

## Impact of Social Media on Crime: A Multifaceted Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

This research paper delves into the intricate relationship between social media and crime, exploring the multifaceted ways in which social media platforms influence criminal behavior, investigation, and public perception. It begins by explaining the evolving nature of crime and its essential ingredient, highlighting how advancements in technology have transformed traditional notion of criminality. Further the paper analyses the impact of social media on crime reporting and public perception. It also explores the influence of social media on the justice system, including its role in the criminal investigations, legal proceedings and advocacy. The study extends its focus to the influence of social media on youth, emphasizing how exposure to harmful content and the influence of social media influencers can lead to criminal behavior among young individuals. Ultimately, this paper provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between social media and crime, underscoring the need for the comprehensive strategies to address the challenge posed by digital platforms in contemporary society

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### 1. Introduction

There is no society which is free from crime, it has become a myth to attain a crime free society. Crime cannot be defined in a single definition, in general crime is commission of an act or omission which a



person is legally prohibited or legally bound to do, in other word it is commission of an act which causes harm or injury to the public. The law of the state determine as if what will be deemed as crime, anything which is against the law of the land is a crime. The definition of crime undergo various changes over the period of time, what was accepted and treated as normal occurrence by the society later become crime, during ancient period in Europe blasphemy were treated as crime and only those act which were prohibited by the religion. In Indian history the Manuscript determines what will be crime, and in present the criminal laws. In modern approach the crime is committed against the society and it varies from society to society and from time to time, even the way of commission of crime also changes as the passage of time. In this digital age the social media and technology have become the integral part of our society, Merriam-Webster dictionary defines social media as ‘form of electronic communication through which users creates online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content’<sup>1</sup>. Social media in other words has become an online society where the people meet up, shares idea, communicate with each other and does various other activities of the society. In this digital era each and everything is in electronic form and almost everything is on social media. Social media aids in the creation of online social network by linking user’s profile with those of other individual or group<sup>2</sup>. Social media influences the lives of the people to an alarming extent, social media is a trend setter and the public acts as per the trend. The ordinary public who are on social media consciously or sub-consciously take their real life decision under the influence of the social media, it has a pervasive influence in the contemporary society, its ability to shape communication pattern, influence public opinion, facilitate public interaction, and transform various aspects of culture, business and politics. The influence of social media on crime is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has gathered significant attention in recent year and has transformed the landscape of criminal behaviour, investigation, and prevention. The research is done in the regard to know the impact of the social media on crime, how the social media influence crime in the contemporary world, the role played by social media (online platforms) in creating new criminal activities, forming opinion for or against such crime and criminal, new method of committing crime and others.

## 2. Crime and Technology

Crime is century old concept which varies from time to time and society to society, an act or omission which is crime in one society at a particular period of time may not be treated as crime in other society or

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

<sup>2</sup> Kalpan Andreas; “users of the world unite! The challenge and opportunity of social media”



other time period. Crime is any act of violating social norms or societal rules of behavior, which are subjected to punishment by the law.<sup>3</sup> Crime is dynamic as it changes with the changing society, the method of commission of crime also changes, the ingredients which are essential for commission of crime:

- a) Human being
- b) Mens Rea
- c) Actus Reus
- d) Injury.

These are the essential ingredients of crime, but as per the advancement of the technology and in the commission of the offence the flexibility has been made in the ingredients especially in the presence of 'human being'. The current era is the digital era where the physical presence of the criminal is not required to commit a crime, crime can be committed through computer by a person who is sitting far away and such criminal act causes much more severe loss as it has caused in traditional method.

The emergence of the internet has become a vital part of our life that imagining a time without it seems implausible. Our day-to-day routines have become heavily dependent on social media, driven by technological advancements, the swift spread of mobile data, and the widespread adoption of platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, X (Twitter) and others, these are termed as 'social media'. The technology in a very short period of time made a great advancement, social media is one of those, these platforms in the given short time frame made drastic changes such as change in advertisement, marketing, sales, news update, social gatherings and various. Crime is not untouched by social media, criminals use social media for the commission of various crimes, from traditional crime like fraud and cheating to more modern era crime like identity theft, bullying and other cyber crimes. Social media also plays an influential role in the commission of crime through hate posts and speeches, spreading of misinformation, glamorising the criminal activities etc. A new concept of crime has been developed after the introduction of internet in the society, the "cyber-crime". When the crime is committed by the use of technology it is known as "cyber-crime".

