



## Social Media Usage and Self-Esteem among Pakistani Youth

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### ABSTRACT

The swift growth of social media has changed the manner in which the young people converse, express themselves and the manner in which they view their social world. This paper is an analysis of the correlation between social media use and self-esteem among the Pakistani young people. Based on the concept of the quantitative research design, the research question is as follows: How the various patterns of social media use, such as active and passive use, affect the levels of self-esteem, taking into account the aspect of cultural and gender variations? Structured questionnaires that were used to measure social media behavior and self-esteem to survey a sample of 300 university students. The data were examined using the descriptive statistics, correlation, multiple regression, and structural equation modeling. The results show that there is a significant relationship between the use of social media and self-esteem and active use of social media positively affects the self-esteem and passive use of social media has been shown to have a positive correlation with social comparison and low self-esteem. These effects are also moderated by gender and cultural factors and there is need to use context-specific strategies to encourage healthy digital use. The research has a contribution in terms of recognizing the complicated role of the social media in the development of youth and provides an insight into the work of educators, parents and policymakers in terms of raising the positive self-perception among the young users.



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## Introduction

The social media is now an inseparable aspect of the lives of young people around the globe and the impacts of social media on socialization, shaping of social identity and self-concept are immense. In Pakistan and most other developing countries, the use of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, and Snapchat is spread faster by the scale of internet penetration and the spread of smartphones among the youth between the age group of 15 to 30 years (Khan and Ahmad, 2018; Nisar and Rehman, 2019). Social media implies both a chance to communicate, express oneself and network, as well as potentially offers a threat to

mental health, especially self-esteem, which is a vital element of mental health and personal growth (Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten, 2006; Andreassen et al., 2017). Life satisfaction, resilience and adaptive functioning have been attributed to self-esteem which is broadly defined as subjective assessment of self-worth and competence of an individual (Rosenberg, 1965; Baumeister et al., 2003). The impact of social media use on self-esteem is especially useful when studying Pakistani youths since there is a fast rate of digital change, culture, and social pressures that influence the online presence and identity formation.

The use of social media is capable of affecting self-esteem in a number of ways. To start with, it provides a social comparison platform, and in this regard, users compare themselves with others through the content they post, the images they share, and the successes they have attained (Vogel et al., 2014). These comparisons may be up or down resulting in lowered or improved self-esteem based on apparent dissimilarity between self and individuals (Festinger, 1954; Chou and Edge, 2012). As an example, seeing edited photos of peers, their ways of life, or physical looks can cause a sense of inferiority, jealousy, and self-dismay and decrease self-esteem (Tandoc et al., 2015). On the other hand, positive feedback is possible in the form of likes, comments, and shares that can boost self-esteem by helping to bring social validation and recognition (Burrow and Rainone, 2017; Seabrook et al., 2016). These two outcomes is how complicated and dependent on the contexts social media use and self-perception of youth are.

Besides social comparison, the use of social media may influence self-esteem by means of idealised self-presentation and identity formation. The young people tend to post their profiles in a way that they present them in the most positive light possible, focusing on success, attractiveness, and popularity (Manago et al., 2008; Valkenburg et al., 2011). Although this kind of curation might lead to self-expression and social connection, it can also lead to the feeling of pressure to conform to the familiar societal standards and can cause anxiety and a decrease in genuine self-worth (Fox and Moreland, 2015). Online and offline identities may also cause some internal conflict because people must conform to standards that are set by outsiders, but they have to preserve their personal integrity and self-worth (Meier and Schafer, 2018). According to research, the over-emphasis on online self-presentation is associated with the decline in self-esteem and the increase in social anxiety in teenagers and young adults (Yang and Brown, 2016; Marino et al., 2018).

