

The Impact of social media on Deviance and Crime

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Abstract. The popularity of social media platforms in the digital age has revolutionized how people engage with one another, share information, and interact with their environment. With the framework of social learning theory and routine activity theory, this article aims to summarize and analyze the impact of social media on deviance and crime. As a result, it is now clear how social media has an impact on a variety of societal issues, such as crime and deviance. Using information from a wide range of academic sources, this paper explores the complex connection between social media and crime or deviance. Through the lenses of routine activity theory, social learning theories, and cyber lifestyle-routine activities theory, this study examines the intricate interplay between online behaviors and offline behaviors in an effort to better understand the complex effects of social media on deviance and crime. Meanwhile, people can harness the benefits of social media while reducing its negative effects on crime and deviance by developing rules that address these issues and encouraging a culture of responsible online activity.

Keywords: Social media; social learning theory; routine activity; crime; deviance.

1. Introduction

The study of how technology influences modern criminal behavior and societal norms is an interesting field of research at the crossroads of deviance, crime, and social media [1-3]. The social learning theory and routine activity theory are two ideas that provide insights into understanding deviance, crime, and social media.

Routine activity theory, developed by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979, posits that for a crime to occur, three elements must converge in time and space: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian [4]. When applied to the context of social media, routine activity theory helps explain how certain online behaviors and interactions create opportunities for deviant and criminal activities. In the realm of social media, individuals engage in routine online activities such as sharing personal information, posting updates, and interacting with others. These routine activities create opportunities for cybercrimes, such as identity theft, online harassment, and phishing scams [5, 6]. The “motivated offender” may be a hacker looking for personal information, a cyberbully picking on a vulnerable target, or a scammer taking advantage of online interactions. People who divulge excessive amounts of personal information or are unaware of the risks associated with using the Internet may be considered a “suitable target.” The “absence of a capable guardian” may relate to inadequate cybersecurity precautions or those who are unaware of possible threats.

Social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes how individuals learn behavior by observing others and the consequences of their actions [7]. This idea, when applied to social media, asserts that criminal and deviant behavior can be taught and reinforced through online interactions. For instance, people may see that illegal or cyberbullying behavior is tolerated or even encouraged in some online forums [8-10]. They may adopt similar behaviors as a result of this observation since they think that they are acceptable in society.

2. The Effect of Social Media on Crime

2.1. Provide Platforms

The advent of social media platforms has facilitated the formation of deviant subcultures that thrive within digital spaces. These online communities can range from extremist groups advocating for

violent ideologies to illicit marketplaces trading in illegal goods and services. Numerous studies have delved into extremist groups' emergence and recruitment strategies on social media platforms [11-13]. These groups exploit the reach of these platforms to radicalize vulnerable individuals and propagate their ideologies. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook, for instance, have been noted as being favorable environments for the spread of hate speech, the recruiting of terrorists, and the planning of violent actions [14, 15].

Additionally, social media acts as a hub for the development of illicit markets where people can conduct illegal transactions, such as selling drugs, manufacturing fake goods, and even human trafficking. These marketplaces frequently operate secretly on social media sites, using coded language and encrypted communication so they can remain undetected. Last but not least, social media provides a platform for the reinforcement and normalization of deviant ideologies. Users can find like-minded individuals who validate and amplify their beliefs, leading to the entrenchment of extreme perspectives. This normalization process can further fuel offline behaviors that align with these ideologies, potentially resulting in criminal activities.

2.2. Enhance the Spread

Due to the speed at which information spreads on social media, moral panics and outrage among the general population can be sparked, and deviant behavior can be amplified. Social media allows for the rapid dissemination of false information and sensationalized content, which frequently exaggerates the prevalence and gravity of particular deviant behaviors. For instance, even if the occurrences are rare, viral recordings showing illegal behavior might give the impression of widespread lawlessness. The algorithms of social media and their echo chambers may fuel the spread of anxiety and fear, which can lead to moral panics. As a result, authorities, policymakers, and the general public may overreact in the face of perceived dangers. Online platforms have the potential to generate echo chambers where people are only exposed to information that supports their preexisting opinions. As a result of this polarization, deviant ideologies may gain popularity in exclusive online communities, further separating people from those with different opinions. Moral panics can lead to retaliatory actions like censorship, greater surveillance, and legislative changes. These actions may unintentionally affect people's right to free speech and privacy.

2.3. Disadvantages of Online Communication

The online disinhibition effect stems from the fact that online interactions often lack the cues and consequences present in face-to-face interactions. In offline situations, individuals are more likely to regulate their behavior due to social norms, immediate feedback, and the potential for negative consequences. However, in the online environment, these factors are often reduced or absent. For instance, in a face-to-face conversation, if someone says something offensive, they can see the immediate reactions of others and might feel embarrassed or ashamed. But online, due to the lack of immediate feedback, people might post hurtful comments or engage in cyberbullying without feeling the same sense of responsibility for their words. Holt and Bossler's research highlights how online interactions can contribute to street offending and violence [12]. An example of this could be an online argument that escalates into offline confrontations. Online disagreements can escalate quickly when people feel distanced from the real-world consequences of their words. Many articles can back up this phenomenon, including the research by Holt and Bossler, which examines how engagement in online activities can influence Offline Street offending and violence [12]. This suggests that online interactions can contribute to a person's involvement in deviant behavior in the physical world. McGloin and Thomas study the relationship between Twitter use and criminal offending, which can shed light on how online interactions might lead to deviant acts offline [16]. Yar's work suggests that the principles of routine activity theory can be applied to the online world [17]. Just as a potential criminal might choose to target a busy shopping mall due to the high number of potential victims, online criminals might choose to target social media platforms with a large user base, seeking to exploit the larger pool of potential victims. Higgins and Marcum delve into the connection between