### 3. Social media and criminal activities

Social media platform serves as a medium of communication and disseminates information, facilitating unprecedented levels of connectivity and interactions. According to Oberlo, in 2022 there were

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<sup>3</sup><https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/antp07/chapter/definition-of-crime-theories-and-treatment/>



4.87 billion social media users across the globe, which is about 58% of the Earth's population<sup>4</sup>, and still it hasn't reached its peak popularity yet. The social media platform is used by individual and groups, these groups are formed by the likeminded person to promote their specific object, among this high number of user throughout the world there are in large number of individual or groups who plans, coordinate, and perpetrate various types of crimes(cyber), such as cyber bullying, fraud, identity theft and cyber-stalking. One of the most powerful tools of the century, social media, has become heaven for the criminals.

The major share of the social media users is with the *Meta*, whose subordinate social media platforms are *Facebook, Instagram, whatsapp*. There is a culture prevailing in the social media as the "meme culture", where the users (individual or groups) makes and shares meme on their social media account for the purpose of making people laugh and to get high reach among the users and to get their page or post viral sometimes the users overlook their social duty and make meme in such a manner that it is derogatory, and to an extent bullying the people. Bullying people on social media has now become a very common phenomenon, social media platforms provide avenues for individuals to engage in cyberbullying, where they harass, intimidate, or humiliate others online. This may involve sending threatening messages, spreading rumours, or posting derogatory comments and images, the person is being bullied just for the purpose of entertainment without the knowledge or being ignorant that the users who are bullying are committing crime..

An incident happened in Tamil Nadu in 2016, a girl 21 year of age victim committed suicide by hanging herself inside her room after she found her semi-nude photos of her own self on social networking site 'facebook'. The victim was informed by her best about her morphed image on facebook. In her suicide note the victim had claimed that her parents didn't trust her<sup>5</sup>. The social media become reason for her death and it in one sense abated her for suicide.

Another incident which started with fraud and ends up taking life of four, a couple alongside with their two children committed suicide after being under pressure by an loan app company to pay their due amount, they blackmail the man by threatening to leak their objectionable image on social media and make it viral<sup>6</sup>. The influence of social media is not only confined to causing mental pressure and

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.oberlo.com/blog/social-media-marketing-statistics>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.news18.com/news/india/after-tn-girl-commits-suicide-salesman-arrested-for-uploading-morphed-photos-on-facebook-1263622.html>

<sup>6</sup><https://indianexpress.com/article/india/madhya-pradesh-loan-company-man-suicide-wife-kids-8834440/>



abatement, sometimes it leads to the murder followed by harm to public peace. A shocking case came into the light in 2022, two men allegedly beheaded a Hindu tailor and made video of the commission of crime after a post appeared on his social media account favour a spokesperson who made derogatory comment about Islam's Prophet Mohammed. This incident cause public unrest and religious tension in India.<sup>7</sup>

Social media also gives shelter and glamourise the criminals, many memes and post are made on social media in the favour of the criminal with the intuition of gaining public sympathy, justifying his/her criminal act, etc. the internet as whole always glamourise the mafia, criminal activities and the criminal. These criminals are projected as a role model and messiah of the people who encourage the young generation to follow their footstep, and commit crime as a matter of pride. X which was twitter earlier plays important role in glamourising the criminals through the trending hashtags, this has become a permanent activity of making the hashtags which is in favour of the criminal trending. Hashtags showing power to such criminal activity, providing support through social media not only encourage the criminals but also pave road for new entries. Let's take the current example of notorious criminal of India, Lawrence Bisnoi who claimed responsibility of killing an khalistani supported gained high popularity on social media that he was trending 1<sup>st</sup> all over India, in this supportive tweets he was portrayed as "hero", a figure who has taken the law into his own hands and emerged as a symbols of justice for slaying the Khalistani 'villain'<sup>8</sup>

Many of the users rely on the instagram, facebook, X to stay connected with the world, to follow news and to buy things. Social media has also become a market place due to the vast presence of users as customers, but this rise in popularity increase the risk of fraud. These types of fraud become more and more sophisticated, often using tampered brand logos, false terms and conditions to appear genuine and various other methods to scam the user like posing as users friend<sup>9</sup>, it is very common in India that the fraudster make fake social media account of a person and commits fraud with his friends on social media pertaining to be that user, the identity theft which is the most infamous problem of social media caused by either making fake account or by hacking the users main personal account.

