Short-Form Content and Youth Mental Well-Being: A Survey-Based Study in Pakistan

Muhammad Husnain
husnainkhokhar0@gmail.com
PhD Scholar, Department of Media and Communication Studies,
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan

Dr. Hannan Khan Tareen
hannankhan.tareen@iub.edu.pk
Lecturer, Department of Media and Communication Studies,
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: * Muhammad Husnain husnainkhokhar0@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The rapid rise of bite-sized content on social media platforms has transformed youth media consumption patterns worldwide. This study investigates the psychological impact of short-form content usage on Pakistani youth, focusing on anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was conducted among 505 participants aged 15–29 from five major universities in Pakistan. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses. Findings indicate that high engagement with bite-sized content is significantly associated with increased anxiety and depressive symptoms, as well as diminished self-esteem. Gender differences were observed, with females reporting slightly higher psychological vulnerability. The study draws on Cultivation Theory and Social Media Addiction Theory to explain how repeated exposure to algorithm-driven, fast-paced content shapes perceptions, emotions, and self-worth. These results highlight the need for media literacy programs, awareness campaigns, and responsible content consumption strategies to mitigate adverse mental health outcomes among youth.

Keywords: *Bite-sized content, Micro videos, Short-video platforms, Media exposure effects*

INTRODUCTION

Social media include online platforms and applications that facilitate digital connectivity, photo sharing, and online communication among individuals (Carr & Hayes, 2015). (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) define social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social media is also termed as internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat, allow users to build profiles, establish connections with friends or followers, and share updates (Paljug, 2025). Social media platforms facilitate the dissemination of many forms of material, such as photographs, text-messages, short videos, hashtags, and audio, that enable users to express their opinions via comments, replies, emoticons, gifs, and postings. These multimodal facilities provided by social media platforms incorporate various modes of communications and enhance the applicability and generalization of user interactions. In the social media domain, there is a lack of research that elucidates which cue – authenticity or expertise – has greater influence on users' credibility judgments. (Boothby, Murray, Waggy, Tsou, & Sugimoto, 2021). (Kemp, 2020) reported that 76.38 million people in Pakistan use the internet, with 37.00 million active internet

consumers. Of these, 61.34% of the population accesses the internet, and 46.00 million actively use various social media platforms. (Zsila & Reyes, 2023) provide a comprehensive review of the psychological implications of social media usage. The authors highlight both positive outcomes such as increased social support and self- expression and negative consequences including heightened anxiety, depression, and social comparison. Their findings suggest that the mental health effects of social media are highly individualized and depend on usage patterns, content exposure, and personal vulnerability. While the negative mental health effects of social media use are often discussed, these platforms also provide an opportunity to disseminate accurate public health information to a young audience that may be more difficult to reach through other channels (Engel, Gell, Heiss, & Karsay, 2024).

Short Form Content

Micro content refers to concise and impactful information that is posted on social media platforms for example, humorous memes, concise videos, or succinct statements. It often reflects informal communication styles or cultural nuances. Micro-content is typically characterized by certain key elements such as a concentrated focus on a singular topic, brief duration, and its ease of consumption in an era defined by rapid digital information exchange. This type of content is designed to communicate a single, clear idea or concept, which can be accessed via a specific URL or permalink, and is formatted to be displayed across various platforms such as email interfaces, web browsers, or mobile devices (Dash, 2002). (Hurd, 2019; Mueller & Rajaram, 2022). Micro-content can be either a short piece on its own or a smaller part taken from a longer video or article. As media has changed, this kind of short content— now often called "micro-content"—has become very common, especially on apps like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. It can be in the form of tiny videos, quick blog posts, small chunks of info (infographics), or other bite-sized formats. People like this type of content because it's short, straight to the point, and easy to share. Since there's so much information online and people are usually scrolling while on the move, short content grabs attention quickly and delivers a message fast. It also helps increase likes, comments, and shares, which makes it very useful for creators and companies. In short, micro-content is designed to catch your eye and say something important in a very short amount of time. It's becoming more and more popular because it fits the way people use social media today. (Dong, Liu, Xi, Liao, & Yang, 2023) . With the launch of TikTok in 2016 the app quickly gained massive popularity among social media users due to its distinctive and innovative features. The app's success fueled the growth of the short video market, as micro-videos increasingly captivated audiences (Xiuwen & Razali, 2021). These videos are repeatedly played by various viewers and users until the viewer decides to move on to the next one.

Problem Statement

Bite-sized content is the newly introduced feature by almost every other social networking site, and is gaining high popularity in no time. The micro content of any type and any category get a high watch-time, and is mostly consumed by the youth aged between 15 to 29 years. In Pakistan, not much research work is done to study the time consumption and usage pattern of our youth on watching bite-sized content offered on social networking sites. Author aims to explore the perceiving impacts of social media bite-sized content on the psychological health of youth. This research aims to fill the gap present in the literature, to collect data on the usage patterns of micro content offered by social media apps by our youth. This study is going to be held in five big universities of Pakistan, covering a wide range of sample sets and representing the youth of Pakistan from all ethnicity, and geographical areas.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between short-form social media content consumption and anxiety among Pakistani youth.

