## Missing the Social Media in Digital Age: A Case Study of Users at the Time of Social Media Blackout in Pakistan

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**Abstract:** *There is a growing concern of internet blackouts caused by political unrest in Pakistan and this necessitates research to examine how user gets impacted in this regard. This research delves deeper into user behavior during countrywide internet blackout on 9th May 2023, emphasizing the alternate ways through which they fulfilled their related needs and the missed opportunities. This quantitative study employs a survey questionnaire to collect primary data regarding social media usage of Pakistani users along with the needs fulfilled by the users through social media. The population of the study comprised of social media users in the public sector universities of Islamabad Capital Territory. The survey results provide valuable insights into the extent of social media usage, preferences, needs getting fulfilled by social media, and behaviors of a sample of 500 students regarding social media outage. It highlights the predominance of younger individuals, active and frequent engagement with social media, and diverse purposes for usage. The findings of this research are in alignment with the Uses and Gratification Theory, emphasizing active audience selection and diverse media uses.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, Digital Age, Military Operation, shutdown, Ashura

## Introduction

On May 09, 2023, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority not only shut downed the data services of mobile networks in Pakistan but also restricted various social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Social Media remained blacked out for four consecutive days till the May 12, 2023 in view of arrest of former prime minister of Pakistan Mr. Imran Khan from Islamabad High Court. The authority partially restored the access to social media which caused low speed in refreshing of feeds on social media platforms

Citizens in Pakistan were not be able to post on social media and they were also unable to access the information and to connect with others. It was observed, in general, that users started using applications of Virtual Private Networks (VPN) available on mobile play stores and proxy websites to access social media at the time of internet and social media crises. The current study applied uses & gratification approach to trace out the motivations of social media users in Pakistan towards internet and their behaviors at the time of social media blackout in the country.

According to the statistics of datareportal, there were more than 87 million internet users and more than 71 million social media users in Pakistan which include more than 37 million Facebook, more than 4.65 million Twitter users respectively (DIGITAL 2023: PAKISTAN, 2023). Shutdowns of internet have become a common practice in many countries around the globe in past 10 years which include Nepal (Ang & Tekwani, 2012), Syria(Gohdes, 2015), Pakistan, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Ethopia, Congo, Burundi, Sudan, Egypt, Uzbekistan, India, North Koria, Yamen, , China, Zimbabwe (Purdon L. A., 2015), Bahrain, Uganda, North Korea, Turkey Bangladesh, Gambia, Egypt(Micek & Now, 2017) and Myanmar (Howard, 2011).

Particularly, different societies across the globe started becoming highly dependent on infrastructures related to communication. The internet includes many other communication services have become important social infrastructures(de Bruijne, 2006). These communication infrastructures are laced in to the communication fabric of those societies to the extent where people find it impossible to imagine a world without the communication (Bank of America, 2014).

Internet blackouts caused by political unrest are a growing concern in Pakistan, necessitating substantial research to determine how they affect user pleasure. This study investigates the issues faced by internet users along with the behavior of users at the time when due to political unrest, the country was forced into backward times by countrywide internet blackout which resulted in social media closure. The study will examine that what Pakistani internet users missed at the time of no internet and what they did to fulfill their needs associated with the intent and social media. The results of the study will sensitize the government, specifically the telecommunication authorizes on the importance of internet and social media for the users in this digital age.

