for academic purposes ([DiMatteo, 2004](#)). Social media platforms are impacting not only a single individual but the entire family, parents, and siblings. One study highlights that even parents use excessive social media, and so their children are affected negatively due to the lack of attention and time given by parents ([O'Keeffe, 2016](#)). According to [Sultana \(2017\)](#), excessive use of social networking sites harms family harmony overall and leads to lasting estrangement and the breaking of family bonds.

Theoretical Framework

The uses and gratifications theory is the most commonly applied theory to explain why people engage in social media. Katz and colleagues first proposed this theory in 1973, and it was used to investigate why people use social media and how it is linked to basic human needs ([Katz et al., 1973](#)). The theory suggests that the reasons behind the excessive use of social media by

students include enhancing one's credibility, avoiding isolation, keeping track of others, and for entertainment purposes ([Sheldon, 2008](#)). Females are more likely to turn to social media to compensate for the lack of family relationships. Males, on the other hand, prefer to use media to alleviate their isolation and to build networks which will benefit them in the future.

Youth and university students are dependent on social media and are using it for long hours to satisfy their needs for social interaction and to escape loneliness ([Wang et al., 2012](#)). People may also spend more time on social media to gratify themselves when their needs for intimacy, emotional security, and companionship are not met by their families. People make online friends and may start to prefer this form of socialization and interaction, as it does not involve face-to-face interaction and instead allows a person to control settings, profile pictures and timings of interaction ([Sheldon, 2008](#)). In the case of university students, social media applications are also being used for academic and internship purposes, such as group study, communication with teachers, and sharing of syllabus content or discussion of the study area. In this way, there are many justifications for the use of social media and very little attention to how time spent on social media can lead to less time for family and other important pursuits such as self-care, health-seeking behaviour, and physical exercise ([Brailovskaia et al., 2021](#)).

Study Aims

Youth and university students are the future of a nation. The support that university students receive from their families ultimately contributes to the quality of production and ethics in Pakistani society. There is a need in today's technological world, with social media pressures, to try and maintain and maximize family quality time and family relations. Awareness needs to be built about how long individuals spend on social media and its relationship with family relations. This is essential to build healthy communication and interpersonal relationships in society and negate the ill effects of too much social media usage ([Procentese et al., 2019](#)).

This study aims to identify the relationship between time spent on social media and the

quality of family relations in Pakistani university students. It is important to understand if our students are spending excessive time on social media and developing distance from their family members, and such research is scarce in the country. This study's findings will help in identifying if there is a change in the relations between students and their parents and if a problem exists. Additionally, the findings of this study can be used to help plan appropriate interventions to maintain the positive tradition and culture of strong family bonds in the country and curtailing of time spent on social media.

Methodology

Research Design and Ethics

This research is a cross-sectional quantitative study. A closed-ended survey was used to collect data using internationally standardized tools. This study received ethical clearance from the Department of Sociology faculty of Forman Christian College University (FCCU) and the Institutional Review Board of FCCU. This manuscript has been extracted from a thesis of the first author, supervised by the second author. All ethical considerations were followed by the researchers, including maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were given information about the study goals, objectives, and their role in it. All participants gave their informed consent and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All participant information has been kept securely with the authors.

Sampling and Data Collection

The selection criterion was all currently enrolled university students of Pakistan. Convenience sampling through Google Survey was used due to the coronavirus pandemic and observance of social distancing. Emails, Facebook, and WhatsApp, were used to sample students from different years of study. University department pages and student societies were approached through Facebook and Whatsapp. The settings in the Google survey were assigned to ensure that all answers were completed before submission was allowed. Settings were also applied not to save and record any confidential data of respondents. Data collection started in August

2021 and was completed at the end of October 2021. There was a low response, and repeated reminders had to be sent. Though the target was to sample as many students as possible, a final sample of 200 students, 100 male and 100 female, was included in the study analysis.

Instrument

Two internationally standardized tools were used for data collection (Appendix A). The survey consisted of 19 questions and had 3 sections. Questions 1 to 6 were socio-demographic questions. Question 7 measured the independent variable 'time spent on social media, i.e. the number of hours spent on social media ([Ganda, 2014](#)). Questions 8 to 19 measured the quality of family relations ([Alolyan, 2015](#)). The four indicators used to measure the quality of family relationships include 1) strength of the bond with family, 2) level of intimacy and understanding with family members, 3) participation in family traditions and 4) common ideas with family members. To measure the study variables, a 5-point Likert scale from 'Never' to 'Always' has been used.

