



The Impact of Social Media in Afghanistan: A Multi-Disciplinary Study

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Background: The rapid growth of social media has profoundly transformed communication, community building, and information sharing worldwide. In Afghanistan, the proliferation of social media platforms has significantly impacted the social, cultural, and political landscape, particularly among the youth.

Objective: This multi-disciplinary study aims to explore the diverse effects of social media on Afghan youth, focusing on usage patterns, mental health implications, entertainment-driven time allocation, financial expenditures, exposure to explicit content, and academic performance.

Methods: A cross-sectional online survey was conducted between September and December 2023, gathering responses from 1556 participants (67% males, 33% females) through various social media platforms. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0, employing statistical tests such as ANOVA and Chi-Square to examine relationships between social media usage and its impacts.

Results: The study reveals significant links between social media usage and demographic, behavioral, and mental health factors. Key findings include Facebook as the most used platform (83.6%), with the majority of participants spending 1–3 hours daily on social media. Age differences in time spent were significant ($F=15.64$, $p<0.001$). Entertainment was the primary use (45.5%), with gender differences in engagement levels. High anxiety (78.5%) and moderate depression (38.3%) were reported. Significant associations between social media use and mental health were found (eg, $\chi^2=591.87$, $p<0.001$ for nervousness). Excessive use negatively impacted study habits, with 25.7% feeling it hindered their academic performance.

Conclusion: This study highlights the multifaceted impacts of social media on Afghan youth, including both positive aspects like enhanced communication and empowerment and negative aspects such as mental health issues and academic challenges. The significant relationships between social media usage and various life aspects underscore the need for targeted interventions to promote healthy digital habits and mitigate adverse effects. Further research is recommended to explore long-term impacts and effective strategies for managing social media use among Afghan youth.

Keywords: social media, Afghan, mental health, time, money, relationship, study, Facebook

Introduction

Social media, defined as a form of mass media accessible via the internet through websites and online applications, allows users to create and share various types of content, including text, audio, pictures, and videos.¹ While social media platforms primarily focus on building audiences, social networking sites emphasize the formation of communities for sharing information and exchanging messages.¹ Since its inception in 1997, social media has rapidly evolved into

a global daily life component, attracting millions of users who dedicate an average of 2.5 hours daily to these platforms.² This daily commitment accumulates to 864 hours yearly, equivalent to 36 days, or over a lifespan, approximately 5.5 years.^{2,3}

The internet's historical trajectory has catalyzed the emergence and evolution of social media. Easier internet interfaces and faster connections have propelled social media from its early limited tools and features to its current status as multifunctional mass media.^{1,2} This transformation has reshaped daily interactions, with platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp becoming ubiquitous, influencing social relationships, cultural norms, and political discourse.^{3,4} The omnipresence of these platforms in contemporary society has brought about a paradigm shift in communication, interaction, and information consumption. These platforms facilitate real-time connectivity and the global exchange of user-generated content, shaping social relationships, cultural norms, and even political discourse.⁴

In the realm of leisure and entertainment, social media platforms have become integral to individuals' routines, shaping how they allocate their time and engage with digital content. Activities range from scrolling through news feeds and binge-watching videos to participating in online gaming communities, offering diverse entertainment options. However, entertainment-driven time allocation on social media raises questions about its implications for productivity, psychological well-being, and overall quality of life.⁵ Exploring the patterns and motivations behind this phenomenon provides insights into the evolving nature of leisure activities in the digital age.

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which posits that individuals actively seek out media that meets their needs and desires.⁶ This framework helps in understanding why Afghan youth engage with social media and what gratifications they derive from its use. Additionally, the Social Comparison Theory is employed to explore how social media influences mental health by fostering comparisons among users, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and depression.⁷

Previous studies have shown mixed impacts of social media on various aspects of life. Research in developed countries has highlighted both the positive and negative consequences of social media use. For instance, social media can enhance communication and empowerment but also contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.⁸ In the context of developing countries like Afghanistan, these impacts are compounded by unique socio-cultural factors.⁹

A study conducted in Saudi Arabia found significant correlations between social media features (eg, likes, comments, followers) and mental health outcomes, emphasizing the need for cautious engagement with these platforms.¹⁰ Other studies have linked excessive social media use to body image dissatisfaction, addiction, cyberbullying, loneliness, and decreased subjective well-being.^{11,12}

Afghanistan has experienced explosive growth in social media use due to widespread internet access. This surge has enhanced communication and fostered national connections, bridging gaps with the outside world and empowering disadvantaged groups, particularly women.^{13,14} Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Facebook Messenger, LinkedIn, Twitter, and TikTok dominate the Afghan social media landscape.^{14,15} However, the rapid increase in social media use prompts a critical exploration of the potential downsides associated with this technology. Despite its myriad benefits for education, business, entertainment, and social life, social media also brings forth numerous disadvantages, including risks to safety, hate speech, interrupting relationships, bad effects on studying, privacy concerns, impacts on general and mental health, increased violence, and implications for professional reputations if not used with precautions.¹⁶

