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Article

# Drug Users' Behaviors and Social Media Communication: A Study on Bangladesh

Mustak Ahmed

Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh; mustak@ru.ac.bd;  
http://rurfid.ru.ac.bd/ru\_profile/public/teacher/21501555/profile; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1436-1101;  
https://www.linkedin.com/in/mustak-ahmed-583084253/; WSR: IDADF-0848-2022; SciProfiles: 2108488; Loop  
profile: 1809701; https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mustak-Ahmed?ev=hdr\_xprf; SSRN Author ID:  
5911923; https://rajshahi.academia.edu/MustakAhmed

**Abstract:** This study explores the social media communication behaviors of drug users in Bangladesh, a country witnessing rising substance abuse rates among young adults. With the increasing integration of digital platforms into everyday life, social media has become a significant tool for drug users—not only for personal expression but also for networking, coping, and even accessing illicit substances. This research examines how drug users in Bangladesh communicate on platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram, focusing on themes such as identity formation, group affiliation, emotional expression, and drug-related content sharing. Drawing on qualitative interviews and content analysis of public social media posts, the study identifies key behavioral patterns, motivations, and the role of digital anonymity in shaping communication practices. Results reveal that social media often acts as a double-edged sword—facilitating emotional support and community-building while also enabling risky behaviors and promoting drug culture. The findings contribute to understanding the socio-digital landscape of drug users in Bangladesh and call for policy measures and digital literacy campaigns aimed at harm reduction.

**Keywords:** drug users; social media; communication behavior; bangladesh; digital identity; substance abuse

## 1. Introduction

Substance abuse has emerged as a pressing public health issue in Bangladesh, particularly among its youth and urban populations. According to recent reports from the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC), the country has witnessed a marked increase in the use of illicit drugs such as yaba (methamphetamine), cannabis, heroin, and various pharmaceutical drugs (DNC, 2023). While drug use in Bangladesh has traditionally been associated with secrecy and social stigma, the advent of digital communication platforms—especially social media—has introduced a new and often contradictory dimension to drug-related behaviors and interactions.

Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram are widely used across Bangladesh, with over 50 million active users (BTRC, 2024). These platforms are increasingly becoming a part of the daily lives of people from various social strata. For drug users, these digital spaces offer avenues to connect with peers, share personal experiences, express psychological states, and even access drugs or drug-related information. Unlike conventional media, which maintains strict regulatory frameworks, social media offers relative anonymity, algorithmic personalization, and user-driven content—factors that can both enable and conceal risky behaviors.

Globally, studies have examined the role of social media in shaping drug-related communication patterns (Moreno et al., 2016; Naslund et al., 2020). These studies highlight how users often present curated identities, share substance-use experiences, engage with drug-promoting content, and participate in online communities that may either normalize or challenge drug-related behaviors. However, in the context of Bangladesh, academic research focusing on this intersection of drug use

and digital communication remains sparse. There is limited empirical evidence on how Bangladeshi drug users use social media for personal, social, or transactional purposes.

This research aims to fill that gap by investigating the social media communication behaviors of drug users in Bangladesh. Specifically, it explores how they represent themselves online, what kind of content they share or engage with, and how digital platforms influence their psychological and social experiences. It also seeks to understand the implications of these behaviors for public health messaging, surveillance, and harm reduction strategies.

The relevance of this study lies in its potential to inform stakeholders—including policymakers, educators, health professionals, and digital platform regulators—about the complex ways in which social media mediates substance use. Understanding these dynamics is critical not only for designing effective intervention programs but also for addressing the broader societal impact of digital culture on youth vulnerability and health risk behaviors.

By adopting a qualitative approach grounded in communication theory and media ethnography, this study offers a nuanced view of the digital lives of drug users in Bangladesh. The findings are expected to generate new insights into how social behavior and substance use intersect in virtual environments, with implications for both academic scholarship and practical intervention.

