



An Introduction to Pakistan Electronic Crime Act

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Abstract

This research study is an introduction to Pakistan Electronic Crime Act which discusses the issues related to media regulations in Pakistan. The rapid growth of digital platforms has transformed communication, political participation, and public discourse, while also increasing challenges such as cyberbullying, online harassment, hate speech, misinformation, and privacy violations. In response, PECA 2016 was enacted to address cybercrime and regulate online spaces; however, concerns remain regarding its implementation, transparency, and impact on fundamental rights. This act has been the central point of discussion in many research inquiries and debates. PECA functions primarily as a protective mechanism for citizens or reflects broader structural and political dynamics within Pakistan's digital governance framework. The main themes of the research include regulatory effectiveness, institutional enforcement capacity, transparency and accountability, protection of freedom of expression, and the balance between national security and digital rights. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative content analysis, analysis of documents to evaluate how the regulatory framework operates in practice. It analyzes content removal powers, blocking authorities, and criminal penalties implemented by the PTA, assessing them through criteria such as legal clarity, fairness, accessibility, and measurable impact on reducing online harms.

Keywords: Electronic Media Regulation Act, Media Regulations, PECA Implementation

Introduction

The social media has become one of the most revolutionary phenomena in the modern digital age, essentially changing the way people interact, as well as access information and engage in social, political, and cultural life. In a broad meaning, social media is defined as online internet-based services and applications that allow their users to produce, disseminate, and exchange content and interact with each other in real time (Beal and Bajali, 2020). Contrary to the traditional mass media which functions through one-way communication, social media is marked by participatory, interactive and networked communication patterns, where the users play roles as both the content producers and as well as the content consumers (Hanna and Lutkevich, 2025). Social media has many benefits in the contemporary world. It has been found that these platforms make social connection easier and lessen the feeling of isolation, as well as give

marginalized groups an opportunity to share their identities and grievances (McAlister et al., 2024). The social media has also contributed positively to the access to information, education, small business promotion, and quick communications in the event of an emergency or crisis (Krishna et al., 2022). In developing societies, especially, social media has opened access to political consciousness and engagement between the people who had initially had no access to the traditional media (George and Jenkins, 2020). Besides, social media sites are run on business models that are profit-oriented and are extensive in terms of data mining, targeted advertisements, and automated content curation. Such structural characteristics raise serious questions about the privacy and surveillance of users, as well as the set of communicative control in the hands of a small number of individual corporations. The social media companies are taking on more of the roles of quasi-governance, especially in content moderation and data management as they are non-state actors possessing immense influence in the domain of the mass discourse (Theil, 2022). This has made the traditional legal and constitutional structures that were initially formulated to control the action of the state difficult to govern the digital action of the digital intermediaries. The social media is directly intertwined with the broader changes in information and communication technologies, especially with the emergence of Web 2.0 which promoted user-generated content, interactivity, and collaboration. As opposed to the previous stages of internet usage where the internet was characterized by into dynamic webpages and passive information consumption, social media platforms promote participation, personalization, and constant interaction (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This has changed how people communicate to a decentralized and networked phenomenon where individuals and groups have an opportunity to influence the narrative of the people without necessarily having to go through the traditional gatekeepers like journalists, broadcasters, or state agencies.