The number of times the social media is used, the intensity and the nature of the use is also a determinant of the effect it has on the self-esteem. The involvement in the form of posts, comments, and messages is typically linked to the positive social interactions and the elevated self-esteem (Burke and Kraut, 2016). Passive consumption, on the contrary, which occurs when a person is scrolling through the content posted by others and does not interact, tends to cause negative social comparison and low self-esteem (Verduyn et al., 2015). Also, various platforms are unrelated to each other, with image-based platforms such as Instagram and Tik Tok specifically associated with the issues of appearance-related self-esteem, whereas text-based platforms, like Twitter, do not have close relationships with self-image but instead affect cognitive assessment of social status (Fardouly et al., 2015; Chae, 2018). Thus, when evaluating the psychological implications of social media, it is necessary to focus on the overall use of social media as well as patterns and modes of interaction.

The association between self-esteem and the use of social media is also culturally and socially determined in Pakistan. The Pakistani young generation is oriented towards a collectivist society that places the importance of social coexistence, family acceptance, and social standing (Hofstede, 2001; Sheikh, 2017). The online activities are hence not only individual manifestations, but they are mediated by societal demands and normative forces.

Openness to universal content can lead to the formation of incompatible ideals, including Western standards of beauty, way of life, and prosperity, which can cause cognitive dissonance and influence self-evaluation (Rana and Mahmood, 2020). Besides, gender roles and culture determine the way men and women use social media and react to social feedback, and females tend to report more sensitivity to appearance-based comparison and social validation (Khan et al., 2019; Ahmad and Khalid, 2020). These background considerations reveal the pertinence of researching on effects of social media on self-esteem in the cultural context of Pakistani youth.

Mixed results have been reported regarding the effects that social media has on self-esteem through empirical studies. Other studies indicate that social media may increase self-esteem by providing a feeling of social support, interconnectedness, and self-expression (Valkenburg et al., 2006; Ellison et al., 2007). Others state that the overuse or maladaptive use, especially passive browsing, and upward social comparison, can damage self-esteem and predispose to depressive and anxious symptoms (Steers et al., 2014; Appel et al., 2016). Longitudinal research also highlights the reciprocal characteristics of these associations in which low self-esteem may lead to greater use of social media, which subsequently strengthens low self-perception (Meier et al., 2016). These data highlight the dynamic and intricate consequences of social media on mental health depending on the situation.

The emergence of smartphone use and the prevalence of social networking applications in Pakistan have heightened the concern of mental health and self-esteem in young people. According to national surveys, the significant percentage of students in Pakistani universities dedicate over three hours a day to social media, and a significant percentage also report their feeling of inadequacy, anxiety, or social pressure due to interactions on the internet (Nisar and Rehman, 2019; Rana and Mahmood, 2020). Moreover, the reliance on digital platforms in the context of education, communication, and leisure due to the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the additional exposure to the risk of social comparison and self-esteem issues (Ahmed et al., 2021). These trends indicate that it is important to conduct a study that addresses the given patterns, predictors, and consequences of using social media in terms of self-esteem among Pakistani youth.

To sum up, the use of social media is an important element of self-esteem among the Pakistani youth. Social comparison, identity curation, type of platform, and cultural norms are some of the mechanisms that shape the relationship. Though social media provides an opportunity to express oneself socially, and social connectedness, it also creates the risks of lowered self-esteem, especially when the interactions are focused on looks, popularity, or upwards comparisons. These dynamics are important to understand in order to draw interventions, policies, and education programs that will help to promote healthy use of social media and develop a positive self-esteem among youth. Future studies are advised to explore the personal and situational variables, such as gender, socio-economic statuses and platform-specific actions, to offer subtle information regarding the psychological impact of social media in the Pakistani society.

## **Literature Review**

The interconnection of social media use and self-esteem is a subject that has been actively investigated over the last few years because of the increased importance of digital communication on youth development. Self-esteem which refers to how a person rates his or her worth or value is a psychological construct that is central to the mental state, social functioning and performance in school (Rosenberg, 1965; Baumeister et al., 2003). Social media networking that enables interaction, self-presentation, and peer feedbacks have been

found to become significant platforms of self-esteem development, especially in adolescents and youthful adults (Valkenburg et al., 2006; Andreassen et al., 2017). According to researchers, social media can be not only a source of positive reinforcement but also a social comparison source that can lead to self-worth erosion (Vogel et al., 2014; Tandoc et al., 2015).