Data Analysis

SPSS has been used for data analysis. Data is automatically sent from Google Survey to an Excel file, enabling automatic coding and transfer to SPSS for analysis. The hypothesis for this study is that 'the more university students spend time on social media, the lower their quality of family relationships' ([Sultana, 2017](#)). The independent variable for this study is 'time spent on social media (social media is defined as the use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or other social media applications). The dependent variable for this study is the 'quality of family relationships' (family is defined as the immediate nuclear family, including parents and siblings). Tests have been applied in consideration that the independent variable (social media usage) is categorical and the dependent variable (family relations) is continuous.

Firstly, factor analysis has been used to show the reliability of the scale. Next, descriptive statistics have been used to present the study variable frequencies and percentages. Last, Welch

ANOVA has been used to present the relationship between the study variables. There needs to be homogeneity of variances, but the data failed to meet this assumption; therefore, Welch ANOVA was used instead of ANOVA (Liu, 2015). Levene's test showed that there was no homogeneity of variance. Therefore Games-Howell Post-hoc analysis has been used to see which categories were statistically significant (Hilton & Armstrong, 2006). Significance levels at $p < 0.05$ have been considered significant.

Reliability Results

Table 1 presents the reliability results. Factor analysis was conducted to assess the validity of

the scale measuring family relations. The relevant items were computed to create the domain of family relations. The mean was 27.3. The results showed that for two items, factor loading was less the 0.5. These 2 items were excluded, and factor analysis was carried out again with the remaining items. This time the results showed that the remaining items have factor loading of more than 0.5, indicating the validity of the scale. The value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.89 and within the recommended interval of 0.7-0.9, showing high relative internal consistency (Brown, 2002).

Table 1. Psychometric properties of scale used in the study

Variable	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	M ± SD
Family Relations		0.899	27.3 ± 10.0
1-Do you share with your family to make a decision?	.598		
2-Do you feel you have got a strong relationship with your family?	.619		
3-Do you feel that the time you spend with your family is boring?	.590		
4-Do you find someone from your family who you can talk with about your private issues?	.610		
5-Do you feel comfortable discussing your special opinions and ideas with your family?	.713		
6-Do you feel family meetings are meaningful?	.603		
7-Do you feel you spend more time online than with your family?	.585		
8-Do you feel isolated when your family is around you?	.636		
9-Do you feel that there is a lot common between you and your family?	.512		
10-Do you feel that your family members can't understand you?	.543		
11-Do you feel free to show your authentic self to your family?	.667		

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the socio-demographic data of the participants. The mean age of respondents is

21.3. More than fifty per cent of respondents are male, and 49.8% are female, meaning our sample is representative of the actual population breakdown, by gender, of Pakistan. The

participants are well distributed between all the years of study: (i) First year (11.8%), (ii) Second year (27.1%), (iii) Third year (22.0%), and (iv) Fourth year (28.1%). Nearly all of the participants (91.1%) have family members of three or less, implying that sampled population belongs to relatively smaller family groups compared to the

national average, which is around six or more people per family. The majority of the respondents (87.2%) connect to the social network once a day. Furthermore, 74.4% of respondents use Instagram compared to other social media applications.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Socio-demographics (N=200)

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean ± SD
Age			21.3 ± 1.41
Gender of respondent			1.50 ± .501
Male	102	50.2	
Female	101	49.8	
Year of study			2.77 ± .989
Freshmen	24	11.8	
Sophomore	55	27.1	
Junior	67	22.0	
Senior	57	28.1	
Number of Family Members			2.08 ± .296
3 and less	184	91.1	
4 and above	18	8.9	
Connect to Social Network			2.84 ± .515
Rarely	11	5.4	
Every couple of days	13	6.4	
Once a day	177	87.2	
Several times a day	2	1.0	
Most Used App			2.06 ± .722
Facebook	29	14.3	
Instagram	151	74.4	
Twitter	5	2.5	
Other	18	8.9	

Descriptive Statistics of use of social media and family relations

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the use of social media. A significant number of

participants (31.5%) spend 4-5 hours on social media, whereas almost thirty per cent of university students report using more than 5 hours on social media (29.1%).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of use of social media (N=200)

	Frequency	Percentage
Time Spent on Social Media in a Day		
1-2 hours	30	14.8
2-3 hours	50	24.6
4-5 hours	64	31.5
More than 5 hours	59	29.1