Social media is not just act as communication tool but also shape behavior Likes, shares, comments, trending lists and recommendation systems are features that proactively organize visibility and attention to favor particular content compared to others. Consequently, social media is not merely a reflection of social reality, but it also takes part in the construction of social reality. Engagement-driven content has been demonstrated to sensationalize emotionally motivated content, such as outrage, fear, and moral judgment, which can bias the deliberation process in the general population, and increase social polarization (Sunstein, 2017). Simultaneously, social media has become a critical political infrastructural phenomenon in communication and civic engagement. Politicians, journalists, activists, and common people are more and more using them to distribute information, to organize and to challenge the mainstream discourse. The pro-democracy uprisings as well as the issue-oriented advocacy campaigns originating in various parts of the world have resorted to the use of social media in order to circumvent the media system controlled by the state or those dominated by the elite (Castells, 2012). In this regard, social media has widened the social space by facilitating new types of participation, visibility, and collective action especially to the marginalized or the underrepresented groups. The vulnerabilities are also caused by the same affordances that facilitate democratic involvement. Openness and rapidity of the social media mean that it is hard to control the content and yet fails to violate the freedom of expression. Cyberbullying, harassment online, hate speech and organized disinformation campaigns are just a few harmful practices that thrive in the settings where the enforcement processes are weak, and the accountability is diffuse (Citron and Norton, 2011). Such hazards are also exacerbated within politically polarized, religiously sensitive, ethnically divided, or digitally illiterate societies, in which hate speech on the internet can be readily turned into real-life violence. The other notable feature of social media is that it is based on data-driven business models. Social media companies gather enormous quantities of this personal information to increase targeted

advertising and content customization, and this practice is highly questionable in terms of privacy, surveillance, and the rights of users. Researchers claim that such kind of surveillance capitalism provides social media corporations with unparalleled control over the attention, behavior, and preferences of the users without any significant degree of transparency and consent. As a result, social media companies have taken on the functions of quasi-regulators, controlling speech and actions by their own rules and automated filters that are not subject to much democratic control (Balkin, 2018). The social media has revolutionized the way people communicate, gather information, and discuss in the society. Facebook, Twitter (since renamed X) and Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube are social media and present opportunities to achieve this goal by connecting news, entertainment, civic engagement, and social networking to billions of active users globally (Statista, 2025). Even as the social media has generated opportunities of connection and expression never before seen, it has also presented a tremendous challenge that pertains to misinformation, hate speech, data privacy, political polarization, and negatively impacts mental health (Cinelli et al., 2020). These fears have motivated policymakers, regulators, and players in the civil society to demand more stringent control of social media sites. These regulatory strategies have been followed nationally, regionally, and internationally and have comprised content moderation requirements, transparency requirements, data protection requirements, and accountability and enforcement mechanisms (London, 2021). The policy issue in the United States has been the revision of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, aimed at clarifying the issue of intermediary liability of user-generated content (Kosseff, 2022). Although it is easily justified that social media regulation is a necessary measure to ensure that the state of the world remains calm, safe, and free of conflicts, critics suggest that regulation is often turned into the means of surveillance, censorship and even political control especially in developing and liberal democratic nations (Zuboff, 2019). The efficacy of social media regulation, consequently, is highly disputed, and the most urgent questions emerge on the authenticity of the supposed benefits of regulation on the online harms or rather a threat to the democratic liberties.

The tools used on social media platforms are meant to ensure that users engage the most by getting notifications, endless scrolling, and recommendation algorithms. They lead to problematic or addictive patterns of usage that have been linked to the decrease in attention span, low impulse control, and executive functioning (Li et al., 2025). Consequently, people could not control their time on the internet which translates to a lack of attention to academic, professional, and personal life. To address these fears, governments and international centers have turned more to control social media outlets. Early internet governance concepts were somewhat centered around the concept of self-regulation, which was based on the assumption that innovation and free speech would be best maintained by the minimal participation of the state (Morozov, 2011). Nevertheless, the recurring crises, including election interference, massive data breaches, and the spread of harmful online content- have demonstrated the weaknesses of the voluntary regulation of platforms and have in turn led to the demands of a more significant level of regulatory control (Bradshaw and Howard, 2019). Such a change is a symptom of the wider reconsideration of the role of the state in regulating online spaces. The modern social media regulation has a broad variety of legal and policy tools, such as content moderation requirements, intermediary liability regimes, data protection laws, and transparency requirements. The European Union has become a world leader in this regard and presented detailed frameworks, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Digital Services Act (DSA), which intend to increase the level of accountability, safeguard core rights, and minimize the systemic risk of digital platforms (European Commission, 2022). The United States, conversely, has traditionally been guided by a less regulated regulatory approach built on

Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which provides a wide immunity of platforms against liability over user-generated content. Such regulatory ideologies indicate that there is no universal approach to regulating social media across the world.