**Series of Internet Shutdowns in Pakistan**

First time, internet shut down took place in year 2005 as a measure of anti-insurgency and military operation in the province Balochistan (El-Khawas, 2009). Such kind of internet falling-out did not take place in the country until the year 2021 when Mr. Rehman Malik who was interior minister at that time started giving orders to shutdown mobile networks. Since that time, such shutdowns have remained a continuous happening in the Pakistan and still continue till today. The frequency of internet shutdown fluctuates but has remained constant in past few years, as depicted in Figure 1.
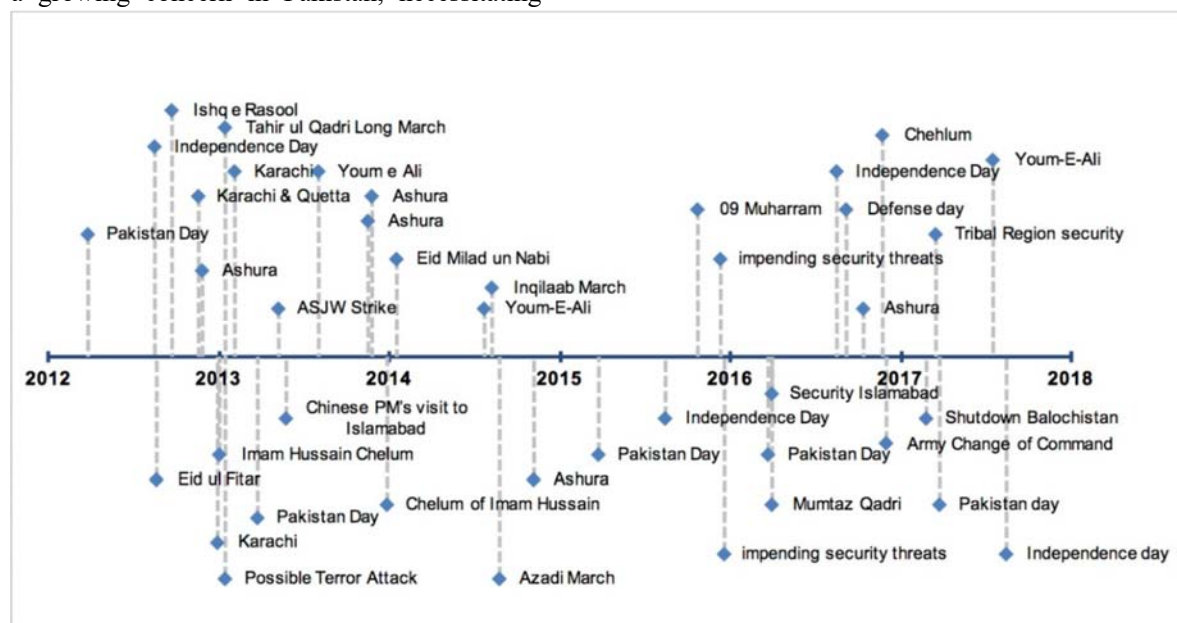


**Figure 1. An overview of internet shutdown in Pakistan from 2012 to 2017.**6

These shutdowns range from capital of Pakistan i.e., Islamabad to its all other cities. Some shutdowns were diverse in nature which effected around 56 cities and towns in province Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, KPK, Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Kashmir(Purdon L. A., 2015).

The internet shutdowns can be categorized into short term (up to one week) and long term (more than a few weeks or months). The short-term internet shutdowns fall under the categories of celebrations on public holidays, religious holidays like Ashura, Large political rallies or strikes specifically in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Important political events like visit of a prime minister and at the time of unspecified security threats. These short-term shutdowns happen for one day and often extend to one week. The long-term internet shutdowns usually happened in remote areas of Pakistan like suspension of internet on March 15, 2017 in entire treble area of Pakistan without giving any specific notice. Another long-term internet shut down happened in February 2017 when government suspended internet in Dalbandin which is a city of province Balochistan(Wagner, 2018).

Nasiripong (2018) in a cross-sectional survey, highlighted how a lack of online connectivity can have a substantial influence on our mental health. It is unsurprising that when we are suddenly cut off from the digital world, which has become a critical medium for connection, support, and supporting our overall well-being, our feelings of stress, fear, and loneliness intensify. This highlights the critical need for comprehensive measures that address the psychological impact of internet outages and priorities the mental health of individuals affected. It emphasizes the significance of finding solutions to lessen the negative impacts of these disruptions and reminds us of the critical role that online connectedness plays in fostering our mental health.

In Pakistan, internet shutdowns are not isolated instances, but rather part of a larger environment of authoritarian tactics. While governments frequently rationalise shutdowns as security or public order measures, their timing and extensive application show that governance

measures that go beyond genuine security concerns are being implemented. This raises questions about the nature of the security and who is protecting it. Shutdowns limit citizens' freedom of expression, access to information, and ability to join in public discourse by depriving them of their digital communication channels, affecting their satisfaction as active participants in the digital sphere. However, they have terrible economic ramifications (Al Jazeera, 2023).