The escalating use of social media has raised valid concerns about its potential impact on mental health, with research consistently pointing to its influence on outcomes such as anxiety and depression.¹⁷ A specific study conducted in Saudi Arabia delves deeper into this relationship, identifying a noteworthy connection between certain social media features – such as likes, comments, followers, and media – and mental health, underscoring the importance of exercising caution when engaging with these features.¹⁸ Furthermore, various studies have uncovered potential adverse effects on body image dissatisfaction, addiction, cyberbullying, mood, loneliness, fear of missing out, and a decrease in subjective well-being.¹⁹ This extensive use is reflected in the significant time dedicated to online activities, with social networking and music-listening ranking highest among Generation-C.²⁰

While social media offers unprecedented opportunities for communication, connection, and self-expression, particularly among youth, it simultaneously poses challenges, particularly in the realm of mental health. Adolescents and young

adults, immersed in a culture of ubiquitous social validation and comparison, grapple with heightened feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, making it imperative to comprehend the intricate relationship between social media and the mental well-being of the youth. Recent research on social media's impact on adolescent mental health has explored correlations with issues like depression, body image concerns, disordered eating, and externalizing problems, revealing a nuanced yet significant negative impact.^{21–23}

The rising tide of hate speech on social media platforms poses significant challenges for fostering inclusive and respectful online communities. From derogatory comments to targeted harassment, the prevalence of hate speech raises critical concerns about its potential consequences for mental health, social cohesion, and democratic discourse. Investigating the scope and impact of hate speech on social media allows researchers to elucidate the underlying mechanisms driving its dissemination and advocate for effective strategies to mitigate its harmful effects.²⁴

The intersection of social media and religious discourse has ushered in a transformative era, redefining conventional religious landscapes and leaving indelible imprints on individuals' beliefs, practices, and communities. Through the dissemination of religious teachings and the establishment of vibrant online faith communities, social media has emerged as a dynamic arena that actively shapes individuals' religious identities and worldviews, prompting critical inquiries into its impact on religious perspectives, authority, and pluralism in contemporary society.²⁵ This influence on religious attitudes is palpable, as research suggests that young adults abstaining from social media are more inclined to participate in regular church services.²⁶ However, the complex interplay of fear of judgment, exposure to diverse beliefs, and the flexible nature of spirituality on social media has led some young adults to embrace a more adaptable and eclectic approach to their spiritual journey.²⁷

Interestingly, social media has transformed into a form of entertainment, with users often posting about their favorite shows while engaging with others online.²⁰ However, the impact of social media extends beyond leisure activities, influencing academic performance among students. Prolonged social media use for non-academic purposes has been linked to distraction from academic work, poor academic performance, compromised social interactions, and disrupted sleep patterns.²⁸ Furthermore, a study in Lebanon revealed that excessive social media use, smoking, and romantic relationships were associated with lower academic performance.²⁹

The landscape of online sexual content poses significant challenges, with surveys revealing that more than 40% of young individuals aged 13–16 have encountered explicit material within the past 12 months.³⁰ This issue extends beyond mere exposure, as approximately one in five youths grapple with unwanted exposure to sexually explicit content, while one in nine faces online sexual solicitation.³¹ To comprehensively address the multifaceted impact of social media on individuals and society, it is imperative to delve into the patterns, prevalence, and consequences of its use across various facets of life. Recent findings indicate that specific social media content serves as a trigger for self-identified porn addicts, with influencing factors including the addict's age, gender, and the frequency of relapses. Furthermore, behavioral shifts on social media are intricately linked to individuals' perceptions of content as triggering, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of these dynamics.³²

Against this backdrop, this study aims to delve into the impacts of social media on Afghan youth, offering a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics shaping their digital experiences and interactions. This research is grounded in the recognition of a critical gap in the literature concerning the specific ways in which Afghan youth engage with and are affected by social media. The need for this research is underscored by the rapid proliferation of social media use in Afghanistan and its profound implications on various aspects of life, including mental health, social relationships, academic performance, and exposure to harmful content.

To frame this study, a comprehensive literature review was conducted, encompassing high prominence studies that address the research gaps and inform the research model. Previous studies have highlighted the significant influence of social media on mental health, body image dissatisfaction, addiction, cyberbullying, mood, loneliness, fear of missing out, and decreased subjective well-being.^{17–23} Additionally, the role of social media in shaping religious discourse and influencing academic performance has been extensively explored.^{20,25–29} By integrating these findings, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the complex interplay between social media and the lives of Afghan youth.

This study's contribution to the body of knowledge lies in its focus on a specific population – Afghan youth – and its examination of the multifaceted impacts of social media within this context. The research addresses the gap in understanding how social media influences the mental health, social relationships, academic performance, and exposure to harmful content among

Afghan youth. The findings of this study will not only enhance the existing literature but also provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, mental health professionals, and social media platforms to develop targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of social media use. By shedding light on the unique challenges and opportunities presented by social media in Afghanistan, this research advances knowledge in the field and contributes to the broader discourse on the digital experiences of youth in developing countries.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to inform stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals, about the multifaceted impacts of social media. Understanding these impacts is crucial for developing strategies to harness the positive aspects of social media while mitigating its negative effects. By advancing knowledge in this area, the study aims to contribute to the creation of a balanced and informed approach to social media use among Afghan youth.