## 2. Literature Review

The intersection of substance uses and digital communication has attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past decade. Studies from Western and some Asian contexts have explored how drug users engage with social media to express identity, find community, seek information, and navigate both risks and support systems (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2015; Moreno et al., 2016). Despite this growing body of work, little research has examined the phenomenon in the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh, where drug use is deeply stigmatized, yet digital connectivity continues to rise.

### 2.1. Social Media as a Behavioral Mirror

Social media platforms serve as both personal and public diaries where users construct and project their identities. Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation remains relevant in understanding how drug users curate content that aligns with perceived social roles or desired impressions. Research by Dwyer et al. (2018) indicates that substance users often adopt symbolic gestures—such as coded language, emojis, or shared memes—to normalize or aestheticize drug culture. Studies from the United States and Europe reveal patterns where drug-related behaviors are glamorized on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, especially among young people seeking peer validation (Ridout et al., 2018).

### 2.2. Online Communities and Peer Support

Social media often functions as a surrogate support network for drug users. Naslund et al. (2020) found that online communities—such as Facebook groups or Reddit forums—serve as spaces where users share recovery stories, emotional experiences, or practical advice. These interactions can foster a sense of belonging and reduce isolation, which is often associated with substance use. In the South Asian context, however, few studies have explored whether similar digital support mechanisms exist or how effective they are in influencing behavioral change.

### 2.3. Drug Culture and the Role of Anonymity

Digital anonymity plays a crucial role in shaping how drug users communicate. Platforms like WhatsApp or Telegram offer encrypted, closed-group interactions, allowing users to share sensitive or illegal content without fear of direct surveillance (Martin et al., 2019). In Bangladesh, the growing use of pseudonyms and fake accounts further complicates detection and intervention. The lack of regulatory oversight on digital platforms enables users to bypass societal and legal consequences, which may encourage more open engagement in risky or illegal behaviors.

#### 2.4. Media and Health Communication Theories

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) provides a useful framework for understanding why individuals use social media in relation to their substance use. Users may seek informational, emotional, or escapist gratifications through digital interactions. Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Theory also suggests that observational learning plays a role in normalizing behaviors—meaning that repeated exposure to drug-related content could desensitize users or even encourage experimentation. These theoretical perspectives help contextualize the communicative behaviors of drug users within broader media consumption patterns.

#### 2.5. The Bangladesh Context

Existing literature on drug use in Bangladesh largely focuses on epidemiological trends, socio-economic causes, and rehabilitation efforts (Rahman et al., 2016; Alam et al., 2020). However, the digital behavior of drug users remains under-researched. A few local news investigations and NGO reports suggest that social media is being used to promote, sell, or glamorize drugs, especially among urban youth (Daily Star, 2022). Yet, there is little peer-reviewed empirical evidence that systematically explores these claims.

#### 2.6. Research Gap

Most available studies either focus on health outcomes or on media behavior in isolation. This study seeks to bridge that gap by focusing on how Bangladeshi drug users utilize social media for communication and community-building purposes. It brings together perspectives from communication studies, digital media, and behavioral psychology to construct a holistic understanding of the subject.

### 3. Theoretical Framework of the Study

Understanding the social media communication behaviors of drug users in Bangladesh requires a multidisciplinary theoretical lens that draws from communication studies, psychology, and digital media theories. This study primarily employs three interrelated theoretical perspectives: Uses and Gratifications Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Goffman's Theory of Self-Presentation. Each offers distinct yet complementary insights into why and how drug users engage with social media platforms.

#### 3.1. Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

Originating in the 1970s, Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) posits that media consumers are active agents who seek out specific media to satisfy individual needs and desires. In the context of social media and substance use, drug users may turn to platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, or TikTok for various purposes:

- Information seeking (e.g., how to acquire substances or learn about their effects),
- Social interaction (e.g., connecting with like-minded peers),
- Entertainment (e.g., drug-related memes or videos), and
- Emotional release or escape (e.g., coping with anxiety, depression, or loneliness).

