

Balancing Act: Pakistan's Quest for Responsible Social Media Regulation

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Abstract

In regulating social media, Pakistan stands at a critical juncture: it can choose to enforce existing laws more rigorously; impose stricter governmental regulations--or opt for a user-empowering approach that prioritizes algorithm transparency. It is advised to adopt a balanced combination strategy that includes not only enforcing current legislation but also empowering users through customizable algorithms and transparency measures to effectively counter misinformation. This integrated approach has several advantages: it swiftly tackles immediate threats posed by illegal content, encourages responsible online behavior, combats misinformation echo chambers—all while prioritizing user empowerment over governmental control. Moving forward, Pakistan must construct a clear and open regulatory framework that involves all stakeholders – the government, civil society organizations, social media platforms, and users themselves – to create a healthy online environment for its citizens.

Keywords: PECA, Social Media Regulations, Customizable Algorithms, Algorithms Transparency, Regulatory Strategy Options.

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1. Introduction

The rapid growth of social media in Pakistan has substantially transformed communication, creating new opportunities for interaction and connection. The digital revolution brings about advantageous effects; however, it also has some downsides such as an upsurge in hate speech, cyberbullying, and a widening spectrum of social inequities that range from insults to threats of physical harm. (Saleem et al., 2021; Iftikhar & Beh, 2018).

The Pakistani government has the authority to restrict internet access for its citizens; in the interest of domestic security; this is an unassailable right. (Jamil, 2021; Deibert et al., 2008). Swift action is undeniably required to increase regulation of social media sites due to their ability to cause havoc both domestically and internationally, occasionally even national security at risk.

A report by Baig reveals a surge of misleading content related to the "Civil War in Pakistan" on social media in April 2021, with a particular geographic area having played a significant role. The accuracy of Twitter posts from a prominent media organization came under scrutiny and the issue

was amplified by the national air force releasing an untruthful warning about eliminating Taliban forces, further complicating matters. Recent events have highlighted the pressing need for reliable information and the implications of external actors disseminating deceptive information. The widespread use of social media has amplified the significance of content regulation.

Following a new ruling from the US Supreme Court, social media networks are now legally mandated to monitor user-generated content. Per Article 8 of the "Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content Rules, 2021", social media platforms are required to independently oversee the content they host. This shift reflects a growing awareness of social media's societal influence and emphasizes the importance of upholding the integrity and veracity of the information present online. To achieve this objective, clearer and more simplified "Community Guidelines" are required, as well as the swift removal of any content that violates local laws and regulations. As a result, various social media platforms have adapted their policies; in 2014, Facebook shifted away from "minimal self-governance" to "augmented self-governance" (Medzini, 2022).

Social media has emerged as a potent means for organizing demonstrations in Pakistan. However, it also harbors an ominous aspect. These platforms have the capability to disseminate extremist ideologies, exacerbate sectarian conflicts, and perpetuate misinformation. Moreover, prolonged use of social media has been correlated with heightened instances of mental health disorders, depression, and loneliness, particularly among the nation's youth.

Pakistan's approach to regulating offline and online expression differs significantly from Western perspectives, particularly from the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. The country's focus is on enacting legislation, such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) of 2016 that strikes a fine balance between protecting individuals' right to free expression and prohibiting the misuse of internet platforms for negative purposes. The Pakistan Electronic Communications Act (PECA) grants the government the authority to prohibit material detrimental to society's welfare, national interests, or moral principles. Nevertheless, the application of these measures raises concerns regarding censorship and limitations on free speech. The legal framework known as the "Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content (Procedure, Oversight and Safeguards) Rules, 2021" has drawn criticism due to its broad and vague character. The concept of an "aggrieved individual" is still unclear, leading to uncertainty in processing complaints and applications. Concerns are also raised by the review mechanism over the process's impartiality and transparency. The absence of a thorough framework for monitoring social media content in the current PECA implementation raises the possibility of violating the fundamental rights to privacy and freedom of speech.