The efficiency of these measures is disputable even though the amount of regulation is growing. Critics respond that most of the regulatory regimes cannot keep up with the rate of technology advancement and the cross-national nature of social media sites (Suzor, 2019). Enforcement mechanisms are weak, rarely effective, or limited by jurisdictional borders and thus harmful content and practices continue to exist. In addition, the intervention of regulation can lead to unexpected effects, including the over-censorship of voices, a disproportionate effect on marginalized voices, or a self-reinforcing effect of dominant platforms with the resources to meet the demands of complex regulatory measures (Roberts, 2019). The other important struggle is how to regulate and at the same time safeguard basic rights especially the freedom of expression and information access. Board policies that are required or recommended by regulation can motivate platforms towards risk-averse practices, where they take down lawful but divisive posts in order to evade penalties (Gillespie, 2020). The manifestation of this phenomenon sparks the question of the privately operated quasi-judicial power of those companies to regulate speech without the necessary level of transparency and responsibility. As a result, the researchers have doubted whether the existing regulatory frameworks are sufficient to deal with the structural power of platforms or simply redistribute it without correcting the system-wide problems (Helberger et al., 2018). The focus of this change is algorithmic curation and recommendation systems to rank, filter, and amplify content on a large scale. Such systems have a strong impact on the exposure of users to information and online attention economies (Bucher, 2018). Empirical evidence on algorithmic personalization has been inconsistent, with scholars attributing it to such phenomena as echo chambers, filter bubbles, and political polarization (Pariser, 2011 and Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016). However, the ability of platforms to control visibility has created significant apprehensions about their impact on the process of democratic deliberation, political participation, and social cohesion (Karppinen and Acunto, 2018). Social media and its political implications have been especially poignant in connection to election, social movements and crisis communication. Although platforms have served as the means of civic mobilization and grassroots activism, platforms also have allowed organized disinformation campaigns, foreign influence, and computational propaganda (Bradshaw and Howard, 2019). Widespread data collection activities also contribute to the use of micro-targeted political advertising, which also undermines the previous regulatory systems in the broadcast media and communication systems that have a territorial basis (Kreiss and McGregor, 2019). These innovations have revealed weaknesses in regulatory frameworks in the current election and campaign finance legislation.

Those social media sites are based on economic systems that make it difficult to regulate them. The vast majority of large platforms are based on business models that are founded on advertising and encourage the extraction, analysis, and the monetization of personal information (Zuboff, 2019). In this model, which is oriented towards surveillance, structural tensions develop between commercial goals and the preservation of the basic rights, such as privacy, autonomy, and informational self-determination (Cohen, 2019). Consequently, the regulations that were concerned too much about content moderation pose a threat of treating symptoms, as opposed to the systemic causes of online harms (Gorwa, 2019). Regulatively, the social media exists in multiple, overlapping levels, such as national laws, supranational arrangements, self-regulation of the platforms, and community-based norms (Flew, 2019). The consequence of such patchwork regulation is the frequent lack of consistency and uncertainty in the law. Compliance costs are