The topic of Internet outages in Pakistan requires immediate investigation and attention. More research is required to fully comprehend the significance and consequences of these shutdowns, both within Pakistan and abroad. Exploration of larger human rights, telecommunications regulations, and authoritarian politics in relation to Internet shutdowns is critical (Wagner, 2018). Future researchers can offer insight on the sociological, economic, and psychological ramifications of these shutdowns by diving deeper into the influence on user gratification, informing legislative debates and fighting for the protection of digital rights.

**Research Objectives**

The current study is designed to achieve following objectives:

1. To find out the extent to which Pakistani users use social media.

2. To find out the needs of users fulfilled by social media in Pakistan.

3. To investigate the behavior of the users at the time of social media blackout in Pakistan.

4. To analyze the users' opinion on 'missing' the social media.

**Literature Review**

In the contemporary world, internet blackouts during times of political turmoil have become a critical issue. This phenomenon has to be studied to understand its impact on human rights, governance, and society. During situations of political unrest, internet blackouts get initiated by governments and it refers to deliberate

shutdown or disruption of internet services. The goal behind this blackout is to maintain the stability of the regime, suppress disagreement, and control the flow of information. Governments usually impose internet blackouts because they see the internet as a threat to their authority (Gohdes, 2014).

Based on the evidence from protests, it has been argued by Breuer et al. (2015) that social media has been an important source of mobilization against the Ben Ali regime. Social media allowed to break the blackout of national media by brokering information, fostering collaboration for a greater protest, and providing emotional mobilization by showcasing the worst scenarios related to the response of the regime to the protests (Breuer et al., 2015). A significant threat is posed to access to information and freedom of expression because of internet blackouts. In research conducted by Jackson (2014), he has emphasized how the ability of individuals to access and share information gets restricted because of internet blackouts. It limits their freedom to communicate with others and express their opinions (Jackson, 2014). Because of these restrictions, their basic human rights are undermined greatly. Internet blackouts also entail economic repercussions. They have the tendency to deter foreign investments, hinder economic development, and disrupt business (Bischof et al., 2023). When people cannot access job opportunities, education, or online markets, it results in long-term economic setbacks.

There are also psychological and social consequences of internet blackouts. It has been suggested that stress and anxiety among the affected population increase because of the disruptions in the internet during political unrest or conflicts. People tend to feel disconnected and isolated from the outside world and this gives them a sense of powerlessness (Ruijgrok, 2022). The efforts of political mobilization also get affected because of internet blackouts. The organization of allies and protests gets hindered because of such disruptions (Edwards and Howard, 2013). When online tools of communication are not working, it becomes very difficult for activists to reach a wider audience and coordinate their activities.

It has been pointed out Hoffmann (2011) that the occurrence of internet blackouts is more frequent in authoritarian regimes where the inclination of the governments is more towards controlling the flow of information. Based on the research of Earl et al. (2022), it has been found out that substantial increases in attention to the dominance of movements and digital activists have been observed because of the rise of the internet.

The role of the Internet in increasing political engagement among the citizens of Pakistan has been highlighted by Ahmad et al. (2019). Because of the rise of social media in the country, people have started engaging more with political parties and leaders, expressing their opinions, and participating in political discussions (Ahmad et al., 2019). It has been suggested by Eijaz (2013) that the organization of campaigns, rallies, and protests has been facilitated because of the increased use of social media platforms in Pakistan. Social media platforms, including Twitter and Facebook, are powerful tools for political mobilization in Pakistan. Also, these platforms allow individuals to stay informed about events, policies, and political developments (Eijaz, 2013). This, thereby, increased their political knowledge.