Despite laws against censorship, such as a chapter on 'Safeguarding the Freedom of Speech and Expression,' Pakistan scored extremely low on the World Press Freedom Index 2022, indicating ongoing free expression difficulties. The law's imprecise goals make implementation challenging. The recent mushrooming of private TV channels has drastically changed the whole scenario of our news and information consumption patterns (Wasim et al., 2012). After the 2014 Army Public School attack, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act was passed in 2016, along with steps to address security, privacy, data protection, extremism, and defense.

Pakistani social networking networks need help with registration, workspaces, and compliance officials (Amin, 2022). These obstacles frustrate Industry members, and social media networks may leave Pakistan (Ahmadani, 2021). This shows that the country needs to do more to attract and maintain private tech firms. This involves simplifying registration and supporting these companies. Simplifying bureaucracy and offering incentives can help these platforms stay. A robust

technology ecosystem requires government-business collaboration. Pakistan may recruit these firms by addressing issues and providing a suitable environment.

Given the obstacles and apprehensions surrounding current PECA legislation, it is indisputable that content moderation and social media regulation constitute a complex undertaking that demands meticulous consideration. To maintain order without infringing on individuals' rights to privacy and freedom of expression, a nuanced equilibrium must be maintained.

2. Research Problem

Despite the rapid expansion of social media in Pakistan, clear and effective regulations are lacking to strike a balance between online safety, national security, and the fundamental right to free speech. Privacy and transparency are issues already burdened by legislation such as PECA (2016), and social media companies' self-regulation practices introduce further intricacy. The objective of this research is to examine the complexities associated with regulating social media within Pakistan's unique context. This study will examine the efficacy of existing legislation and alternative regulatory strategies regarding national security, online freedom of expression, and free speech. The objective is to ascertain a harmonious strategy that balances protecting digital user rights with promoting a secure online environment.

3. Literature Review

In Pakistan, the laws to regulate inappropriate media content have evolved over the years with the advent of every new media. A brief overview of these laws underscores the consistent efforts of the state of Pakistan to balance freedom of speech with society's well-being and tranquility.

3.1. Constitutional Provisions

Essential rights and values are set out in the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973, and are used as the basis for all laws. Article 19 says that everyone has the right to free speech and expression, but it also says that some restrictions are necessary to protect national security, public order, and morals in society. Pakistan's media content laws are based on the constitutional clause.

3.2. Print Media Laws

Pakistan Penal Code and the Press & Publications Ordinance are the primary laws regulating print media in Pakistan. These laws define offenses such as defamation, obscenity, and sedition. In 2002, these laws were revised and named as the Press Regulations, focusing on the registration of newspapers.

3.3. Electronic Media Regulation

An independent body PEMRA was established in 2002 with the advent of private TV channels. PEMRA primarily deals with issuing licenses, monitoring content, and ensuring ethical standards in media content. It brought about significant changes in how electronic media is regulated. PEMRA carefully monitors broadcasting practices. It has the authority to penalize electronic media outlets in case of violating established rules of conduct. The objective remains to protect the public against unsuitable content that may be harmful.

3.4. Cybercrime Legislation

In 2016, Pakistan enacted the Prevention of Electronic Crime Act (PECA). This law intends to address cybercrime. On February 18, 2022, the government passed an ordinance amending the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 (PECA) to make online "defamation" of authorities, including the military and judiciary, a criminal offense with harsh penalties. It responds to the growing digital landscape and the emergence of new online channels. The PECA expanded the government's power. It is capable of managing internal material and prosecuting specific infractions. These include harassment, cyberstalking, hate speech, and defamation. It governs

online activity and protects people from potentially harmful or illegal digital content and persecution.

3.5.Social Media Regulations

Pakistan's government has recently been focusing on controlling social media sites to deal with problems like hate speech, extreme content, and false information. The "Citizens Protection Rules" (2020) and the "Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content Rules" (2021) are two rules that specifically target social media activities. It was said that the January 2020 guidelines might limit free speech. They were changed by the "Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content (Procedure, Oversight and Safeguards) Rules, 2021." While trying to solve problems with online speech in society, groups like the Asia Internet Coalition raised worries about people's privacy and freedom of speech about how these rules would be applied.