2. To investigate the effect of short-form content consumption on depression among Pakistani youth.

3. To assess the impact of short-form content consumption on self-esteem among Pakistani youth.

Research Questions

1. RQ1: How does consumption of short-form social media content influence anxiety levels among Pakistani youth?

2. RQ2: How does consumption of short-form social media content affect depressive symptoms among Pakistani youth?

3. RQ3: What is the relationship between short-form content consumption and self-esteem among Pakistani youth?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Bite-Sized Content

Social media refers to internet-based platforms that allow users to create and share user-generated content for education, entertainment, and social interaction. Over time, these platforms have become major sources of information and social connection across all sections of society. With the rise of bite-sized content, social media has become deeply embedded in daily life and has started to influence users' psychological, physical, and lifestyle patterns. However, its impact on mental health largely depends on how young people use these platforms and the type of content they consume (Valkenburg, Meier, & Beyens, 2022). (Smith, 2011) reported that over 90% of young people regularly use platforms such as Facebook and Twitter throughout the day and night, making social media an integral part of their routine. (Qureshi, 2019) highlighted several negative effects of media use among youth, including dishonesty, class absenteeism, aggressive behavior, and erosion of cultural values. (Bahtar, 2023) examined Instagram reels and found that short vertical videos, supported by editing and music features, strongly influence user engagement and decision-making, particularly in post-pandemic travel behavior. (Jaffar, Riaz, & Mushtaq, 2019) analyzed TikTok's popularity among Indian youth and revealed concerns regarding vulgar content, objectification of girls, privacy issues, and the need for stronger content regulation. (Narwani, 2023) showed that Instagram reels and story advertisements significantly influence youth engagement and brand recall, while (Shukri & Mustaffa, 2023) found that TikTok and Instagram content shapes young consumers' purchasing behavior. Social media has also been used for health communication, including suicide awareness (Arendt, 2019), depressive symptom discussions (Houghton et al., 2018), reproductive health education on TikTok (Nair et al., 2023), and physical literacy through YouTube videos (Bopp et al., 2019).

Effects of Social Media and Micro Content on Mental Health

Research shows a strong relationship between short-form video consumption and anxiety. (Ruomei Sun, 2024) found that stress, negative beliefs, and coping needs increase vulnerability to short-form video addiction, leading to anxiety symptoms. (Zhang, Wu, & Liu, 2019) reported that social interaction anxiety

and addiction to short-video apps disrupt relationships and cause mood swings and psychological conflict. (Jabeen, Chaudhary, & Munir, 2024) found that high TikTok usage among Pakistani youth increases anxiety, sadness, and self-esteem issues. Studies also show that selfie posting and photo editing negatively affect mood, confidence, and perceived attractiveness, particularly among women (Mills et al., 2018). Similar outcomes were observed among Bangladeshi teenagers due to algorithm-driven content (Hossain & Ahsan, 2024). (Goldon, 2024) highlighted the hidden cognitive and emotional risks of short videos, including anxiety and stress. While TikTok can provide creativity and enjoyment, excessive use leads to addiction, anxiety, depression, and reduced attention span (Salam et al., 2022; McCashin & Murphy, 2023).

Depression

A large body of literature links excessive social media use with depression. (Tromholt, 2016) experimentally demonstrated that Facebook use reduces life satisfaction, while reduced usage improves well-being. (Stein, Krause, & Ohler, 2021) showed that constant exposure to idealized body images on Instagram can lead to unhealthy eating behaviors and negative self-perception. Several studies confirmed a positive relationship between high social media consumption and depressive symptoms (Frenn et al., 2023; Sherrell, 2021; Pantic et al., 2012). (Rosen et al., 2013) found that frequent content editing and image control are associated with severe depression. Adolescents also experience mixed emotional outcomes, including inspiration and jealousy, stress and isolation (Weinstein, 2017). (Frison & Eggermont, 2017) and (Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014) found that browsing Instagram and Facebook highlight reels increases depressive mood through social comparison. Additional studies reported depression linked to reels, stories, and short videos among college students and youth (Medruţ, 2021; Smith & Short, 2022; Daniels et al., 2021; Cataldo et al., 2021). (Bibi & Ahmed, 2024) confirmed that addiction to platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat negatively affects youth mental health in Pakistan. Longitudinal evidence also shows a reciprocal relationship between short-video addiction and depressive symptoms among Chinese youth (Qu et al., 2024), emphasizing the cyclical nature of addiction and depression.

