The Dark Side of Connectivity: Examining the Role of Social Media in Rising Crime Rates in India

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the role of social media in the rising crime rates in India, with a particular focus on youth involvement. It examines how social media platforms serve as conduits for cybercrimes such as identity theft, cyberbullying, online harassment, and financial fraud. Using Social Learning Theory, Strain Theory, and Routine Activity Theory, the research delves into how social media fosters criminal behaviour by promoting harmful role models, intensifying societal pressures, and creating environments conducive to crime. The paper highlights the vulnerabilities of young users, the challenges faced by law enforcement in regulating online spaces, and the societal impacts of crimes facilitated through social media. Despite government initiatives and legal frameworks aimed at curbing cybercrime, the study underscores persistent gaps in policy, digital literacy, and law enforcement capabilities. It calls for a multi-faceted approach combining education, regulation, and technological advancements to mitigate the growing nexus between social media and crime in India.

INTRODUCTION

Social media's emergence has changed Indian communication and connectedness, providing formerly unheard-of chances for contact, knowledge exchange, and community development. The digital revolution has, meantime, also been connected to a concerning rise in crime rates. With over

50,000 recorded instances including notable events of false news encouraging violence and sectarian tensions, recent figures show India's cybercrime surge in 2020 to be 11.8%. Particularly among young people, the ubiquitous character of social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikHub has helped not just the dissemination of false information but also the rise of fresh kinds of crime. One such example is the infamous online game Blue Whale Challenge, which allegedly caused many suicides among teenagers, therefore drawing attention to the perilous junction of social media and young fragility (White Black Legal, 2024). Furthermore, research show that social media exposure influences young crimes like digital theft and cyberbullying especially more and more (Yadav and Dixit, 2024). As a major population impacted by these changes, the Indian National Youth Policy (2014) stresses the importance of awareness among young people about the hazards related with their online activity. These patterns have consequences for more general society issues than just personal ones. Studies indicate that regular viewing of violent material on social media might desensitise people and cause rising tolerance for aggressive behaviour in society to drop (Clarion India, 2024). A poll revealed that a significant portion of Indian teenagers interact with violent material on sites like Instagram and TikHub, which begs concerns about the long-term consequences on society norms and interpersonal interactions (NIMHANS Study, 2023). Normalising such information might help to create a society in which crime is not only accepted but maybe praised (Boer et al., 2021). Organised criminal networks now use social media as a tool for recruitment of members, planning of unlawful acts, and dissemination of radical ideas. These sites appeal to anyone looking to take advantage of weaker users because of their simple access and anonymity (Mitra, 2024). Additionally on the increase are sextortion, internet grooming, and human trafficking; social media is mostly responsible for enabling these crimes (Tiwari et al., 2023).

Understanding the negative side of connection becomes essential as India negotiates its digital terrain if it is to create sensible plans to lower social media-related crime rates. The research intends to investigate these dynamics even further by looking at how social media contributes to increasing crime rates in India and suggesting some solutions to handle the urgent problem.

Review of Literature

Understanding the present knowledge about a subject depends on an examination of the literature, particularly in cases where secondary material is used. It provides a solid basis for further research as it supports the study with reliable sources, helps to spot research gaps, and provides understanding of trends and patterns.

Particularly among young people, the emergence of social media has dramatically changed crime rates in India. From 2014 to 2024, cybercrime incidences have surged dramatically; estimates of over 80,000 instances by the end of 2024 point to a thorough study by Tripathy, (2024). The fast digital change India is experiencing—more people are interacting with online platforms that might enable illegal activities such identity theft and online fraud—attributes to the rising rate (Tripathy, 2024). The research also underlines the importance of cooperative plans between public and commercial sectors to properly address cyber risks. Furthermore, according to a Statista (2024) analysis, in the first four months of 2024 saw over 740,000 cybercrime cases registered to the Indian Cyber Crime Coordinating Centre (I4C). According to the statistics, around 85% of these complaints had to do with online financial fraud, therefore highlighting how social media may be a portal for financial crimes (Statista, 2024). The concerning trend calls on law enforcement and legislators to react immediately to improve cybersecurity policies. Furthermore well investigated have been the effects of social media on young crime. Sharma and Gupta's 2023 research on how social media platforms can inspire teenage criminal copycat addresses Their results imply that viewing violent material can desensitise young people and cause rising hostility and criminal activity (Sharma & Gupta, 2023). Dipsita (2021), who contends that social media provides a forum for young criminals to network and discuss criminal ideas, thus supports the phenomena even more.

