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Social media is an indispensable tool that has radically changed the global landscape. It plays a significant role in fostering interconnectedness and exchange of ideas, experiences, and knowledge across nations, overcoming the challenges posed by time and distance. For instance, the United States of America (USA), a

globalized giant influencing global trends, has a significant market for social media platforms, like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram. Likewise, many other countries have also experienced an outbreak of social media, including Pakistan, where the recent surge in social media usage has left a myriad of positive and negative effects. On the darker side, cyberbullying and harassment are the most pressing concerns, which have heightened insecurity among individuals. The rising gap between real and reel life, decreasing real-life interactions, and spreading of false information also highlight the adverse effects of social media in society. However, as every coin has its two sides, social media also comes with its share of positive aspects. On the brighter side, social media stands as a key pillar in disseminating information and providing entertainment in the country. It is a dynamic medium aiming to transform digital media by amplifying its reach and driving informed engagement. Verily, Pakistan can leverage the positive aspects of social media by addressing the negative effects through prompt steps, like promoting social media awareness, raising digital media literacy, and regulating policies for cybersecurity, all of which would make social media a powerful tool for national progress. Hence, Pakistan can harness social media as a key driver for positive change in society.

Before delving into the importance of social media in contemporary times, it is critical to understand the term social media.

Social media is an innovation that facilitates people from all over the world to create, share, and exchange information in virtual communities and networks. The launch of Facebook in 2004 has paved the way for the rise of other social media giants, such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and TikTok, transforming how modern-day society communicates. In addition, social media enables individuals and businesses to voice their ideas and use these platforms to engage with their audiences. Unlike mainstream media, social media allows a two-way style of communication rather than one-way communication, which fosters more engagement and direct feedback between users and content creators. Further, it plays a key role in influencing trends, shaping public opinion, and catalyzing social movements.

Discussing the importance of social media in contemporary times, it is imperative to note that social media provides a platform for people to express their opinions, share information, and participate in public discourse. It plays a crucial role in highlighting pressing issues, such as humanitarian crises, environmental challenges, and social issues; thus, it drives collective action and encourages collaborative solutions to address these critical concerns. **For instance, Palestinian journalists like Motaz Azaiza, along with other content reporters, are using Instagram to portray heart-wrenching realities of the war crimes committed by Israel.** As a result, this heightened awareness in public has unified the world regardless of geographical differences and beliefs. Undoubtedly, it is a vital instrument in the contemporary world to keep the public aware and drive change globally.

Currently, with the advancement in technology, social media has become a necessity for youth, celebrities, politicians, and influencers in Pakistan. As social media is easily accessible, people use it to their advantage and utilize its reach for various personal, professional, and social benefits. Moreover, the trend of blogging and vlogging has also gained momentum over the past year in the country as individuals document their lives and gain popularity, providing them with multiple opportunities. **According to the recent report of the Global Digital Insights (GDI), 'In Pakistan, Facebook has the largest user base with more than 3.07 billion monthly active users, followed by YouTube with 2.5 billion users, and Instagram with 2 billion users.** This unprecedented rise highlights how social media has become the need of time and increased people's over-dependence on social media apps. Hence, the country is currently transcending towards the rapid use of social media, evolving digital landscape.

Verily, social media is a transformative tool that comes with its own set of positive and negative aspects.

Moving towards the negative aspects of social media, the widened gap between real and reel life stands as a notable drawback of social media. The glamorous lifestyle of influencers and content creators portrays a utopian and flawless picture of life; therefore, it traps the managerial class and others in a vicious loop of inferiority complex. For instance, **the rising influencer culture in Pakistan has promoted unrealistic beauty standards in women, leading to the encouragement of beauty filters and other cosmetology procedures.** This depicts the bleak picture of today's generation struggling for perfect outer appearances, luxurious lifestyles, and perfection in everything. Hence, the excessive usage of social media has created a gap between real and online life.

Stepping down the ladder, the widespread dissemination of misinformation is another most prevalent issue in the country due to social media. Easy access to social media platforms allows people to spread news according to their vested interests. Many politicians use digital platforms to spread misinformation to discrete opponent candidates; they target each other to suppress their political participation. **According to a report by the Digital Media Wing (DMW) of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, investigations into misinformation campaigns during elections reveal that political parties frequently use defaming strategies to suppress their rivals.** This highlights how news spreads like wildfire, leading to worse outcomes, such as polarization and hatred in society. Therefore, social media is widely used as a tool to spread misinformation in the country.