UGT helps explain the motivations behind content creation, sharing, and engagement in digital drug-related contexts. It emphasizes user agency and acknowledges that individuals make conscious choices in their media consumption, even when engaging in deviant or stigmatized behaviors.

#### 3.2. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (2001) underscores the importance of observational learning, imitation, and modeling in shaping human behavior. According to SCT, individuals learn not only through their own experiences but also by observing others—especially those who serve as



perceived role models. In digital spaces, where visual and interactive content is abundant, drug users are exposed to a wide range of behaviors and narratives. This exposure may normalize substance use or, conversely, discourage it depending on the content and user interpretation.

SCT is particularly relevant when considering the algorithmic amplification of drug-related content. For instance, repeated exposure to users celebrating drug experiences on TikTok or Instagram could contribute to behavioral reinforcement or even new drug experimentation among vulnerable individuals. SCT also considers the role of self-efficacy, which can influence whether a user feels confident enough to seek recovery support or continue risky behaviors.

### 3.3. Goffman's Theory of Self-Presentation

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model of self-presentation (1959) suggests that individuals perform identity roles depending on their social setting. In the context of social media, this 'performance' becomes even more complex due to the affordances of digital anonymity, audience segmentation, and asynchronous interaction. Drug users may present selective or exaggerated identities online—such as portraying themselves as rebellious, humorous, or emotionally distressed—in ways that might not be permissible in face-to-face settings due to stigma or legal fears.

Goffman's theory is crucial for understanding how Bangladeshi drug users negotiate digital identity amidst a culture that heavily stigmatizes substance abuse. It also sheds light on the symbolic language, visual aesthetics, and narrative strategies used in drug-related content.

### 3.4. Integration of Theories

These three frameworks—UGT, SCT, and Self-Presentation Theory—are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they offer layered explanations for user behavior. While UGT explains the *why*, SCT addresses the *how*, and Goffman's theory explores the *what* and *in what form* drug users communicate on social media. Together, they enable a comprehensive analysis of individual motivations, environmental influences, and representational strategies.

In applying these theories, this study positions itself within a critical media and health communication paradigm. It seeks not only to describe user behaviors but also to interrogate the broader socio-digital dynamics that facilitate, reinforce, or challenge substance use practices in the Bangladeshi context.

## 4. Research Objectives and Questions

This study investigates how drug users in Bangladesh communicate via social media, focusing on the interplay of digital identity, community interaction, and content behavior. Given the limited scholarly work on this subject in the South Asian context, the research is exploratory in nature, seeking to generate insights that may guide future research and policy development.

### 4.1. Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the types of content shared or engaged with by drug users on social media platforms in Bangladesh.
2. To explore the motivations behind social media usage among drug users, including emotional, informational, and social needs.
3. To understand how drug users construct and present their digital identities on platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram.
4. To identify how social media platforms facilitate communication, community-building, and possibly, access to drugs.
5. To assess the implications of such communication behaviors for digital health education, public policy, and substance abuse interventions.

4.2. Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. RQ1: What kinds of content do drug users in Bangladesh typically share, post, or engage with on social media platforms?
2. RQ2: What are the primary motivations behind drug users’ social media communication behaviors?
3. RQ3: How do drug users construct and manage their digital identities in the face of legal and social stigma?
4. RQ4: In what ways do social media platforms facilitate or influence drug-related behaviors, peer interactions, and emotional expression?
5. RQ5: What are the potential public health and communication policy implications of these digital communication patterns?

These questions are designed to be answered through a qualitative methodological framework involving interviews, content analysis, and thematic interpretation. The goal is to capture the lived digital experiences of drug users in a way that is both analytically rich and socially relevant.

5. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the social media communication behaviors of drug users in Bangladesh. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for examining subjective experiences, symbolic interactions, and the contextual nature of communication practices. Given the sensitivity of the topic and the stigmatized status of drug users in Bangladeshi society, a flexible and ethically grounded research approach was essential.