Furthermore emphasised by Singh (2024) are certain kinds of cybercrimes that are common in India nowadays, including cyberbullying and online harassment. Emphasising the psychological effects these crimes have on victims, the research advocates better educational programs meant to increase knowledge of online safety (Singh, 2024). Furthermore emphasised by Kiriakose and Samuel (2021) the influence of mass media on young people's opinions of crime is the suggestion that sensationalised reporting helps to create a society of normalcy of violence and terror. By means of programs like the creation of the I4C and the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, the Indian government has taken important action to solve these problems. These initiatives, according to a Ministry of Home Affairs (2024) study, seek to raise public awareness campaigns about digital safety and increase law enforcement's capacity to properly fight cybercrime. Still, there are difficulties with law enforcement staff training and resource allocation notwithstanding these steps. Furthermore covered in ORF Online (2025) is the vital requirement of data-driven tactics in India's cybercrime prevention. The paper underlines that while a lot of information on recorded crimes exists, thorough investigation on unreported events and their consequences for policy-making is still lacking (Jha, 2024). The disparity draws attention to a field of future study that may greatly influence government strategies for crime prevention.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research approach through an extensive review of secondary data to explore the role of social media in rising crime rates in India. Data sources include peer-reviewed journals, government reports, and reputable publications such as research articles, books, newspapers, Ministry of Home Affairs (2024) and internet. The literature review focuses on identifying patterns, trends, and theoretical frameworks related to cybercrime, particularly among youth. By synthesizing existing research, the study aims to highlight the multifaceted impact of social media on crime rates and identify gaps for future investigation.

Rationale

The increasing integration of social media into daily life has brought about profound societal changes, including a noticeable rise in crime rates in India. Understanding the relationship is crucial for developing effective policies and preventive strategies. The study is grounded in the belief that social media's vast reach and influence can both directly and indirectly contribute to various forms of crime. By examining the dynamic through established criminological theories; Social Learning Theory, Strain Theory, and Routine Activity Theory aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms that drive social media-related crimes. The rationale also stems from the need to bridge existing research gaps and provide insights that can inform legal frameworks, law enforcement strategies, and public awareness initiatives to mitigate the adverse effects of social media on crime rates.

Role of Social Media in Rising Crime Rates in India

The role of social media in rising crime rates in India reveals a complex interplay of factors that contribute to various forms of criminal activity. The analysis draws on extensive research to highlight the multifaceted nature of cybercrime, particularly as it pertains to youth and the societal implications of social media usage.

Cybercrime and Vulnerability

Social media platforms, which provide havens for many illegal activities, greatly affect the increase of cybercrime in India. Mitra's (2024) research highlights how cybercriminals use social media's intrinsic characteristics to carry out crimes such identity theft and online abuse. Because of their regular sharing of personal information, which makes them easy targets for cyberbullying and frauds, teenage users are especially susceptible, the research adds (Tiwari et al., 2023). Furthermore, the anonymity these sites provide hinders criminal tracking, hence making it difficult for law authorities to properly handle these offences (Hussain, 2023). Underlining the critical necessity of thorough cyber

security measures, the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) has seen a 63% rise in social media-related crimes over the previous five years (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023). Apart from identity theft and harassment, social media channels have grown to be hotspots for more advanced crimes like phishing campaigns, financial fraud, and even recruiting by extreme organisations. Studies show that criminals utilise social engineering strategies to control people into revealing private information, sometimes resulting in large financial losses (Sharma & Patel, 2022). Growing trends draw attention to the need of users adopting more robust security policies and of platforms using sophisticated monitoring systems.

Social Media Trials and Public Perception

Emerging as a major problem in India where public opinion may greatly affect court procedures is the phenomena of "social media trials". Hussain (2023) talks on how public instances like the Nirbhaya case have been under close examination and judged fiercely on social media, therefore influencing the court system and society views of justice. The circumstances presents two challenges: social media may increase awareness of crime, but it can also result in mob justice and harassment of those engaged in court proceedings. Particularly with regard to the mental health and privacy of individuals accused, the ethical ramifications of trial by public opinion are great (Hussain, 2023). Sharma and Patel (2022) claim that around 47% of Indian social media users confess to having views on legal issues based only on online information, therefore underlining the great impact of digital narratives. Social media experiments influence public confidence in the judicial system, therefore transcending personal events. Legal procedures run the danger of undercutting the idea of "innocent until proven guilty" when public opinion dominates them. The shift in view can result in more societal polarisation and less confidence in court rulings (Gupta & Mehra, 2023).

Legal Framework and Governance

Dealing with cybercrime calls for a strong legal framework able to change with the nature of social media crimes. Studies show that current legislation can fail to adequately control these online exchanges (Singh et al., 2022). As Iqbal and Beigh (2017) point out, comprehensive laws covering both punitive actions against cybercriminals and preventative policies are desperately needed. Absence of strict rules lets a lot of cyber crimes—including financial fraud and online harassment—which disproportionately impact underprivileged groups like women and children proliferate (Tiwari et al., 2023). Though basic, the Information Technology Act of 2000 needs major changes to handle contemporary cyberthreats (Chaudhary, 2023). Several legal professionals respond to these difficulties by supporting the creation of specialised cybercrime courts and tougher data privacy regulations. Improved worldwide collaboration is also vital as cybercrime usually crosses national boundaries. Cooperation among nations may enable better monitoring and punishment of cybercrime (Kumar & Singh, 2023).