Ahmed et al. (2013) examined the ways in which digital strategies, including campaigns on social media and targeted advertising, were leveraged by the political parties in Pakistan during the general elections of 2013. Their goal was to convey their narrative and reach potential voters effectively (Ahmed et al., 2013). In a study conducted by Khan (2021), it has been observed that an increasing number of citizens in Pakistan use the Internet to access news. In this way, it has become easier for people to stay up-to-date regarding current events. The emergence of citizen journalism in Pakistan based on the Internet has been explored by Azeema and Nazuk (2017). Because of the emergence of social media, ordinary citizens provide eyewitnesses, share opinions, and report news (Azeema and Nazuk, 2017).

Because of the emergence of the internet in Pakistan, significant growth has been observed in its use for journalism purposes by news organizations and journalists. Online platforms were adopted by news organizations in Pakistan to engage with audiences in realtime and disseminate the content of news (Jamil, 2020). Journalists use the platforms of social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, to interact with the public, promote stories, and gather news. They also get to know about the opinions of the public, contact eyewitnesses, and report news through social media (Jamil, 2022). Umran et al. (2019) conducted a study with the purpose of examining the patterns of Pakistani journalists using Facebook to get information. They found out that urban journalists made the highest use of Facebook information for writing follow-up stories and staying updated. Also, it has been found by Jamil (2022) that the internet and other digital tools are getting increasingly used by mainstream news organizations in Pakistan.

So, it can be seen that the internet is used for political participation, news and information, and journalism in Pakistan. Online news consumption is great in Pakistan. Mobilization, awareness, and political engagement are effectively facilitated through the Internet in Pakistan. Also, it has been seen that political mobilization, social well-being, economic development, and freedom of expression get greatly undermined because of internet blackouts during political unrest. These actions might be justified by the government for maintaining order, but it has been seen that the internet gets seen as a threat to the authority of governments during political turmoil. Keeping this in view and the increased use of the internet for political mobilization and participation in Pakistan, it is necessary to explore the internet blackout during the important event of 9th May in the political history of Pakistan.

**Research Question**

Approaching to the issue of social media blackout from a diverse perspective, this study specifically addresses the following research question:

RQ1. What is the extent of social media usage among Pakistani users?

RQ2. What are the needs of Pakistani users fulfilled by the social media?

RQ3. How did users in Pakistan behave during social media blackout?

RQ4. What are the opinions of users in Pakistan regarding the impact of "missing" access to social media?

**Theoretical Framework**

In the theory of uses and gratification, it has been explored why the channels of communication and media get actively chosen by people to specify their specific goals and needs. Unlike the theories of traditional media, the focus of this theory is on the effects of media on individuals and the active role of the audience in utilizing and selecting media based on their gratifications and preferences. It posits through this theory that people are not passive recipients of the content they see in media, but they make decisions about what they want to consume and how they want to consume it (Ruggiero, 2000).

This implies that psychological and social functions, gratification sought and obtained, and the selection of media are the factors that contribute to the aforementioned decision-making of users. Users may select media based on their social interaction goals, preferences for entertainment, and needs for information. Their sought and obtained gratifications may include the personal expression of identity, social interaction, information seeking, and entertainment. Psychological and social functions may be the facilitation of communication and social interactions or needs like self-expression, self-esteem, and belonging.

Valuable insights into understanding the behavior of users during the blackout of social media in Pakistan can be provided through the framework of Uses and Gratification theory. The focus will be on the active role, motivations, and needs of media consumers for the selection and use of the Internet. While relating the theory of uses and gratification with our study, the focus will be on the variable of the study i.e., the needs of the users that they had to get fulfilled through other mediums instead of the internet during the

blackout. A user-centric perspective is provided through this theoretical framework and it goes beyond the theories of traditional media effects while highlighting the active role of users in shaping their experience with media.

## Research Methodology

This quantitative study employed a survey questionnaire to collect primary data regarding social media usage of Pakistani users along with the needs fulfilled by the users through social media. The population of the study comprised of social media users in the Islamabad Capital Territory. Both male and female social media users were taken as units of analysis. To conduct the study effectively, the researchers used simple random sampling technique to select respondents. An online survey was distributed among the students of public sector universities of Islamabad.

The survey consisted of close and open-ended questions was designed to gather information on users' extent of social media usage, their needs fulfilled by social media, behavior of users at the time of social media blackout and their opinions on "missing" the social media.