5.1. Research Design

The study used a qualitative exploratory design incorporating two primary data collection methods:

1. In-depth semi-structured interviews with self-identified drug users who actively use social media.
2. Content analysis of publicly available social media posts, comments, and multimedia materials shared by drug users.

This mixed-method approach allowed for triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and richness of the findings.

5.2. Participant Selection

Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods. Initial contacts were made through community outreach via NGOs working in the fields of addiction and youth welfare in Dhaka and Chattogram. Participants were eligible if they:

- Were aged 18 or older,
- Had a history of drug use (ongoing or within the past year),
- Actively used at least one social media platform,
- Gave informed consent to participate in the study.

A total of 20 participants (16 males, 4 females; aged 19–32) were interviewed between October 2024 and February 2025.

5.3. Data Collection

5.3.1. In-Depth Interviews

Each participant took part in a one-on-one interview lasting between 45 and 70 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Bengali and later transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Questions explored topics such as:

- Social media habits and preferences,
- Content creation and sharing,
- Emotional expression and peer interactions,
- Perceived risks and benefits of online engagement,
- Experiences with digital surveillance or social judgment.

Participants were encouraged to show specific social media content (e.g., posts, messages, group chats), where ethically permissible, to support their narratives.

### 5.3.2. Social Media Content Analysis

Researchers also conducted a non-intrusive analysis of publicly available content on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube using keyword searches (in both Bengali and English) related to drugs (e.g., 'yaba,' 'ganja,' 'nasha,' 'high life,' etc.). Content from open groups, pages, hashtags, and public influencer accounts was collected. Approximately 250 social media items (text, video, image, comments) were analyzed to detect patterns, language use, symbolism, and thematic trends.

### 5.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to code and interpret the interview transcripts and social media data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved:

- a) Initial familiarization with the data,
- b) Generating codes manually using NVivo software,
- c) Searching for recurring themes across participants and platforms,
- d) Reviewing and refining themes,
- e) Defining final themes in relation to the theoretical framework.

The analysis focused on both manifest content (what is said or posted) and latent meanings (symbolic or emotional subtexts).

### 5.5. Ethical Considerations

Given the high sensitivity of the topic, ethical rigor was maintained throughout the research:

- Informed consent was obtained verbally and in writing.
- Participant anonymity was guaranteed using pseudonyms.
- No identifying information or private content was used without explicit permission.

Participants were also provided with referral information for counseling services, in case the interview triggered distress.

## 6. Findings and Analysis

This section presents the key findings of the study, organized thematically based on the analysis of interview data and social media content. The themes emerged through iterative coding and were mapped to the theoretical framework to offer deeper analytical insights. Four major themes were identified:

1. Identity Construction and Digital Personas
2. Content Sharing and Symbolic Communication
3. Peer Interaction and Online Community Formation
4. Digital Risk, Surveillance, and Coping Strategies

### 6.1. Identity Construction and Digital Personas

Participants exhibited deliberate strategies in presenting themselves on social media. Most drug users maintained multiple digital identities—some using real names for family-safe content and

others using pseudonyms or ‘dark accounts’ for drug-related activity. These hidden profiles often featured nicknames like ‘Dark Rider,’ ‘High King,’ or ‘Nasha Boss.’

Participants used visual cues (e.g., edited photos, stylized captions) to align with subcultural aesthetics—frequently mimicking Western hip-hop or desi underground styles. For instance, one male participant posted TikTok videos mimicking a ‘gangsta’ persona with background music referencing marijuana or MDMA.

As Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory suggests, these drug users were ‘performing’ their identities in ways that concealed them from judgment while reinforcing in-group belonging. The use of emojis, slang (e.g., ‘light chilo’ meaning ‘was high’), and coded language (‘red’ for yaba) further helped maintain these dual identities.