3.6.Judicial Precedents

In Pakistan, the court system is very important. It talks about and follows media rules. Court rulings about free speech, libel, and censorship affect what the government does and the laws it passes. These decisions affect how Pakistan deals with media content in a way that respects constitutional rights, the law, and traditional norms. Media oversight in Pakistan is hard for a lot of reasons. Freedom of speech must be balanced with the public good and social peace. Laws about media content today show that the state is still trying to figure out how to deal with these problems while protecting basic rights and values.

4. Research Methodology:

The study examined potential strategies to govern social media in Pakistan, as well as the implications of such rules. The researchers used a qualitative approach and drew their results from both first-hand and second-hand sources. It included an in-depth look at all the previous studies and an analysis of what experts in the field had to say. Scholarly journals, government documents, policy papers, and online sources were used to look into Pakistan's current rules on social media, protections for free speech, and rules to govern digital places. The review talked about the history of regulation, the rules that apply, problems, and possible solutions. The thematic analysis allowed us to draw the major discourses around social media regulations and concerns.

5. Data Analysis

The thematic analysis of the laws, expert opinions, and public sphere discourses the following three approaches are identified as the available three options for the state to regulate social media content.

Option 1: Social Media Companies' Content Moderation in Pakistan

As a global practice, social media companies are mostly responsible for policing their platforms for inappropriate material, which includes detecting, blocking, removing, and reporting instances ; (Yar, 2018, Kasakowkij et al., 2020). Political and practical considerations, such as the potential overreach of government surveillance and the resulting dilution of free expression in liberal democracies, have kept this trend going.

In many respects, the evolution of the internet's regulatory architecture typifies the change from "government" to "governance" in the carrying out of public policy. The term "governance" refers to the emergence of interconnected policy networks that include representatives from the public, commercial, and nonprofit sectors, and work to coordinate social activities or provide "steering" (Rhodes, 2020). In this context, "changed conditions of ordered rule" (pp. 652-653) is what we mean when discussing governance. This means that processes outside of nation-state institutions are now responsible for achieving the same goals as centralized government activities. Several significant factors have contributed to this change. Firstly, there has been a political and

ideological backlash against top-down state interventionism since the 1970s, with supporters arguing that "markets" and "civil society" should handle social functions and needs. Secondly, there is a practical requirement for new forms of coordination due to the increasing complexity and interdependence of globalized systems (Crawford, 2006; Jessop, 2002).

The current self-regulatory approach is in crisis, nevertheless, due to mounting evidence that providers are either unwilling or unable to adequately curb the flow of unlawful and damaging content. Thus, many new suggestions aim to punish and coerce media platforms into taking more coordinated action by increasing the level of government oversight and interference.

There is disagreement among experts on to what extent the government should get involved in the complicated matter of moderating social media content. A straightforward strategy is that the government assert stricter measures by implementation and execution of regulations (such as PECA laws in Pakistan, NetzDG in Germany) to ensure removal of have been heavily criticized for suppressing dissent and restricting free expression, even with legal protections (Crilly & Gillespie, 2019). There are still worries that laws are occasionally administered unfairly, and underprivileged groups fear excessive monitoring or censorship (Yar, 2018, Kasakowkij et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, the strategy is to let social media companies remove potentially harmful content through their filtering processes respecting the cultural, religious, and political sensitivities. However, this cannot be accomplished in the absence of mutually accepted standards. To reach a consensus on what should be removed, some have proposed that social media companies form an unbiased consortium with representatives from the corporate world, user base, and even the government to establish and enforce content standards. (Vizoso et al., 2021). Although internal regulations and codes of conduct on social networks can help combat harmful content such as hate speech, they confront obstacles due to various legal jurisdictions and technological realities (Alkiviadou, 2018).

This strategy seeks to safeguard people's freedom of expression online while also preventing negative effects from the internet by establishing a set of well-defined guidelines. The challenge is to walk the fine line between removing unpleasant content and retaining the internet as a venue for free speech, especially in a country as diverse and complicated as Pakistan.

Option 2: Revising Legal Frameworks for Social Media Accountability in Pakistan

With Pakistani law and social dynamics in mind, there are a lot of complicated issues and worries raised by the idea of changing legal frameworks to make social media companies responsible for harmful information on their platforms. Compared to Western legal systems and cultural norms, Pakistan's are notably different, especially in areas such as internet regulation, free expression, and censorship (Lau, 2005). It is challenging to speak about a singular Pakistani or even Islamic culture due to the country's culturally diversified environment, which has been shaped by Hindu, British, and Islamic influences (Zia, 2003). Modifying Pakistan in a way comparable to Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act might have various ramifications, challenges, and possible consequences.