typically more easily covered by large, multinational platforms whereas smaller platforms and non-profit digital services might take undue regulatory risks, which may increase market concentration and decrease competition (Cafaggi and Iamiceli, 2021). Social media sites are transnational, which also poses more issues in regulation. Rules on freedom of expression, intermediary liability, and data protection are highly diverse in jurisdiction which makes it more difficult to implement and coordinate (Kaye, 2019). Additionally, a few of the authoritarian regimes have employed the platform regulation schemes in the pretext of fighting dangerous content and instead employed them to justify censorship and monitoring (Deibert, 2020). These trends underline the need to base the social media regulation on the international human rights standards. To address these issues, researchers and policy-makers have promoted an increased adoption of systemic and risk-based regulations. These strategies focus on platform responsibility by imposing transparency requirements, algorithmic audit, external checks and balances and participatory governance including civil society and users (Helberger et al., 2018). These models view platforms as influential socio-technical actors whose responsibilities are equal to their impact on society as opposed to their neutrality. The emergence of the social media has also been accompanied by a wider shift in the patterns of power exercising and mediation in digital societies. Instead of being a tool of communication, platforms have become institutional actors in that regulate rules, norms, and incentives of social interactions. This has been referred to as the platformization of the internet as it is through which economic, political and cultural activities are restructured around a few infrastructural mediators (Nieborg and Poell, 2018). Platformization does not only have implications on the markets and media systems, but also governance since the roles performed by public institutions are taken by private companies. A major issue that arises out of such change is the power accumulation of large social media companies. The network effects, data concentration, and economies of scale have allowed few platforms to gain nearly monopoly statuses in the online communication markets (Srnicsek, 2017). It is an excessive level of concentration that curbs user choice and prevents competitive pressure, at the same time giving platforms a large amount of control over the situation in which speech, association, and visibility take place. Researchers have said that such structural power undermines the ease of regulation since the states might hesitate or fail to confront corporations whose services are central to social and economic life (Khan, 2017).

The social media platforms are also important in influencing epistemic space, which is the conditions in which knowledge is generated, distributed, and verified. The prevalence of virality, measures of popularity, and the influencer phenomenon may bias content with emotional appeal or fake data with facts (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral, 2018). The issues with these dynamics are especially serious in the fields of communicating about public health emergencies, climate change, and conflict coverage where false information may have real, offline effects. The loss of common reference points of facts has made other researchers call social media as an erosion of the so-called epistemic crisis of the democratic societies (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). The problem of labor and governance in the social media ecosystems also makes measurements of platform responsibility more complicated. Such a core aspect of the regulatory compliance as content moderation is frequently performed by precarious, outsourced workers who work in obscure conditions and have limited institutional protection (Gray and Suri, 2019). This invisible work develops ethical issues on labor conditions, psychological damage, and sustainability of the vast moderation systems. The proposal of regulatory frameworks where the increase of content control occurs but no action is taken regarding labor practices tends to transfer the social costs to the invisible workforces.

Pakistan Electronic Crime Act (PECA)

Khan & Daud, (2019) utilized the qualitative content analysis of the social media posts and semi-structured interviews to explore the topic of cyberbullying among Pakistani young people. The authors divide cyberbullying into verbal abuse, character assassination, religious and gendered shaming, pointing out that Facebook and WhatsApp are mentioned most often in Pakistan. The analysis reveals that in Pakistan, cyberbullying is a deeply rooted phenomenon, especially regarding gender hierarchies and religious sensibility. Threats, moral policing and reputational attacks are common techniques used to target female users. Notably, the research concludes that the PECA is hardly known among the legal community, and victims are hardly willing to file complaints because of stigma and lack of confidence in law enforcers. The authors conclude that PECA is a legal preventive measure, but its application out of the cyberbullying in the social media context has little practical value. Based on content analysis of abusive tweets and Facebook remarks, Ali and Khalid (2020) discussed the issue of gendered cyberbullying: this paper will analyze the instances of harassment of women journalists in Pakistan through PECA. The authors compare linguistic patterns, themes and frequency of abuse revealing sexualized insults, accusations of blasphemy and threats of violence as the most common ones. It is a critical assessment of PECA, which asserts that despite the fact that online harassment is a criminal offense by the law, the law does not consider organized harassment and harassment based on religion. Among the weaknesses, the authors note the lack of enforcement, selective law enforcement, and the non-existence of mechanisms that prioritize victims. The results indicate that PECA is not a practical protective measure against cyberbullying victims but it is a symbolic legal framework. Raza and Shah, (2021) provides an analysis of FIA case summary of cybercrime, and media coverage through content analysis to study PECA application in cyber harassment cases. The paper has found that there are loopholes in the enforcement process, as political oratory or blasphemy case is faster than cyberbullying cases. The authors discover that PECA is unbalanced with regards to speech control and protection of victims, particularly when it comes to the powerful actors. In many cases of cyberbullying between regular users, there is no resolution that will be made. The research finds that PECA has been implemented based on the institutional interests but not the intent of the law hence it can be considered ineffective in terms of fighting cyberbullying.