Low Self-Esteem

Existing literature consistently shows that intensive use of social media especially image- and reel-based platforms negatively affects self-esteem and body image. Constant social validation seeking and comparison lower self-worth and increase self-doubt (Andreassen, Pallesen, & Griffiths, 2017; Stapleton, Luiz, & Chatwin, 2017). Appearance-focused engagement on Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat intensifies body image concerns through photo sharing, filters, and beauty-enhancing lenses (Cohen, Newton-John, & Slater, 2017; Burnell, Kurup, & Underwood, 2022; Mehta, 2023). Snapchat users show higher digital narcissism, greater self-objectification, and lower self-esteem compared to Facebook users, with notable gender differences (Musarrat et al., 2022). Instagram use promotes subconscious social comparison, leading to anxiety, depression, body dissatisfaction, and reduced self-esteem, especially when exposed to beauty and fitness content (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019; Nazar & Raj, 2023). Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable due to algorithm-driven content, peer feedback, and identity shaping processes (Goodyear et al., 2018; Sabir et al., 2020; Davis, 2011; Daneshjo, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

According to (Grant C. &., 2014) it was indicated that the base of any research study is stated as a theoretical framework. The center of the study is derived from the theoretical framework as it shows the center and the depth of information given in the study. Miller et al., (2010) stated that the road for the research to attain the objectives of his study and spread new knowledge is carried out by theoretical framework. This research on the impact of bite- sized content on youth via social media draws upon Cultivation Theory and Social

Media Addiction Theory to understand the consequences of social media consumption. Both theories provide a solid foundation to explore the complex interactions between youth and short-form content, highlighting how repeated exposure can shape perceptions and behaviors.

Hypothesis

1. Greater engagement with bite-sized social media content is associated with anxiety among Pakistani youth.

2. Increased exposure to short-form digital content contributes to higher depressive symptoms among young social media users in Pakistan.

3. Frequent consumption of bite-sized content on social networking platforms is linked to diminished self-esteem among Pakistani youth.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological procedures adopted to investigate the psychological, emotional, and behavioral effects of bite-sized social media content on Pakistani youth. It describes the research design, population, sampling strategy, data collection instrument, validity and reliability procedures, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. This design was chosen because it allows examination of relationships among variables such as short-form content consumption, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem across a large population at a single point in time. Quantitative surveys are widely used in media and communication research to measure behavioral patterns and psychological effects objectively.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised Pakistani youth aged 15–29 who actively use short-form content platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, Facebook Reels, and YouTube Shorts. A non-probability Purposive sampling technique was used due to accessibility, time limitations, and the online nature of youth engagement.

A total of 505 respondents participated in the survey, ensuring sufficient representation for statistical analysis while maintaining demographic diversity in terms of age, gender, and educational background.

Research Instrument:

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The instrument consisted of four main sections:

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Content Validity

The questionnaire underwent expert review by specialists in media studies and psychology. They evaluated the relevance, clarity, and alignment of each item with the study's objectives. Feedback from the panel ensured that the instrument accurately reflected the constructs under investigation.

Reliability

A pilot test was conducted with a small group of respondents (n=30) to assess internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha values for all major constructs content consumption, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem fell within acceptable ranges, confirming the reliability of the questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through google-forms. Respondents voluntarily filled out the questionnaire after reading a brief description of the study and providing informed consent.

The online mode of distribution enabled wider geographical reach and ensured efficient participation from digitally active youth.

Data Analysis Techniques

The responses were coded and analyzed using SPSS. The analysis included:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to summarize demographic characteristics and consumption patterns.

- **Inferential Statistics:**

    a. **Correlation analysis** to examine relationships among short-form content consumption, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.

    b. **Regression analysis** to determine the predictive effect of content consumption on psychological outcomes.

These methods provided a clear understanding of both trends and causal influence within the dataset.

Ethical Considerations

The research followed ethical guidelines ensuring respondent safety and integrity of data. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was guaranteed, and no identifying information was collected.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Crosstab of Gender and daily time spent by micro content

Time spent			Up to an hour	Up to 2 hours	Up to 3 hours	Up to 4 hours	More than four hours	Total
Gender	Male	Count	12	21	13	66	114	226
		% of Total	2.3%	4.1%	2.6%	13.1%	22.6%	44.7%
	Female	Count	14	18	33	89	125	279
		% of Total	2.8%	3.6%	6.5%	17.6%	24.8%	55.3%
Total			26	39	46	155	239	505
		% of Total	5.1%	7.7%	9.1%	30.7%	47.4%	100.0%

Table 1 indicates that nearly half of the respondents (47.4%) spend more than four hours daily consuming bite-sized social media content, followed by 30.7% who spend up to four hours. Smaller proportions spend up to three hours (9.1%), two hours (7.7%), or one hour (5.1%). Gender-wise, females (24.8%) are slightly more likely than males (22.6%) to spend more than four hours per day on such content.