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for responses to family time. Most of the participants

share decision-making with their families and consult with them (57.2%). A majority of the

respondents feel that they have a strong relationship with their families (65.5%). Furthermore, 54.2% of the respondents have someone in their families with whom they can talk about their private issues. The majority feel comfortable discussing their special opinions and ideas with their families (52.2%), and many also

feel that family meetings are meaningful (69.4%). However, some of the respondents feel that the time they spend with their family is boring (14.3%). A near majority (44.9%) of respondents feel that they spend more time online than with their families, and 16.7% feel isolated when their family is around them.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for family relations (N=200)

	Never/Rarely/Sometimes (%)	Often/Always (%)
I consult family when making a decision	42.9	57.2
I feel I have a strong relationship with my family	34.4	65.5
I feel the time spent with my family is boring	85.7	14.3
I have someone in my family who I can talk with about your private issues	54.2	45.8
I feel comfortable discussing my opinions & ideas with my family	47.7	52.2
I feel family meetings are meaningful	30.6	69.4
I feel I spend more time online than with my family	55.2	44.9
I feel isolated when my family is around me	83.3	16.7
I feel there is a lot in common between my family and me	50.3	49.7
I feel that my family members can't understand me	70.9	29.1
I feel free to show my authentic self to my family	56.2	43.9

Mean Results

Table 5 presents the Welch ANOVA and Post-hoc comparisons to assess mean differences in family relations compared to time spent on social media. The results of Welch ANOVA showed that the mean difference between family relations to social media usage was statistically significant, $F(3,92.91) = 8.258, p < 0.01$. The Games Howell post hoc test reveals that the quality of family

relations was significantly lower when social media usage is more than 5 hours (21.8 ± 11.1) as compared to 4 – 5 hours ($28.8 \pm 8.00, p = 0.001$), 2 – 3 hours ($28.9 \pm 8.47, p = 0.001$), and 1 – 2 hours ($32.2 \pm 9.74, p = 0.00$). From the four averages, it is clear that as the usage of social media increases, the average family score decreases, and there is a clear negative correlation between the study variables.

Table 5. Welch ANOVA and Post-hoc comparisons results for time spent on social media as a predictor of family relations

Predictor variable	M ± SDA	p-value	MD ± SE ^c	MD ± SE	MD ± SE
Time spent on social media		< .001	2 – 3 hours	4 – 5 hours	> 5 hours
<2 Hours	32.2 ± 9.74		3.28 ± 2.14ns	3.42 ± 2.04 ^{ns}	10.4 ± 2.29*
2-3 hours	28.9 ± 8.47		----	0.14 ± 1.56 ^{ns}	7.12 ± 1.88**

Predictor variable	M ± SDA	p-value	MD ± SE ^c	MD ± SE	MD ± SE
4-5 hours	28.8 ± 8.00		----	----	6.99 ± 1.76**
>5 Hours	21.8 ± 11.1		----	----	----

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the relationship between time spent on social media and the quality of family relations in university students. We found that the scale used for this study to measure the quality of family relations shows high reliability and can be used to sample university students in the future by other scholars in the country. The results of this study support the study hypothesis that the more university students spend time on social media, the lower their quality of family relationships. Previous literature corroborates our research findings, confirming that more than half of youth who use social networking sites for long hours have a poor relationship with their parents and family ([Sultana, 2017](#)). We were also able to sample university students who were representative of the actual population breakdown, by gender, of Pakistan. Nearly all of the participants have family members of three or less, implying that the sampled population belongs to relatively smaller family groups compared to the national average, which is around six or more people per family. Our results suggest that perhaps smaller families are able to exert less pressure to spend time with each other. Some research suggests that the larger the families, the greater likelihood of their being pressured to spend time with each other and engage in family pursuits ([Bossard, 2016](#)).

We also found that nearly all the participants use social media applications once a day and that more than sixty per cent of them spend more than 4 hours a day using social media, which is much higher than the reported national average of one hour a day (World Times, 2022). Our study highlights the die need for social interventions and social media policy reform to limit social media usage, given that scholars and psychologists recommend that social media should be used for less than 30 minutes a day ([Hunt et al., 2018](#)). Almost eighty per cent of our participants use Instagram more than any other social media application, highlighting that Instagram is the lead application which can be used for salient messages to be communicated to

the youth pertaining to interfaith harmony, public health, and national solidarity. In the same vein, all social media application, especially Instagram, needs to be monitored for their content by the government of Pakistan and social media regulators in the country.