The primary objective is to improve accountability through changes to the law. To encourage more stringent content moderation standards, Pakistan tries to reduce extremist speech, disinformation, and hate speech without limiting political discourse or free speech by making platforms own user-generated content. Successful content moderation requires overcoming regulatory hurdles and ensuring compliance. Overreach by the government could stifle political opposition, so striking a balance between rights and regulations is critical. To ensure that modifications do not become instruments of political control or to suppress opposition voices, safeguards must be put in place.

Reforms can only be effective with a well-grounded knowledge of local dynamics (Picazo-Vela, Gutiérrez-Martínez, & Luna-Reyes, 2012).

A delicate balancing act between free expression and the prevention of harm regarding social media platforms should be regulated. Because of the risks associated with over-censorship and over-protection, moderation rules should not be overly strict or too nebulous. This makes the option between legislative control and unrestrained speech anything but black and white. While being true to the legislation's original goals and following an ethical framework, it is necessary to clarify the limits of content governance and liability exemption (Zeng, 2023).

Option 3: Granting Users Control Over Content through Customizable Algorithms

In keeping with the principles outlined in Pakistan's constitution, user-controlled algorithms offer an alternative to outright censorship in protecting users from dangerous information. Social media businesses must consider commercial, regulatory, and technical considerations when creating these algorithms (Kirkpatrick, 2016). More significantly, the system will not function unless people understand how to utilize these restrictions, and low education levels may provide challenges.

The third choice is to provide users with the ability to modify algorithms. They are making it possible for users to control what they see online and tailor the algorithms that determine what they see online (Bhargava, 2019; Thilagavathi & Taarika, 2014). This way, they can stay away from unpleasant sights. In this approach, individuals are not enslaved or muzzled by social media but instead given the power to control their content and have constructive online conversations. In addition to letting you express yourself freely, these customizable settings can block harmful content.

The second big problem is joining "echo chambers," where people only see things that make them feel better about themselves. There are two possible solutions. The first thing that would help you understand how these recommendation settings function and make better content decisions is if they were more obvious. Additionally, by promoting positive discourse in online forums, you can gain exposure to different points of view (Cen, Madry, & Shah, 2023). To guarantee a good experience for all users, Fazelpour and Danks (2021) stress the significance of neutral and fair environments. A fairer and more inclusive online environment can be created if Pakistan takes action to resolve these issues.

Challenges of Option 1

Although this policy is encouraging, particularly for large social media platforms, there may be challenges with using the rule of law and its judicial implementation to filter out particular content in the digital era. We will go over these issues below.

Incomplete Solution to Systemic Issues

Although this method successfully addresses pornographic and illegal content, it fails to address more systemic issues such as cyberbullying, false news, and hate speech. These broader problems have the potential to cause a lot of damage to people and communities. This top-down approach ignores the more nuanced types of harmful online conduct that have a significant impact. Consequently, it risks providing simplistic answers to intricate problems.

Non-Uniform Compliance and Enforcement

It is tough to implement uniform regulations across the whole internet ecosystem. Smaller and less well-funded websites may have less incentive to follow best practices. Establishing "safe spaces" where harmful content can exist unchecked could lead to its proliferation (Frish & Greenbaum, 2017). Even more concerning is the possibility of a fragmented online environment due to uneven

enforcement across various platforms (Ryan, Roedig, & Stol, 2022). User safety and experience may differ substantially across platforms due to this fragmentation.

Challenges with Oversight and Objectivity

Decisions about online content, particularly those involving powerful people, might be influenced by outside forces, or be biased by committees charged with monitoring the process. This may cause them to lose their objectivity and make biased decisions. Financial incentives may also have an impact on these committees, making it less likely that they will hold influential figures responsible for content guidelines violations. The whole content moderation system could be jeopardized by this.

