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Social Media and Cultural Shifts Among Youth: A Sociological Perspective on Changing Social Practices in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

In the era of digitalization, social networks appeared to be a very influential factor of cultural changes, partly because the youth represent the most active and adaptive users of digital platforms. This article tries to study the sociological issues of social media with youth culture, thus revealing how new digital communications affect the changes in identity creation, social relations, and cultural behavior. The research relies on symbolic interactionism, cultural globalization, and digital sociology theories, thus trying to fathom the role of social media in generating new vocabularies, in changing the new communication rules, and in redistributing the social limits. A mixed-method approach involving qualitative interviews among university students and quantitative surveys has helped to uncover significant correlations between social media engagement and shifts in values, behavior, and collective identities. The emerging picture is, therefore, of social media having a hybrid nature in its role as both the converging vehicle across global youth communities and the divisive energizer of the local identity expressions. The research still puts forth the idea that social media should be perceived not only as a technological facilitator but also as a place of culture where new norms are continuously challenged and changed. The paper places such transformations in a broad sociological context and provides a deep understanding of digital youth cultures whilst at the same time trying to help educators, policymakers, and researchers to come up with ideas on how to deal with such a changing environment of youth socialization in the hyper-connected world.

Keywords: Social Media, Youth Culture, Cultural Transformation, Social Practices,

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Digital Identity, Gender, University Students, Pakistan.

Introduction:

In the era of digital transformation, social media has become a powerful force that is altering social norms and youth culture globally. These digital platforms—from Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat to TikTok and WhatsApp—have evolved from basic communication tools into whole ecosystems where young people construct identities, form bonds with one another, express their feelings, consume content, and negotiate cultural norms (Boyd, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2016). The phenomenal growth of mobile connectivity and social networking applications has led to a reconfiguration of everyday life, social meanings, and interpersonal interactions by enabling young people to engage with cultural narratives that transcend their immediate environment (Castells, 2011; Miller et al., 2016).

From a sociological perspective, culture is dynamic and evolves in tandem with changing material conditions, advances in technology, and symbolic interactions. As change agents and cultural innovators, youth are frequently at the forefront of these developments. Through the blending of globalized digital trends with traditional beliefs, social media facilitates the hybridization of cultural values in the digital age, resulting in new cultural expressions and social practices (Tomlinson, 1999; Appadurai, 2000).

In transitional societies like Pakistan, where cultural structures have historically been shaped by patriarchal ideologies, religious values, and collectivist norms, this change is particularly significant (Haque, 2021). As they interact more virtually, young people are exposed to diverse worldviews and value systems that might conflict with their social and familial expectations. Additionally, social media has an impact on youth that extends beyond individual identity to cultural customs, interpersonal relationships, and communication norms.

According to research, digital affordances are drastically changing how young people interact with one another, date, maintain their privacy, and even participate in politics (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016; Alhabash and Ma, 2017). Specifically, Pakistani youth are exposed to a diverse array of influences, including feminist movements, Bollywood, Western pop culture, and Islamic revivalism, all of which interact within their digital feeds to intricately shape their attitudes and behaviors (Ali and Shah, 2021). The distinctions between local and global, private and public, and real and virtual are thus becoming more and more hazy. Notwithstanding the significance of these changes, little empirical study has examined the sociocultural effects of youth digital media use in Pakistan, particularly at the city level. In South Asia, the majority of social media conversations still center on political activism, cyberbullying, or digital literacy, with little focus on daily cultural changes and identity negotiations. In order to close this gap, this study uses a sociological lens to examine how social media is changing young people's social and cultural practices in Faisalabad. It centers on college students as a crucial group that creates and consumes digital content, acting as a catalyst for cultural change as well as an audience.

The study intends to reveal how young people in Faisalabad manage the conflicts between local and global cultures, traditional and modern value systems, and online and offline life. The study advances a growing global understanding of youth, culture,

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and technology in the Global South by placing the results within the larger theoretical frameworks of digital sociology, cultural globalization, and symbolic interactionism. Its ultimate goal is to provide insights into how social media is reshaping cultural practices in a variety of social contexts, in addition to the shifting terrain of youth culture in Pakistan.

