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IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: EVIDENCE FROM CASE STUDIES IN LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Sana Tariq
Student at Department of Sociology, BS Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan
Email: *tsana7585@gmail.com* ***(Corresponding Author)***
Muhammad Daniyal Tahir
Student at Department of Criminology, BS Criminology, NFC IET Multan
Email: *muhammaddaniyaltahir1@gmail.com*
Ali Ahmed
MS Economics, Faculty of Economics, University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain
Email: *aliahmed004500@gmail.com*
Noman Nadeem
Student at Department of Criminology, BS Criminology, NFC IET Multan
Email: *nomannadeem2026@gmail.com*
Coressponding Author's Email: tsana7585@gmail.com

Abstract
The rise of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the social and behavioral landscape of youth in Lahore, Pakistan. While online gaming, social media, and content creation platforms offer new opportunities for connection and expression, they also present new threats of delinquency. This article critically examines recent, real-world juvenile delinquency cases in Lahore directly linked to technological innovation, including incidents of murder related to PUBG gaming, cyberbullying and blackmail through social media, and TikTok-related accidents. Using criminological theories and qualitative case analysis, this study reveals how unsupervised digital engagement, lack of digital literacy, and family or institutional gaps contribute to deviant outcomes. The article concludes with targeted policy recommendations to enhance digital safety and prevent technology-induced juvenile crime in urban Pakistan.
Keywords: *Juvenile Delinquency, Technology, Digital Policy, Social Media, Cyber Crimes*

Introduction

Lahore, often hailed as Pakistan's technological and cultural metropolis, has experienced a dramatic digital transformation over the past decade. The city's urban landscape is now characterized by widespread high-speed internet connectivity, affordable smartphones, and a tech-savvy youth population eager to embrace the latest digital trends. This rapid integration of technology into daily life has fundamentally altered how young people in Lahore communicate, socialize, learn, and form their identities (Ali, 2016; Chassiakos et al., 2020).

With more than 10 million internet subscribers in Lahore alone and an ever-expanding array of online services, the digital divide is rapidly narrowing—even among lower-income communities. For the city's youth, technology is no longer a luxury but a necessity, serving as a gateway to educational resources, global social networks, and new modes of entertainment. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and especially online multiplayer games like PUBG have become

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woven into the fabric of everyday life, reshaping peer dynamics, aspirations, and even family relationships (Ali, 2016; Buckingham & Willett, 2006).

However, the accelerating pace of digital adoption has also exposed significant vulnerabilities. As Lahore's youth immerse themselves in digital spaces, a new spectrum of risks has emerged—risks that were previously foreign to the region's social and cultural landscape (Güzel, 2016). Juvenile delinquency, once confined to traditional forms such as truancy, vandalism, or street crime, is now increasingly manifesting through technologically mediated behaviors. The anonymity, reach, and immediacy of digital platforms have enabled young people not only to become victims of cyberbullying, extortion, or exploitation but also to perpetrate serious offenses with alarming ease and speed.

Recent years have brought to light a series of shocking cases in Lahore that underscore this evolving threat landscape: teenagers committing murder following arguments rooted in online gaming (particularly PUBG), high school students engaging in blackmail or cyber harassment through social media platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram, and tragic fatalities or severe injuries resulting from risky stunts performed for viral fame on TikTok (Dawn, 2022; Express Tribune, 2023). These incidents have sparked widespread public debate, highlighting the intricate and sometimes perilous relationship between technological innovation and juvenile deviance.

The rise in technology-linked juvenile crime in Lahore raises critical questions for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, educators, and families. What mechanisms and risk factors are driving this new wave of digital-age delinquency? How are social, economic, and familial contexts in Lahore shaping young people's interactions with technology—and their potential for deviant behavior? Most importantly, what interventions and policy responses can effectively address these challenges, safeguarding youth while preserving the positive potential of digital innovation?