Potential for Censorship and Bias

A big concern is that rules might get too stringent, stifling free speech by silencing genuine debates. Online content regulation is made more difficult by Pakistan's stringent religious laws, which prohibit, among other things, blasphemy (Ahmed, 2017). Ensuring a balance between free speech and law enforcement is of the utmost importance. One way to control inappropriate behavior in online communities is to give social groups the power to make those decisions. Preventing violence and social unrest can be achieved through educational initiatives and flexible regulations (Kurniawan, 2023). In order to avoid violent incidents, it is crucial to keep an eye on delicate social and religious topics. The establishment of flexible regulations and the promotion of safe internet usage could, in the end, be the solution.

Challenges of Option 2 in the Pakistani Context

Pakistan is deliberating about making rules for social media companies stricter, similar to Option 2. However, this method has some problems that need careful thought because of Pakistan's laws and social situation.

Increased Government Intervention and Expenditure

Stricter regulations for social media (Option 2) necessitate a more expansive government. The additional workload requires the establishment of new divisions or the expansion of current ones. Online content regulation is made more difficult by Pakistan's stringent religious laws, which prohibit, among other things, blasphemy (Ahmed, 2017). Ensuring a balance between free speech and law enforcement is of the utmost importance. One way to control inappropriate behavior in online communities is to give social groups the power to make those decisions. Preventing violence and social unrest can be achieved through educational initiatives and flexible regulations (Kurniawan, 2023). To avoid violent incidents, it is crucial to keep an eye on delicate social and religious topics. The establishment of flexible regulations and the promotion of safe internet usage could, in the end, be the solution.

Concern About Excessive Regulation

Stricter social media regulations may negatively impact the Internet ecosystem by decreasing the effectiveness of e-commerce and limiting revenue available to support free or low-cost content, applications, and services (Lal, 1922). Overall, stricter regulations may increase government intervention in online activities, but they must also address privacy concerns and protect individuals' rights. These are factors that ought to be taken into account carefully.

Risk of Over-Regulation:

Overregulation online may stifle free speech. Critics of national and supranational regulatory efforts argue that the normative balance between speech protection and regulation varies worldwide and is unlikely to be upset by new speech mediums (Haupt & Haupt, 2021). When online platforms filter, block, and remove content, they exercise regulatory power by combining law enforcement and adjudication powers, necessitating a new approach to limiting their power

and protecting fundamental freedoms (Filmar & Elkin-Koren, 2019). Stricter regulations in Southeast Asia have limited freedom of expression, including restrictions on critical speech and attempts to restrict online activities (Gilder, 2022).

Impact on Businesses and Legal Complexity

Stricter social media regulations may harm Pakistan's digital economy. Stricter social media regulations may cause a shift in consumer behavior to alternative platforms or services. Popular platforms may hesitate to implement stringent rules due to concerns about user retention and the potential economic benefits of less regulated alternatives (Sasaki, 2022). Furthermore, the competitive advantage of not implementing strict content moderation may explain social media platforms' reluctance to impose regulations. (Sakaki, 2022). Strict regulation may harm a popular platform's user base by causing users to migrate to less-regulated platforms; this migration may render regulation ineffective in combating information pollution (Sasaki, 2022).

A popular platform can enforce strict regulation without losing users if it provides high social interaction quality, disseminates news information among users, has cohesive blocking clusters in the social network structure, and has many users far from the influencer (Sasaki, 2022). Strong intellectual property protections in manufacturing and weaker protections in services can influence investment in service innovation (Samuelson, 2010). Douek (2020) notes that the criteria for unacceptable interference on social media platforms must be clarified and that enforcement is inconsistent.

Normative influence and a strong desire for conformity in organizations can stifle creativity and innovation (Litan, 2011). Understanding the nature of rules and determining where and when rule-breaking makes sense are critical for fostering innovation and creativity.

Enforcement and Definitional Ambiguities

Critics have pointed out Some problems with content moderation: The first issue is that content moderation guidelines are frequently politically contentious and inconsistent due to the lack of standard definitions of harmful content across platforms (Stockmann D., 2023). Data removed from one platform can still be recovered from another. Consequently, individuals subject to censorship on one platform seek out others where they are not (Stockmann, 2020b).