According to Shabbir et al.,(2025) social media regulation has become a significant field of academic research in Pakistan because of the swift development of digital platforms and their increased role in political, social, and cultural life. The current literature indicates that, even though social media has facilitated increased access to information, civic engagement, and political participation, it has created a lot of issues associated with misinformation, hate speech, cyberbullying, invasion of privacy, and surveillance by the state. Consequently, the regulatory reaction in Pakistan, mainly in the form of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) and the rules of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has elicited a heated academic and policy discussion. Digital rights foundation (2021) applied systematic qualitative content analysis with regard to thousands of cyber harassment cases. The analysis defines Facebook as the platform that most people are cyber bullied on, the next platforms are WhatsApp and Instagram. The report identifies significant weaknesses in the enforcement of PECA, such as the blame on the victims, the delays in the process, and the insensitiveness of the law enforcement agencies towards gender. It comes to the conclusion that PECA, in its current form, does not safeguard vulnerable users and often fails to encourage reporting. Yousaf and Rasheed, (2022) analyzed of Facebook posts and comments that deal with moral policing and harassment is carried out in this study. The authors discover that cyberbullying is often explained by religious expressions, which confuses the boundary between the manifestation of beliefs and harassment.

The article also criticizes PECA to not focus on religiously justified cyberbullying because they think that law enforcement agencies are too reticent to act in such situations.

According to Javed & Ahmad (2018) the records of the FIA cybercrime cases, and newspaper coverage of the case of online harassment registered on PECA. The authors propose common trends of latency, unofficial settlements, and case withdrawal especially in cases of cyberbullying involving women. The study also concludes that PECA is mostly applied to the cases when there is political dissent or accusations of blasphemy whereas complaints of cyber bullying are less likely to get an institutional priority. The involved victims are normally under the social pressure and procedural sophistication which discourages legal action. The authors determine that the application of PECA is an expression of power gaps and not protection of victims, which restricts its use in preventing day-to-day cyberbullying on social media. According to Dad (2019) that PECA does not cover the area of coordinated harassment, impersonation, and abuse of personal images, particularly on Facebook and WhatsApp. The article highlights the fact that the procedural requirements of PECA and the structures used in enforcing the law disempower women in accessing justice. There is a tendency of secondary harassment of the victims during reporting. Yaseen (2021) analyzed Facebook posts and Twitter posts on harassment. It concludes that cyberbullying is often promoted as correcting the morals, especially toward women and minorities. The authors believe that PECA is less effective in deterring harassment because it does not consider cultural explanations of harassment. The enforcement agencies are reluctant to interfere into the cases that are presented as religious or as a way of expressing oneself. According to Hussain and Khan (2019) indicated that media portrays PECA as a law of security and control, and the protection of victims of cyberbullying is barely present. This kind of framing adds to the fear and lack of understanding of laws pertaining to cyber among the people making them not want to report on harassment. According to Shah and Qureshi (2019) that PECA is conceptualized as a security mechanism of a state with cyberbullying as a secondary concern. The authors contend that this kind of framing prevents victims to complain about harassment since the law relates to monitoring and penalization. Cyber bullying is therefore regulated indirectly and haphazardly. Zubair and Saleem (2021) discovered that abusive material frequently develops in cyberbullying but hardly leads to PECA action unless it targets state institutions or elites. The research concludes that PECA enforcement is selective in political aspects and does not provide much protection against common cyberbullying.