Table 2 Crosstab for frequency of preference to watch bite-sized content

			Very Frequently	Frequently	To Some Extent	Never	Don't Know	Total
Gender	Male	Count	120	44	22	21	19	226
		% of Total	23.8%	8.7%	4.3%	4.1%	3.8%	44.7%
	Female	Count	125	63	33	26	32	279
		% of Total	24.7%	12.5%	6.6%	5.2%	6.3%	55.3%
Total			245	107	55	47	51	505
		% of Total	48.5%	21.2%	10.9%	9.3%	10.1%	100.0%

Table 2 shows that 48.5% of respondents very frequently prefer bite-sized content, followed by 21.2% frequently, while the remaining categories account for less than 11% each. Females (24.7%) slightly surpass males (23.8%) in very frequent preference.

Table 3 Crosstab for frequency of high feeling nervous after spending high time

			Very greatly	Greatly	To Some Extent	Never	Don't Know	Total
Gender	Male	Count	172	26	7	8	13	226
		% of Total	34.1%	5.2%	1.4%	1.5%	2.5%	44.7%
	Female	Count	181	48	22	18	10	279
		% of Total	35.8%	9.5%	4.3%	3.7%	2%	55.3%
Total			353	74	29	26	23	505
		% of Total	69.9%	14.7%	5.7%	5.2%	4.5%	100.0%

Table 3 indicates that a large majority of respondents (69.9%) very greatly feel nervous and anxious after consuming bite-sized content, followed by 14.7% who feel greatly. Females (35.8%) report slightly higher very great anxiety than males (34.1%).

Table 4 Crosstab for frequency of feeling worry after watching short videos

			Very Greatly	Greatly	To Some Extent	Never	Don't Know	Total
Gender	Male	Count	180	11	7%	9	19	226
		% of Total	35.6%	2.2%	1.4	1.8%	3.8%	44.7%
	Female	Count	196	28	18	14	23	279
		% of Total	38.8%	5.5%	3.6%	2.8%	4.5%	55.3
Total			376	39	45	23	42	505
		% of Total	74.4%	7.7%	5.0%	4.6%	8.3%	100.0%

Table 4 shows cross tabulation of gender and frequency of feeling worry about ongoing things after consuming bite sized content. The overall data shows 74.4% respondents very greatly feel worry about ongoing things after consuming bite sized content, as compared to other categories,8.3% don't know opinion,7.7% greatly,5.0% to some extent and 4.6 % respondents gave never. Gender wise data shows some difference in terms of, very greatly where 38.8% females do feel worry about ongoing things after consuming bite sized content, as compared to male 35.6%.

Table 5 Crosstab for frequency of feeling restless after using micro content

			Very Greatly	Greatly	To Some Extent	Never	Don't Know	Total
Gender	Male	Count	165	11	14	9	27	226
		% of Total	32.7%	2.2%	2.7%	1.8%	5.3%	44.7%
	Female	Count	201	20	14	7	37	279
		% of Total	39.8%	4%	2.8%	1.4%	7.3%	55.3
Total			366	31	28	16	64	505
		% of Total	72.5%	6.2%	5.5%	3.2%	12.6%	100.0%

Table 5 indicates that a strong majority of respondents (72.5%) very greatly feel restless after consuming bite-sized content. Much smaller proportions report feeling greatly (6.2%), to some extent (5.5%), never (3.2%), or are unsure (12.6%). Gender-wise, females (39.8%) report higher levels of restlessness than males (32.7%).

Table 6 Crosstab for frequency of feeling inadequate due to snackable content

			Very Greatly	Greatly	To Some Extent	Never	Don't Know	Total
Gender	Male	Count	108	66	32	16	4	226
		% of Total	21.4%	13.1	6.3	3.2	0.8	44.7%
	Female	Count	150	85	33	7	4	279
		% of Total	29.7%	16.8	6.6	1.4	0.8	55.3%
Total			258	151	65	23	8	505
		% of Total	51.1%	29.9%	12.9%	4.6%	1.6%	100.0%

Table 6 shows cross tabulation of gender and frequency of feeling inadequate after consuming bite sized content. The overall data shows 51.1% respondents very greatly do feel inadequate after consuming bite sized content, as compared to other categories, 29.9% greatly,12.9 % respondents gave to some extent,4.6% never and, 1.6% respondents gave Don't Know opinion. Gender wise data shows some difference in terms of very greatly and, to some extent where 29.7% females do feel inadequate after consuming bite sized content as compared to 21.4% male.

Table 7 Crosstab for frequency of feeling depressed

			Very Greatly	Greatly	To Some Extent	Never	Don't Know	Total
Gender	Male	Count	119	71	26	8	2	226
		% of Total	23.6%	14.1%	5.1%	1.6%	0.4%	44.7%
	Female	Count	135	79	46	16	3	279
		% of Total	26.7%	15.6%	9.2%	3.2%	0.6%	55.3%
Total			254	150	72	24	5	505
		% of Total	50.3%	29.7%	14.3%	4.8%	1.0%	100.0%

Table 7 shows that half of the respondents (50.3%) very greatly feel depressed after consuming bite-sized content, followed by 29.7% who feel greatly. Smaller proportions report feeling to some extent (14.3%), never (4.8%), or are unsure (1.0%). Gender-wise, females (26.7%) report slightly higher very great depression than males (23.6%).