The data was collected over four weeks from August to March 2023 by sharing online questionnaire with students via their class groups. Total 500 respondents responded the questionnaire.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the responses and to obtain frequencies from each question. To safeguard the accuracy and credibility of the data, the researchers used traditional research methods, such as survey pretesting, assuring the anonymity of the respondents, in order to ensure reliability and quality of their research.

In essence, the current study sought to get a through grasp of Pakistani social media users' needs which are fulfilled by the social media and their behavior at the time of social media blackout in the country.

## Data Analysis

### Q1. What is your age?

| Age Group | Percentage of Respondents |
|---|---|
| 18-24 years | 45% |
| 25-34 years | 30% |
| 35-44 years | 10% |
| 45-54 years | 3% |
| 55 and above | 2% |

The majority of respondents fall into the "18-24 years" age group, constituting 45% of the sample. The "25-34 years" age group is the second most prevalent, with 30% of respondents. The "35-44 years" age group accounts for 10% of the sample. The "45-54 years" age group represents 3% of respondents. The "55 and above" age group is the least represented, comprising 2% of respondents. This distribution indicates that a significant portion of the sample consists of younger individuals aged 18-24, while the older age groups have a smaller presence. Understanding these age demographics is essential for tailoring social media strategies to reach specific target audiences effectively.

### Q2. What is your gender?

| Gender | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 250 | 50% |
| Female | 225 | 45% |
| Other | 25 | 5% |

The data represents the gender distribution of a sample of 500 students. Among the respondents, sample of 500 students. Among the respondents,

50% identify as male, while 45% identify as female. A smaller percentage, 5%, falls under the "Other" category, which may include non-

binary or gender-nonconforming individuals who specified their gender identity.

**Q3. What is your education level?**

| Educational Background | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| High School | 150 | 30% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 225 | 45% |
| Master's Degree | 100 | 20% |
| Ph.D. or Higher | 25 | 5% |

The data shows the educational background of a sample of 500 students. The majority of respondents hold Bachelor's degrees, constituting 45% of the sample. High school graduates make up 30% of the group, while 20% have attained Master's degrees. A smaller proportion, 5%, possess Ph.D. or higher degrees. This distribution provides valuable insights into the educational diversity within the sample and can inform educational institutions and policymakers about the demographics of the student population they are serving. Understanding the educational background of this group is essential for tailoring educational programs and services to meet their needs and aspirations, whether they are pursuing higher education or entering the workforce.

**Q4. Which social media platforms do you use regularly?**

| Social Media Platforms | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Facebook | 200 | 40% |
| Twitter | 50 | 10% |
| Instagram | 150 | 30% |
| WhatsApp | 75 | 15% |
| TikTok | 25 | 5% |

In analyzing the responses regarding the social media platforms used regularly by a sample of 500 students, it's evident that Facebook is the most frequently used platform, with 40% of respondents indicating its regular use. Instagram follows closely behind, with 30% of students regularly using it. WhatsApp is used regularly by 15% of respondents, Twitter by 10%, and TikTok by 5%. This data suggests that Facebook and Instagram hold significant popularity among students for regular social media usage, while Twitter and TikTok are less frequently used. WhatsApp falls in between, representing moderate regular usage. Understanding these usage patterns can inform targeted communication strategies and content distribution on these platforms to engage with this student demographic effectively.

**Q 5. How frequently do you use social media platforms?**

| Frequency of Social Media Usage | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Daily | 275 | 55% |
| Several times a week | 150 | 30% |
| Once a week | 50 | 10% |
| Rarely | 25 | 5% |
| Never | 0 | 0% |

The analysis of these responses from a sample of 500 students reveals that a significant majority

of students (55%) use social media daily, indicating frequent engagement with social media platforms. Another substantial portion (30%) uses social media several times a week, emphasizing the prevalence of regular usage among students. A smaller but still noteworthy group (10%) uses it once a week, and a minority (5%) uses social media rarely. Surprisingly, there are no respondents who indicated never using social media, suggesting that social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of these students. This data underscores the pervasive nature of social media and its frequent incorporation into the routines of the younger demographic, aligning with the Uses and Gratification Theory's focus on individuals actively choosing and using media for specific needs and gratifications.