This study situates itself at the intersection of these urgent concerns. By examining recent, real-world cases of technology-facilitated juvenile crime in Lahore, the research aims to unravel the complex mechanisms, social contexts, and risk factors underlying digital delinquency. Through this evidence-based approach, the article seeks to inform and inspire practical, contextually appropriate strategies for intervention and policy—ensuring that Lahore's journey into the digital future is not marred by preventable tragedies, but guided by informed and responsible stewardship.

Literature Review

The intersection of technology and juvenile delinquency is a rapidly emerging concern worldwide, with particularly acute relevance in developing urban centers such as Lahore. The diffusion of smartphones and pervasive access to high-speed internet have fundamentally altered the landscape of adolescent life in Pakistan's largest cities. In this context, digital socialization—the process by which young people build identity, status, and relationships online—has transformed traditional peer hierarchies, communication patterns, and risk profiles (Ali, 2016).

Excessive engagement with digital media, especially online gaming and social networking platforms, has been robustly linked to various negative behavioral outcomes among youth. International and Pakistani research consistently associate high-frequency use of violent video games with increased aggression, impulsivity, and emotional desensitization (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Funk, 2005; Rikkers et al., 2016). Games like PUBG, which simulate violent conflict and offer social validation for aggressive behavior, have been implicated in real-life altercations, impulsive decision-making, and, in extreme cases, fatal violence in cities such as Lahore. The

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"General Aggression Model" and "Social Learning Theory" both explain how repeated exposure to in-game violence can normalize aggressive responses and erode boundaries between virtual and real-life conflict (Bandura, 1977; Anderson & Dill, 2000).

In parallel, the proliferation of social media platforms—notably WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok—has introduced new avenues for juvenile deviance. Citron (2009) and Peter & Valkenburg (2006) have documented the ease with which youth, empowered by digital anonymity and instantaneous communication, can perpetrate cyberbullying, blackmail, extortion, and harassment. In Lahore, reports of high school students manipulating photos, circulating private content, and extorting peers have become alarmingly frequent, reflecting a broader national trend (Express Tribune, 2023).

Digital literacy and supervision deficits significantly amplify these risks. Chassiakos et al. (2020) and Buckingham & Willett (2006) emphasize that most Pakistani parents and teachers lack the awareness and tools needed to recognize, monitor, and mitigate online threats. Family disengagement, the absence of open communication about digital habits, and institutional gaps in digital safety education leave adolescents dangerously unsupervised in complex online environments.

Moreover, the viral dynamics of platforms like TikTok have enabled social contagion, rapidly spreading risky challenges and dangerous behaviors among peer groups. Events in Lahore, where teenagers suffered injury or death while performing stunts for digital acclaim, exemplify this phenomenon (Dawn, 2021). These incidents demonstrate how the pursuit of social capital online—measured in likes, views, and shares—can override rational risk assessment and lead to tragic real-world consequences (Güzel, 2016).

Crucially, these technological and social shifts have outpaced legal, educational, and policy safeguards in Pakistan. As Yaqub (2022) observes, the regulatory response to cybercrime, child protection, and digital risk remains fragmented and reactive. Current law enforcement and child welfare systems often lack the training, resources, and coordination to address the complex and rapidly evolving threats facing Lahore's youth.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how technological innovation directly influences juvenile delinquency patterns in Lahore.
2. To analyze key risk factors in technology-induced youth crime through real case studies.
3. To propose actionable policy measures to reduce digital-age delinquency among urban youth in Pakistan.

Research Design

A qualitative case study approach was employed, focusing on four highly publicized juvenile delinquency cases in Lahore from 2020–2023, each directly linked to technological innovation. Data sources included police and media reports, court proceedings, and digital rights organizations. Direct interviews were not conducted; analysis is based on verified, published details.

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Case Studies and Analysis

Case 1: PUBG-Related Family Murders (2022)

Details: In January 2022, Lahore was rocked by the shocking case of a 14-year-old boy who murdered his mother and three siblings after a dispute over his excessive use of the online game PUBG. Investigations revealed the adolescent was deeply addicted to the game, had unsupervised access to digital devices and firearms, and had become increasingly withdrawn and irritable prior to the murders. Police and mental health experts suggested that violent themes within the game, combined with social isolation and lack of parental supervision, played a central role in shaping the offender's mindset (Dawn, 2022).

