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Social Media Addiction and Healthy Life Habits: A Comparative Study of New York City - USA and Lahore - Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Developing comparative analysis between negative and positive health habits among young adults in wake of social media usage among youth in Lahore – Pakistan and New York, USA, is the core objective of this research. Different parameters applied on habits of young adults due to social media usage revealed excessive use of social media was resulting into negative effects on healthy habits of young adults in Pakistan, wherein social media was the least preference in USA. The purpose of the study was achieved to great extent.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study employed in-depth interviews qualitative method to extract detailed opinions about the phenomenon under exploration. In-depth interview technique seemed the most appropriate method for qualitative studies for data collection.

Findings: A massive gulf between social media consuming habits of Pakistani and Americans owing to multiple factors was established from this study. With the support of relevant stakeholders including cellular companies, prominent figures of society and Tech icons in USA has chalked out a comprehensive social-structural mechanism for wellbeing of the society at large particularly the young adults wherein the developing nations including Pakistan has least concern about this important component of social wellbeing.

Implications/Originality/Value: The US citizens love to enjoy through physical activities i.e., plan weekends and other events and even they avoid using cell phones / social media while dinning collectively at restaurants. In Lahore, however, the youngsters have developed negative social media usage habits which are highly affecting their healthy lifestyle.



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Introduction

A different form of habitual behavior has emerged from excessive usage of social media in contemporary era (Paiman, 2023). Undoubtedly, there is a long list of positive and negative behavioral outcomes due to using social media. In fact, habit is developed as a result of implicit relationships between action and reaction based on punishment or reward (Anderson, 2016). People develop cognitive linkage in wake of specific context and responses on any action. Hence, the social media users learn various behaviors from different contexts; accordingly they depict different type of behavior in specific circumstances (Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015). In broader perspective, habits developing from excessive usage of social media platforms are the outcomes of continuous evolution of modern media and modern technology. For instance, in contemporary world of modern technology, people with smart phone devices have options to consume their time on various social media platforms, different apps, websites, tools etc. Consequently, they have developed tech oriented habits which can be positive or negative if they are examined in particular context. An extensive body of literature revealed that once the users develop certain habits; they repeat to save times whenever they are confronted to specific phenomenon. It is an addictive habit on part of the users (Moreno-Munoz, Bellido-Outeirino, Siano, & Gomez-Nieto, 2016).

So, the use of social media has become an addiction in most parts of the developing countries especially in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and other nations (Hu et al., 2014). Social media is believed to be the most powerful uncontrollable medium for bombardment of speedy information about different walks of life (Brown & Duguid, 2017). The eastern and western nations have a vivid difference of approach towards adoption of new technology in their routine lifestyle. The western or the developed countries discuss negative aspects of new technology for couple of initial years and prepare their population about negative sides of the technology. This makes them to introduce legislation, proper rules and regulations, time constraints and consumption habits of the technology. Later on, the developed nations discuss positive use of new technology through which they build their nations in accordance with the needs of the population thus technology becomes beneficial for the general public. On the other side, the developing nations have quite different approach towards accepting new technology. The developing countries seldom think about negative sides or drawbacks of the new technology rather they swiftly adopt new mediums without giving a second thought by indulging them into deep down technological advancements (Brownsword, 2019; Gazzaley & Rosen, 2016).

Pakistan is one of the developing nations, which adopted social media as an integral part of social, cultural, and political life of the nation without discussing negative or positive effects of the social media (Abbas, Aman, Nurunnabi, & Bano, 2019). Lahore is the provincial capital of the Punjab, Pakistan's largest province in term of size of population wherein heterogeneous population hailing from different parts of the country share different cultures, rituals, languages and reside together in the same region of Lahore (Ghafoor, Fayyaz, Nisa, & Akbar, 2021). Total estimated population of Lahore was 11.1 million as per Census of 2017 including 52.35 per cent males and 47.64 per cent females. Demographically, Lahore is believed to be the young city as almost 40 per cent of the total population is under 15 years of age. Lahore is a traditional and