**Q6. How many hours, on average, do you spend on social media each day?**

| Hours Spent on Social Media | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Less than 1 hour | 125 | 25% |
| 1-2 hours | 175 | 35% |
| 2-4 hours | 150 | 30% |
| More than 4 hours | 50 | 10% |

The analysis of the responses from 500 students regarding their daily social media usage reveals that the majority (35%) spend 1-2 hours on social media, followed by 30% spending 2-4 hours, 25% spending less than 1 hour, and 10% spending more than 4 hours daily. The mean time spent on social media is estimated to be approximately 1.75 hours, indicating that, on average, students spend around 1-2 hours each day. The median time spent is 2-4 hours, reflecting a more central value in the dataset. The mode is 1-2 hours, signifying that this is the most common daily social media usage among the surveyed students. This information provides valuable insights into their social media habits and can be used to understand their digital behaviors and preferences in the context of the Uses and Gratification Theory.

**Q7. What primary needs or purposes do you fulfill through your use of social media?**

| Needs/Purposes | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Staying connected with friends and family | 250 | 50% |
| Keeping up with current events/news | 100 | 20% |
| Entertainment and leisure | 100 | 20% |
| Networking and professional connections | 25 | 5% |
| Expressing personal opinions and thoughts | 15 | 3% |
| Promoting a business or brand | 10 | 2% |

Among the sample of 500 students, the primary purposes for using social media are as follows: staying connected with friends and family is the most prevalent, with half of the respondents selecting this option, indicating its importance in maintaining personal relationships. A significant portion, 20%, use social media to keep up with current events and news, highlighting its role as an information source. An equal proportion, also 20%, use it for entertainment and leisure. Networking and professional connections are less common, chosen by 5% of respondents. A smaller percentage, 3%, use social media to express personal opinions and thoughts, while the fewest, 2%, utilize it to promote a business or brand. These findings illustrate the diverse purposes social media serves among students, with personal connections and information consumption being the most prominent.

The above interpretation of the survey data aligns with the Uses and Gratification Theory as it illustrates that students actively select and use social media to fulfill various needs and preferences, including staying connected with

friends and family, keeping up with current events, seeking entertainment, establishing professional connections, expressing personal opinions, and promoting businesses or brands. This active audience participation reflects the theory's emphasis on individuals' agency in choosing media content that gratifies their specific needs, demonstrating that social media serves as a versatile platform catering to diverse purposes within the same audience. Additionally, the findings underline the interactive and multifaceted nature of social media consumption, in line with the theory's acknowledgment of two-way communication and audience diversity.

**Q8: What primary needs or purposes do you fulfill through your use of social media?**

| Primary Needs or Purposes | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Staying connected with friends and family | 250 | 50% |
| Keeping up with current events/news | 83 | 16.6% |
| Entertainment and leisure | 42 | 8.4% |
| Networking and professional connections | 63 | 12.6% |
| Expressing personal opinions and thoughts | 50 | 10% |
| Promoting a business or brand | 12 | 2.4% |

The data shows that the most common need for using social media is staying connected with friends and family, with 50% of respondents indicating this as a primary purpose. Keeping up with current events/news is the second most common purpose, cited by 16.6% of respondents. Entertainment and leisure, networking and professional connections, and expressing personal opinions and thoughts are also important purposes, with 8.4%, 12.6%, and 10% of respondents choosing these options, respectively. Promoting a business or brand is the least common purpose, chosen by only 2.4% of respondents.

Overall, the data suggests that social media serves various needs for individuals, with personal connections and staying informed being the most prevalent reasons for its use, while business promotion is a less common motive.