Also, some have said that content moderation is too sluggish. Unexpected consequences can result, for instance, from a failure to respond promptly (Díaz & Hecht-Felella, 2021). It would appear that this is a widely recognized issue with the platforms. According to Etta et al. (2023), users are likely to engage with both types of content due to the absence of precise regulation. They may even slightly prefer the questionable content, which could explain their dissing/endorsement behavior.

Potential for Misuse and Erosion of Civil Liberties

Stricter social media regulations could be abused, according to critics. Legislation like PECA, they say, gives the government too much authority through its regulations. The goal of more stringent regulations is to make the internet a safer place for everyone, but there's a chance that people who are against social change or who criticize the government might be silenced anyway. However, there are some areas where the state can "limit" free speech, including national security, public order, public safety, and public morals. All across the globe, people's right to freely express themselves is being threatened when governments are not held to a high standard of substantial justification when restricting this right (Gunatilleke, 2020). If this happens, the public sphere will be impacted, which will impact people's freedom.

Stricter regulations would hurt personal liberty and privacy. Individual freedom and a robust democracy depend on these free speech and expression rights. Removing these rights would make democracy impossible to maintain.

In conclusion, the issue of social media regulation in Pakistan is intricate and has many dimensions.

Challenges of Option 3 in the Pakistani Context

Allowing users to control their own social media feeds and algorithms, but this may present some issues. Given Pakistan's complex social and political climate, it is important to consider the following factors.

Government Oversight Concerns

It would take expanding the government's current regulatory institutions to monitor tech and social media companies to ensure they don't abuse their algorithms to manipulate their clients and customers or deceive people. Furthermore, experts and stakeholders are concerned about a government regulatory body with extensive power to monitor and control internet platforms. They argue that if powerful and influential individuals abuse this authority, it will result in censorship and suppression of free speech, particularly on smaller and more autonomous social media sites. Furthermore, it may be challenging to locate competent individuals with sufficient technical expertise to supply different approaches to platform regulation. It will be expensive and challenging as well. It is also difficult to ensure that the existing bureaucratic system in Pakistan will be transparent and fair.

Transparency Challenges

Due to the unfamiliarity of AI-driven algorithms, users may unknowingly lose privacy on social media platforms, which is a real concern given the low literacy rate in Pakistan. Data breaches involving the manipulation and misuse of personal information by malicious actors with access to the algorithms of social media platforms that allow users to customize their experience are a cause for concern (Ozkaya & Islam, 2018). Additionally, it can be used to disseminate false information, which can further polarize religious and political factions and endanger societal harmony (Weth et al., 2020). The fact that some users or companies will try to manipulate algorithms is another possibility. Members of the social media industry may attempt to game the system to make their content seem more popular than it is (Jain, 2022; Xu, 2022). It would become more difficult to locate trustworthy online spaces and accurate information, and social media's credibility as a platform for honest discourse would suffer as a result.

User Customization Issues

Even if they could control what they see online, many Pakistanis might need to learn how to adjust the settings. This problem makes it possible for people who aren't very tech-savvy to become stuck in what are known as "echo chambers"—settings where they only see information that confirms their existing views (Ali & Qazi, 2022). Nobody could tell them what to do or show them other perspectives online. Pakistan's smaller social media firms are also worried. Creating these customizable settings can be technically challenging and expensive (Jarrahi et al., 2021). Pakistani users may have fewer social media platforms if these businesses cannot meet the demands.

Free Market Dynamics

The optimal approach to controlling social media in Pakistan needs to be carefully considered. Market success for ethical platforms depends on the social environment (Soliman & Rinta-Kahila, 2023; Silverglate et al., 2021). Finding a compromise is a top priority. It is essential to address concerns about government control, increase transparency about algorithms, and empower users. Also, we need to address the issues of low digital literacy rates and content control driven by the market (Sari et al., 2023).

A major issue in the modern digital age is the community's low level of digital literacy, which has many negative outcomes, including fraud, privacy invasion, and false information (hoaxes).

Internet users, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and the elderly who lack the necessary skills and knowledge, pose a threat due to the sheer volume of people using the internet and the frequency with which they access information content and social media. This necessitates an ongoing dialogue between the tech sector, non-profits, and government agencies. They can collaborate to establish regulations that protect users' rights and offer guidance on safe practices, methods of training and counseling, and digital media usage. For them to comprehend and use digital media wisely, it is necessary to raise awareness of digital literacy, which includes training in digital skills, culture, ethics, and safety.