low self-control and online behavior [18]. An example here could be impulsive online shopping or oversharing personal information on social media, both of which might lead to financial or personal security risks. Chayko discusses how digital media can shape behavior, which can extend to deviant actions [19]. For example, the rise of “cancel culture” on social media involves people collectively criticizing or “canceling” individuals for their actions. This can lead to mob-like behavior where individuals feel justified in targeting and berating others online, often without considering the full consequences of their actions. Overall, the online disinhibition effect, as evidenced by these studies, can indeed amplify deviant behaviors due to the reduced sense of accountability and consequences associated with online interactions [20, 21]. The digital environment’s perceived anonymity and distance from immediate repercussions can lead people to act in ways they would not in face-to-face situations, thus contributing to the amplification of deviant behaviors both online and offline.

2.4. Other Influencing Factors

Some other factors that could influence crime occurrence include peer influence, group dynamics, and the spread of norm-violating content that contribute to shaping deviance through social media [22-24]. Peer influence refers to the impact that one’s friends, acquaintances, or online connections have on their thoughts, decisions, and behaviors. Social media platforms provide a space where individuals can interact with peers and be exposed to various perspectives and behaviors. This influence can lead to the adoption of deviant actions. For instance, imagine a teenager who follows a group of peers on social media who engage in risky behaviors like underage drinking. Seeing these friends post about their activities might make the teenager more likely to consider engaging in similar actions to fit in or gain approval from their peers. Group dynamics on social media are similar to those in offline environments, but they can be amplified due to the speed and reach of online interactions. Online groups, forums, and communities can form around shared interests, beliefs, or behaviors. These groups can shape and encourage deviant actions through shared norms and behaviors. An example could be an online community that promotes extreme dieting or unhealthy body image practices. Within this group, individuals might encourage each other to engage in harmful behaviors in the pursuit of a particular aesthetic, even though these actions might be considered deviant or dangerous in a broader context. Last but not least, social media platforms facilitate the rapid spread of content, including videos, images, and posts that showcase norm-violating behaviors. When such content receives attention, likes, and shares, it can contribute to the normalization of these behaviors and influence others to replicate them. Consider a viral challenge that encourages people to perform dangerous stunts or harmful actions. As the challenge gains momentum and participants receive positive feedback for their participation, more individuals might feel compelled to engage in the behavior despite the associated risks.

3. Future Implications

As technology advances, new forms of deviant behaviors facilitated by social media platforms are likely to emerge. The emergence of augmented reality, virtual reality, and new communication technologies may provide people with additional opportunities to participate in criminal or deviant behavior. To capture and comprehend these changing behaviors, researchers will need to adjust their methodology, ensuring that their research stays current and thorough. A new area of study is opened up by the growing influence of algorithms on how users interact with social media platforms. Future research may focus on how user behavior is affected by content recommendation algorithms, perhaps causing the proliferation of inappropriate content. In order to create efficient interventions and platform restrictions, it will be crucial to understand how these algorithms contribute to the normalization of dangerous behaviors. In addition, it’s likely to get more complex when examining the psychological elements behind deviant behavior on social media. Researchers may delve into the interplay between anonymity, group dynamics, and personal identity in influencing online actions.

This might result in a more in-depth comprehension of the motivations behind people's deviant online behavior, paving the way for the creation of focused preventative tactics.

4. Conclusion

Social media's influence on deviant behaviors is evident through its facilitation of criminal planning, coordination, and the spread of norm-violating content. The online disinhibition effect has been recognized as a significant factor leading to the amplification of deviance due to reduced accountability and consequences in online interactions. Moreover, peer influence and group dynamics play a crucial role in shaping behaviors, both positive and negative, within online communities. However, the research landscape also underscores the need for further investigation to fully comprehend the evolving dynamics between online platforms and criminal behavior. Emerging technologies, algorithmic influences, cross-cultural variations, and the long-term consequences of online actions are areas that warrant deeper exploration. The constant evolution of technology and its impact on human behavior necessitate ongoing research to provide timely insights into these intricate relationships. As we navigate this digital age, the implications for policy, prevention, and responsible digital citizenship are profound. Policymakers and platform administrators must collaborate to establish and enforce regulations that curb criminal activities on social media while still preserving user privacy and free expression. Effective prevention strategies should be developed to educate users about the potential consequences of engaging in deviant behaviors online, fostering a culture of responsible digital citizenship. In conclusion, the literature reveals that social media's impact on deviance and crime is a complex interplay of various factors, including psychological influences, technological advancements, and peer dynamics. The need for continuous research is undeniable to understand these evolving dynamics and inform effective interventions. By shaping policies that address these challenges and promoting a culture of responsible online behavior, we can harness the positive potential of social media while mitigating its negative impacts on deviance and crime.

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