## 6.2. Content Sharing and Symbolic Communication

Drug users frequently shared or engaged with posts that used symbolism to refer to drug use indirectly. For example, leaf emojis, fire icons, or captions like ‘Friday Mood’ often subtly referenced drug experiences. The symbolic and humorous nature of these posts allowed users to bypass platform moderation while maintaining engagement.

Many participants shared music, memes, and images that romanticized or normalized drug use. Some posted selfies or reels showing altered states or euphoric expressions, with hashtags like #GoodVibesOnly or #TripTime. This aligns with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001), where observational learning occurs through mimicry of admired figures or peer models.

Interestingly, several participants reported deleting posts after a short time, suggesting a balancing act between self-expression and self-censorship due to potential digital surveillance.

## 6.3. Peer Interaction and Online Community Formation

Social media provided drug users with a sense of digital kinship—a space to connect with others who shared similar experiences. Closed Facebook or WhatsApp groups functioned as safe spaces for discussions on substance effects, dosage safety, and emotional support. Interviewees described these interactions as ‘family-like’ and ‘non-judgmental.’

One participant stated:

‘My family doesn’t know about my condition. But in the group, everyone understands. We talk about stuff we can’t share elsewhere.’

These online communities also facilitated access to drugs through referrals or encrypted chats. However, unlike darknet markets, these exchanges were informal and peer-driven.

The findings highlight the dual role of social media as both a risk factor and a harm reduction platform. While some users found solace and advice, others were exposed to glorified drug narratives that encouraged continued use.

## 6.4. Digital Risk, Surveillance, and Coping Strategies

Participants expressed a heightened awareness of digital risk, especially legal and familial consequences. Some reported past incidents where law enforcement or relatives discovered their activities through social media.

To avoid detection, users employed tactics such as:

- Using secret groups or encrypted messaging apps (Telegram, Signal),
- Posting content at night to minimize attention,
- Switching between multiple accounts,
- Using foreign language codes or misspellings (e.g., ‘Y@ba,’ ‘h3roin’).

One participant noted:

‘I never post openly. I use code words or just emojis. We all know what they mean.’

These findings reveal a complex negotiation between visibility and invisibility—users desire connection but must continuously navigate risk, stigma, and algorithmic surveillance.



Summary of Key Insights

Theme	Key Findings
Digital Identity	Drug users maintain dual identities; use stylized content and pseudonyms to express subcultural belonging while avoiding stigma.
Symbolic Communication	Content is shared in coded or symbolic forms; includes memes, slang, emojis, and music.
Online Community	Social media groups offer emotional support, information exchange, and occasional drug access.
Risk and Surveillance	Users employ anonymity, encryption, and self-censorship to protect against social or legal consequences.

These findings not only support existing theories but also demonstrate the contextual nuances of social media use in Bangladesh’s drug-using community.

7. Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the complex, multilayered nature of drug users’ social media communication behaviors in Bangladesh. Drawing upon the theoretical framework and qualitative insights, this section contextualizes the results within broader discussions on media behavior, deviant identity construction, digital subcultures, and health communication in the Global South.

7.1. Social Media as a Space for Identity Expression and Negotiation

Consistent with Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation, participants curated distinct digital personas to maintain social respectability while simultaneously expressing deviant aspects of their identity. These online performances suggest that social media is not merely a passive space but an active site of identity negotiation. In a society where drug use is criminalized and heavily stigmatized, digital platforms offered users an alternative arena to articulate a sense of self otherwise silenced in public or familial life.

These curated digital personas reflect a broader trend in digital culture, where marginalized groups utilize pseudonymity and selective visibility to resist dominant norms and construct counter-narratives. Among Bangladeshi youth, the symbolic use of hashtags, emojis, and slang operates as a form of semiotic resistance—creating in-group codes while avoiding detection.