Review of literature:

Globally, young people are some of the most active and significant users of social media platforms. Boyd (2014) claims that social media has developed into a vital platform for young people to communicate with peers, express who they are, and negotiate social norms. Jenkins, Ito, and Boyd (2016) stress the idea of participatory culture, in which young people remix cultural meaning by producing and sharing content in addition to consuming media. As a site of cultural production, social media sees rapid changes in language, trends, values, and aesthetics—often without the help of traditional institutions or adult influence.

Youth use of social media is rising quickly in South Asia, especially in Pakistan, where sites like Instagram and TikTok are becoming more and more well-liked for self-presentation, education, and entertainment. An emerging form of digital resistance is demonstrated by Abbas and Qureshi (2023), who point out how Pakistani youth use TikTok to perform identity and subvert conservative cultural norms. This is particularly important in semi-urban areas like Faisalabad, where youth are still enmeshed in traditional social structures despite social media providing exposure to a variety of global cultures.

According to Giddens et al., (2017) culture is the set of values, customs, rituals, and symbols that govern social interactions. Traditional social practices are reshaped by the new cultural logics brought about by social media. According to Turkle (2017) digital interaction frequently takes the place of in-person communication, which alters the character of relationships and emotional expressions. Digital technologies are agents of both continuity and disruption in collectivist societies like Pakistan, where cultural practices are ingrained in gender, religion, and family structures (Ali and Shah, 2021). Cultural expressions such as language (e.g., code-switching), attire, holidays, and morals have all been impacted by social media platforms. According to Shahbaz and Saeed (2022), digital platforms are fostering a "glocalized" youth identity in Pakistan, where young people combine local cultural norms with international digital trends. Generational conflict is frequently the result of this hybridity, especially when it comes to topics like self-presentation, digital privacy, and gender roles.

A helpful theoretical framework for comprehending how young people use social media to create their identities is symbolic interactionism. Given that young people curate idealized versions of themselves through online interactions, images, and captions, Goffman's (1959) concept of presentation of self is especially pertinent today. Young people's perceptions of their own value and social standing are influenced by social validation, which is achieved through likes, shares, and comments (Ellison et al., 2007). The process of constructing one's identity in Pakistan is complicated and impacted by peer pressure, gender norms, and religious expectations. According to a study by Ali and Shah (2021), young women in Pakistan's cities use Instagram to experiment with

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and declare alternative gender identities, despite the fact that family members frequently criticize or watch them. The tensions young people face as they balance traditional expectations and digital freedom are exemplified by this duality.

For sociological studies of youth, social change, and modernization, the emergence of digital culture raises significant issues. Digital networks, according to Castells (2011), are changing the very structure of social life by substituting horizontal, decentralized communication for hierarchical systems. According to Miller et al., (2016), social media facilitates new kinds of group action and belonging even as it encourages individualism.

This dynamic is seen in Pakistan in the way young people engage in religious communities, entertainment subcultures, and online activism. These changes do carry some risks, though; psychological distress can result from misinformation, digital surveillance, cyberbullying, and increased social comparison (Alhabash and Ma, 2017). For academics, educators, and legislators interested in youth development in the digital age, it is imperative to comprehend these contradictions.

Communication, interaction, dress codes, celebrations, gender roles, and peer engagement are examples of social practices—routine behaviors and common norms that govern daily life. Although these customs are ingrained in social and cultural structures, the widespread influence of social media in recent years has drastically changed them (Giddens et al., 2017). Social media serves as a crucial platform for young people to learn, practice, and replicate new social behaviors as well as to reevaluate established norms.

Youth communication has been completely transformed by social media. Constant, real-time digital interaction has replaced face-to-face communication, thanks to platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat. Digital tools improve connectivity, but they also cause fewer in-depth, sympathetic conversations, according to Turkle (2017). Even within families or close-knit communities, young people in Pakistani urban settings prefer visual communication (emojis, memes, and reels), voice notes, and texting to face-to-face conversation (Shahbaz and Saeed, 2022). The transition from group, synchronous discussions to dispersed, asynchronous interactions facilitated by technology is indicative of a larger change in social practice.