6. Discussion

The comparative advantages and disadvantages of the three strategy options analyzed earlier are discussed below to determine which one suits best for Pakistan.

Option 1: Stricter Enforcement of Existing Laws

The first alternative is to strictly enforce rules to ensure secure digital areas. Existing legislation, such as PECA, is aimed at removing internet harmful content, including obscene and criminal content. Globally, such regulations generally require organizations and individuals to strictly conform to content requirements, with severe consequences for noncompliance. This method is best suited for deleting explicit content and hate speech. However, more sophisticated concerns like cyberbullying and fake news fall between the cracks.

Critics have expressed concern about this strategy. First, because of its potential misuse. The authorities' biases may be reflected in their selective targets. Enforcement agencies may target government opponents, 'perceived' enemy groups, or personal vendettas. Furthermore, regular monitoring and oversight of illegal content will be costly and require additional technically skilled personnel. Matching the competence of social media firms' expertise could be difficult. In short, option 1 does not solve all of the digital challenges and cannot be used as a solo method.

Option 2: Stricter Government Regulation

The second option for the government is to enact new laws. This implies severe content guidelines. And severe penalties for noncompliance. This method provides social media companies with explicit criteria and holds them accountable to a specific standard. It is feasible to make this method less forceful. A company that meets standards may be shielded from responsibility by the government. Only if a company fails to meet the standards will it be liable for hate speech or potentially harmful misleading material.

However, the disadvantage of this method is that, first, surrendering authority to define acceptable speech to the government is comparable to entering a "slippery slope"—a forerunner to allowing increasing censorship. This is against the principles of free expression. Second, there is a risk that the rules' inherent biases will work against specific groups or viewpoints. Government prejudices can result in legislation that permanently suppresses dissenting voices. New rules alone will not address the problem; instead, they will create new divisions and instability. This option can be implemented using an inclusive approach, which involves consulting all stakeholders throughout the legislative process. This is an ideal scenario, yet it takes work to accomplish. Therefore, option two cannot be used as a standalone tactic. It must be employed to achieve a particular purpose when a challenge arises.

Option 3: Empowering Users and Algorithm Transparency

The third option, digital transparency, and user empowerment, appears promising. The digital struggle is better fought digitally. Allowing consumers to see their social media feed algorithms might give them more control over their online experiences. Rather than being trapped in echo chambers, individuals will be able to expose themselves to a different perspective. In addition,

they will be able to filter out unwanted items from their feeds. In Pakistan, where there are numerous cultural, religious, and political fault lines, it is difficult to develop a common content code; this is a viable solution.

However, this option has several limitations. First, most customers who lack fundamental technological expertise will not benefit from this feature. Because of low literacy rates and even poorer digital literacy, consumers may be unable to fully benefit from algorithm customizability. The chances of being manipulated by social media corporations and individuals increase. Second, when algorithms are accessible to everyone, knowledge of how they function can be used to benefit firms while harming competitors. Substantial government intervention is required to monitor and protect against such abuse of algorithms, which may cost more than the good it can provide. Third, offering bespoke algorithms would be too expensive for small enterprises. There is a danger that such demands would inhibit technology startups.

To summarize, Option 3 is good, but it will take time before it is truly beneficial to Pakistan. If the government wants to pursue this option, it must urgently engage in population education and training. Meanwhile, it should be considered alongside other solutions.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Options for Social Media Regulation in Pakistan