historical city which enjoys deep roots of primitive religions, cultures, civilizational development and witnessed different periods of different powerful civilizations of past and modern era (Khan, 2020). In today's era, most of the population especially the young generation is habitual of using social media excessively without thinking about benefits or drawbacks of different social media platforms. Most of the students of different academic institutions have smart phones and they have been witnessed using social media platforms at the cost of their health. Social media platforms have become addiction of young generations in Pakistan especially in Lahore. Consuming maximum time on various social media platforms has become a common feature among young generations in Lahore. The youth is consuming social media excessively without knowing the ultimate outcome of spending long hours on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, YouTube and other platforms (Noori, Sayes, & Anwari, 2023; Turel & Serenko, 2012).

According to a study, 34 per cent population of the New York City is under 24 years, 33 per cent under 44 years, 21 per cent under 64 years and 12 per cent population of the city is above 65 years of age. Although, different age groups have different social media habits but surprisingly most of the citizens have no WhatsApp installed in their smart phones rather they are habitual of using voice mails for interaction with their colleagues or professional friends. Studies revealed most of the youngsters avoid spending long hours on social media platforms. After inventing the technology, the inventors in the USA and other developed nations examined pros and cons of the technology and developed positive habits among their citizens. New York City is believed to be a city which never sleeps throughout the year. This city is the house of invention of various social media platforms (Juris, 2016). New York is further believed to be the ethnically, socially and culturally diverse metropolis of the USA with long historical background of massive international immigration. This city of the USA enjoys population comprised of almost 23.5 million citizens as per statistics released in 2020. New York City is considered as a multicultural city of the United States with almost 36 per cent of total foreign-born population from Brazil, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ecuador, Haiti, Russia etc (Kasinitz, 2023).

Statement of Problem

Social media is a new media which has swift outreach. However, approaches and methods to use social seem different in various parts of the world. In different areas of the globe, social media proved to be a blessing especially for spreading information about disasters, early warnings, assistance in providing aid and relief needs but in most of the cases, misuse of social media and excessive usage of social media have endangered human health.

The users of social media in developing countries have different approach from the users of such mediums in developed countries. For instance, social media have changed healthy life habits of social media users in third world countries, but simultaneously social media remained helpless in affecting lifestyle or healthy life habits in different parts of the developed nations. This social problem required investigation.

Significance of Study

Social media has changed healthy lifestyle thus affecting negatively to socio-economic and socio-psychological needs of the social media users. This study may assist in analyzing comparatively the reasons and circumstances, which push users for excessive usage of social media platforms in developing nations as compared to the users residing in developed nations. Therefore, this study may be significant to the extent to provide doable solutions for changing negative lifestyle endangering human life.

Literature Review

A study revealed that social media has direct impact on the health issues of the social media

users. Findings of the study stated 85 per cent female students studying in public and private sector educational institutions are using social media networking sites (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012). Online activity has become a popular activity wherein 75 per cent adults agreed to have their profile / social media account(s) on different social media networking services (Gambo & Özad, 2020). A massive majority of young adults between 18 to 24 years of age expressed to have obsession of using social media platforms notwithstanding to have knowledge about potential negative effects on their health (Easton, Morton, Tappy, Francis, & Dennison, 2018). A study revealed that in early days, the young adults in stable circumstances have developed consuming behavior of Facebook, TikTok, Snack Video etc., but with the passage of time, they have developed behavioral changes. In an American survey study, the results showed 6 per cent of the young adults in the United States accepted that their relationships have suffered due to their excessive usage of online networking sites. Likewise, online networking sites have proportional socio-psychological maladjustments as per results of the correlational studies in the USA. In some of the developed nations, the health authorities have identified mental illness category, which emerged in wake of disorder created due to excessive online networking usage (Kirmayer, Raikhel, & Rahimi, 2013; Oyeboode et al., 2021).