Moving further, social media has destroyed real-life communication, leading to social isolation. Overdependence on social media hinders an individual's interpersonal skills and shatters their confidence, and ultimately, this diminishes the frequency of in-depth conversations and genuine real-life connections. **As per the American Psychological Association (APA) report published in 2023, excessive use of social media can lead to constant checker syndrome that results in diminished real-life communication.** Consequently, this leads to distraction and a lack of presence during face-to-face interactions. This highlights the detrimental effect on the youth's mind, weakening personal connections. Hence, overdependence on

social media has hindered real-life communication, followed by feelings of alienation in society.

Further, in the age of virtual reality, cyberbullying and harassment have become persistent issues fueled by overreliance on social media. The digital world is infiltrated by multiple cyberbullying techniques, such as phishing, cyberstalking, trolling, and web assaults; as a result, this leaves ever-lasting psychological wounds on victims' souls. **According to the Federal Investigation Agency report published recently, 'Ayesha, a university student in Rawalpindi took her own life in 2023 after being harassed and blackmailed online.'** This depicts how cyberbullying and harassment undermine a victim's self-esteem, which sparks humiliation, depression, and a feeling of alienation in victims. Therefore, social media has indeed given birth to serious challenges like cyberbullying and harassment.

However, as every coin has its two sides, social media also comes with its share of positive aspects. On the brighter side, it is significant to highlight multifold benefits of social media in Pakistan.

First, the role of disseminating information through social media holds great significance in Pakistan. Social media apps, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube, have widespread usage across various groups and regions in Pakistan; this enables the quick distribution of information to a diverse audience, including people living in remote areas. **For instance, during the Pandemic, the Ministry of Health used Twitter to provide real-time updates on COVID cases, healthcare tips, vaccination tips, and emergency healthcare help.** This demonstrates how social media platforms can effectively spread information across the country. Therefore, social media is a dynamic platform for disseminating information to the masses within no time.

Another significant advantage of social media is raising awareness among the masses in the country. Social media apps provide people with a way to highlight ongoing trends, voice their opinions, and promote campaigns to hold people accountable. For a case in point, **in the wake of a recent event in Karachi, the 'Boycott Gul Ahmed' campaign has been launched where the wife of Metro Power CEO Danish Iqbal killed a father and daughter duo and injured four others due to her impaired state and rash driving. As a result, the public outrage mounted pressure on authorities, leading to her fourteen days in judicial remand with her fate yet to be decided.** This depicts how social media can raise awareness about ongoing issues and serves as a powerful tool for advocacy. Hence, the ability of social media to raise awareness solidifies its significance for the country.

Proceeding further, social media has transformed the digital market by driving consumer engagement and expanding global reach. Social media platforms powered by Meta AI help businesses, content creators, and digital marketers to target their audience, enhance their online presence, and promote their services. Furthermore, the diversity on social media leads to diverse traffic by integrating SEO keywords; thus, this boosts user engagement and increases their popularity among people. To illustrate this, **a recent report by CrunchBase Company highlights how Careem, a small car railing service, became Pakistan's Number one car app by effectively using social media campaigns, customer feedback, and user-friendly techniques.** This portrays how small startups can leverage the power of social media to drive growth in a competitive world. Therefore, social media has the power to revive digital marketing and lead businesses to success.

Lastly, social media offers great entertainment to the public by using specially curated algorithms and delivering personalized content to alleviate stress. The personalized content resonates with the user's interests and trends, ensuring a smooth stream of engaging memes, videos, social media posts, and reels. In addition, entertainment through social media helps the audience unwind and relax

for a while. **As per the report of Instagram Meta published in 2023, the new trend of Instagram reels combined with innovative ways of exploring music trends has increased user engagement by up to 5 per cent as compared to standard feed posts in Pakistan.** This perfectly illustrates that social media apps provide people with a valuable outlet for releasing their overwhelming emotions regardless of their age. Thus, social media's increasing role in entertaining the masses reinforces its role in helping people find digital escape.

Verily, Pakistan can follow pragmatic measures to maximize the positive impacts of social media by addressing its negative aspects, which would surely give birth to a safer digital presence.

First, raising social media awareness can help Pakistan mitigate the negative aspects of social media in society. Non-governmental organizations can help the masses learn about the responsible use of social media, its privacy settings, and ways to differentiate between authentic and fake news. Moreover, this would help people stay safe from online scams, hacking, cybercrimes, and harassment. For instance, promoting small documentaries in regional languages can help everyone become conscious and responsible users of social media. Thus, raising awareness can ultimately help Pakistan mitigate the drawbacks of social media.

