



Editorial

Social media has acquired inescapable position, especially in the life of youths. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, X, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Telegram dominate interest of youths for entertainment, self-expression, and interaction. The platforms play crucial role in shaping behaviour, affecting mental health, shaping perception, and knowledge. The question arises that do these platforms guide to shape positive future or distorting their learning capacities?

Many people spend hours and hours scrolling through feeds filled with images, stories, reels showcasing the highlights of others' activities. The majority of the content has unrealistic portrayals of success, attractiveness, and happiness. As a result, youths enter into negative comparison which causes anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Further, "poor body image relationship with depressive symptoms would be partially mediated by poor self-esteem". Teenagers and adults measure their worth against likes and comments they receive from people on social media platforms. Fragile self-image and external validation have become crucial for measuring worth and popularity. There is a huge difference between authentic self-expression and augmented representation.

Social media intensely influences interest of people, limits exposure to diverse perspectives, discourages critical thinking, and fosters polarizing false belief among people. Though social media offers possibilities to connect with a large number of people but, how do adults utilise the opportunity for their growth and development. Another bleak side of social media is, people create various social media persona for deceptive purpose. Social media platforms contain diverse content which affect youths' behaviour and their interest. Digital literacy plays crucial role when "different cultural values, education systems, technological infrastructure, regulatory frameworks" come forward to educate. They spend a lot of time without any productive outcome. Social media is also a major factor in trends, challenges, and behaviours, from harmless dance routines to dangerous challenges that can encourage risky behaviour. For instance, trends like the "Tide Pod Challenge" or extreme dieting fads have led young people to engage in harmful actions for temporary online fame. This herd mentality, encouraged by social media's reward systems of likes and views, highlights a troubling lack of moderation on many platforms.

Social media also plays crucial role in connecting with wider range of people. Therefore, it has potential to educate, encourage, and empower young minds. Activism and awareness campaigns through social media can yield better results by way of creating awareness among people. Institutions can play crucial role in educating as to how social media may prove to be pertinent in sensitizing viz-a-viz mental health, racial discrimination, gender discrimination, caste, etc. Social media can shape society where behaviour of youth emerges as supportive, sensitive, and positive. Policymakers can come up with apprehensions that address worries of families. Therefore, certain policy is required that "doesn't harm speech and privacy, and doesn't presume that the most restrictive approach is always preferable." To ensure these benefits, people need to ensure digital literacy and stakeholders of education should come

forward to shape healthy society. Schools, colleges and parents can play better role in educating youths on safe behaviour and necessity of critical thinking when watching any content. Thus, digital literacy helps youths to differentiate between reality and illusion and to distinguish the influence of social media on their mental health is necessary.

To sum up, youths' behaviour depends largely on what kind of content they consume. Encouraging responsible usage fosters awareness toward balanced relationship between digital persona and role in real life. Digital literacy programs for strengthening self-worth can offer ample possibilities for developing critical thinking, creativity, and innovation among youth. Thus, making balance between both positive and negative consequence is a growing challenge for the wellbeing of today's youths.

Dr. Rohit Yadav
Assistant Professor, Dept. of English
Central University of Punjab
(Guest Editor)