According to a study, health authorities in Lahore have less attention towards psychological treatment of heavy users of social media especially negative traits emerged among young adults studying in universities and colleges (Naureen, Javaid, Saif, Shaukat, & Mughal, 2022). Most of the young adults involved in social media usage have developed ‘media consumption behavior’ which have led towards perpetual consumption patterns. In fact, media consumption behavior among the young adults has led towards creating new ‘media habits’ thus causing severe mental illness problems in Lahore. Now, social media consumption behaviors are habit-driven which have made young adults habitual of using smart phones whenever they awake early in the morning. Excessive media-habits have become out of control even at the part of the young adults (Bayer, Anderson, & Tokunaga, 2022; Siraj & Ali, 2023).

According to a study, the Problematic Internet Use Model revealed that cognitive behavior emerging from multidimensional syndrome has resulted into negative academic and professional consequences (Gámez-Guadix, 2014). Findings showed that negative life habits were directly interlinked with excessive use of social media networking sites. A study carried out in Turkey have grouped social media users into five categories including social pioneers, content creators, observers, game lovers and engagers. However, most of the users were merely using social media for the sake of entertainment (Bulut & Doğan, 2017).

Most of the young adults have severe restrictions on openly using social media networking sites in the USA by the government authorities. However, here in Pakistan, most of the government authorities have not even chalked out any regulatory framework for social media for young adults or even for elders. A study revealed due to absence of any policy framework, the heavy social media users have developed negative traits (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010).

Knowledge Gap

After detailed search of relevant literature, abrupt and systematic attention of relevant authorities in third world nations is required to fill the gap of knowledge based on reasons, background and consequences of excessive usage of social media. Efforts have not been made to conduct academic and industrial research to analyze or enlist the negative healthy life habits emerging among the heavy users of social media in developing nations. This research is an effort to carry out meaningful research for the purpose given above.

Research Questions

Keeping in view of the above-mentioned literature review, the following research questions

emerged: -

- RQ1:** What kind of negative healthy life habits emerged among heavy users of social media?
- RQ2:** What different parameters are followed by social media users in Pakistan and USA?
- RQ3:** What background and reasons lie behind social media usage in Pakistan and USA?

Research Objectives

In wake of literature review and the research questions, the following research objectives have been designed to achieve this research study: -

- RO1:** To investigate negative healthy life habits emerged among heavy users of social media in Pakistan and USA.
- RO2:** To analyze the parameters followed by social media users in Lahore - Pakistan and New York City - USA.
- RO3:** To examine background and reasons present behind social media usage in Lahore - Pakistan and New York City - USA.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) as theoretical baseline to comprehend the users and media relationships. The UGT argues people use media in order to fulfill their needs and gratify the message given by the media to them. The UGT basically contradicts the core concept of the Magic Bullet Theory of 'passive audience' who accept the message of media (De Mooij & de Mooij, 2014). The UGT, however, enjoys user-audience association based on mutual interest. Originated from the discussions, findings and concepts given in various premier theories, the UGT postulates that audiences are always available consumers to consume another available product – media (Ajila, 2021). Therefore, the consumers chose particular media to gratify their needs i.e., enhance their information about any subject, general knowledge, amusement, relaxation, diversion, social interaction, escaping from tension etc. The UGT has a strong relationship with the study in hand that social media users desire to gratify their social, economic and psychological needs from different content available on social media networking sites. This study has postulated a different concept of 'excessive usage' of social media has great negative effect on mental as well as physical health of the users especially residing in third world countries (Chavez, Ruiz, Curras, & Hernandez, 2020).

Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative research methodology to explore the unique phenomenon of searching difference of opinion about positive or negative outcomes of social media usage in developed and developing nations. Quantitative methodology could also be employed to seek more empirical results but due to financial constraints and possible hurdles in collection of data, the researchers employed qualitative methodology.

Methods

The study employed in-depth interviews qualitative method to extract detailed opinions about the phenomenon under exploration. In-depth interview technique is believed to be the most appropriate technique for qualitative studies for data collection.