In summary, this study seeks to elucidate the impacts of social media on Afghan youth, offering a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics shaping their digital experiences. Through a rigorous examination of the literature and an in-depth analysis of the specific context of Afghanistan, this research aims to fill the existing gaps in knowledge and provide valuable insights for stakeholders aiming to harness the positive potential of social media while mitigating its negative consequences.

Methodology

Study Design and Participants

This cross-sectional study was conducted between September and December 2023, chosen to capture seasonal variations in social media usage and behaviors among participants. The selected period also ensured adequate time for data collection and analysis. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 35 years, targeting Afghan youth to understand the specific impacts of social media on this demographic.

Data Collection

Data were collected using an online questionnaire disseminated via several social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The survey consisted of 25 questions divided into five focus areas: social media usage patterns, mental health, academic performance, social relationships, and exposure to harmful content. This comprehensive survey design aimed to capture a wide array of data relevant to the research objectives.

Sampling Strategy

A convenience sampling method was employed due to the ease of reaching a large and diverse audience through social media. While this approach facilitated broad participation, it also introduced potential biases such as overrepresentation of more active social media users and underrepresentation of those without internet access. To mitigate these biases, efforts were made to promote the survey across different platforms and communities to enhance the diversity and representativeness of the sample.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of data collection, responses were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. The data analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and inferential statistics to explore relationships between variables. Specifically, correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of relationships between social media usage and various impact factors. Additionally, analytical tests such as *t*-tests, ANOVA (Analysis of Variance), and chi-square tests were employed to identify statistically significant differences and relationships within the data.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The online questionnaire distributed through social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger, Emails, and Twitter, gathered responses from 1556 participants (Table 1). Male respondents predominated, comprising 67% (1042), while females constituted 33% (513). The age distribution revealed the highest percentage in the 20–25 age group (41.2%), followed by 25–30 (25.9%) and 30–35 (21.8%) (Table 2). Regarding educational attainment, the majority held a bachelor's degree (66.9%), followed by master's (18.9%) and primary education (14.16%) (Table 3). In terms of social media platform usage, Facebook emerged as the most used platform (83.6%), followed by Instagram (69.7%), YouTube (74%), TikTok (34.5%), and Twitter (29.5%) (Table 4).

Time Allocation for Social Media

Of the 1556 participants, 1042 were male and 514 were female, indicating a male majority. Male participants reported slightly more time spent on social media than females. The majority of participants spent 1–3 hours (47.9%) and less than

Table 1 Social Media and Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	1042	67%
Female	513	33%
Total	1556	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=234.22, p<0.001$
 $\chi^2 = 234.22, p < 0.001$

Table 2 Social Media and Age

Age	Percentage	Frequency
10–15	0.8%	12
15–20	10.3%	160
20–25	41.2%	641
25–30	25.9%	403
30–35	21.8%	340
Total	100%	1556

Notes: ANOVA: $F=12.34, p<0.001$
 $F = 12.34, p < 0.001$

Table 3 Social Media and Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Primary Education (School)	218	14.16%
Bachelor	1030	66.9%
Master	292	18.9%
Total	1540	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=451.16, p<0.001$
 $\chi^2 = 451.16, p < 0.001$

Table 4 Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platforms	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	1288	83.6%
Instagram	1074	69.7%
TikTok	531	34.5%
Twitter	454	29.5%
YouTube	1139	74%
PubG	116	7.5%
Movies	277	18%
Email	1068	69.3%
TV-Programs	233	4.5%
Total	1541	100%

Notes: Multiple Response Analysis: Frequencies and percentages of each platform usage were analyzed.

1 hour (23.4%) on social media daily (Tables 5 and 6). Notably, 32.84% of male participants and 14.71% of female participants spent 1–3 hours on social media, while only 1.92% of male participants and 1.73% of female participants spent more than 8 hours.

Table 5 Social Media Time Spending

Time spent on social media during 24 hours	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	362	23.4%
1–3 hr.	741	47.9%
3–5 hr.	291	18.8%
5–8 hr.	116	7.5%
More than 8 hours	35	2.3%
Total	1545	100%

Notes: ANOVA: $F=15.64$, $p<0.001$ $F=15.64$, $p<0.001$ $F=15.64$, $p<0.001$.

Table 6 Social Media Usage During Daytime

More usage of social media during the 24 hours	Frequency	Percentage
Morning	99	6.4%
During the day	442	28.7%
During the night	458	29.7%
Based on my free time	843	54.7%
Total	1541	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=287.64$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2=287.64$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2=287.64$, $p<0.001$.

Statistical Analysis: An ANOVA test revealed significant differences in time spent on social media across different age groups ($F=15.64, p<0.001$ $F = 15.64, p < 0.001$ $F=15.64, p<0.001$).

Purpose of Social Media Usage

Regarding the purpose of social media usage, 45.5% of participants used social media as followers for entertainment and passive consumption. 33.1% were sometimes active on social media, while 16.9% used it to attract attention and impress others. A smaller percentage (6%) reported earning income through social media (Table 7).

Statistical Analysis: A Chi-Square test indicated significant differences in the purposes of social media usage ($\chi^2=315.44, p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 315.44, p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=315.44, p<0.001$).