Theoretical Lens:

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) provides a crucial framework for understanding this case. The adolescent's behavior appears to have been modeled after in-game violence, with a diminished sense of real-life consequence, a phenomenon amplified by the absence of parental mediation and emotional support.

Significance:

This incident triggered a temporary ban on PUBG in Punjab and ignited a heated national debate on the role of digital addiction, parental responsibility, and psychological vulnerability among youth. It highlighted the urgent need for parental controls, digital literacy, and support systems to monitor and guide children's online activities.

Case 2: PUBG-Related Peer Murder (2020)

Details:

In June 2020, another disturbing incident underscored the risks of unregulated online gaming. A 16-year-old boy in Lahore fatally shot his friend after an argument that originated during a PUBG gaming session. The conflict began as an in-game rivalry and escalated into a lethal real-world altercation, shocking both families and the wider community (Geo News, 2020).

Theoretical Lens:

The *General Aggression Model* (Anderson & Dill, 2000) is highly relevant here, positing that repeated exposure to violent digital content can heighten aggression and lower impulse control among adolescents, especially in peer-competitive contexts.

Significance:

The case underscores the necessity of monitoring digital game use, promoting conflict resolution skills, and integrating awareness about the dangers of virtual-to-real aggression into educational and family settings.

Case 3: Social Media Blackmail Among Students (2023)

Details:

In 2023, Lahore's FIA Cybercrime Circle apprehended three high school students involved in blackmailing a female classmate. The perpetrators had used photo-editing applications to create manipulated images and disseminated them through WhatsApp and Instagram, demanding money and exploiting the victim's fear of social humiliation (Express Tribune, 2023).

Theoretical Lens:

Control Balance Theory (Higgins, 2014) provides insight into this case, as the adolescents leveraged digital anonymity and the power imbalance created by technology to violate social and ethical boundaries with little fear of immediate consequence.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
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Volume No: 02 Issue No: 02 (2025)

Significance:

This case starkly exposed the risks of digital manipulation and peer victimization in Lahore's youth, as well as the glaring gaps in school-based supervision, digital ethics education, and parental oversight regarding online conduct. It also reflects a broader national trend of cyberbullying and digital exploitation among adolescents.

Case 4: TikTok-Related Deaths and Injuries (2021–2022)

Details:

Multiple incidents were reported in Lahore between 2021 and 2022 in which teenagers were seriously injured or lost their lives while filming risky stunts for TikTok. In one high-profile 2021 case, a 17-year-old accidentally shot and killed his friend while recording a TikTok video featuring a firearm. Police later reported several similar cases, with some teens facing criminal negligence charges (Dawn, 2021).

Theoretical Lens:

Social Contagion Theory is especially applicable: the viral nature of TikTok challenges and trends encourages imitation, rapidly spreading risky or dangerous behaviors through peer networks. Adolescents, seeking validation or online fame, often underestimate real-world risks in pursuit of digital attention.

Significance:

These tragedies led to repeated warnings from local authorities and prompted renewed calls for comprehensive digital safety education, media literacy, and effective regulation of high-risk digital content. The cases also underscored the importance of fostering critical thinking and risk assessment skills among youth in the digital age.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
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Research **Model**