Option	Main Strengths	Main Weaknesses	Challenges in Adoption
Option 1: Stricter Enforcement of Existing Laws	- Addresses specific harmful content (e.g., pornography, unlawful material)	- Incomplete solution to broader issues like misinformation, hate speech, cyberbullying	- Ensuring uniform compliance across platforms
	- Establishes clear guidelines for content moderation	- Non-uniform compliance, especially among smaller platforms	- Establishing oversight bodies may introduce biases
			- Risk of censorship and selective enforcement
Option 2: Stricter Government Regulation	- Aims for stricter government regulation to combat harmful content	- Risk of government overreach and censorship	- Implementing regulations may strain government resources
	- Sets fines and rigorous content standards	- Potential for resistance from social media companies	- Ensuring consistent and fair enforcement across platforms
			- Addressing concerns of selective enforcement and bias
Option 3: Empowering Users and Algorithm Transparency	- Empowers users with control over content through customizable algorithms	- Limited user awareness and technical knowledge	- Educating users about customizable algorithms
	- Promotes algorithm transparency to combat misinformation and echo chambers	- Technological and economic challenges for smaller platforms	- Preventing manipulation and maintaining authenticity of content

			- Ensuring technological feasibility and platform compatibility
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Determining how to address misinformation on social media platforms presents several challenges. These include:

1. *Technical feasibility*: effectively executing the chosen strategy and using existing technology without substantial technical impediments or constraints.
2. *User comprehension*: Evaluating whether users possess the requisite knowledge and awareness to proficiently employ the suggested tools, such as adaptable algorithms, for detecting and countering misinformation.
3. *Oversight*: Creating regulatory organizations to supervise and control the execution of the suggested solutions while simultaneously reducing prejudice in decision-making procedures.
4. *Ensuring Compliance*: Tackling the issue of motivating social media sites to adhere to rules.
5. *Enforcement*: Developing protocols to guarantee uniform enforcement across platforms.

Pakistan's optimal social media regulatory strategy will incorporate elements from each alternative. When overseeing the intricate social media ecosystem, it is imperative to adopt a well-rounded strategy that places equal importance on user rights, content moderation, and platform accountability. Above all, any regulatory strategy's efficacy is only protected with a comprehensive understanding of the intricate politics, religion, and culture involved. The circumstances must modify rules and laws.

7. Conclusion

Pakistan is striving to balance protecting user rights, promoting innovation, and efficiently regulating social media. The present study examined three primary strategic alternatives Pakistan can employ to accomplish this objective. There are three methods to establish a secure online environment: enforcing current laws to eliminate online threats, improving existing laws to enhance their effectiveness, and adopting a user-focused strategy that promotes algorithmic transparency.

Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages. Applying any of the strategies, however, will not be successful given the scenario in Pakistan with its complex mix of religious, cultural, and communal aspects. Preserving the right to freedom of speech and privacy is a challenging endeavor that requires significant effort. Another area for improvement is the cost of implementation for hiring staff and obtaining knowledge. The poor literacy levels in the population contribute to the increased complexity. Governments must invest immediately in enhancing the quality of their human resources by providing them with technical expertise, awareness, and education. Eliminating biases from the law, starting at the implementation stage, is challenging. Pakistan cannot depend on a single solution to address the control of social media material. Adopting a comprehensive approach, including all three elements, would result in a highly effective plan.

8. Limitations of the Study

One of the study's limitations is that it focuses solely on three methods of digital space security. Furthermore, because the researchers lack legal grounding, they are prone to overlooking numerous essential issues when analyzing the three options or investigating new ways to address the problem. This is an endeavor to comprehend Pakistan's implemented or contemplated social media regulations. This research by no means constitutes an exhaustive examination of the subject matter. Furthermore, the data utilized in this study was publicly accessible information from the

internet. The researchers did not obtain any exclusive documents or statistics. Our attempts to maintain objectivity may have been compromised in our interpretation of the study's findings when discussing legal or sensitive issues such as national security and free speech, due to our potential biases.

9. Recommendations

To establish transparent regulations for social media that strike a balance between regulatory objectives and freedom of expression, academic institutions, government agencies, civil society organizations, and social media platforms should work in collaboration. The following actions are required to achieve this objective:

1. Encourage regulatory organizations and law enforcement to regulate social media.
2. Encourage communication, technical support, and training.
3. Establish mechanisms for evaluating, reviewing, and adjusting legislation on social media.
4. Consistently involve stakeholders and assess policies to revise regulatory frameworks.
5. Engage in dialogue regarding transnational concerns with foreign partners, regulatory bodies, and social media platforms.
6. Promote the implementation of robust and inclusive social media policies that foster digital innovation, safeguard individual rights, and uphold democratic values.

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