Money Spending on Social Media

Most participants reported spending between 500 to 1000 AFG on social media (41.1%). Nearly equal percentages reported spending less than 500 AFG (40.9%) (Table 8). A minority spent between 1000 to 3000 AFG, while only 1.86% spent more than 5000 AFG monthly.

Statistical Analysis: An ANOVA test showed significant differences in the amount of money spent on social media ($F=10.23, p<0.001$ $F = 10.23, p < 0.001$ $F=10.23, p<0.001$).

Mental Health

A significant portion of respondents experienced feelings of nervousness, anxiety, or edginess, with 78.5% reporting such feelings either “Several days”, “More than half the days”, or “Almost every day” (Tables 9–12). About 42.2% experienced a feeling of not being in control of worry for several days, while 36.9% experienced it almost every day. Additionally, 38.3% reported experiencing a medium level of depression, while 48.5% experienced a low level (Tables 9 and 13).

Table 7 Social Media Purpose

Purpose of Social Media Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Getting money from social media	91	6%
Willing to be more active to impress others	257	16.9%
Just following and watching others and not engaging directly	765	49.8%
Sometimes I will be active	690	45.5%
Total	1516	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=315.44, p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 315.44, p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=315.44, p<0.001$.

Table 8 Social Media and Money Spent

Money spent on social media	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 500 AFG	621	40.9%
500–1000 AFG	624	41.1%
1000–3000 AFG	205	13.5%
3000–5000 AFG	46	3%
More than 5000 AFG	28	1.86%
Total	1515	100%

Notes: ANOVA: $F=10.23, p<0.001$ $F = 10.23, p < 0.001$ $F=10.23, p<0.001$.

Table 9 Social Media and Depression Level

Depression and Stress Level	Frequency	Percentage
Very low	735	48.5%
Medium	580	38.3%
High	136	9%
Very High	65	4.2%
Total	1516	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=411.52$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 411.52$, $p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=411.52$, $p<0.001$.

Table 10 Social Media and Feelings

Feeling Nervous, Anxious or on Edge	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	329	21.5%
Several days	931	60.9%
More than half the days	142	9.3%
Almost every day	126	8.3%
Total	1528	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=591.87$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 591.87$, $p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=591.87$, $p<0.001$.

Table 11 Social Media and Worry

Not being able to stop or control worry	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	107	7%
Several days	644	42.2%
N/A	213	14%
Almost every day	563	36.9%
Total	1527	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=312.14$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 312.14$, $p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=312.14$, $p<0.001$.

Table 12 Social Media and Relationships

Interruption of relationships with friends through social media	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	431	28.1%
No	1102	71.9%
Total	1533	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=245.12$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 245.12$, $p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=245.12$, $p<0.001$.

Table 13 Social Media and Depression Causes

Depression and Stress Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Unknown Future	834	56.3%
Personal Problems	462	31.1%
Chronic Disease	64	4.3%
Friends' Achievements	43	2.9%
Being Lazy	298	20.1%
Other Reasons	323	21.8%
Total	1482	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=337.66$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 337.66$, $p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=337.66$, $p<0.001$.

Statistical Analysis: Chi-Square tests revealed significant associations between social media usage and various mental health outcomes: feelings of nervousness ($\chi^2=591.87$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 591.87$, $p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=591.87$, $p<0.001$), control of worry ($\chi^2=312.14$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 312.14$, $p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=312.14$, $p<0.001$), and depression levels ($\chi^2=411.52$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 411.52$, $p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=411.52$, $p<0.001$).

Time for Entertainment and Social Media Interaction

Regarding time spent with family members during the day, 38.3% reported spending 1–3 hours, while 19.8% spent 3–5 hours (Tables 6 and 14). Approximately 34.6% indicated having a gathering with friends for entertainment every month, while 32.1% reported having a gathering if they found free time (Table 15).

Table 14 Social Media and Time Spent with Family

Time spent with family members during the day	Frequency	Percentage
1–3 hr.	370	24.1%
3–5 hr.	303	19.8%
I do not know.	588	38.3%
Sometimes	175	11.4%
N/A	100	6.4%
Total	1536	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=492.65$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 492.65$, $p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=492.65$, $p<0.001$.

Table 15 Social Media and Entertainment

Time spent with friends for entertainment	Frequency	Percentage
Every month we have a gathering	530	34.6%
Sometimes if we find free time	492	32.1%
During special events like Eid Nowroz	187	12.2%
I follow everyone through social media	178	11.6%
N/A	145	9.5%
Total	1532	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=245.78$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 245.78$, $p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=245.78$, $p<0.001$.

Statistical Analysis: Chi-Square tests indicated significant differences in time spent with family members ($\chi^2=492.65$, $p<0.001$) and time spent with friends for entertainment ($\chi^2=245.78$, $p<0.001$).

Encountered Topics and Issues While Using Social Media

Participants encountered various topics on social media, with educational issues (71.5%), comedic issues (45.8%), political issues (39.8%), religious issues (30.8%), and sexual issues (8.8%) being the most common (Table 16). Many participants expressed dislike for political issues (72.5%), sexual issues (39.1%), and religious issues (18.8%) (Table 17).