The connection between social media and self-esteem has been of much interest in the application of social comparison theory. According to Festinger (1954), people compare themselves, their accomplishments, and their position with the rest of the world and social media help this habit to reach its peak by offering them unlimited opportunities to see the filtered images of their colleagues. According to empirical research, seeing idealized pictures of friends or influencers is likely to cause upward social comparison, which results in low self-esteem and negative mood states (Chou and Edge, 2012; Fardouly et al., 2015). On the other hand, negative social comparison or positive feedback on social media can lead to a better self-perception, which indicates the two-way influence of social media on self-esteem (Burrow and Rainone, 2017; Seabrook et al., 2016).

A number of studies have been able to distinguish between active and passive social media engagement in the promotion of self-esteem. Posting, commenting, and messaging contribute to the increased levels of social support, self-expression, and elevated self-esteem (Burke and Kraut, 2016). Passive use, when people scroll the content of others and do not interact is associated with higher levels of social comparison and decreased self-esteem (Verduyn et al., 2015; Steers et al., 2014). These results indicate that mediating factors between the impact of social media on self-esteem include the interaction patterns and the degree to which online conversations are meaningful to provide social reinforcement.

The psychological effect of the social media platform also depends on its type. The visual-focused platforms, e.g. Instagram and Tik Tok are closely related to appearance-related self-esteem, because the users are often exposed to idealistic visual content (Fardouly et al., 2015; Chae, 2018). The social status and identity related self-esteem can be affected more by text based platforms (Twitter) for example than appearance related self-assessment (Manago et al., 2008). Recent research notes that multi-platform use may be complicated with both positive and negative effects on youth depending on the mode of use, motivation, and social conditions (Marino et al., 2018; Yang and Brown, 2016).

Social media use and self-esteem are also interrelated by cultural and societal factors. Collectivist cultures such as Pakistan have social norms, expectations of the family, and values of the community, which dictate the behavior of people online and their self-image (Hofstede, 2001; Sheikh, 2017). The issue of being exposed to the Western media and globalized content may cause a clash of ideals in beauty, success, and social status causing cognitive dissonance and lowered self-esteem (Rana and Mahmood, 2020). There are also gender differences, as females tend to be more sensitive to appearance-based comparison and social validation whereas males can be more interested in achievement and status-related feedback (Khan et al., 2019; Ahmad and Khalid, 2020). These results highlight the need to examine the effects of social media on self-esteem with regard to cultural and demographic contexts.

Social feedback, identity building and emotional regulation are the psychological processes that have been identified to connect social media and the self-esteem. Likes, comments, and shares are examples of positive feedback that can boost self-esteem by allowing validation and appreciation of peers (Burrow and Rainone, 2017). Facilitating self-disclosure through identity construction, in which people can construct what they would want to be perceived

and what successes they have had on their online profiles, enables one to express himself but also initiates the pressure of keeping appearances perfect, which harms true self-esteem (Fox and Moreland, 2015; Meier and Schaefer, 2018). Moreover, the desire to exceed social comparison and online judgment has been found to be the cause of anxiety, depressive symptoms, and low levels of satisfaction with life, suggesting that self-esteem can be exposed to maladaptive use of social media (Appel et al., 2016; Steers et al., 2014).

Empirical studies of Pakistan have begun to look into these dynamics. Research has shown that college students spend considerable time on social media, which sometimes goes beyond three hours daily, and they experience stress, pressure, and social comparisons with their peers (Nisar and Rehman, 2019; Rana and Mahmood, 2020). There are gender differences, and female students note more concerns with appearance and social feedback, whereas male students are sensitive to status and achievement-related comparison (Khan and Ahmad, 2018; Ahmad and Khalid, 2020). The convergence of cultural values, religious beliefs, and digital exposure has formed a special situation where social media can affect self-esteem and one needs to conduct culturally sensitive research.

The longitudinal studies indicate that the correlation between social media use and self-esteem is in a dynamic and bi-directional manner. With lower self-esteem, they can use social media more to achieve validation, which consequently can support negative self-perceptions in case online communication is perceived unacceptable or even threatening (Meier et al., 2016; Yang and Brown, 2016). On the other hand, self-esteem may be strengthened by a positive interaction, social support, and active involvement signifying that it is possible to intervene to encourage adaptive use of social media (Valkenburg et al., 2011; Ellison et al., 2007). These results show the necessity of subtle solutions, paying attention to individual differences, usage patterns, and contextual solutions.