**Q 9: Were you aware of any recent social media blackouts or restrictions in Pakistan?**

| Response | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|
| Yes | 70% |
| No | 30% |

**Q 10: How did you respond or behave during the blackout?**

| Behavior During Blackout | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Used VPNs to access social media | 200 | 40% |
| Reduced my time on social media | 275 | 55% |
| Engaged in alternative online activities | 20 | 4% |
| Participated in offline activities more | 5 | 1% |
| Didn't change my behavior | 0 | 0% |

The mean (average) behavior during the blackout was approximately 232.1 respondents, with the most common behavior being "Reduced my time on social media," which also serves as the median and mode, representing 55% of respondents. The data exhibited low variability, with a standard deviation of approximately 1.29%. The range, representing the difference

between the highest and lowest percentages, was 55%. This analysis provides insights into the distribution of respondents' behaviors during the blackout, indicating a predominant trend of reducing time on social media among the surveyed population.

Question 11: How would you describe the impact of not having access to social media during a blackout?

| Response | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Very negative | 45% |
| Somewhat negative | 30% |
| Neutral | 15% |
| Somewhat positive | 5% |
| Very positive | 5% |

We calculated measures of central tendency which gave the following results:

Mean: $(1 * 45\% + 2 * 30\% + 3 * 15\% + 4 * 5\% + 5 * 5\%) / 100 = 1.75$

The mean indicates that, on average, respondents described the impact as between "Somewhat negative" and "Neutral."

Median: The descriptive statistics showed that the median falls between "Somewhat negative" and "Neutral" as well.

Mode: Here, the mode is "Very negative" since it has the highest percentage of respondents selecting it.

This statistical analysis suggests that the majority of respondents described the impact of not having access to social media during a blackout as negative, with a concentration in the "Very negative" and "Somewhat negative" categories. The mean, median, and mode all align with this assessment.

Question 12: Did the social media blackout affect your daily life in any significant way?

| Response | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Yes | 80% |
| No | 20% |

Analysis of the survey responses here tells that a significant majority of respondents, 80%, indicated that the social media blackout did affect their daily lives in some way. This suggests that the blackout had a substantial impact on the majority of participants. However, it's important to consider the specific nature of these effects, which can be explored further in qualitative research or by analyzing the responses of those who answered "Yes" in more detail.

**Question 13: In your opinion, do you believe that social media is essential for communication and information sharing in today's digital age?**

| Response | Percentage of Respondents |
|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 35% |
| Agree | 40% |
| Neutral | 15% |
| Disagree | 7% |
| Strongly disagree | 3% |

Through descriptive statistics, we calculated measures of central tendency and found the following result:

Mean: $(1 * 35\% + 2 * 40\% + 3 * 15\% + 4 * 7\% + 5 * 3\%) / 100 = 2.25$

The mean indicates that the average response

falls between "Agree" and "Neutral."

Median: In this case, the median falls between "Agree" and "Neutral" as well.

Mode: Here, the mode is "Agree" since it has the highest percentage of respondents selecting it.

This statistical analysis suggests that the majority of respondents have a positive view of the importance of social media in communication and information sharing in today's digital age. The mean, median, and mode all indicate a leaning towards agreement with this statement.

**Data Analysis and Findings:**

1. Age Distribution: The survey reveals that the majority of respondents (45%) fall into the "18-24 years" age group, with the "25-34 years" group representing the second-largest portion at 30%. This distribution highlights a predominantly young audience, which is crucial for tailoring social media strategies to target specific age demographics effectively.

2. Gender Distribution: Among the 500 students surveyed, 50% identify as male, 45% as female, and 5% fall under the "Other" category, indicating a diverse gender representation within the sample.

3. Educational Background: The data shows that 45% of respondents hold Bachelor's degrees, 30% have completed high school, 20% possess Master's degrees, and 5% have Ph.D. or higher degrees. This educational diversity provides insights into the student population's demographics, aiding in program and service tailoring.

4. Regular Social Media Usage: Facebook is the most regularly used platform, with 40% of respondents, followed by Instagram at 30%. WhatsApp is used regularly by 15%, Twitter by 10%, and TikTok by 5%. Understanding these preferences can inform targeted communication strategies.

5. Frequency of Social Media Usage: A significant majority (55%) use social media daily, with 30% using it several times a week, reflecting the Uses and Gratification Theory's emphasis on active selection and use of media.