Universe of Study

The young adults using various social media platforms of Pakistan and the USA have been chosen as universe of the study as the study is an effort to collect expert opinion of the observers about social media users of the both nations with the lens to gauge the effects of excessive usage of social media on changing healthy life habits of the users.

Population of Study

The researchers after detailed deliberations on the subject under discussion have chosen the young adults using social media in Lahore – Punjab, Pakistan and New York City, USA, as population of the study. However, the respondents of the study have been selected the senior observers in both countries to include their observations/ opinion about changing life habits of the young adults in both nations.

Sample Size

Two expert-cum-respondents one each from Lahore and New York City has been selected as sample size for this study. Based on their knowledge and unique observations about use and misuse of social media usage, government laws, personal priorities, changing habits, changing personality traits of the social media users, the researchers considered these two respondents quite valuable for the study.

Data Analysis Tool

Data has been collected through interview protocol guide, which carried out 15 open ended questions for the respondents. Responses were recorded face-to-face during in detail interview besides getting questionnaire filled by the respondents.

Data Analysis

Two experts have been taken from the both cities of Pakistan and the USA. Basically, hailing from Pakistan, Mufti Ahmed Saeed is a US national residing in the New York City of the USA for the last over 15 years wherein Arshad Dogar is Pakistani national residing in Lahore for the last 15 years. The first respondent contains ample socio-economic and societal knowledge of the US society especially the living life style of the citizens of the New York City. The second respondent, hailing from lower Punjab, has been associated with the media industry for the last several years in Lahore; therefore, he has firm command on the pulse of the youth using social media being the eyewitness to the dynamic change by switching over from national media to social media among young adults. After detailed discussions about the subject under investigation and detailed responses of 15 open ended questions, four major categories with three main themes were derived from patterns of the qualitative data. The following themes have been analyzed in detail in following fashion: -

1. Social Media Develop Negative Life Habits
2. Parameters of Social Media Usage
3. Reasons behind Use of Social Media

Thematic Analysis

Theme No. 1

Social Media Develop Negative Life Habits

Respondent No.1

Social media is merely one part of the routine life of the US citizens. For instance, seldom people think about trending on social media in the USA. Rather, people in the United States have less concerns about news, bombardment of information or any abrupt change in any part of the world. According to the respondent,

“The US nationals have practical lifestyle to enjoy with their colleagues on weekends. One cannot believe that most of the young adults in the New York City don’t have WhatsApp installed in their smart phones because they have less interest in using WhatsApp or any other such app to get them engaged unnecessarily. Yes, they do have voice mails. In most of the cases, people in New York use voice mails for communication between each other on cell phones. So, to my utmost observation, most of the young adults have never nurtured such

negative life habits affected by the social media”.

Respondent No.2

Social media is believed to be a new media which has overlapped traditional print and electronic media in Pakistan. Social media has affected young generations in Pakistan to great extent.

“Every individual including school going girls have cell phones in their bags now. Parents have no control on their offspring pertaining to usage of cell phones. So, no one knows what sort of content was being watched by their daughter or son. Consequently, I’ve reported several stories of eloping young girls with their lovebirds. In Lahore, situation is quite catastrophic,” the respondent commented.

Interpretation of Theme: - the content of the theme itself is the best interpretation wherein the respondents have revealed the US young adults have lesser priorities for social media usage as compared to the Pakistani young adults especially the girls. People have different priorities; liking / disliking, social media using habits in both countries; therefore, the outcomes emerged among the healthy lifestyle habits are quite different. For instance, the US nationals have prioritized practical enjoyment and gathering with their friends on weekends instead of spending time on social media wherein the citizens of Lahore, Pakistan are without adequate facilities for practical enjoyment. So, comparative analysis is quite tough in this regard.