Our findings have implications for wider study, as the use of excessive social media does not just affect one individual but the entire family, including parents and siblings ([O’Keeffe, 2016](#)). Parents, children, and siblings can all experience estrangement and loneliness. Another study reports that due to the rise in social media, the transmission of cultural values from parents and elders to children is declining ([Ali, 2016](#)). The cultural values and our cultural system encompass caring for the family, spending time with them on a daily basis, sitting together for meals, playing with younger siblings, and tutoring them for studies. Other scholars confirm that it is social media is the leading cause of 'interruption' and disruption between the parent and child relationship and the sibling relationship ([McDaniel, 2015](#)). When people use social media more, all of these family values and activities are disrupted or abandoned. More and more parents are complaining about their children not listening to them, remaining distracted or being unable to hold a conversation due to consistent use of smartphones and social media. The social media world has an attraction and addictive quality, which prevents youth from easily abandoning or reducing usage, necessitating formal and planned interventional help.

There is great fear that excessive social media use among university students in Pakistan can also contribute to loneliness and isolation ([Zaffar et al., 2015](#)). It is common for youth to attempt to come out of the state of loneliness by using even more social media. This can create a negative spiral and compound the problem. Our study results imply that serious interventions are needed to make youth and families aware of the negative effects of excessive social media usage, specifically estrangement from family members. Separation from family can result in multiple and

compounding problems such as loss of self-esteem, security, values, and emotional support, and the possible inclination toward deviant behaviour. Other findings also confirm that a lack of quality time spent with the family shows a negative impact on individual lives ([Sultana, 2017](#)).

Our findings can be used to plan interventions targeting two broad areas: (i) limiting the use of social media and (ii) increasing family quality of life. University students specifically need support in planning and balancing their lives in a way that their academic, social and family lives are managed in a healthy manner without compromising any of the three. With regard to interventions for limiting social media usage, some scholars, based on the cognitive-behavioural model, suggest that cognitive distortions, such as the ruminative cognitive style, are the primary cause of excessive internet use ([Davis, 2001](#); [Liu & Peng, 2009](#)). In lieu of this, an intervention has been designed to reduce internet usage through the following means ([Hou et al., 2019](#)): A. Asking participants to reflect on: (i) their excessive use of social media use and other meaningful things they could have done instead, (ii) the benefits and adverse effects of using social media versus alternative activities they could be doing; B. Asking participants to write down their reflection notes and paste it: (i) on their lock screen of the phone, and (ii) on their work desks. The latter is aimed to serve as reminders to reduce social media usage. The results of this intervention were effective in reducing university students' social media addiction and improving their mental health and academic efficiency.

Different research confirms that education and awareness-based interventions with parents and families can improve family relations and reduce social media usage. In fact, family-level support-based interventions for university students can produce beneficial results with respect to a reduction in deviant behaviour and use of intoxicants ([Mallet et al., 2011](#); [Turrisi et al., 2001](#)). Numerous interventions and activities have been shown to be effective in improving family relations and family engagement, including (i) improving communication in disadvantaged families ([Charles et al., 2014](#)), (ii)

improving awareness of child development and stability in parents ([Cowan & Cowan, 2002](#)), (iii) improving sibling relations ([Rediy & Tefera, 2020](#)), (iv) travelling together ([Durko & Petrick, 2013](#)), (v) playing board games together ([Rogerson & Gibbs 2018](#)), and (vi) playing sports, singing or playing musical instruments together ([Lehto et al., 2012](#)). There is a need in today's technological world, with social media pressures, to try and maintain and maximize family quality time and family relations through increasing time for family meals, game nights, quality talk time, watching TV and movies together, and increasing face-to-face interactions ([Baker et al., 2016](#)).

Another study has highlighted those self-control strategies are best for limiting social media usage. Some of the possible examples of self-control strategies that have worked in university students include ([Brevers & Turel, 2019](#)): (i) inculcating less interest in social media; (ii) building or choosing a safe context with no direct access to social media, for example, leaving the phone in another room or putting the WiFi off (iii) modifying features on the device, for example, putting phone off aeroplane mode or using an internet blocker; (iv) limiting the use of social media and assigning timings, for example, no use of social media at home or during family dinner; (v) use of self-talk for reminders about adverse effects of social media on mental health and family relations; and (vi) straightforward self-control.