Additionally, social media platforms have been instrumental in changing moral standards and public conduct. Youth are encouraged to continuously curate their public personas by digital surveillance and public visibility through images, videos, and narratives. As young people carefully control how they present themselves on digital "front stages," Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory becomes more and more pertinent. According to Ali and Shah (2021), young people in Pakistani cities now follow digital standards of respectability and status, such as being trendy, getting likes, or upholding a "modest yet modern" image. Real-world behavior, including how young people dress, speak, and behave in public settings—particularly in gendered contexts—is influenced by this ongoing performance.

The gender roles that young men and women play have been impacted by social media. Social media gives people a platform to express themselves privately in conservative environments like Faisalabad, where gender segregation and modesty standards are still deeply ingrained in society. In particular, women use apps like Instagram and TikTok

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to experiment with different identities, frequently balancing modern digital aesthetics with conventional expectations (Abbas and Qureshi, 2023). But social scrutiny, online harassment, and moral policing also come with this visibility. As a result, even though social media can empower people, peer, family, and community online surveillance also serves to reinforce some patriarchal controls.

With the advent of digital technology, peer relationships and friendships among young people have also changed. Friendship is no longer limited to being physically close; online networks frequently cut across institutional, class, and geographic borders. Social media platforms allow young people to establish weak connections that can result in information sharing and emotional support, according to Ellison et al., (2007). Numerous young people in Faisalabad report that shared digital experiences—such as online gaming, meme sharing, or group content creation—have strengthened peer bonds and redefined customary friendship rituals (Shahbaz and Saeed, 2022).

Digital platforms are increasingly being used to mediate cultural events like weddings, birthdays, and Eid. These days, young people post carefully chosen moments online, live-stream events, and exchange virtual greetings—sometimes putting digital visibility ahead of more conventional involvement. What was once private and communal is now frequently public and performative, reflecting a change in the way social practices are carried out (Miller et al., 2016). A crucial element of engaging in such rituals is receiving social validation in the form of likes and comments.

The rise of social media platforms has significantly influenced youth culture, fostering changes in communication practices and social behavior, as these platforms serve as powerful tools for identity formation and cultural shifts (Janjua et al., 2024). The interaction of youth with digital technologies has led to the creation of new vocabularies and communication norms, which directly shape the development of online communities and individual identities (Rehman et al., 2024). Digital platforms, especially through the use of multimedia like emojis and stickers, have contributed to the hybridization of youth culture, blending global trends with local cultural expressions (Janjua et al., 2016). Similarly, digital platforms have redefined social boundaries, enabling new forms of interaction and community formation that challenge traditional norms, a shift that is crucial for understanding contemporary youth socialization (Almansour et al., 2024). The emergence of AI-based systems also aligns with this shift, reflecting how technological advancements impact not just communication but also cultural practices and identity formation (Abbas et al., 2023).

These findings underline the growing importance of understanding the sociological implications of digital platforms, particularly in the context of youth culture. Social media's role as both a global connector and a local identity driver highlights its transformative influence on communication practices, emphasizing the need for policymakers and educators to adapt to these evolving cultural shifts (Janjua et al., 2024).

The literature reviewed provides evidence that social media is not only a communication instrument but an energy that is changing the social practices of young people. The way in which young people use digital platforms in their everyday social lives is deeply affected by their gender roles, cultural rituals, communication patterns, and friendship standards. Such changes in transitional societies like Pakistan are usually

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depicted as conflicts in privacy and visibility, control, and empowerment, as well as tradition and modernity. The research herein explores the impact on young people of these changes experienced in their social environments due to the influence of Faisalabad, a city in Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework:

According to Giddens' Structuration Theory (1984), the social practices are not only affected by social structures but also give rise to the latter. Social media platforms are repeat-interaction facilitators, and hence they serve as new social structures to have a decisive effect on young people's cultural practices. Such youths are no longer mere consumers of the cultural content, as they are also modifying and negotiating across and within the meanings thus creating a new culture. Fundamentally, this theory offers an insight into the role that digital technologies play in the process of cultural transformation and, at the same time, how they are being affected by the users' agency if local cultural norms and values are considered.