Explanation of Theme: - this theme has explained major difference of priorities among healthy life habits of the citizens of both nations. The excessive mobile usage has developed negative healthy life habits among the young adults in Lahore. Mostly, the social media users are less interested in hang out, social gathering, enjoying movies or spending times in parks or recreational places along with their classmates, family friends and other friends. Mostly, students desire to spend maximum time on using social media platforms. Now, the young adults have developed deviant behavioral changes owing to social media usage. In fact, the young adults using excessive social media in Lahore have started to accept happenings on social media as genuine reality contrary to the actual happenings in practical life. However, nothing such thing has occurred in lifestyle or caused changing healthy life habits in the New York City.

Theme No. 2

Parameters of Social Media Usage

Respondent No.1

In New York City, people are engaged in their usual lifecycle to great extent. For instance, everyone residing in New York has to work and earn money to meet the both ends of their needs. Social media has no charm for US citizens. The respondent revealed as,

“You have to pay \$500 per month to share hostel / residence with your partner. To earn that amount, you have to work consistently. You have no option to spend long hours on social media for flighty content”.

According to the 1st respondent, there is inbuilt programing in smart phones to filter filthy content when parents purchase those cell phones for their offspring. The parents have absolute control on functionality of their children till they attain the age of 18 years. They get notification on their cell phones if any of their children is watching unhealthy content. In other words, social media is under absolute control and parents can watch the content their children are watching. In such circumstances, misuse of social media is quite impossible in the USA contrary to the perception prevailing in the third world countries about lifestyle in the USA.

Respondent No.2

In Lahore, the government or the cellular companies have no monitoring policy, which may provide assistance to parents to monitor their children. In fact, the government has never ever prioritized to provide emotional and psychological protection to the young adults using social media negatively. According to the respondent,

“Pakistan has only PEMRA to regulate electronic media channels in the country. Otherwise, no serious effort has been made to chalk out rules and regulations for effective and positive usage of social media in Pakistan. Lahore is the provincial capital but the provincial government never initiated any such plan or even it never organized any awareness seminar for positive use of social media”.

Interpretation of Theme: - in USA, everyone seems busy in his/ her practical lifestyle, so, none of the residents have any spare time to consume on social media. The New York City government is quite serious about healthy lifestyle of their residents. The government in the USA has chalked out practical policies for positive use of social media. The government assists in providing alternative ways to young adults to spend fruitful hours in enjoyable ways instead of wasting time on filthy content thus injuring their mind and health. However, in Lahore not a single awareness seminar initiated by the provincial government has been conducted so far for positive use of social media.

Explanation of Theme: - there are serious parameters for positive use of social media in New York City and everyone ranging from parents to children are bound to follow those parameters while using social media. For instance, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and other social media platforms have inbuilt programs to curtail negative content on social media. Misuse of social media is unquestionable in New York City wherein in Lahore, parents as well as their offspring has no basic knowledge about rules and regulations for social media usage.

Theme No. 3

Reasons behind Use of Social Media

Respondent No.1

Most of the population especially the young adults in New York City of the USA have least priority to use social media excessively. The basic reason behind non-usage of social media in New York has no extra time.

“There is no such concept of having maids in the USA rather the housewives have to complete all tasks including washing utensils, laundry, etc., when her husband is out of home. She can use social media for five to ten minutes but the main question is to whom she will chat on WhatsApp or other social media platforms because the next person is also busy in his/ her work,” respondent commented.

According to the respondent, even his close friends watch texts/ voice notes on WhatsApp after three to four days because they have no such habit or time to waste on social media. In the USA, everyone knows that every individual is busy in his/ her own tasks, and one would be surprised to know that millions of people don't have WhatsApp accounts.

“If it's necessary then they will or send you voice mails, and the basic reason is time. Secondly, they have come to conclusions of different concepts. First of all they see negative aspects of new technology to prepare their nations, e.g., Elon Musk, Jeff Besoz, all are sensitizing their nations about negative aspects of AI. Similarly, they had sensitized about social media to their nation and people understood the consequences, so, they prioritized human interactions,” the respondent further commented.