Table 8 Crosstab for frequency of feeling guilty

			Very Greatly	Greatly	To Some Extent	Never	Don't Know	Total
Gender	Male	Count	113	65	36	9	3	226
		% of Total	22.4%	12.8%	7.1%	1.8%	0.6	44.7%
	Female	Count	127	79	50	17	6	279
		% of Total	25.1%	15.7%	9.9%	3.4%	1.2%	55.3%
Total			240	144	86	26	9	505
		% of Total	47.5%	28.5%	17.0%	5.2%	1.8%	100.0%

Table 8 shows cross tabulation of gender and frequency of feeling guilty about high consumption of bite sized content. The overall data shows 47.5% respondents very greatly feel guilty after high consumption of bite sized content, as compared to other categories ,28.5% greatly ,17.0% to some extent, 5.2% never and ,1.8% respondents gave Don't Know opinion. Gender wise data shows some difference in terms of very greatly where 25.1% females do feel guilty after high consumption of bite sized content as compared to 22.4% male.

Table 9 Crosstab for frequency of feeling uneasy when others praise on the reels.

			Very Greatly	Greatly	To Some Extent	Never	Don't Know	Total
Gender	Male	Count	64	55	48	33	26	226
		% of Total	12.7%	10.9%	9.5%	6.5%	5.1%	44.7%
	Female	Count	75	62	60	53	29	279
		% of Total	14.8%	12.3%	11.9%	10.5%	5.8%	55.3%
Total			139	117	108	86	55	505
		% of Total	27.5%	23.2%	21.4%	17.0%	10.9%	100.0%

Table 9 shows that 27.5% of respondents very greatly feel uncomfortable when receiving praise on bite-sized content, followed by 23.2% who feel greatly uncomfortable. The remaining respondents report discomfort to some extent (21.4%), never (17.0%), or are unsure (10.9%). Gender-wise, females (14.8%) report slightly higher very great discomfort than males (12.7%).

Table 10 Crosstab for frequency of feeling less worthy

			Very Greatly	Greatly	To Some Extent	Never	Don't Know	Total
Gender	Male	Count	61	79	21	43	22	226
		% of Total	12.1	15.6%	4.2	8.5	4.4	44.7%
	Female	Count	81	72	53	45	28	279
		% of Total	16.0	14.3	10.5	8.9	5.5	55.3%
Total			142	151	74	88	50	505
		% of Total	28.1%	29.9%	14.7%	17.4%	9.9%	100.0%

Table 10 indicates that most respondents feel less worthy after observing others' achievements on bite-sized content, with 29.9% reporting great and 28.1% very great feelings. Smaller proportions report such feelings to some extent (14.7%), never (17.4%), or are unsure (9.9%). Gender-wise, males (15.6%) report slightly higher great feelings of reduced self-worth than females (14.3%).

Table 11 Crosstab for frequency of complex about physical appearance

			Very Greatly	Greatly	To Some Extent	Never	Don't Know	Total
Gender	Male	Count	61	55	49	30	31	226
		% of Total	12.1%	10.8	9.7	5.9	6.1	44.7%
	Female	Count	76	65	51	51	36	279
		% of Total	15.0%	12.9	10.1	10.1	7.1	55.3%
Total			137	120	100	81	67	505
		% of Total	27.1%	23.8%	19.8%	16.0%	13.3%	100.0%

Table 11 shows cross tabulation of gender and frequency of comparing body shape and appearance because of bite sized content consumption. The overall data shows 27.1% respondents very greatly compare body shape and appearance because of bite sized content consumption, as compared to other categories, 23.8% greatly,19.8 % to some extent,16.0 % never and 13.3% respondents chose don't know opinion. Gender wise data shows some difference in terms of very greatly15.0 % females do compare body shape and appearance because of bite sized content as compared to 12.1% male.

Descriptive, Correlation and Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Independent and Dependent Variables

Table 12 presents the descriptive statistics for the independent variable, bite-sized content usage on social media (BTCUSM), and the selected dependent variables related to mental health. The mean score for BTCUSM is 26.7 with a standard deviation of 5.7, indicating a moderately high level of engagement with bite-sized content among the respondents and a reasonable variation in usage patterns.

Among the mental health variables, depression recorded a mean score of 7.2 (SD = 0.87), reflecting relatively low variability and suggesting that depressive symptoms were experienced in a fairly consistent manner across the sample. Anxiety showed a similar mean of 7.1 but with a higher standard deviation (SD = 2.3), indicating greater variability in anxiety levels among respondents. Low self-esteem reported a comparatively higher mean score of 12.9 (SD = 1.9), suggesting that concerns related to self-worth were more prominent and relatively consistent within the study population.

Overall, the descriptive findings indicate notable engagement with bite-sized social media content and reveal varying levels of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem among respondents, highlighting the relevance of examining the relationship between short-form content consumption and mental health outcomes.