6. Daily Hours on social media: On average, students spend approximately 1-2 hours daily on social media, with "1-2 hours" being the most common category, reflecting their social media habits.

7. Primary Needs for Social Media Use: Staying connected with friends and family (50%) is the most common need, followed by keeping up with current events/news (20%) and entertainment (20%). This illustrates the multifaceted nature of social media in fulfilling various needs.

8. Awareness of Social Media Blackouts: A majority (70%) of respondents were aware of recent social media blackouts or restrictions in Pakistan.

9. Behavior During Blackout: The most common behavior during a blackout was "Reduced my time on social media" (55%), indicating a tendency to adapt to restricted access.

10. Impact of Blackout: Most respondents (45%) described the impact of not having access to social media during a blackout as "Very negative," with the mean, median, and mode aligning with this assessment.

11. Effect on Daily Life: A significant majority (80%) indicated that the social media blackout affected their daily lives in some way.

12. Importance of social media: The majority (75%) agreed that social media is essential for communication and information sharing in today's digital age.

**Conclusion:**

The survey results provide valuable insights into

the demographics, preferences, and behaviors of a sample of 500 students regarding social media usage. It highlights the predominance of younger individuals, active and frequent engagement with social media, and diverse purposes for usage. The impact of social media blackouts is substantial, and the majority view social media as essential for communication and information sharing in the digital age. These findings are in alignment with the Uses and Gratification Theory, emphasizing active audience selection and diverse media uses. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for crafting effective communication strategies and catering to the specific needs of this audience in the digital era.

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**Appendix:**

**Title: Survey on Social Media Usage and Impact During Blackouts in Pakistan**

**Introduction:** Thank you for participating in this survey. Your responses will help us understand the extent of social media usage among Pakistani users and the impact of social media blackouts. Please answer the following questions honestly.

**Demographics:**

Age:

- ❑ 18-24 years
- ❑ 25-34 years
- ❑ 35-44 years
- ❑ 45-54 years
- ❑ 55 and above

Gender:

- ❑ Male
- ❑ Female
- ❑ Other (please specify): _____

Educational Background:

- ❑ High School
- ❑ Bachelor's Degree
- ❑ Master's Degree
- ❑ Ph.D. or Higher

**Social Media Usage:**

4. Which social media platforms do you use regularly? (Select all that apply)

- ❑ Facebook
- ❑ Twitter
- ❑ Instagram
- ❑ WhatsApp
- ❑ TikTok

1. How frequently do you use social media platforms?

- ❑ Daily
- ❑ Several times a week
- ❑ Once a week
- ❑ Rarely
- ❑ Never

6. How many hours, on average, do you spend on social media each day?

❑ Less than 1 hour

❑ 1-2 hours

❑ 2-4 hours

❑ More than 4 hours

**Needs Fulfilled by Social Media:**

7. What primary needs or purposes do you fulfill through your use of social media? (Select all that apply)

❑ Staying connected with friends and family

❑ Keeping up with current events/news

❑ Entertainment and leisure

❑ Networking and professional connections

❑ Expressing personal opinions and thoughts

❑ Promoting a business or brand

**Social Media Blackout Experience:**

8. Were you aware of any recent social media blackouts or restrictions in Pakistan?

❑ Yes

❑ No

If yes, how did you respond or behave during the blackout? (Select all that apply)

❑ Used VPNs to access social media

❑ Reduced my time on social media

❑ Engaged in alternative online activities

❑ Participated in offline activities more

❑ Didn't change my behavior

**Opinions Regarding the Impact of Social Media Blackouts:**

9. How would you describe the impact of not having access to social media during a blackout?

- [ ] Very negative

- [ ] Somewhat negative

- [ ] Neutral

- [ ] Somewhat positive

- [ ] Very positive

10. Did the social media blackout affect your daily life in any significant way? If yes, please describe how.

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- [ ] Yes

- [ ] No

11. In your opinion, do you believe that social media is essential for communication and information sharing in today's digital age?

- [ ] Strongly agree

- [ ] Agree

- [ ] Neutral

- [ ] Disagree

- [ ] Strongly disagree


Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your input is valuable for our research.


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