Respondent No.2

Most of Pakistani nationals including young adults in Lahore are habitual of using social media. In fact, there are lots of reasons behind developing this habit of spending long hours on cell phones using social media. According to the respondent,

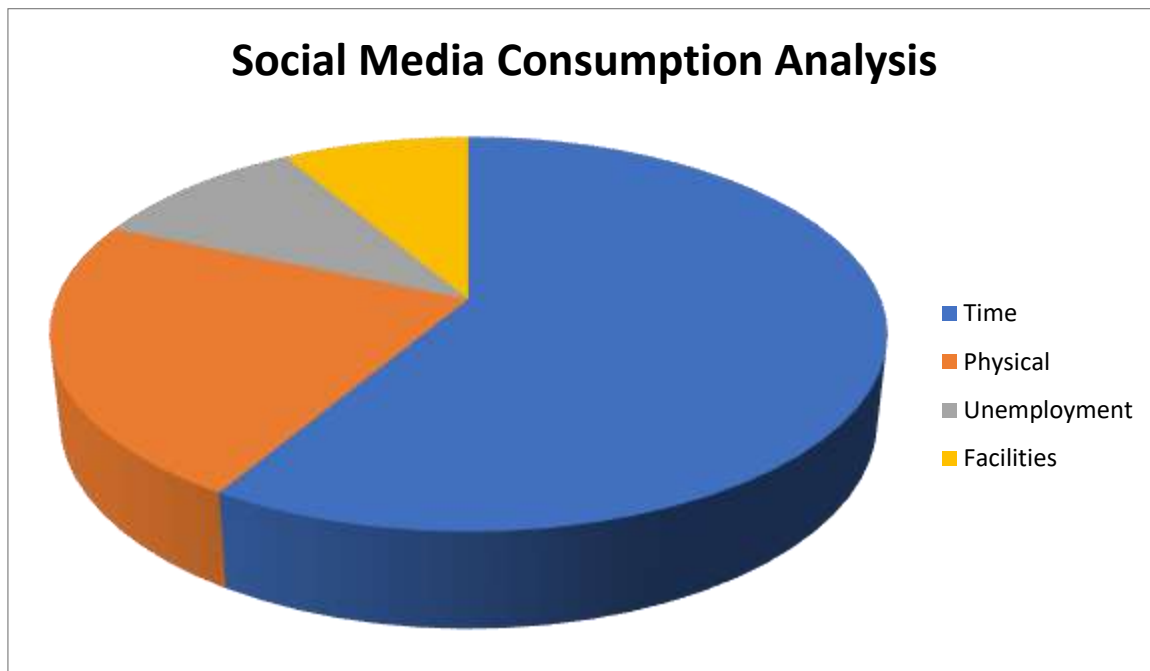
“Social media users have plenty of time as they have no other work to do except spending hours and hours on smart phones. Unemployment, non-availability of physical activities; family gatherings, outings, collective family dining and

enjoying on recreational places are seldom leading to key reasons for spending long hours on social media”.

Most of the young adults feel comfortable spending time on social media, which has almost isolated the members from the family. In fact, every member of the family even sitting together at home can be witnessed busy in watching YouTube, TikTok, Instagram etc., instead of spending time along with the family members.

Interpretation of Theme: - Most of the US nationals liked to have a cup of tea on a coffee shop for 20 minutes instead of wasting entire day on WhatsApp with friends. Likewise, they enjoy meals on restaurants with their family members; enjoy gossips, however, in Pakistan the situation is otherwise. Mostly, nine out of ten people in restaurant can be witnessed using cell phones instead of having life chat with their family members. In USA, now restaurants have introduced a policy to give 20 per cent discount if you submit your cell phone on counter of the restaurant. No doubt, people use social media, they have joined WhatsApp groups for their official engagements in industry, academia but they have no such concept of using social media like you people have in Pakistan.