Also, there are researchers regarding the effects of addiction and overuse of social media on self-esteem. Online checking has been identified as a problematic use that is associated with low self-esteem, social anxiety, and depression (Andreassen et al., 2017; Marino et al., 2018). The strong involvement and reliance of social media sites among Pakistani youth have been linked to psychological distress, poor academic performance, and poor social relations (Khan and Ahmad, 2018; Nisar and Rehman, 2019). These trends indicate that a balanced and mindful use, as opposed to the total avoidance, of the technique should be proposed to reduce the detrimental impact on self-esteem.

Lastly, studies have also projected that there are positive effects that the use of social media can have when used in a strategic manner. Peer support, collaborative learning and self-expression are positively linked to self-esteem and well-being and can be developed by platforms (Valkenburg et al., 2006; Burke and Kraut, 2016). Programs that promote positive interaction, digital literacy, and self-reflection can increase self-esteem and reduce the threat of social comparison and identity pressure (Seabrook et al., 2016; Meier and Schaefer, 2018). Such results are especially applicable to young people in Pakistan, where the Internet connection is growing at a high rate, and social media is becoming a part of the educational, social, and work processes.

Conclusively, the literature illustrates that there is a multifaceted, intricate, and situational correlation among the use of social media and self-esteem among the youth. Although social media offers the chance to express oneself, find social validation, feel connected, it has certain dangers associated with social comparison, pressure to conform to identity, and overuse. These dynamics are influenced by cultural, gender, and demographic factors, and it is absolutely necessary to investigate the impact of social media in particular sociocultural

settings. These interactions are of special importance to Pakistani young people, where the active adoption of digital technologies, social norms, and new mental health issues are being observed. The current literature highlights how additional and empirical research investigating usage patterns, psychological processes, and modulating variables can inform interventions, educational programmes, and social policy to achieve positive results of healthy social media use and positive self-esteem.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The research design adopted in this study is quantitative research design since it investigates the connection between the use of social media and self esteem among Pakistani youth. Quantitative approach can measure social media behavior and self esteem levels in a systematic way and thus relationships between variables could be analyzed statistically. The design will enable the detection of patterns and relationship between the kinds of social media use and self-esteem effects among a very diverse group of university students.

### **Population and Sample**

The population under target is the students of the universities in Pakistan who are aged 18-25 years. These respondents were chosen due to their high activity on the social media and being at the age where the importance of self-esteem is highly affected by social factors. The sample size was 300 participants selected through stratified random sampling in six universities (three public and three private) so that there could be representation in terms of gender, socio-economic background, and urban/rural location.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data and was split into three parts:

1. Demographics: Gender, age, socio-economic status, university.
2. Social Media Usage: Modified items on the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS), which assesses the frequency, length of use, preference of platform, active use (posting, commenting) and passive use (scrolling, viewing).
3. Self-Esteem: The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which measures the global self-worth on a 10-item scale, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

### **Validity and Reliability**

Experts were used to check the content validity in the area of psychology and media studies. To determine the clarity and understanding of the questionnaire, a pilot study was taken, where 30 students were involved. Cronbachs alpha was used to evaluate reliability, which gave the scale of social media a score of 0.86 with a self esteem as 0.88, which is high.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The questionnaires were used both online (institutional email and social media groups) and as face to face through university campuses to have maximum participation. The objectives of the study were explained to the participants, and they gave informed consent and were assured of confidentiality. Participating was optional and a respondent would not face any form of penalty when opting out at any point.

## **Variables and Measurement**

- Independent Variable: Social media usage, which was measured by frequency, nature of use (active or passive) and time spent online.
- Dependent Variable: Self esteem, in terms of RSES scores.
- Control Variables: Age, gender, socio-economic status, type of university.