Impact on Youth

The impact of social media on youth crime is particularly alarming. A significant percentage of cybercrimes reported in India involve young individuals either as victims or perpetrators. According to a report by Microsoft, over 53% of Indian children have experienced online bullying (World Wide Journals, 2024). The statistic underscores the urgent need for educational initiatives aimed at increasing digital literacy among youth. Studies suggest that young people often lack awareness regarding online safety protocols, making them susceptible to various forms of cybercrime (Boer et al., 2021). The normalization of risky behaviors on social media can lead to long-term psychological effects, further complicating the landscape of youth crime in India. Gupta and Mehra (2023) found that 38% of teenagers in urban India have engaged in or witnessed online harassment, underscoring the depth of the issue. Moreover, excessive social media use has been linked to mental health issues among youth, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. These psychological effects can, in turn, lead to behavioral problems and increased susceptibility to engaging in or falling victim to cybercrimes (Boer

et al., 2021). Addressing these concerns requires a multi-faceted approach involving parents, educators, policymakers, and social media companies.

Societal Implications

The societal implications of rising crime rates linked to social media are profound. As highlighted by recent studies, there is a growing concern about how social media platforms can facilitate not only individual crimes but also larger societal issues such as communal violence fueled by misinformation (Sehgal & Dhaarna, 2021). The spread of fake news has been shown to incite violence and unrest within communities, demonstrating the powerful influence that social media holds over public perception and behavior. The dynamic necessitates a critical examination of how information is disseminated online and its potential consequences on societal harmony. A study by Kumar and Singh (2023) revealed that 62% of communal riots in India between 2018 and 2022 were triggered or exacerbated by misinformation circulated on social media. Also, the pervasive reach of social media has contributed to the erosion of privacy and the normalization of invasive behaviors. The constant exposure to curated content can also create unrealistic societal standards, leading to issues such as body image concerns and social anxiety (Sehgal & Dhaarna, 2021). These broader societal impacts highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to promote responsible social media use.

Theoretical Framework

Different theoretical models help one to properly investigate the link between social media and growing crime rates in India. Particularly among young people, these ideas serve to explain how social media platforms support criminal activity and user vulnerabilities. Three main theories—Social Learning Theory, Strain Theory, and Routine Activity Theory—each with ideas on the dynamics of social media and crime—are discussed.

The Social Learning Theory Proposed by Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory (SLT) holds that people pick up behaviours by seeing and copying others—especially role models. In the framework of social media, the hypothesis is important as young users come across material that could either glamorise or normalise illegal activity. Cyberbullying, data theft, and online harassment, for example, may be seen as taught behaviours from peers or influencers who suffer no immediate penalties (Ansari & Najeeb Ahmed, 2024). The Blue Whale Challenge is one example of which teenagers were pushed via social media to do risky activities that resulted in terrible consequences (Ansari & Najeeb Ahmed, 2024). It emphasises how impressionable young people use social media as a venue for disseminating negative behaviours. Also, strain theory Robert Merton's strain theory contends that when people cannot reach culturally acceptable objectives by reasonable methods, society pressures might cause them to turn to crime. The fast spread of social media in India has opened new paths for young people to both aspire to and get frustrated. Constant exposure to idealised lives on sites like Instagram might cause emotions of inadequacy and animosity in people unable to match these criteria (Tiwari et al., 2023). The emotional load might lead people towards illegal behaviour as a means of status or a coping strategy. Such frustrations sometimes lead to cyberbullying and harassment as users utilise social media's anonymity to convey rage free from immediate consequences. Hessain, 2023. Routine Activity Theory According to Routine Activity Theory (RAT), three variables come together to explain crime: a motivated criminal, an appropriate target, and inadequate care. On social media, these components often line up. Platforms provide criminals quick access to possible targets—people who freely publish personal data—Singh et al., 2022. Absence of rigorous monitoring or security policies compromises guardianship, therefore allowing crimes include hacking, identity theft, and cyberstalking (Roy & Tripathy, 2023). The dissemination of false information and fake news via WhatsApp that resulted in actual violence in India highlights how these elements interact to inflict major damage (Sehgal & Dhaarna, 2021). WhatsApp is Applying Social Learning Theory, Strain Theory, and Routine Activity Theory therefore offers a complete knowledge of how social media helps to explain India's increasing crime rates. Every hypothesis clarifies the reasons underlying criminal activity in digital environments and emphasises the necessity of focused actions to help to solve these problems.

CONCLUSION

The escalating influence of social media on crime rates in India underscores a complex and pressing issue. The rapid digital transformation has led to a surge in cybercrimes, particularly targeting youth who are more vulnerable to online threats like identity theft, harassment, and financial fraud. Social Learning Theory, Strain Theory, and Routine Activity Theory collectively explain how social media fosters criminal behavior, from imitation of harmful content to crimes driven by societal pressures and the exploitation of online anonymity. Despite governmental efforts, such as the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) and the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, gaps in legal frameworks and awareness persist. The alarming rise in juvenile delinquency, online harassment, and misinformation highlights the urgent need for comprehensive strategies, including stricter regulations, educational initiatives, and enhanced cybersecurity measures. Addressing these challenges holistically is crucial to safeguarding users and curbing the growing nexus between social media and crime in India.

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