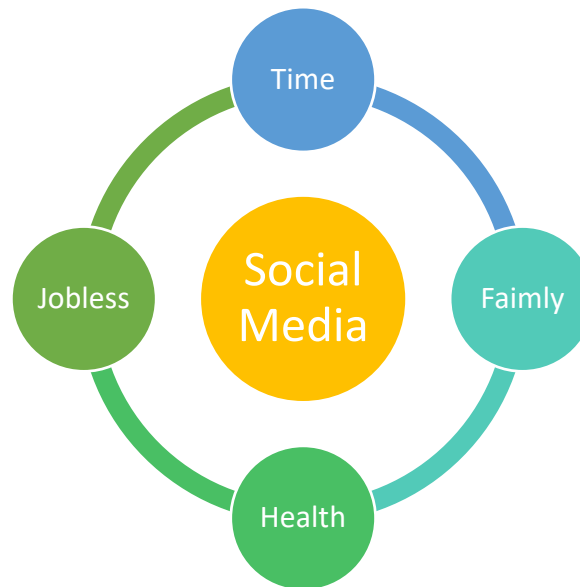
Explanation of Theme: - a plenty of reasons have been elaborated in this theme which provided in-depth insight to comprehend the causes behind using social media in New York City and Lahore. One of the major contradictory reasons has been revealed as ‘time’. Most of the US nationals have no time to spend on social media wherein in Lahore; mostly young adults have extra time to spend on social media. Secondly, the US nationals have developed habits of enjoying physically wherein Pakistani citizens in Lahore have become habitual of spending time on cell phones. In other words, the overall social media consumption analysis can be comprehended with the help of the given chart.



Conclusion

In wake of detailed discussion summarized in the chart above, the study concluded that ‘time’ was the major differentiating factor between unhealthy social media consumption habits between citizens of New York City and Lahore. The study concluded US citizens have to perform different functions to meet the both ends of their routine life; therefore, from housewives to male members of the society have to work. In Lahore, however, the citizens especially the youngsters

have developed negative social media usage habits which are highly affecting their healthy lifestyle. The study concluded the US citizens love to enjoy through physical activities i.e., plan weekends and other events and even they avoid using cell phones / social media while dining collectively at restaurants. However, in Lahore, most of the young adults are unemployed and they have no other activity but to spend time on social media; and now they have developed negative personality traits to the extent that 9 out of 10 people use social media even at dining due to absence of adequate facilities for physical activities. The study further concluded that in the following chart wherein social media addiction has changed healthy life habits altogether in Pakistan, wherein it has affected positively in the USA. All of the three research objectives were also achieved while providing adequate answers to the research questions.



Findings and Discussion

The study has found out that there is a massive gulf between social media consumption habits of Pakistani and Americans owing to multiple factors. The government in USA with the support of relevant stakeholders including cellular companies, prominent figures of society and Tech icons has chalked out a comprehensive social-structural mechanism for wellbeing of the society at large particularly the young adults. The developed nations with the advent of new technology launch massive awareness campaigns to sensitive their populace wherein the developing nations including Pakistan has least concern about this important component of social wellbeing. Every technology has positive as well as negative aspects but human beings have to adopt the ways for benefits or damages. Unfortunately, the youth in Pakistan have no access to opportunities of education, awareness or practical facilities to enjoy instead of wasting time on social media.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Keeping in view of the facts above, the following suggestions and recommendations can provide adequate ways for introducing comprehensive framework for effective and positive consumption of social media content: -

1. The Federal Ministry of Information Technology, Government of Pakistan, should develop liaison with relevant ministries of the developed nations and examine social media using policies.

2. The Federal Health Ministry, Government of Pakistan, should also develop linkage with relevant ministries and examine negative effects of excessive social media on health of the nations.
3. The law department of the government should also step forward and introduce effective legislation along with penalties for negative use of social media.
4. The cellular companies should also join hands with the government and introduce the laws at par with the effective laws, strategies and inbuilt programming in cell phones to curtail access of youth to negative content on social media.
5. Different stakeholders of society should also come forward and creative awareness seminars in academic, industry and other economic institutions.

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