

PART-II

SECTION A

QUESTION NO.3

What are the key ideas of Social Learning theory. How Social Learning theory helps in understanding the trends of ~~Extreme~~ cyber Harrasment in Pakistan.

I. Key Ideas of Social Learning theory:

Social Learning theory has its roots in **Sutherland's Differential Association theory** and was developed by **Albert Bandura**, which explains that learning is not purely behavioral, rather it is a cognitive process, and is learned through social interaction, especially by observing others, rather through direct experiences.

- **Observation is the primary mechanism through which behavior is learned.**

According to Bandura, people acquire new behaviors by watching others such as family, peers, teachers, celebrities, and media figures, as models.

- **Modeling shows that people imitate influential or admired individuals.**

Social learning theory emphasizes that behavior is more likely to be copied when the model has high social status or authority.

- **Imitation allows learned behavior to spread across rapidly.**

Once behavior is observed and understood, individuals may replicate it, especially when it appears successful or socially accepted.

- **Reinforcement**

Bandura highlights that behavior is strengthened when it is followed by rewards (approval, praise etc) and weakened when followed by punishment.

- Positive reinforcement occurs when a behavior is followed by a reward, which increases the likelihood of repetition.
For example Online harrasment that receives likes or supportive comments becomes positively reinforced.
- Negative reinforcement occurs when a behavior removes or

avoids a negative consequence, thereby increasing its frequency. For example: A user engaging in aggressive online behavior and avoids being criticized by peers, reinforcing the behavior.

- **Learning is a cognitive process.**

Social Learning theory stresses that Learning is a cognitive process, structured around Attention, Retention, Reproduction and Motivation.



- ⇒ Learning begins when an individual pays attention to a model. Attention is a cognitive act, influenced by model's status. Without attention, behavior cannot be learned.
- ⇒ After observing behavior, learner retains it in memory through images or symbols etc.
- ⇒ Reproduction refers to the learner's ability to translate mental representations into action.
- ⇒ Even if a behavior is learned, it will only be enacted if the individual is motivated. Motivation depends on expected rewards, social approval, and personal goals.

II. How Social Learning Theory helps in understanding the trends of Cyber Harrasment in Pakistan:

Cyber harrasment ranging from online abuse, trolling, sexual harrasment, stalking, and character assasination, is an emerging social problem in Pakistan, particularly affecting women, journalists, students and political activists.

According to the lens of **social learning theory**, as it explains that behavior is **socially** and **cognitively learned**, individuals observe models, process information mentally, retain behavior patterns, reproduce actions, and are motivated by rewards or avoidance of punishment.

In Pakistani context, social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok etc. serve as learning environments where abusive behavior is visible, repetitive and often socially reinforced.

Applying the learning process model (Attention, Retention, Reproduction, and motivation) helps explain how cyber harassment spreads and persists in the country.

1. **Attention : Observing Harrasment Online**

Online harassment is often designed to capture attention,

through viral hashtags, threatening messages, memes etc. Women journalists in Pakistan often face threats and trolling on social media platforms. This draws attention from the public which later may imitate it. Moreover, young female tiktokers often face sexualized comments and stalking. Content creators, politicians, influencers, journalists etc serve as attention-grabbing models. Users observing these models of online harassment may perceive them as effective and socially relevant, which increases likelihood of imitation.

2. Retention: Memorizing Harassment patterns

Retention involves mental processes. Users remember language, patterns and strategies of harassment to reproduce them later. Patterns of trolling are shared across groups. New members retain these scripts and apply them while targeting others.

3. Reproduction: Performing learned behavior

Retained behaviors are transformed into actions later when the observer has the capacity, opportunity and skills. In Pakistan, young users reproduce harassment online with emojis, threats or insults etc. TikTok harassment shows reproduction of sexualized comments and stalking behavior learned from observing others online. Reproduction is not limited to minor or digital behaviors, it can escalate to physical violence as happened in **Sana Yousaf's Murder case 2025**. He reproduced the learned harassment behavior by sending persistent messages and unlike typical online harassment cases, the reproduction escalated into extreme violence, culminating in her murder.

4. Motivation: Why Harassment continues

Behavior continues when individuals are motivated, by rewards or avoidance of punishment. Even if an individual has observed and retained a behavior, they will only reproduce it if they expect rewards, approval, or satisfaction, or if they believe punishment is unlikely. In Pakistan, **PECA, 2016** is not properly enforced and harassment often carries no consequences. Thus, repetition continues.

In Pakistan, repeated targetting of journalists like the recent **Benazir Shah case**, in which her deepfakes were created and spread, shows that impunity is a key driver of cyber harassment trends and the cycle continues.