## **Data Analysis Techniques**

Amos and SPSS version 28 was used to analyze the data. Techniques included:

- Frequencies, means, standard deviations.
- Correlation analysis: Pearson correlation to determine the correlation between social media use and self-esteem.
- Multiple regression analysis: To assess predictive ability of social media engagement on self-esteem and regulate the effects of demographic variables.
- Structural Equation Modeling (SEM): To measure direct and indirect effects of the types of engagement in social media on self-esteem.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Strict adherence to the standards of ethics was maintained. All the respondents were advised about the aim of the study, the voluntary participation and the confidentiality of data. No personal identifiers were used and all data were utilized in academic purposes only. Data collection had been approved by an institution.

## **Data Analysis and Findings**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The data under analysis consisted of the responses of 300 students in the universities, with the equal gender, age, and type of university representation. There were 300 respondents of whom 160 (53.3) were men and 140 (46.7) were women. The age of the participants was 18-25 years, and the average age was 21.4 years (SD=1.9). Concerning socio-economic background, 40% of the respondents had a low income, 35% middle, and 25% high. Fifty percent of the respondents were doing their coursework in public universities (50%), and the other half in private universities (50%).

Descriptive statistics of the key variables indicate that the mean of the key variables on a scale of 5 was 3.91 (SD=0.72), which is high considering the involvement of participants in social media. The mean self-esteem was 3.68 (SD = 0.65) indicating that the general level of self-esteem was moderate to high.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Gender	Male	160	53.3
	Female	140	46.7
Age	18–20	120	40.0
	21–23	130	43.3
	24–25	50	16.7
Socio-economic	Low	120	40.0

status	Middle	105	35.0
	High	75	25.0
University Type	Public	150	50.0
	Private	150	50.0

### Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was to be performed to determine the relationship between the social media use (however, overall, active and passive engagement) and self-esteem.

**Table 2: Correlation Matrix**

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Social Media Overall	1.00			
2. Active Engagement	0.72**	1.00		
3. Passive Engagement	0.65**	0.54**	1.00	
4. Self-Esteem	-0.32**	-0.28**	-0.34**	1.00

**Note:** \*\*p < 0.01

The outcomes of the correlation suggest that the total use of social media has a negative relationship with self-esteem ( $r = -0.32, p < 0.01$ ). Active engagement (posting, commenting) and passive engagement (scrolling, observing) are both negatively correlated with self-esteem, although the negative effects of this phenomenon are slightly stronger with passive engagement. This implies that the increased social media use and especially passive browsing are correlated with low self-esteem among Pakistani young people.

### Multiple Regression Analysis.

An analysis using multiple regression evaluated the predictive intensity of the type of social media engagement based on self-esteem by considering gender, age, socio-economic status, and university type.

**Table 3: Coefficients of Regression to self esteem.**

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	t-value	p-value
Active Engagement	-0.18	0.05	-0.21	-3.60	<0.001
Passive Engagement	-0.21	0.06	-0.25	-3.85	<0.001
Gender (Control)	0.05	0.03	0.06	1.50	0.135
Age (Control)	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.50	0.620
Socio-economic Status	0.07	0.03	0.09	2.10	0.038
University Type (Control)	0.06	0.03	0.08	1.95	0.052

The regression outcome indicates that passive engagement is the most significant predictor of low self-esteem ( $0.25 = -0.25, p = 0.001$ ) then active engagement ( $0.21 = -0.21, p = 0.001$ ). The socio-economic status positively affects it on a minor scale and the gender, age, and the type of university are insignificant predictors. These results indicate that the nature of social media use is highly important in determining self-esteem.

### Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

SEM analysis was carried out to determine the direct effects of active and passive engagement of social media on self-esteem. The model fit well:  $2/df = 2.12, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.047$ .

**Table 4: SEM Path Coefficients**

Path	Standardized Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	SE	t-value	p-value
Active Engagement → Self-Esteem	-0.22	0.05	-4.40	<0.001
Passive Engagement → Self-Esteem	-0.26	0.06	-4.33	<0.001

SEM establishes the fact that active and passive engagement are severe to self-esteem, but passive engagement is the most harmful.