Social life constitutes of numerous acts and characters, and Goffman's dramaturgical approach (1959), the main idea of symbolic interactionism, sees it through this metaphor. The advent of social media radically changes and expands the young people's concept of a "front stage" and creates many more and diverse opportunities for the performance of various identities. Through this metaphor, we can understand how young people develop new cultural identities in their virtual worlds, constantly re-addressing the balance between tradition and the new.

The scholars remind us that the access of youth to the digitally mediated worlds makes it possible for them to encounter and absorb global values, concepts, and lifestyles, which, in turn, leads to cultural modernization that proceeds with high speed and eventually brings about cultural hybridization (Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Castells, 2011). Social media's role here is to be the conveyor of the newness and local-global co-existence because it can energize the merging of local and global cultures and therefore youth social practices become dynamic, as they adapt to and reflect not only localized customs but also global influences.

Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity is very relevant in understanding how the young generation, especially the female ones, are engaging in the social media to express and sometimes challenge the gender norms. The internet has given a lot of freedom to the redefinition of the gender identities that represent complicated sociocultural negotiations and at the same time they present both the empowerment opportunities and the surveillance or the moral policing risks.

Conceptual Model:

Social Media Use → Changes in Social Practices → Transformation in Cultural Norms		
Influenced by: User Agency (Giddens), Identity Performance (Goffman), Global-Local Dynamics (Castells), Gender Negotiations (Butler)		
Variable Type	**Variables**	**Examples/Details**

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Dependent	Transformation of Cultural & Social Practices	Changes in norms, rituals, communication, gender roles
Independent	Social Media Usage	Frequency, platforms, engagement type
	Youth Agency/Identity Performance	Online self-presentation, identity negotiation
Background	Gender, Age, Income, Education, etc.	Socio-demographic and socio-economic controls

Methodology:

This research investigated the impact of social media on young people's changing cultural and social norms in Faisalabad through the implementation of mixed-methods research design. Firstly, in the quantitative part, a structured survey was conducted using stratified sampling from two public and two private universities to ensure that the sample was representative of different genders, socioeconomic statuses, and academic disciplines. In particular, 300 students from universities, who were between the ages of 18 and 25, were selected. The questionnaire aimed at evaluating the frequency of social media use, changes in communication styles, shifts in cultural values, and changes in lifestyle. Besides, twenty undergraduates and graduates varied in gender, academic discipline, and involvement in the digital world were interviewed in-depth semi-structured for the qualitative section.

The students who were chosen as the respondents were intended to represent the different sides of the stories of social media's impact on the identity of their characters, the ways they expressed their culture, and the interactions they had with the peers. The interviews available in Urdu and English languages were audio generated, translated, and then analyzed by thematic to discover new ideas and patterns. The investigation of significant relationships between variables in quantitative data was conducted with SPSS regression analysis and other descriptive and inferential statistics. This comprehensive approach ensured a sociological understanding of how digital platforms are transforming the social and cultural lives of young people in Faisalabad.

Results and discussion:

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Usage Among Youth (N = 300)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Min	Max
Daily Time on Social Media (hrs)	4.9	1.6	1	9
No. of Active Platforms Used	4.1	1.2	1	6
Frequency of Posting (per week)	4.2	2.4	0	10
Perceived Impact on Culture (1–5 Likert)	4.3	0.8	2	5

The descriptive statistics highlight important trends in the use of social media and its perceived cultural impact among young people in Faisalabad. The Pew Research Center (2022) reported that the average time spent on social media by the respondents was 4.9

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hours a day (SD = 1.6), which is in full accord with the youth of other countries. Besides, it is a very good indicator of youth's digital involvement. The average number of active platforms used was 4.1 (SD = 1.2), which means that people have different social media engagement. Miller et al. (2016) found that multi-platform usage shapes youth social practices globally.