Statistical Analysis: Multiple response analyses were conducted to determine the frequencies and percentages of issues encountered and disliked on social media.

Social Media's Influence on Sensitivity to Issues

The majority of respondents (70.3%) indicated that they watch different issues on social media but never take action, 19% reported a decrease in sensitivity to issues, and 10% said they take the same actions without consideration (Table 18).

Statistical Analysis: A Chi-Square test confirmed significant differences in the influence of social media on sensitivity to issues ($\chi^2=315.87$, $p<0.001$).

Studying Habits

Regarding studying habits, 32.7% of participants reported studying daily using newspapers, books, and articles, while 26% studied occasionally. A notable portion (25.7%) expressed liking to study but felt they had no time due to social media engagement (Table 19).

Table 16 Topics and Issues Encountered on Social Media

Topics and Issues	Frequency	Percentage
Political issues	612	39.8%
Sexual issues	135	8.8%
Religious issues	474	30.8%
Comedic issues	704	45.8%
Educational issues	1098	71.5%
Total	1536	100%

Notes: Multiple Response Analysis: Frequencies and percentages of each topic encountered were analyzed.

Table 17 Issues Disliked on Social Media

Issues Disliked on Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
Political issues	1100	72.5%
Sexual issues	594	39.1%
Religious issues	285	18.8%
Comedic issues	65	4.3%
N/A	257	16.9%
Total	1518	100%

Notes: Multiple Response Analysis: Frequencies and percentages of issues disliked were analyzed.

Table 18 Social Media's Influence on Sensitivity to Issues

Influence on Social Media's Senses and Issues	Frequency	Percentage
Decrease sensitivity to issues	282	19%
Take the same actions without consideration	148	10%
Watch different issues but never take action	1044	70.3%
Total	1484	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=315.87, p<0.001$ | $\chi^2 = 315.87, p < 0.001$ | $\chi^2=315.87, p<0.001$.

Table 19 Studying Habits

Studying Habits	Frequency	Percentage
Study daily using newspapers, books, articles, etc.	500	32.7%
Occasionally study	397	26%
Find newspapers, books, and magazines boring	165	10.8%
Like to study but feel no time due to social media engagement	393	25.7%
N/A	75	4.8%
Total	1530	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=513.14, p<0.001$ | $\chi^2 = 513.14, p < 0.001$ | $\chi^2=513.14, p<0.001$.

Statistical Analysis: A Chi-Square test revealed significant differences in studying habits ($\chi^2=513.14, p<0.001$ | $\chi^2 = 513.14, p < 0.001$ | $\chi^2=513.14, p<0.001$).

Discussion of Statistical Tests

The ANOVA test for time spent on social media (Table 5) revealed significant differences across different age groups, suggesting that age impacts how much time individuals spend on social media. The Chi-Square tests for the purpose of social media usage (Table 7), feelings of nervousness, anxiety, or edginess (Tables 9–11), control of worry and depression levels (Tables 9 and 13), time spent with family members (Table 14), time spent with friends for entertainment (Table 15), influence on sensitivity to issues (Table 18), and studying habits (Table 19) all showed significant associations, indicating strong relationships between these variables and social media usage.

The significant p-values (all < 0.001) across the tests confirm that the observed relationships are unlikely due to chance, reinforcing the validity of the findings. These results provide robust statistical evidence supporting the hypothesis that social media usage significantly impacts various aspects of life among Afghan youth.

In addition to descriptive analysis, statistical tests were conducted to examine the relationships between social media usage and its impacts on Afghan youth. The results of these tests are summarized in (Table 20). These findings provide robust statistical evidence supporting the hypothesis that social media usage significantly impacts various aspects of life among Afghan youth.

The results indicate significant associations between social media usage and various demographic, behavioral, and mental health factors among Afghan youth. The findings highlight the pervasive influence of social media on daily activities, mental well-being, and social interactions. The statistical tests underscore the robustness of these associations, supporting the hypothesis that social media usage significantly impacts the lives of young people in Afghanistan.

These findings underscore the profound impact of social media on various facets of Afghan youth's lives. The significant p-values across these tests confirm that these relationships are statistically robust and not due to random chance. This detailed analysis validates the descriptive observations and highlights critical areas where social media

Table 20 Summary of Statistical Tests for Social Media Impact Study

Table	Variable	Statistical Test	Test Statistic	p-value	Significance
Table 5	Time spent on social media	ANOVA	F = 15.64	< 0.001	Significant
Table 7	Purpose of social media usage	Chi-Square	$\chi^2 = 315.44$	< 0.001	Significant
Table 8	Money spent on social media	ANOVA	F = 10.23	< 0.001	Significant
Tables 9–11	Feelings of nervousness, anxiety, or edginess	Chi-Square	$\chi^2 = 591.87$	< 0.001	Significant
Tables 9, 13	Control of worry and depression levels	Chi-Square	$\chi^2 = 312.14$, $\chi^2 = 411.52$	< 0.001, < 0.001	Significant
Table 14	Time spent with family members	Chi-Square	$\chi^2 = 492.65$	< 0.001	Significant
Table 15	Time spent with friends for entertainment	Chi-Square	$\chi^2 = 245.78$	< 0.001	Significant

influences behavior, mental health, and social interactions among Afghan youth. Consequently, these results call for further research and targeted interventions to promote healthier social media habits and mitigate adverse effects.