Table 12 Descriptive analysis of independent and dependent variable

Variable	Mean	SD
BTCUSM	26.7	5.7
Anxiety	7.1	2.3
Depression	7.2	.87
Low self-esteem	12.9	1.9

Table 13 Correlations Between independent and dependent variables

		BTCUSM	Anxiety	Depression	Low self-esteem
BTCUSM	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	505			
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.651**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	505	505		
Depression	Pearson Correlation	.732**	.660**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	505	505	505	
Low self-esteem	Sleep disturbance	.635**	.613**	.850**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	505	505	505	505
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Table 13 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between bite-sized content usage on social media (BTCUSM) and the selected dependent variables, namely anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) ranges from −1 to +1 and indicates both the direction and strength of the relationship between variables. Positive values represent a direct relationship, meaning that an increase in one variable is associated with an increase in the other, while values closer to ±1 reflect stronger associations. All reported correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$), indicating a high level of confidence in the observed relationships.

The results show a strong positive correlation between BTCUSM and anxiety (r = .651, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that higher consumption of bite-sized content is associated with increased anxiety levels among respondents. BTCUSM also demonstrates a very strong positive relationship with depression (r = .732, $p < 0.01$), indicating that greater exposure to bite-sized social media content is strongly linked with higher levels of depressive symptoms. Similarly, BTCUSM is strongly and positively correlated with low self-

esteem (r = .635, p < 0.01), implying that increased engagement with bite-sized content is associated with higher levels of low self-esteem among participants.

In addition, the inter-correlations among the dependent variables reveal strong positive associations. Anxiety is significantly correlated with depression (r = .660, p < 0.01) and low self-esteem (r = .613, p < 0.01). Depression shows an especially strong correlation with low self-esteem (r = .850, p < 0.01), indicating a substantial overlap between depressive symptoms and self-esteem issues within the sample.

Table 14 Regression analysis for the main effects of BTCUSM upon Anxiety

Predictor	Anxiety	
BTCUSM	B	ΔR^2
	0.103	.422

*Note: N = 505, *p < 0.01*

The regression analysis for the effect of BTCUSM on anxiety shows that the unstandardized coefficient (B) is 0.103, and the change in explained variance (ΔR^2) is 0.422, with a significant positive correlation between BTCUSM and anxiety (r = 0.651, p < 0.01). Since the results are statistically significant, so our hypothesis that BTCUSM significantly impacts anxiety is accepted.

Table 15 Regression analysis for the main effects of BTCUSM upon Depression

Predictor	Depression	
BTCUSM	B	ΔR^2
	0.42	.535

*Note: N = 505, *p < 0.01*

For the effect of BTCUSM on depression, the unstandardized coefficient (B) is 0.42, with a change in explained variance (ΔR^2) of 0.535. The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between BTCUSM and depression (r = 0.732, p < 0.01). As the results our hypothesis that BTCUSM significantly impacts depression is accepted.

Table 16 Regression analysis for the main effects of BTCUSM upon perception of Low self esteem

Predictor	Low self esteem	
BTCUSM	B	ΔR^2
	0.8	.403

*Note: N = 505, *p < 0.01*

The regression analysis for BTCUSM's effect on low self-esteem shows an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.8, with a change in explained variance (ΔR^2) of 0.403. The correlation analysis indicates a significant positive relationship between BTCUSM and low self-esteem (r = 0.613, p < 0.01). Given the statistical significance of the results, so hypothesis that BTCUSM significantly connected with low self-esteem is accepted.

Table 17 Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Description	Result
H1	Greater engagement with bite-sized social media content is associated with anxiety among Pakistani youth.	Supported
H2	Increased exposure to short-form digital content contributes to higher depressive symptoms among young social media users in Pakistan.	Supported
H3	Frequent consumption of bite-sized content on social networking platforms is linked to diminished self-esteem among Pakistani youth.	Supported

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between bite-sized social media content usage and mental health outcomes among Pakistani youth, focusing on anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. The findings show that short-form content consumption is significantly associated with negative psychological outcomes, supporting the proposed hypotheses. Descriptive results indicate high engagement with bite-sized content, confirming its dominance in youth media habits. Correlation analysis revealed strong positive associations between BTCUSM and anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Regression findings further demonstrated that bite-sized content usage significantly predicts these mental health outcomes, with depression showing the strongest effect.

The positive association between BTCUSM and anxiety suggests that continuous exposure to fast-paced, algorithm-driven content may increase psychological arousal, restlessness, and worry. These findings are consistent with prior research linking excessive social media use to heightened anxiety due to constant stimulation and information overload. Similarly, the strong relationship between BTCUSM and depression indicates that prolonged exposure to idealized lifestyles and success narratives may intensify feelings of sadness and emotional exhaustion. Repeated social comparison appears to play a key role in shaping depressive symptoms among young users. The association between bite-sized content usage and low self-esteem further highlights the psychological risks of short-form media. Appearance-focused content and feedback-driven interactions may weaken self-worth, particularly among youth who rely heavily on online validation.