In another vein altogether, there have been some studies that argue that instead of targeting a reduction in social media usage, instead, effort needs to be made to use social media as a medium to improve family relations among university students ([Padilla-Walker, 2012](#)). This may especially be valid, considering that university scholars may not be living at home, and physical distances are inevitable. Even students who do live at home may be spending the majority of hours at the college campus, in the library or with friends outside the home. Local scholars have reported that university students are unable to separate from social media, suggesting that one way to improve family integration is to encourage the family to communicate through social media ([Iqbal et al., 2021](#)). Parents can opt to make social media accounts like Facebook and

Instagram to chat and view their children's profiles and updates, whereas youth can help their parents to learn how to use social media, so they remain in contact on a daily basis. Other studies suggest that social media use can even help to improve self-concept and identity development within the family ([Sponcil, & Gitimu, 2013](#)).

International literature confirms that college students find it convenient and easy to use social media to communicate with their parents, as long as their parents are also using the same sites and making an effort to remain in touch ([Sharaievska & Stodolska, 2017](#)). It is also important that parents do not stalk or embarrass their children on social media and instead learn to support and understand their social media posts and projections. Another systematic literature review confirmed that social media is being used in unique ways to build family relations and strengthen communication, especially when there are distances and in-person time is not possible. Social media platforms allow families to regularly communicate photos and stories and share rituals in a way that can build bonds and create positive reminders about family values ([Abel et al., 2021](#)). Two recent local studies found that social media can help in keeping family members in touch and sustain intergenerational learning ([Rizvi Jafree et al., 2021](#)) and that social media can also be used to maintain links with religious centres and overall spiritual values ([Rizvi Jafree, 2021](#)).

Our research findings can be used to create strategies to limit the social media usage of university students and to improve the quality of family relations. This research is also valuable for psychologists, social workers, and social welfare officers, who can plan counselling and support to improve the quality of family relations and upscale the level of bonding between them. Moreover, future research can be carried out on the same topic with a larger sampled population for more generalizable results. More research is also needed about how social media usage can be used in Pakistani society to improve the quality of family relations, for example, by training parents and grandparents who live in separate

houses for social media use so they can communicate with their children and grandchildren.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are that the data was collected from university students who tend to have more social media use. Another limitation is that data were only collected online through Google surveys due to the pandemic. Additionally, the sample size was small, preventing the use of parametric tests. This research has been helpful in its own way in raising awareness amongst the participants about the relationship between social media usage and the ill effects on family quality of life. More research in this area is needed in the country, involving other age groups and even rural communities where social media usage is on the rise. Attempts also must be made to explore other consequences of excessive social media usage, such as participation in deviant activities and physical and mental health effects.

Conclusion

Social media is now a part of contemporary society. In fact, work and academic studies cannot be separated from social media usage. However, our study shows that university students in Pakistan are using social media excessively and that this is contributing to a decline in the quality of family relations. Given that Pakistan has a unique cultural history of strong family bonds and that family relations are key to the stability and development of individuals, communities and nations, there is a need for dire efforts on two fronts. First, interventions for reducing social media usage and monitoring it are important for the health of individuals and the safety of society. Second, there is a need for family-level interventions to improve family quality time so that individuals and the community benefits from the emotional, financial and physical support provided by the family unit. Youth needs to be made aware of the importance of creating a balance between social media and family time before it is too late and Pakistani society's family values disintegrate.

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Appendix A
Survey Questionnaire

Questions 1 to 6 are *demographic questions*.

Questions 7 measure the time *spent on social media*. Questions 8 to 19 measure *the quality of family relations*.

Demographics

1	Age				
2	Gender				
3	What is your year of study at FCCU?	Freshmen	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
4	How many members are there in your family?	3 and less		4 and above	
5	How frequently do you connect yourself to social networks?	Rarely	Every couple of days	Once a day	Several times a day
6	Which App do you use most?	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	Other

Questionnaire for measuring time spent on social media. ([Ganda 2014](#))

7	How much time do you spend on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or other) in a day?	1-2	2-3	4-5	More
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Questionnaire for measuring family relations ([Alolyan,2015](#))

		Never	Rarely	Sometime	Often	Always
8	Do you share with your family to make a decision?					
9	Do you feel you have got a strong relationship with your family?					
10	Do you feel that the time you spend with your family is boring?					
11	Do you find someone from your family who you can talk with about					

		Never	Rarely	Sometime	Often	Always
	your private issues?					
12	Do you feel comfortable discussing your special opinions, ideas with your family?					
13	Do you feel family meetings are meaningful?					
15	Do you feel you spend more time online than with your family?					
16	Do you feel isolated when your family is around you?					
17	Do you feel that there is a lot common between you and your family?					
18	Do you feel that your family members can't understand you?					
19	Do you feel free to show your authentic self to your family?					