Khan and Ashraf (2022) examined Facebook and Instagram posts, screen shots, and accounts of the victims. One of the most harmful forms of cyber bullying, which is brought out by the authors, is image-based abuse. In spite of PECA making such acts criminal, the victims are therefore secondarily victimized during reporting. The paper concludes that there are legal remedies in theory and fail in practice because of institutional and cultural obstacles. According to Farooq and Jamil (2023) the law is perceived as retaliatory as opposed to being protective making cyberbullying massively underreported. Using thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and online stories, this research concludes that victims do not take PECA due to fears of legal abuse, social backlashing, and institutional persecution. Sattar and Ahmad (2020) employs the method of qualitative content analysis in Facebook posts, comments and accounts of victims of cyber harassment. The authors show that cyberbullying is often being under the banners of honor and morality, particularly towards women. In its study, the researcher concludes that PECA does not deal with cyberbullying based on the concept of social legitimacy since the police are reluctant to intervene in situations which are perceived as moral or religious correction. Legal reporting would cause victims to fear more reputational damage. Shah and Jilani (2020) analyzed the abuse of journalists on Facebook and Twitter, discovering that there

are cyberbullying, doxing, and threats among other types of harassment. PECA is increasingly being enforced against journalists than protecting them. The authors consider PECA as a factor that leads to an unfriendly online environment and facilitates selective enforcement instead of solving cyberbullying. Raza (2020) analyzed Facebook posts, Twitter threads, and blog narratives is carried out in this study where users share their experiences of cyberbullying and harassment. In their work, the authors concentrate on the discussion of the fear of PECA by the user in retaliation to online abuse. The discussion shows that as common as cyberbullying is, the victims do not report the offense because they fear legal apprehension, lack of awareness on how to do this, and fear of being counter-accused. Most users take PECA as a surveillance feature and not a safeguarding mechanism because they think that getting closer to law enforcement will aggravate their predicament. The article concludes that in Pakistan, the discourse of cyberbullying is determined by self-censorship, silence, and normalization, and not empowerment by the law. The authors find that there is a failure in the logic of deterrence in PECA since it is an institutional environment of low trust, where cyberbullying is socially acceptable and legally unnoticed.

According to Imran and Akbar (2025) that the spread of disinformation in Pakistan on social media and critically evaluates the efficiency of the currently existing cybersecurity and digital media legislation to counter the identified phenomenon. The authors posit that through literature-based and policy analysis approach, the social media platforms have enabled quick expansion of false, misleading, and manipulative news, especially in times of political crises, religious scandals, and national security incidents. The paper especially focuses on the legal and regulatory environment of Pakistan, such as Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) regulations, and further changes. The authors suggest that these laws have been brought in to combat cybercrime, hate speech and disinformation, but they have weaknesses in form of vague definitions, inconsistent application, and insufficient institutional capacity, which make them ineffective. Iftikhar et al, (2025) analyzed the current trend of social media regulation in Pakistan, where the authors believe that balancing control of the state, responsibility of the platforms, and fundamental rights is a complicated issue, especially freedom of expression. The authors examine law and regulatory tools of Pakistan, the central of which are Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, the rules and regulations of the PTA, and suggested amendments to evaluate their effectiveness and normative legitimacy. The paper follows a legal and policy review approach based on the statutory analysis, regulatory documents, and comparative standpoints. It claims that the regulatory environment in Pakistan is more reactive and state-centered and adopts more of control and compliance than transparency, accountability, and user rights. Although these laws are designed to prevent hate speech, disinformation, and cybercrime as well as threats to national security, the authors argue that their sweeping and vaguity give discretionary authority to interpret the law, which inevitably leads to political abuse and censorship.