Discussion

This study pioneers an exploration into the usage patterns of social media among Afghan youth and the consequential impacts on their lives—a subject that, until now, has remained largely unexplored. Through a meticulous analysis of the results, the study discerns several prominent themes, including social media platforms, user motivations, mental health implications, entertainment-driven time allocation, financial expenditures, exposure to explicit content, the prevalence of hate speech, ramifications on study habits and cultural norms, and its influence on religious perspectives. This comprehensive investigation aims to shed light on the intricate interplay between Afghan youth and social media, providing a foundational understanding of the diverse facets and ramifications associated with this phenomenon.

The findings of our analysis underscore the prevalence of Facebook as the leading social media platform in Afghanistan, with 1288 out of 1556 respondents favoring it (Tables 4 and 21). YouTube claims the second position, trailed by Instagram and TikTok. Extrapolating from this data, it is estimated that a substantial 34,794,000 out of the total 42 million Afghan population engage with Facebook. This aligns with global trends, as Facebook maintains its status as the most widely used social media network globally, boasting an impressive 3.049 billion monthly active users. It's

Table 21 Social Media Addiction

Addiction to Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	659	56%
Instagram	423	35.9%
TikTok	199	19.9%
YouTube	293	24.9%
Email	152	12.9%
Online Games (PubG)	44	3.7%
Hollywood & Bollywood movies	46	3.9%
TV-programs	39	3.3%
Total	1177	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=423.78$, $p<0.001$ | $\chi^2=423.78$, $p<0.001$ | $\chi^2=423.78$, $p<0.001$.

noteworthy that while Facebook remains a frontrunner, several other platforms have also amassed over a billion monthly active members each—illustrating the dynamic landscape of social media. Instagram records a substantial two billion monthly active users, YouTube demonstrates a potential advertising reach of 2.491 billion, and TikTok commercials exhibit the capacity to reach 1.562 billion individuals aged 18 and above globally each month.³³

Social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicative utility, convenience utility, opinion expression, information sharing, and surveillance or knowledge about others are among the ten reasons for using social media that were found in a study.³⁴ Out of the 1516 respondents in this survey, roughly 1022 just use social media to pass the time, entertain themselves, and wow others by posting about various subjects. Even though 91 out of the participants—a very small percentage—used social media as their primary source of income, a significant portion of Afghans utilize the platform just for leisure. When analyzing this data in its entirety, it is projected that 28,326,000 of Afghanistan's 42 million citizens utilize social media just for amusement and idle time.

The survey findings underscore a noteworthy trend, with 78.5% of respondents expressing feelings of unease, anxiety, or tension. A demographic analysis using a population map of Afghanistan would reveal a significant prevalence of mental health challenges across the nation. A UN study, involving 592 Afghan women from 22 of the country's 34 regions, delved into the experiences of these individuals, uncovering a spectrum of psychological issues, including suicidal thoughts, despair, sleeplessness, worry, fear, anger, lack of hope and motivation, loneliness, and increased isolationist behavior.³⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected social media usage and mental health globally. The pandemic-induced lockdowns and social distancing measures have led to increased reliance on digital platforms for communication, education, and entertainment. This surge in social media usage has significant implications for mental health and well-being, as documented in several studies.^{17–19}

In the context of this study, the COVID-19 pandemic likely intensified the observed impacts of social media on mental health among Afghan youth. Increased screen time and social media engagement during lockdowns have been associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress.²⁰ These mental health challenges are compounded by the socio-economic difficulties in Afghanistan, creating a complex interplay of factors that affect the well-being of young people.

While social media emerges as a prominent factor contributing to mental health concerns, our research (Table 22) underscores the complexity of this issue, suggesting the involvement of other critical variables. Addressing mental health challenges solely through social media interventions may prove challenging, as indicated by our poll results. A recent empirical field study, involving 304 participants randomly assigned to conditions with or without phones on the table, revealed that the mere presence of a phone can lead to increased distraction and reduced enjoyment during social interactions.³⁶ Furthermore, our investigation sheds light on the time invested in social media, with a majority of participants dedicating one to two hours daily to these platforms. Analyzing yearly survey data from the United States, we observed a concerning trend post-2011–2013, with over 40% of teenagers sleeping for fewer than 7 hours

Table 22 Expectations Without Social Media Access

Expectations Without Social Media Access	Frequency	Percentage
I will be successful in my life	291	19.5%
I will have a peaceful and safe life	189	12.6%
Sexual issues on social media decrease concentration	42	2.8%
I will have more income but waste time	103	6.9%
N/A	869	58.2%
Total	1494	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=513.67$, $p<0.001$ | $\chi^2 = 513.67$, $p < 0.001$ | $\chi^2=513.67$, $p<0.001$.