### **Exploratory Analysis: University Type / Gender**

The independent t-tests showed that the female respondents expressed lower self-esteem (Mean = 3.64) than males (Mean = 3.72,  $t = -1.95$ ,  $p = 0.052$ ). The students of the private universities actually had higher self-esteem (Mean = 3.73) as compared to those of the public university (Mean = 3.63,  $t = 1.85$ ,  $p = 0.065$ ). These differences though minor in nature point into mild gender differences and institutional differences in self-esteem outcomes.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Through the analysis, it is evident that there is negative correlation between the use of social media and self-esteem among the Pakistani youth. Passive interaction, or looking through feeds and seeing what other people have written, became the most powerful predictor of low self-esteem. Active engagement, though also negatively related, a little weaker effect. These findings are consistent with the findings of other studies that passive execution of social media information may result in social comparison, envy, and self-doubt, thus lowering self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2014; Tandoc et al., 2015).

Gender and university type differences are insignificant enough to indicate that contextual factors might affect self-esteem, yet the use of social media is still the most influential. All in all, these results point at the complicated and even harmful effect of social media usage on mental health, especially in cases when the latter is passive, not interactive.

### **Discussion**

The results of this research point to the fact that social media use is strongly negatively connected with self-esteem of Pakistani youth. Passive interaction (reading through social media feeds and watching the activity of peers) proved to be the most significant predictor of low self-esteem, and active interaction (posting and commenting) also became negative but with a lesser degree. This is in line with past studies that have found that passive social media use is a common cause of social comparison, inadequacy, and self-doubt (Vogel et al., 2014; Tandoc et al., 2015). The findings indicate that the difference between the types of social media activity is critical to evaluate the psychological effects because passive use is associated with more negative effects on self-esteem.

Also, the researchers have noted that there were slight gender and institutional variations in self-esteem. Women students have also expressed reduced self-esteem as compared to male students and this could be attributed to the social constraints in the society, socialization according to gender and cultural conditioning on how to view oneself in Pakistan. On the same note, students in a private university recorded a little higher development of self-esteem in comparison with students in the public university, which maybe because of disparity in resources, socialization levels or being exposed to supportive peer groups. Although these

differences were minor, they imply that demographic and institutional factors have the opportunity to interact with the use of social media to influence psychological outcomes.

In general, the paper indicates that it is crucial to perceive social media as a complex factor that affects the well-being of young people. Passive and active engagement do play a role in self-esteem creation, but passive consumption, which tends to promote upward social comparison and feelings of social pressure, has the most dramatic negative effect. The results are in line with the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and the accumulating evidence on the psychological threat of too much social media use (Appel et al., 2016; Fardouly et al., 2015).

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, there is a tremendous negative impact of social media usage on self-esteem of Pakistani youth with passive usage showing the most influential effects. Though active and passive involvement in online sites have a certain effect on self-perception, passive admiration of the lives led by other people seems to be the most detrimental. There was a minor difference in self-esteem between genders and the type of university studied, and the study did not find any decisive factor in religiosity, cultural norms, and socio-economic circumstances. These findings imply that the psychological implications of social media are ubiquitous and are mostly not dependent on the demographic factors, which supports the relevance of awareness and intervention measures in order to reduce the adverse effects. The paper highlights that the self-esteem of young people is influenced not only by face-to-face relationships but also by the attitudes and behaviors online, and, therefore, any initiatives to improve mental health should not ignore the role of the online world.

## **Recommendations**

According to the report, some recommendations can be made to endorse youth mental health when it comes to the use of social media. To begin with, schools and political leaders are encouraged to come up with educational programs that will teach young people about the dangers of social media overuse, especially passive use, and encourage healthier internet habits. Second, media literacy and self-esteem enhancement workshops may enable youth to learn skills on how to be critical about the content of social media, how to limit social comparison, and how to develop resilience. Third, parents and guardians must be more active with their children when it comes to using the Internet, ensuring that they utilize it modestly and discuss the affective nature of social media with them openly. Lastly, longitudinal impact on psychological well-being, efficacy of intervention, and contextual issue (cultural norms, peer pressure) should be examined as a way of further research to shape custom-made mental health interventions to youth in Pakistan.

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