#### 4. Social media and AI

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<sup>7</sup><https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/29/india/india-udaipur-hindu-muslim-killing-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> DailyOnews, "India-Canada tussle makes gangster Lawrence Bishnoi un likely hero on Twitter", Ayaan Paul, 2023

<sup>9</sup><https://www.experian.co.uk/consumer/identity/guides/social-media-fraud.html>



AI which stands for Artificial Intelligence is the latest innovation in the field of technology, the AI encompasses machine learning and deep learning. These disciplines involve the development of AI algorithms, modeled after the decision-making processes of the human brain, that can 'learn' from available data and make increasingly more accurate classifications or predictions over time.<sup>10</sup>

The AI has become sensation nowadays, on one hand where the AI is a boon to the humanity on the other hand it has become curse as well, this is available to be used by all and even for the criminal minded persons, the recent incident related to AI was the incident of "deepfakes", which became viral on the internet and due to this many individuals suffer loss due to the criminal act by the social media users, Deepfakes are digital media- video, audio and images edited and manipulated using AI<sup>11</sup>. It is basically hyper-realistic digital falsification created to inflict harm on individuals and institutions. These AI tools are used to create morphed video and photos of a person which is circulated on social media which harm the victim in various aspects. Circulations of pornography is very common on social media, the keyword 'porn' and 'sex' draw huge audience on social media, hence in order to increase the reach these subject is highly promotes these subject which adversely affect the society at large and be a contributing factor for increase in sexual offences. The Adhoc Committee of the Rajay Sabha Chair by Jairam Ramesh constituted to study 'the alarming issue of pornography on social media and its effect on children and society as a whole' in its report states that the circulation of pornography on the internet has become of the major cause for the sexual offence committed against women and children. The AI is also being used for creation of such material, this not only harms the victim but also makes the society insensitive towards such crucial and sensitive matter.

## 5. Impact on crime reporting and perception

Majority of the social media users use the platform to connect with the world and to update with the news. Social media channels become a go to source for the local and other news for the public, which also includes crime reporting in order to cover the latest news on their social media channels the managers of those channels skip the verification process before publishing such crime report. This in one hand increases the awareness in the society and also public condemnation of the crime could lead to reduction of crime, whereas on the other hand this can also amplify other crimes mainly the hate crime. In order to increase their reach the social media channels use sensational headlines and thumbnail to grab users'

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.ibm.com/topics/artificial-intelligence>

<sup>11</sup> The Hindu Article on "danger of deepfakes" by Ashish Jaiman



attention, a great example is the thumbnail and title used on the YouTube as click bait. Such pages or channels confine their news coverage on only those topics which creates sensation in the society having emotional response from users, such as fear, outrage or sympathy. The news covered by social media page or channels are over exposed and under surveyed<sup>12</sup>, which lead to the misinformation among the public, the social media is the best friend for rumors to thrive, the false information conspiracy theory and reinforcement of such information by the like-minded individual which ultimately lead to perpetuation of false narratives and rumors .

The User-Generated contents on the social media platforms which are circulated as news are the most dangerous ones, most of such contents are manipulated and doctored content related to crime incident, such as edited video and fabricated images. The social media gives an opportunity to the users to act as a citizen journalist, a person who has no training or degree of journalism can also be a journalist on social media which adversely affect the society and crime coverage, due to lack of knowledge the pages or channels publish a total fake news or even connect wrong news with other images to make it look authentic.

The portrayal of crime on social media can shape public perception and attitudes towards crime, law enforcement and judicial system. The incorrect coverage of such news related to crime can cause blunder, portrayal of crime as the demand of the time and necessity for the offender generate empathy for them, and in a sense promotes the commission of crime, it also erodes the trust in the administration and empowers the ones who took law in their hand. The overrepresentation of crime against a certain sect of the society by a particular section has become trademark of social media, which creates hate and bad perception against one, this is hate crime.

## **6. Social media and justice system**

The social media extends its reach to the legal proceedings also, not a single stone is pristine by the impact of Social media, these not only influence the commission of crime, criminals and public but it also penetrate the legal proceedings in one or other way.

Its impact on the investigation of crime – The role of social media has become important in investigation of crime, the platform is being used by law enforcement to alter the public about the crime and update about the ongoing investigation. The social media has become important for the evidence collection as

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<sup>12</sup> 'How social media shapes our perception about crime' by Nikki Goth, Standford university



large number of investigator use suspects and victims social media accounts to gather evidence. It is also being utilized as to identify suspects, locate missing person, obtain tips related to criminal activities and to follow organized crime.<sup>13</sup>

Its impact on Judiciary and Advocacy– The advocates uses the social media and its trend as a defense in the court proceeding. The defense counsel may gather evidence, alibis, or character testimonials from social media posts, photos, and messages to support their clients. The Social media present challenge for the judiciary for maintaining the untempered legal proceeding and ensuring fair trial, the court many a times endure immense pressure from the public, whose major cause is the social media.