on most nights in 2015, correlating with increased daily electronic media use exceeding two hours—a relationship established through an exposure-response model.³⁶ This emphasizes the intricate interplay between media consumption, sleep patterns, and mental well-being. Our investigation reveals that the majority of our participants engage with social media for a duration ranging from one to three hours daily. This aligns with a global trend highlighted in a recent 2024 study, indicating an average daily usage of two hours and twenty-four minutes.³⁷ Extrapolating this pattern over a lifetime, if an Afghan individual were to live for 72 years, our calculations project an approximate allocation of 2736.15 days, equivalent to 89.86 months, to social media. Contrastingly, existing research^{38,39} underscores the psychological benefits associated with dedicating one to two hours daily to face-to-face entertainment instead of technological engagements. Such in-person interactions have been linked to reduced levels of sadness and stress. However, it is disconcerting to note that our participants, as per available data, predominantly engage in face-to-face recreational activities only once a month. This observation prompts consideration of the potential disparities in access to and frequency of in-person social interactions, raising valid concerns about the fairness of social engagement opportunities. As of 2024, a survey indicates that the median monthly cost of internet connectivity in the United States stands at \$75.⁴⁰ Facebook claims its place as the predominant social media network in the US, boasting 313 million members and a staggering 74.2% user penetration.^{41,42} In contrast, our study sheds light on the social media landscape in Afghanistan, where the surveyed majority reports an average monthly spending of 10 USD (equivalent to 750 Afghani). Intriguingly, Facebook emerges as the favored platform among Afghans. However, it's crucial to consider the economic context, with Afghans earning an annual income of 28,120 Afghani. This financial backdrop poses challenges for allocating a significant portion of their earnings to social media networks. Recognizing the financial disparities between Afghanistan and the United States is imperative, emphasizing the need for nuanced considerations in cross-cultural comparative analyses of social media usage.

A notable limitation of our study is rooted in the cultural norms prevalent in Afghanistan, where individuals often strive to maintain privacy and refrain from sharing personal information due to strict community laws and regulations. Despite expressing a reluctance to discuss sex-related topics on social media, our findings reveal that 594 out of 1518 respondents actively engaged in searching for such content on these platforms. In comparison to the annual 69% of men in the United States who reportedly watch pornography, approximately one-third of the Afghan community grapples with similar concerns.⁴³ The consumption of pornography is associated with an increased likelihood of divorce, a heightened desire for aggressive or violent sexual behavior, and diminished satisfaction with one's sex life.⁴³ Despite a prevalent societal tendency to overlook the impact of pornography, studies consistently affirm its adverse effects, prompting the formation of groups dedicated to addressing this perceived “pandemic”.⁴³ This underscores the need for nuanced considerations when examining cultural attitudes toward sensitive topics like pornography across different societies.

A frightening amount of hate speech is spread on social media, targeting specific people and groups and endangering the mental and physical health of its targets. Conventional methods for combating hate speech online frequently concentrate on the characteristics and attitudes of those who perpetrate it. These methods ignore the interpersonal and social dynamics provided by social media, which people use to get approval from peers who share their interests. According to a theory of online hate based on social approval, people and their allies spread hate speech in order to get support and friendship for their animosity toward targets who are also hated by them, which both improves the perpetrators' well-being and feeds their prejudices. This perspective is supported by recent research on a range of similar phenomena, such as ideas of political mockery as amusement, moral grandstanding, and peer support for interpersonal violence.⁴⁴ According to the results of our study, the majority of participants (1100 out of 1518) stated that they detest political issues on social media. Additionally, approximately 622 of them claimed that political, religious, and personal issues on social media disrupt and foster hatred in their relationships with friends. Pew Research Center polls⁴⁵ indicate that roughly 39% of respondents do not like their personal data.

Posting visual content on social media, including images, text, and memes, is one of the primary activities. Whether or not the information or memes are real or fraudulent, they will all have an impact on viewers, either favorably or unfavorably, and in doing so, the community as a whole will be altered.⁴⁶ Access to media is becoming more and more convenient as mobile devices become a need in people's everyday lives.⁴⁶ People can openly engage with others and post and express their opinions and feelings regarding social issues with ease. As a result, a wide range of materials with

Table 23 Causes of Relationship Interruption Through Social Media

Causes of Relationship Interruption	Frequency	Percentage
Political issues	270	18.8%
Religious issues	112	7.5%
Personal issues	240	16.7%
Friends' Achievements	83	5.8%
N/A	881	61.4%
Total	1435	100%

Notes: Chi-Square Test: $\chi^2=453.24, p<0.001$ $\chi^2 = 453.24, p < 0.001$ $\chi^2=453.24, p<0.001$.

different viewpoints on social issues continually exist and vanish in contemporary society. The media has a big influence on how people form opinions since it creates the echo chamber or filter bubble on many platforms that offer material customized to each user's tastes and preferences. Accordingly, 70.3% of participants in our study stated that they just monitor everything on social media and have not copied any community-based actions, while a smaller percentage stated that they will copy and follow that path without giving the community any thought. According to 51% of respondents in France, social media is a harmful thing, according to the same study and survey, but most respondents in other countries suggested that social media can have positive effects if used properly for leadership.⁴⁷ As a result, it is impossible to overlook the influence that media content has on the beliefs we hold.

The outcomes of this investigation reveal that 32.7% of participants acknowledged utilizing social media as a means of leisure when not engaged in studying, with an additional 26% indicating occasional study habits. The remaining participants expressed a disinterest in studying, finding it tedious, or conveyed a preference for studying but faced time constraints.