Similarly, promoting digital literacy is another viable measure that can help Pakistan overcome the adverse impacts of social media. The government should introduce collaborative initiatives with various tech companies and teachers to provide training programs, resources, and tools that support digital literacy. For instance, improving the framework of existing initiatives like DigiSkills.pk and Taleemabad can help Pakistan bridge the digital divide. In fact, such initiatives can also help the youth stay informed about the latest digital trends and enhance digital competencies. Hence, digital literacy can verily help Pakistan equip its youth with the necessary skills to navigate the digital world.

Lastly, strengthening and regulating the policies of cybersecurity can help Pakistan combat cyberbullying and harassment, holding the perpetrators accountable. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) should collaborate with social media platforms to streamline the process of removing inappropriate content and tracking down multiple IDs of criminals. For instance, Germany's Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) is a strict law that targets fake news, online harassment, cyberbullying, and hate speech, holding social media platforms accountable. Likewise, adopting such polices can also help Pakistan ensure robust cybersecurity protection. Moreover, strict laws regarding privacy invasion, stalking, cyberbullying, and harassment must be made and regulated, which would empower digital citizenship where everyone feels safe. Therefore, devising strict laws for cybersecurity can help the country promote a safer online environment.

To evaluate critically, social media is indeed a double-edged sword, facilitating global interactions while exposing users to digital threats. It offers a plethora of benefits that make it a remarkable innovation and a necessity of today's time. Undoubtedly, it is a great way to connect with people, foster connections, and voice opinions. However, the negative impacts that it holds cannot be overlooked. Depending upon the usage, social media can be used as a potent tool to enhance one's global standing and advocate for the betterment of society. Strengthening cybersecurity and devising cyber laws to keep a proper check on social media platforms can help the government reduce the demerits of social media. Thus, responsible use and effective oversight can turn social media into a great force for good.

All in all, social media is a great tool for change, offering multiple advantages and disadvantages. Pakistan can use social media to equip its youth with the latest digital trends and use it as a tool for national progress. However, negative aspects, such as cyberbullying and harassment, the spreading of false information, and the

rift between the online and real world, are some of the negative aspects social media possesses. Nonetheless, there is a solution to every problem; Pakistan can leverage the positive aspects of social media while addressing its negative effects. The government can maintain checks and balances to ensure social media is used as a force of good in society.

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Social media is a revolutionary tool that has profoundly reshaped the contemporary digital landscape. Various social media platforms play a key role in connecting people, breaking down geographical barriers, and driving global trends. **As reported by the National Statistics Bureau of Technology and Development, social media plays a crucial role in raising awareness of human development growth indicators, contributing to the development of a country in both economic and socio-political aspects.** Similarly, Pakistan, like many other countries, has experienced the massive spread of social media, which has had both positive and negative effects. On the negative side, cyberbullying and harassment are the most pressing concerns, which has heightened the insecurity among individuals. Further, the rising gap between real and reel life and decreasing real-life interactions also highlight the adverse effects of social media in society. On the positive side, social media stands as a key pillar in disseminating information throughout the country. In addition, it serves as a dynamic medium, providing entertainment to the masses. Verily, Pakistan can leverage the positive aspects of social media while addressing its negative effects. For example, the government should adopt pragmatic measures, such as promoting digital literacy and raising awareness, which would make social media a powerful tool for national progress. Hence, Pakistan can harness social media as a key driver for positive change in society.

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Social media is a groundbreaking technology that fosters global connectivity and drives global trends in the world. It is not only a tool to enhance to global standing but also a dynamic platform to boost economic growth, enhance communication, and support civic engagement; however, despite its benefits, it also presents significant challenges and risks. Developing countries like Pakistan have witnessed both positive and negative impacts of social media. On the positive side, social media stands as a key pillar in disseminating information, entertaining the masses, and transforming the digital markets in the country. However, social media also comes with its share of drawbacks, including cyberbullying and harassment, the rising gap between real and reel life, and decreasing real-life interactions, which have plagued the country's digital landscape. Nonetheless, Pakistan can leverage the positive aspects of social media while addressing its negative effects. For example, the government should promote social media awareness, raise digital media literacy, and regulate the policies of cybersecurity, which would make social media a powerful tool for national progress. Hence, Pakistan can harness social media as a key driver for positive change in society.