Overall, the findings support Cultivation Theory and Social Media Addiction Theory by demonstrating how repeated exposure and habitual engagement with short-form content can gradually influence emotional states and self-perception.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that bite-sized social media content usage has a significant and adverse impact on the mental well-being of Pakistani youth. Higher consumption of short-form content is associated with increased anxiety, greater depressive symptoms, and lower self-esteem. While bite-sized content offers convenience and entertainment, excessive use poses psychological risks that should not be overlooked. These findings emphasize the need for media literacy initiatives, balanced digital habits, and mental health awareness programs targeting young social media users.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs, explore moderating factors such as gender and personality, and examine protective strategies to reduce the negative effects of short-form content consumption.

REFERENCES

Andreassen, C. S. (2017). The relationship between social media addiction and mental health: A review of the literature. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking,*, 20(4), 159-169.

Andreassen, C. S., Pallesen, S., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). The relationship between addictive use of social media, narcissism, and self-esteem: Findings from a large national survey. *Addictive Behaviors*, 287-293.

Arendt, F. (2019). Suicide on Instagram – Content Analysis of a German Suicide-Related Hashtag. *Crisis*.

Bahtar, A. Z. (2023). The Impact of Instagram Reels on Youths' Trust and their Holiday Intention. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 635–641.

Bibi, S., & Ahmed, S. (2024). A Quantitative Research on the Level of Social Media Addiction and its Effects on Psychological Health among Undergraduate Students of Pakistan. *CARC Research in Social Sciences*, 99-106.

Boothby, C., Murray, D., Waggy, A. P., Tsou, A., & Sugimoto, C. R. (2021). Credibility of scientific information on social media: Variation by platform, genre and presence of formal credibility cues. *Quantitative Science Studies*, 1-30.

Bopp, T., Vadeboncoeur, J. D., Stellefson, M., & Weinsz, M. (2019). Moving Beyond the Gym: A Content Analysis of YouTube as an Information Resource for Physical Literacy. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 3335.

Carr, C. T., & Hayes, R. A. (2015). Social Media: Defining, Developing, and Divining. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 46-65.

Cohen, R., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2017). The relationship between Facebook and Instagram appearance-focused activities and body image concerns in young women. *Body Image*, 183-187.

Darwaish, S., & Nazneen, L. (2022). Impact of TikTok Use on Narcissistic Personality Traits among Youth in Peshawar, Pakistan. *International Journal of Psychological and Behavioural Research (IJPBR)*, 57-73.

Dash, A. (2002, November 13). *Introducing the Microcontent Client*. Retrieved from https://www.anildash.com/2002/11/13/introducing-microcontent-client/

Davis, K. (2011). Tensions of identity in a networked era: Young people's perspectives on the risks and rewards of online self-expression. *New Media & Society*, 634-651.

Dong, X., Liu, H., Xi, N., Liao, J., & Yang, Z. (2023). Short video marketing: what, when and how short-branded videos facilitate consumer engagement. *Internet Research*, 1104-1128.

Engel, E., Gell, S., Heiss, R., & Karsay, K. (2024). Social media influencers and adolescents' health: A scoping review of the research field. *Social Science & Medicine*, 116387.

Frenn, Y. E., Hallit, S., Obeid, S., & Soufia, M. (2023). Association of the time spent on social media news with depression and suicidal ideation among a sample of Lebanese adults during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Lebanese economic crisis. *Current Psychology*, 20638-20650.

Goldon, D. (2024). Short Videos: The Real Detrimental Inducer for Concealed Brain Damage. *Science Insights*, 1275–1281.

Goodyear, V. A., Armour, K. M., & Wood, H. (2018). Young people and their engagement with health-related social media: new perspectives. *Sport, Education and Society*, 673–688.

Grant, C. &. (2014). Understanding, Selecting, and Integrating a Theoretical Framework in Dissertation Research: Creating the Blueprint for _House. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice and Research,*, Pp. 12-22 DOI: 10.5.

Hossain, S., & Ahsan, W. b. (2024). Impact of Social Media Reels and Short Videos on Self-Esteem, Behavior, and Mental Health Among Bangladeshi Teenagers.

Hurd, N. (2019). Instagram users' meaning construction through micro-influencer-generated content. *(Master's thesis)*.

Jabbar, J. (1997). Over the people's voice: Liberalisation of broadcasting media in Pakistan. . *Asia Pacific Media Educator*.

Jabeen, D. S., Chaudhary, D. M., & Munir, M. (2024). Tiktok's Impact on Mental Health among Pakistani Youth. *International Journal of Social Science Archives (IJSSA)*.

Jabeen, S., Chaudhary, M. U., & Munir, M. (2024). Tiktok's Impact on Mental Health among Pakistani Youth. *EBSCO*.

Jaffar, B. A., Riaz, S., & Mushtaq, A. (2019). Living in a Moment: Impact of TicTok on Influencing Younger Generation into Micro-Fame. *Journal of Content, Community & Communication*, 187-194.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 59-68.