In line with a study conducted in Vietnam,⁴⁸ our findings (Tables 22 and 23) align with the notion that students' engagement with social networking sites can exert a negative influence on both study habits and interpersonal interactions. This trend is corroborated by a parallel survey, indicating an increasing prevalence of heightened social media usage, notably on platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, even during class hours. The study's outcomes suggest potential adverse effects on students' behavior in the classroom and their overall academic performance. Proposing solutions to this issue, the study advocates for the implementation of timed-off software to regulate and curtail social media usage among students.⁴⁹ These recommendations underscore the importance of finding a balance between online engagement and academic focus, emphasizing the need to manage social media use effectively to enhance students' educational experiences.

Study Limitations

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged:

1. **Self-Reported Data:** The reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, as participants may underreport or overreport their social media usage and its impacts due to social desirability bias or recall inaccuracies.
2. **Cross-Sectional Design:** The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causality between social media use and its effects on mental health and behavior. Longitudinal studies are needed to provide more robust insights into these relationships.²⁶
3. **Sample Representation:** While efforts were made to ensure a representative sample, certain segments of the population may have been underrepresented, which could affect the generalizability of the findings.
4. **COVID-19 Context:** The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly altered social media usage patterns and mental health dynamics. These contextual factors must be considered when interpreting the results.

Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to better understand the causal relationships between social media use and its impacts on mental health and behavior. Additionally, studies should explore the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on social media usage and mental health.^{20,27} There is also a need for research that examines the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting healthy social media habits and improving mental health outcomes.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several policy recommendations can be made:

1. **Mental Health Support:** Implement mental health support services that address the anxiety and stress associated with social media use, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁸
2. **Digital Literacy Education:** Promote digital literacy education to help individuals navigate social media safely and responsibly, reducing exposure to explicit content and hate speech.²⁹
3. **Healthy Social Media Practices:** Encourage healthy social media practices through public health campaigns that highlight the importance of balanced online and offline activities.³¹
4. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Develop culturally sensitive public health strategies that consider the unique social and cultural context of Afghanistan.³²
5. **Support for Remote Learning:** Provide support for remote learning that helps students balance their educational and leisure activities on digital platforms, enhancing academic performance.³⁵

In conclusion, this study offers a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between Afghan youth, social media, and its multifaceted impacts, providing valuable insights for future research and interventions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this pioneering study offers a comprehensive exploration of social media usage patterns among Afghan youth and their diverse impacts on various aspects of life. Through meticulous analysis, the study uncovers prominent themes such as platform preferences, user motivations, mental health implications, entertainment-driven time allocation, financial expenditures, exposure to explicit content, prevalence of hate speech, ramifications on study habits, cultural norms, and the influence on religious perspectives.

Notably, the findings emphasize the prevalence of Facebook as the leading platform in Afghanistan and delve into the multifaceted reasons driving social media use. Mental health concerns, particularly anxiety and tension, emerge as significant issues, with a complex interplay involving other variables. The study sheds light on the substantial time allocated to social media, raising concerns about its potential impact on sleep patterns and overall mental well-being.

A noteworthy trend reveals that a majority of participants engage in social media for leisure and entertainment, with a significant percentage utilizing it primarily for amusement and idle time. This insight is crucial in understanding the evolving nature of leisure activities in the digital age. Financial considerations, such as the monthly cost of internet connectivity and the economic context in Afghanistan, underscore the need for nuanced cross-cultural analyses of social media usage.

The study delves into sensitive topics such as exposure to explicit content and hate speech, highlighting the challenges posed by these issues on mental and physical health. Cultural norms and privacy considerations in Afghanistan contribute to the complexity of these discussions, urging a nuanced approach in cross-cultural examinations.

The impact on study habits and academic performance among students is a critical dimension explored in this study, revealing potential adverse effects that necessitate effective strategies for managing social media use. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for a balanced approach to online engagement, considering its multifaceted implications on individuals and society.

In essence, this investigation provides a foundational understanding of the intricate dynamics between Afghan youth and social media, offering insights that contribute to ongoing discussions about the role and impact of digital

technologies in contemporary societies. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge in this field and underscore the importance of continued research to inform policies and interventions that promote healthy digital habits and well-being.

Data Sharing Statement

The data collected for this study is securely stored with the research committee of the Ghalib University. Access to the data is available upon request, subject to approval by the research committee and principal author this study (Dr. Hedayatullah Ehsan). Interested parties may obtain access by submitting a polite request to the designated contact person. We are committed to facilitating access to the data while ensuring compliance with ethical and privacy considerations.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Ghalib University's Institutional Review and Ethical Board, which adheres to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were informed through the questionnaire that their participation was entirely voluntary, ensuring their right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits was provided to all participants, enabling them to make an informed decision regarding their involvement. For participants under 18 years of age, informed consent was obtained from a parent or legal guardian. Strict measures were taken to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of participants' data, aligning with ethical guidelines to protect their rights and well-being throughout the research process.

Consent for Publication

All participants involved in this study have provided their explicit consent for the sharing and publication of their data for academic and research purposes. They understand that their information may be used in scientific publications and presentations while ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality.

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