A moderate amount of active content creation that balances active participation and passive consumption is indicated by the posting frequency, which averages 4.2 posts per week (SD = 2.4). Boyd (2014) describes young people as both producers and consumers in networked publics, which is in line with this. Crucially, the high mean score of 4.3 on a 5-point Likert scale (SD = 0.8) for the perceived impact of social media on culture indicates that participants strongly agreed that social media is drastically altering social norms and behaviors. This opinion supports Castells' (2011) and Shahbaz and Saeed's (2022) assertions regarding the rapidly increasing impact of digital technologies on cultural modernization and globalization processes, especially among urban youth. These findings highlight the significance of social media as a medium and a context for cultural change and negotiation. Social media's high perceived cultural influence, ubiquitous daily use, and engagement across multiple platforms all reflect a shift towards hybrid cultural identities where local customs and global digital influences collide.

Table 2: Independent Samples t-Test – Gender Differences in Perceived Cultural Change

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	T	p-value	Interpretation
Cultural Change Perception	Male	4.1	0.7			
	Female	4.5	0.6	-4.53	0.000	Significant difference: females perceive greater cultural change

The analysis shows that young people in Faisalabad have a statistically significant gender gap in their perceptions of social media's impact on cultural change. Female respondents reported a higher mean score (M = 4.5, SD = 0.6) than male respondents (M = 4.1, SD = 0.7) on a 5-point Likert scale that measures the extent of perceived cultural change. This difference is highly significant, according to the independent samples t-test results ($t(298) = -4.53$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that young women believe social media has a bigger influence on shifting social norms and practices than their male counterparts.

This result aligns with earlier sociological studies that emphasize the gendered nature of digital engagement and cultural transformation (Ali and Shah, 2021; Abbas and Qureshi, 2023). Studies show that women see the social network as a necessary instrument for the construction of their own identities, for the gaining of power and the breaking of the gender stereotypes, which in turn may increase their sensitivity to the cultural changes. However, the methods that boys use social media can be different as

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they may reflect a variety of digital behaviors and social roles (Shahbaz and Saeed, 2022). Such findings bring forth specific ways of engaging with the cultural dynamics and digital inclusion while underlining the necessity of taking gender into account when exploring the sociocultural effects of social media.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA – Impact of Type of University on Social Practice Transformation

Group	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**		
Public Universities	150	4.2	0.8		
Private Universities	150	4.5	0.6		
Source of Variation	**SS**	**Df**	**MS**	**F**	**p-value**
Between Groups	3.24	1	3.24	7.81	0.005
Within Groups	123.45	300	0.414		
Total	126.69	300			

A one-way ANOVA was employed to determine whether there were significant differences between the opinions of students from public and private universities regarding the influence of social media on cultural change. Students from private universities gave a higher mean perception score of 4.5 (SD = 0.6) than students from public universities, who only gave a mean score of 4.2 (SD = 0.8). The ANOVA results show that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups: $F(1, 298) = 7.81$, $p = 0.005$. This means that students at private universities believe that social media is more influential in bringing about changes in cultural and social practices than students at public universities.

There is a variety of factors that may affect the way students engage and understand social media, such as their socioeconomic backgrounds, their exposure to globalized norms, and different institutional cultures (Shahbaz and Saeed, 2022; Castells, 2011). The private universities, on the other hand, are usually more open and have a deeply technological infrastructure, which supports the development and incorporation of new cultural changes, unlike public universities, which might still have a more traditional background. To sum up, the findings underline the great importance of university setting as a factor, which changes the way young people understand the transition to digital culture.

Table 4: Perceived Transformation of Cultural and Social Practices by Gender and University Type

Group	**N**	**Mean Score (1–5 Likert)**	**SD**	**Test Statistic**	**p-value**	**Interpretation**
Gender						
Male	140	3.8	0.7	t = -4.32	0.000	Females perceive higher transformation
Female	160	4.3	0.6			
University						

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Type						
Public	150	3.9	0.7	F = 6.89	0.009	Private university students report higher transformation
Private	150	4.2	0.6			

When categorized by gender and type of university, the comparative analysis shows notable disparities in how young people view social media's influence on cultural and social practices.