Nawaz (2021) analyzed interviews and online discussion forums of student participants in evaluating the interpretation and reaction of cyberbullying among Pakistani youth. The authors single out avoidance as the predominant coping mechanism comprising of blocking users, deletion of accounts, and leaving public platforms. PECA is not a frequently mentioned option by the participants. Rather, the law is seen as complex, threatening and favoring the interests of influential players. The paper concludes that cyberbullying is socialized as a price of being online and especially to women. Authors suppose that the legal frameworks such as PECA do not appeal to the youth digital cultures, where the responses to platforms are formed by the platform norms and peer support rather than by the state law. This lack of attachment undermines

the relevance of PECA to cyberbullying. According to Singhal et al., (2022) a systematization of knowledge (SoK) in the domain of content moderation in social media by considering how social media platforms implement policy guidelines in practical enforcement. The authors examine moderation systems of the leading platforms including Facebook, Twitter (X), and YouTube based on interdisciplinary literature in computer science and legal and social sciences. The paper ends with the conclusion that proper social media regulation needs to be more transparent in the algorithms, human-in-the-loop and context-sensitive regulation, and to be legally regulated. Rizvi and Gilani (2022) analyzed the regulation of social media in Pakistan in the prism of digital authoritarianism. Effective content governance should be promoted instead of the state surveillance and control, which the authors support through legal analysis and policy review, by arguing that legislations like PECA 2016 institutionalize state surveillance and control. The researchers conclude that journalists, activists, and voices of dissent are over-regulated, whereas disinformation and extremist materials usually go unnoticed. The authors conclude that the regulatory model in Pakistan is more focused on political stability than democracy accountability and is minimally effective in regulating but compromising the trust of the population. Khan and Yousaf (2023) discovered that the law on hate speech is merely applied selectively, disregarding in most cases religious or majoritarian hate and criminalizing political opposition. Moderation tools that are automated are proved to be ineffective in the detection of culturally hidden hate narratives in Urdu and other regional languages. The paper postulates that poor enforcement is a result of political partisanship, technical incompetence, and poor liaison with platforms. Ahmed et al., (2021) presented the results of interviews and message content analysis which demonstrates that disinformation is propagated without any restraint in encrypted and informal networks that are not covered by regulatory frameworks. An important weakness of the regulatory strategy of Pakistan that is mentioned in the article is that the laws applicable to public platforms cannot be transferred to regulate the private digital places. Qadir (2021) analyzed the discourse on cyberbullying in reference to digital citizenship using content analysis of online discussion threads and educational forums. The members focus on ethical conduct, but not legal responsibility. PECA is an infrequently mentioned principle when it comes to responsible online behaviour, implying that there is no correspondence between law and civic culture. The authors believe that informal control is more effective in the prevention of cyberbullying in Pakistan than the state law.

Saleem (2020) used a qualitative content analysis carried out on victim stories shared on Facebook support groups, blogs, and online forums on online cyberbullying. The authors dwell on the interpretation of possible legal solutions by the victims, especially PECA. The results indicate that cyberbullying is seen as devastating emotionally and impossible to prosecute in courts. Victims report being bullied, impersonated and mocked publicly many times, but do not report because they are afraid of retaliation, damaged image and distrust to the institutions. PECA is often referred to as vague, threatening, and discriminatory. The authors state that cyberbullying in Pakistan is not an issue that continues to exist because of lack of law, but lack of the legal credibility. The research findings also suggest that PECA cannot be effective as a cyberbullying deterrent in the absence of institutional trust and victim-focused implementation. Lodhi (2021) analyzed cyberbullying based on reputational damage using thematic content analysis of social media posts, screenshots and interview transcripts. The authors refer to such tricks like manipulated photos, rumour mongering, and viral rumour campaigns. The review indicates that PECA has a poor legal language that does not take into account the long-term reputational harm but instead targets single cases. Victims claim that even on filing complaints, the legal procedures are sluggish and not tied to platform reality. The authors conclude that

PECA views cyberbullying as a single crime instead of a sustained social process, which restrains its utility in cases of reputation-based harassment.