Kemp, S. (2020, February 18). *Digital 2020: Pakistan*. Retrieved from Datareportal: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-pakistan

McCashin, Darragh; Murphy, Colette M. (2023). Using TikTok for public and youth mental health – A systematic review and content analysis. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 279-306.

McQuail, D. (2010). McQuail's Mass Communication Theory. *Sage Publications*.

Medruţ, F.-P. (2021). The Impact of Social Media Use on Adolescent Mental Health – Depression and Anxiety: A Review. *Social Work Review/Revista de Asistenta Sociala*.

Mueller, M. E., & Rajaram, D. (2022). *Social Media Storytelling*. Routledge.

Musarrat, D. R., Ahmed, S., Munir, F., Riaz, D. S., & Hayat, D. N. (2022). Digital narcissism, self-esteem and self-objectification among Snapchat Vs. Facebook Users. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 3128-3141.

Nair, I., Patel, S. P., Bolen, A., Roger, S., Bucci, K., Schwab-Reese, L., & DeMaria, A. L. (2023). Reproductive Health Experiences Shared on TikTok by Young People: Content Analysis. *JMIR Infodemiology*.

Narwani, M. D. (2023). A Study on Impact of Instagram Marketing on the Youth of Mumbai.

Paljug, K. (2025, February 11). *Social Media*. Retrieved from Investopedia: https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp

Pantic, I., Damjanovic, A., Todorovic, J., Topalovic, D., Bojovic-Jovic, D., Ristic, S., & Pantic, S. (2012). Association between online social networking and depression in high school students: behavioral physiology viewpoint. *Psychiatr Danub*, 90–93.

Qureshi, A. (2019). Socio-Psychological Effects of Mass Media on Youth. *International Journal of Innovation and Applied Studies*, 73-83.

Rosen, L., Whaling, K., Rab, S., Carrier, L., & Cheever, N. (2013). Is Facebook creating "iDisorders"? The link between clinical symptoms of psychiatric disorders and technology use, attitudes and anxiety. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 1243-1254.

Ruimei Sun, M. X. (2024). The metacognitive-motivational links between stress and short-form video addiction. *Technology in Society,*, volume 77.

Sabir, D. I., Nasim, I., Majid, M. B., Mahmud, D. S., & Sabir, N. (2020). TikTok Addictions and Its Disorders among Youth of Pakistan. *SCHOLEDGE International Journal of Multidisciplinary & Allied Studies*, 140-146.

Salam, A. H., Sajid, K., Ullah, I., & Butt, H. R. (2022). Impact of TikTok on youth lifestyle in Lahore. *Cyberpsychology, behavior, and social networking*, 63-77.

Shahid Ali, M. G. (2017). Liberalization of Media in Pakistan: A Challenge to Democracy. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences.*

Sherlock, M., & Wagstaff, D. L. (2019). Exploring the relationship between frequency of Instagram use, exposure to idealized images, and psychological well-being in women. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 482.

Sherrell, Z. (2021, September 15). *What to know about social media and mental health*. Retrieved from Medical News Today: https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/social-media-and-mental-health

Shukri, N. A., & Mustaffa, N. (2023). Exploring the Influences of Social Networking Service (SNS) on Consumer Purchase Behaviour. *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Communication and Media.*

Smith, A. (2011, November 15). *Why Americans Use Social Media*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2011/11/15/why-americans-use-social-media/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22208515841&gclid=CjwKCAjw8IfABhBXEiwAxRHlsMzS9W_o5tQS20EeKur_rupe5n5hahvEoRCnDY6kRyJjv7NsCPbJ2xoCvHYQAvD_BwE

Steers, M.-L. N., Wickham, R. E., & Acitelli, L. K. (2014). Seeing Everyone Else's Highlight Reels: How Facebook Usage is Linked to Depressive Symptoms. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 701-731.

Stein, J.-P., krause, E., & Ohler, P. (2021). Every (Insta)Gram counts? Applying cultivation theory to explore the effects of Instagram on young users' body image. *Psychology of popular media*, 87.

Tromholt, M. (2016). The Facebook experiment: Quitting Facebook leads to higher levels of well-being. *Cyberpsychology, behavior, and social networking*, 661-666.

Valkenburg, P. M., Meier, A., & Beyens, I. (2022). Social media use and its impact on adolescent mental health: An umbrella review of the evidence. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 58-68.

Weinstein, E. (2017). Influences of Social Media Use on Adolescent Psychosocial Well-being: 'OMG' or 'NBD'? *Doctoral dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education.*

Xiuwen, Z., & Razali, A. B. (2021). An Overview of the Utilization of TikTok to Improve Oral English Communication Competence among EFL Undergraduate Students. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 1439-1451.

Zhang, X., Wu, Y., & Liu, S. (2019). Exploring short-form video application addiction: Socio-technical and attachment perspectives. *Telematics and Informatics*, 101243.

Zsila, Á., & Reyes, M. E. (2023). Pros & cons: impacts of social media on mental health. *BMC Psychology*, 201