Disparities by Gender: Compared to male students (M = 3.8, SD = 0.7), female students reported a higher mean perception score (M = 4.3, SD = 0.6). This difference was confirmed as statistically significant by an independent samples t-test ($t = -4.32$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that women perceive a greater degree of cultural transformation brought about by social media. This is consistent with earlier studies showing women's increased involvement in online cultural change and identity negotiation (Ali and Shah, 2021; Abbas and Qureshi, 2023).

University Type Differences: Compared to their peers at public universities (M = 3.9, SD = 0.7), students at private universities also expressed noticeably greater views of cultural change (M = 4.2, SD = 0.6). The ANOVA results support this difference ($F = 6.89$, $p = 0.009$), suggesting that private university environments may encourage greater exposure to and acceptance of evolving digital cultures (Shahbaz and Saeed, 2022; Castells, 2011). Collectively, these findings demonstrate the importance of gender and institutional context in shaping young people's perceptions and comprehensions of the cultural shifts made possible by social media platforms.

Table 5. Correlation between Social Media Usage and Cultural Shifts Among Youth (N = 300)

Variable Pair	r (Correlation Coefficient)	p-value	Interpretation
Daily Time on Social Media × Perceived Cultural Shift	**0.44**	0.000	Moderate positive and statistically significant
Number of Platforms Used × Perceived Cultural Shift	**0.49**	0.000	Moderate positive and statistically significant
Frequency of Posting × Perceived Cultural Shift	**0.55**	0.000	Strongest positive relationship, highly significant

Correlation analysis shows a statistically significant and positive relationship between social media usage and perceived cultural shifts among youth in Faisalabad. In particular, the frequency of posting had the highest correlation ($r = .55$, $p < .01$), followed by the number of platforms used ($r = .49$, $p < .01$) and daily time spent on social media ($r = .44$, $p < .01$). The results indicate that, with the increase in the intensity

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and diversity of their engagement on social media platforms, young people's understanding and perception of the ongoing cultural transformation go up accordingly. This is in line with Boyd's (2014) idea of youth as "networked publics," where digital interaction creates new opportunities for identity negotiation and social behavior. Moreover, it is consistent with Castells' (2011) argument that digital communication networks hold a primary place in the process of cultural norm transformation in the information age. In this way, the evidence reveals the role of social media not only in effective communication but also as a vibrant area for cultural production and change.
Qualitative Insights from Respondents: The thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 20 university students revealed nuanced perspectives on how social media has transformed cultural and social practices. Most respondents emphasized that platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have redefined concepts of modesty, fashion, relationships, and self-expression, especially among female youth. Several participants noted a growing disconnect from traditional values, with one female student stating, "We don't dress or behave the way our mothers did; social media gives us new ideas every day." Male respondents, however, were more likely to associate social media with entertainment and networking, downplaying its cultural influence. A few students from public universities expressed concern about losing touch with regional languages and customs, while private university students celebrated digital exposure as a means of personal freedom and global connectivity. A recurring theme was the tension between modernity and tradition, with students expressing both excitement and anxiety about navigating identity in the digital age. These narratives underscore the interplay between social media, gender, institutional culture, and identity negotiation, complementing the quantitative findings and enriching the understanding of youth cultural transformation in Pakistan.

Conclusion:

Students spend a significant amount of time on social media platforms and observe significant cultural changes, according to this study, which examined how social media influences how young people in Faisalabad alter their cultural and social practices. Female and private university students were more conscious of these shifts, highlighting the ways that gender and institutional context shape digital experiences. The results indicate that young people actively negotiate hybrid identities by combining global digital trends with local customs, portraying social media as a source of cultural modernization and social tension.
It is recommended that gender-sensitive strategies be used to promote digital literacy programs, that resource gaps between public and private institutions be filled, and that community engagement be promoted in order to strike a balance between traditional values and evolving digital cultures. More long-term studies are needed to examine the ongoing impact of social media on young people's cultural dynamics.

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