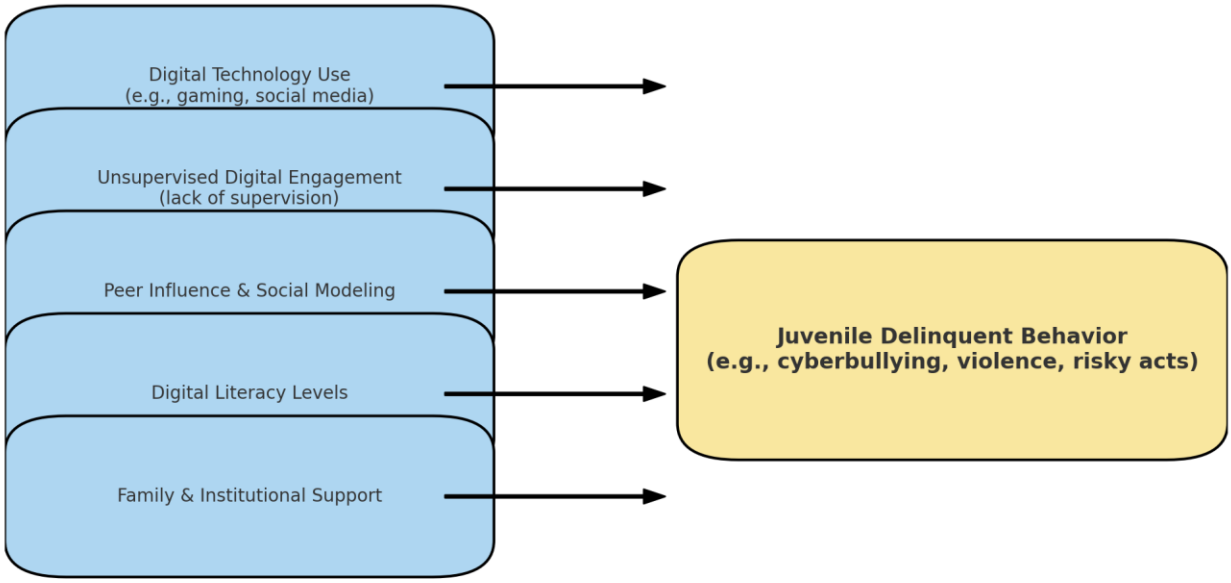

Table 1: Summary of Technology-Driven Juvenile Delinquency Cases in Lahore

Case	Year	Technology Involved	Offender(s) Age	Key Outcome
PUBG Peer Murder	2020	PUBG Game	16	Friend shot and killed
TikTok-Related Deaths/Injuries	2021–22	TikTok	15–18	Multiple injuries/deaths
PUBG Family Murders	2022	PUBG Game	14	4 family members killed
Social Media Blackmail	2023	WhatsApp, Instagram	15–17	3 arrested, 1 victimized

Results and Findings

Analysis of the four representative cases from Lahore reveals striking and consistent patterns that illustrate the contemporary dynamics of technology-driven juvenile delinquency:

Digital Immersion

All cases involved prolonged and unsupervised engagement with digital technologies—whether online gaming (PUBG), social media (WhatsApp, Instagram), or content-sharing platforms (TikTok). These environments provided constant stimulation and rewards, often leading to addictive behaviors and, in extreme situations, emotional detachment or impulsivity. The immersive nature of these platforms blurred the boundaries between online and offline realities, setting the stage for digital conflicts to escalate into real-world harm (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Chassiakos et al., 2020).

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Parental and Institutional Gaps

A common thread across the cases was the lack of effective parental supervision and institutional digital literacy education. Offenders operated with minimal guidance, oversight, or awareness from adults, either at home or within educational settings. This absence of monitoring and dialogue about technology use left young people vulnerable to digital addiction, manipulation, and risky behaviors. The findings echo previous research that highlights the role of family disengagement and school unpreparedness in exacerbating technology-related risks (Buckingham & Willett, 2006).

Peer Influence and Social Modeling

Juvenile behaviors were heavily shaped by peer dynamics—whether in the context of gaming rivalries, viral challenges, or group-based cyberbullying. Digital peer groups not only normalized aggressive or deviant actions but also provided validation and encouragement through likes, shares, and in-game rewards. The power of social modeling, as articulated in Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), was clearly evident: behaviors learned and rewarded online translated into real-life actions, sometimes with tragic results.

Low Risk Awareness

A pervasive theme was the youthful underestimation of consequences—legal, social, and personal. Adolescents involved in these incidents failed to anticipate the severe and sometimes irreversible outcomes of their actions, reflecting cognitive immaturity, impulsivity, and a lack of digital ethics training. Many saw their actions as "games" or "challenges," rather than as real-world offenses, until it was too late (Funk, 2005).