## 7. Influence on youth

Almost all of the youth (96%) uses social media,<sup>14</sup> the youth from age 13 onwards have the availability of each and every category of content online, there are certain guideline and rules made by Social media platform regarding the young person of age limit, but a vast majority shows fake age on social media platform, only 84.2% of the youth who identifies as 18+ are actually 18+ in real life and rest give false information to get the restricted content.<sup>15</sup> The average youth around the globe uses social media for 4.5hrs daily,<sup>16</sup> in this time period they are exposed to numerous of information, posts, news articles and other content, these content impact the youth in various ways like cyberbullying, compromise privacy and safety, criminal exposure, feeling of hate etc.

There are various social media influencer who are followed by the youth, the young immature mind of the youth follows these so called influencers blindly, and get themselves in trouble and involved in criminal activities.

Elvish Yadav a famous influencer having millions of follower on social media recently get involved in crime relating to narcotic drugs, was arrest in accusation of supply of snake venom in party,<sup>17</sup>his followers instead of condemning his act was supporting him, even the demand of snake venom as drug has increased.

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<sup>13</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360540601\\_How\\_Social\\_Media\\_Influence\\_Crimes](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360540601_How_Social_Media_Influence_Crimes)

<sup>14</sup><https://actforyouth.net/adolescence/demographics/internet.cfm>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup><https://www.news18.com/movies/elvish-yadav-confesses-to-arranging-snake-venom-at-rave-parties-a-day-after-his-arrest-report-8819342.html>



The youth has become very sensitive toward religion, sex and caste. The sensitivity is such that even a single unfavourable comment or act becomes a cause of action for the commission of crime. This is the result of hate contents available on the social media platform.

## 8. Government's policy

The government is well aware of the impacts of the social media on the society as well as relating to the crime. The government in order to tackle this emerging problem took number of steps such as:-

- Legislation- the government in 2023 in The Information Technology Amendment Rules, 2023 made provision related to fake news circulation, specially on social media platform.
- Awareness program- government from time to time launch awareness program in this regard the latest one name "be careful while using Social media platforms".
- Help Centre- In order to provide intensive help to the internet user, the government launch helpline and website "[www.cybercrime.gov.in](http://www.cybercrime.gov.in)".

## 9. Suggestion and Recommendations

The researcher would like to contribute few suggestions as follow:-

- Parental Guidance and Supervision- provide parents and guardian with resources and guidance on how to monitor their children's online activities and educate them about the potential dangers of social media.
- Rules for news publication- Social media page which does not have experience or education in journalism should be prohibited from publishing news article on their account.
- Proper source publication- No information regarding any crime or other should be circulated online without the source of such information.
- Education Campaigns- the Social media should be made a part of curricular of the student and it's pro and cons to be taught to them, and how to identify the fake news/ information.
- Legal Consequences and Enforcement- Ensure that individuals who engage in criminal behavior on social media are held accountable for their actions through appropriate legal consequences

## 10. Conclusion

The intricate relationship between social media and crime unveils a multifaceted landscape where digital platforms profoundly influence criminal behavior, investigation and public perception. As crime evolves



alongside technological advancements, social media platforms have become both a breeding ground for criminal activity and a catalyst for transformative shifts in public behavior.

From cyberbullying and identity theft to glamourisation of criminal behavior, social media provides a fertile ground for nefarious activities. The rise of cybercrime has introduced new challenges, where crimes can be committed remotely, and transcending physical boundaries. Moreover, social media amplifies the voices of criminals, glamourising their actions and fostering an environment where criminal behavior is normalized or even celebrated.

Misinformation and sensationalized reporting on social media can exacerbate societal tensions and erode trust in institutions, while youth are particularly vulnerable to the influence of harmful content and influencers. Governments and stakeholders have begun to respond with legislative measures, awareness campaigns, and help centers to address the challenges posed by social media in contemporary world.

Moving forward, it is essential to prioritize parental guidance, education campaigns, and legal enforcement to mitigate the negative impacts of social media on crime. By promoting responsible usage, fostering literacy, and holding individuals accountable for criminal behavior online, we can strive towards a safer and more resilient society in the digital era.

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