Noor (2022) analyzed Instagram posts and comments related to cyberbullying. The authors discover that visual platforms allow an intensified form of moral policing, especially on the appearance and style of life of women even though PECA has established that individuals must not be harassed, the enforcement agencies fail to interpret harm through visual means but emphasize on verbal abuse. Consequently, image cyberbullying has yet to be regulated in a large scale. This paper suggests that PECA is an indication of text-based expertise of harm that cannot work in visual-oriented social media conditions. Siddiqui (2022) demonstrate that the abusive content is frequently propagated through engagement-based visibility, whether it is legal or not. PECA targets the offenders individually, without considering amplification processes at the platform level. Even in cases where abusive posts are deleted, victims confirm that they have already been damaged. Its authors conclude that the legal frameworks such as PECA are still reactive and inadequate without accountability by the platforms. Ilyas (2022) examined cyberbullying as a cyclical process, which has a long-term impact according to the analysis of victim timelines based on qualitative content analysis. The authors demonstrate that case based logic as applied by PECA does not handle recurring re-emergence of malicious material. The author of the present study concludes that cyber-bullying should be regulated longitudinally, which PECA cannot do at the moment. Khan (2019) examined Twitter responses, and posts of women activists, journalists, and students on Facebook. The authors recognize some common patterns of sexualized speech, character attacks, and threats that they theorize as gendered cyberbullying. This analysis has revealed that the PECA provisions on harassment do not cover implicit and culturally coded abuse in a comprehensive manner because enforcement agencies are concerned with explicit threats and not symbolic or reputational harm. Victims state that they have been told to disregard harassment instead of seeking legal action The authors find that cyberbullying against women is legally invisible because of the patriarchal norms of digital culture as well as the enforcement practices, which is limiting PECA as a protective law. According to Butt and Jamal (2020) FIA press releases, media reports, and legal documents, the paper explored the official narrative of cyberbullying cases. The authors note that the enforcement of PECA is focused on the national security and defamation of the state or political dissent whereas interpersonal cyberbullying is underemphasized. The research indicates that the victims of online harassment have difficulties placing their experiences in legally comprehensible categories. Consequently, cyber bullying is redefined as individual problem unless it is related to the political leverage. The authors claim that this framing misconstrues the purpose of PECA and compromises the credibility in the control of cybercrime. According to Ashraf (2021) that cyber bullying is a common experience but PECA is very unfamiliar with its knowledge. Students also equate the law with censorship and not protection which is another cause of underreporting. The authors state that legal deterrence cannot be effective without the education on the digital rights. The paper finds that the potential of PECA is limited by the lack of awareness of the population, particularly young people who are the most susceptible to cyberbullying.

Conclusion

It was identified in this review that social media regulation is a rather controversial and complicated area on the global level and in Pakistan, where the regulatory frameworks are built on the principles of accountability, transparency, and human rights, yet the gap between the intended goals of the regulation and its application is evident. The discussion revealed that in Pakistan, legislations like Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) receive a lot of criticism

in the sense that they are reactive, state-centric and selectively applied with international recognition often tending to give precedence to the political stability and national security at the expense of blanket responses to misinformation, hate speech and cyberbullying. Consequently, regulation is likely to create self-censorship, institutional mistrust and symbolic compliance instead of a real reduction in harm. The results also suggest that paying more attention to content control ignores more profound structural forces that lead to online harm such as engagement-driven algorithms, amplification mechanisms, digital illiteracy, and power imbalances, and socio-cultural factors. Generally speaking, the review shows that there is a notable gap in the existing research, as there is no empirical data regarding whether regulation of social media in Pakistan can lead to the reduction of online harm or simply to a restructuration of the already existing power relations but not to their systemic roots.

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