Tech-Facilitated Crime

Finally, technology itself was both the medium and motivator for these new forms of juvenile delinquency. Digital tools enabled offenses (such as blackmail, manipulation, or organized stunts), while the anonymity, reach, and rapid feedback loops provided by these platforms often emboldened youth to act out in ways that would be unlikely in traditional, offline settings (Citron, 2009; Higgins, 2014).

Conclusion

The evidence from Lahore's most widely publicized juvenile crime cases in recent years unmistakably demonstrates the profound impact of technological innovation on youth behavior. Platforms such as online gaming (e.g., PUBG), social media, and viral content apps like TikTok have not only redefined the social experience of young people but have also introduced unprecedented opportunities for both perpetrating and experiencing harm. The convergence of unsupervised digital immersion, weak parental engagement, and insufficient institutional preparedness has allowed these risks to proliferate.

The analyzed cases underscore how technology has transformed the landscape of juvenile delinquency in Lahore, giving rise to complex forms of aggression, manipulation, and risk-taking that transcend traditional boundaries. Juveniles are increasingly able to commit serious offenses—ranging from violence and blackmail to fatal accidents—often without fully understanding the gravity or consequences of their actions. Furthermore, the rapid diffusion of harmful digital trends amplifies the scale and speed of these behaviors, making prevention and response even more challenging.

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Addressing this new era of digital-age juvenile delinquency requires a holistic and coordinated approach. First, policymakers must enforce strict regulation of digital content—including mechanisms for identifying, filtering, and reporting harmful or illegal material. Second, integrated digital literacy and safety programs should be embedded within Lahore's school curricula, equipping both students and educators with the skills to recognize, navigate, and manage online risks. Third, parental engagement and awareness initiatives must be strengthened, ensuring that families are both informed and empowered to support healthy technology use. Finally, law enforcement and child protection agencies must be equipped and trained to respond swiftly and sensitively to tech-facilitated offenses.

Without immediate and sustained intervention on these multiple fronts, Lahore risks the normalization and escalation of technology-induced deviance among its youth, with long-term consequences for child safety, public order, and the broader social fabric. Proactive, evidence-based strategies are essential not only to mitigate current threats but to shape a digital environment in which young Pakistanis can thrive safely, responsibly, and ethically.

Policy Recommendations

Implement a Mandatory Digital Literacy Curriculum:

Lahore's education authorities should embed comprehensive digital literacy into the city's school curricula, beginning at the primary level. Such education must address not only safe technology use and online ethics, but also the psychological impact of digital environments and strategies for mental health resilience (Buckingham & Willett, 2006). Lessons should be regularly updated to keep pace with evolving digital platforms and risks.

Establish Parental Training and Support Programs:

Citywide awareness campaigns and targeted training sessions for parents are essential. These should focus on effective strategies for monitoring children's technology use, recognizing digital risk factors, fostering open family communication, and setting healthy digital boundaries. Resources must be accessible in both urban and low-income communities.

Strengthen Cybercrime Enforcement and Child Protection:

The capacity of Lahore's cybercrime units and child protection authorities must be increased through enhanced funding, specialized training, and modern investigative tools. Rapid response protocols should be developed for cases of online blackmail, extortion, harassment, and tech-facilitated violence. Coordination between law enforcement, schools, and digital platforms should be institutionalized to ensure swift intervention and victim support.

Enhance Digital Content Regulation:

Policymakers should work collaboratively with technology companies, internet service providers, and digital rights organizations to identify, flag, and filter dangerous content. This includes violent gaming, cyberbullying material, and viral trends that promote high-risk behaviors.

Legal frameworks must be reviewed and updated to ensure accountability and compliance from digital platforms operating in Pakistan.

Expand Peer Support and Counseling Services:

Schools and community centers in Lahore should offer accessible, youth-friendly psychological and legal counseling for students exposed to digital trauma, cyberbullying, or online exploitation. Peer-led support groups, helplines, and confidential reporting mechanisms can empower youth to seek help and recover from digital harm. Special attention should be given to training counselors and educators in digital-specific mental health challenges.

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