7.2. Observational Learning and Peer Influence in Digital Environments

Aligned with Bandura’s (2001) Social Cognitive Theory, the study shows that exposure to drug-related content on social media plays a formative role in shaping user attitudes, behaviors, and normalization of substance use. The sharing and consumption of euphoric or humorous drug content fosters a digital feedback loop where identity reinforcement, peer approval, and risk desensitization co-exist.

This is particularly significant for young users who may be at the early stages of drug experimentation. Observing others glamorize or minimize the dangers of drug use—often without any visible consequence—can reduce perceived risk and encourage emulation. The algorithmic nature of platforms like TikTok and Instagram, which amplify engaging or sensational content, further intensifies this effect by increasing the visibility of drug-related content.

7.3. Social Media as a Double-Edged Sword: Support vs. Risk

One of the paradoxical findings of this study is that social media acts both as a support system and a risk amplifier. On the one hand, users described their online communities as therapeutic spaces—offering emotional solidarity, advice on safe usage, and non-judgmental dialogue. These

findings resonate with global literature on digital peer support for marginalized or stigmatized groups (Naslund et al., 2020).

On the other hand, these same platforms expose users to misinformation, glorified narratives, and potential access to illicit substances. The blurred boundary between community care and normalization of risky behavior demands nuanced intervention strategies. This dual function challenges traditional drug prevention models that often overlook the empowering aspects of peer-driven communication.

#### *7.4. Communication Under Surveillance and the Politics of Digital Secrecy*

Participants' heightened awareness of digital surveillance underscores a growing tension between digital freedom and state control. While users employed various tactics—fake accounts, private groups, coded language—to avoid being traced, their anxiety points to the shrinking safe spaces for marginalized voices in Bangladesh's digital sphere.

The fear of legal action, public shame, or familial conflict highlights the socio-political precocity that shapes user behavior. This phenomenon aligns with scholarship on digital resistance in authoritarian or conservative contexts, where users must constantly strategize visibility, anonymity, and encryption (Martin et al., 2019).

#### *7.5. Implications for Public Health and Communication Policy*

The insights from this study have several implications:

- a) **Digital Health Communication:** Public health campaigns in Bangladesh must evolve beyond traditional mass media approaches to engage users on the platforms they frequent. Health messaging should be subtle, peer-driven, and culturally relevant—possibly leveraging influencers or user-generated content.
- b) **Algorithmic Regulation:** Social media platforms operating in South Asia must reconsider the visibility and amplification of drug-related content. Context-aware moderation, local-language filters, and harm-reduction partnerships could mitigate risk.
- c) **Policy Development:** Rather than blanket censorship, a nuanced policy approach is needed—one that supports digital harm reduction without criminalizing vulnerable users. Incorporating digital behavior research into national drug policies can enhance intervention effectiveness.

#### *7.6. Contribution to Theory and Research*

This study extends existing communication and behavioral theories into a unique cultural context. By integrating UGT, SCT, and self-presentation theory, the research provides a multidimensional understanding of how drug users in Bangladesh utilize social media as a tool for identity, interaction, and resistance. It contributes to the emerging field of digital drug ethnography in non-Western societies and underscores the need for culturally situated research frameworks.

## **8. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### *8.1. Conclusion*

This study explored the social media communication behaviors of drug users in Bangladesh, offering a detailed understanding of how they navigate digital spaces to express identity, form peer connections, and manage risk. Using a qualitative approach, it examined the content they share, the communities they engage in, and the communication tactics they employ to avoid stigma and surveillance.

Findings revealed that drug users in Bangladesh are not passive consumers of digital content but active agents who strategically construct online personas, engage in coded communication, and form digital subcultures. Social media serves as both a refuge and a risk—enabling emotional support

and connection while simultaneously exposing users to harmful content, peer pressure, and legal vulnerability.

These behaviors are shaped by broader socio-cultural, legal, and technological factors. In a country where drug use is criminalized and heavily stigmatized, digital platforms offer a contested space for visibility, resistance, and community. However, the growing surveillance and algorithmic control on these platforms introduce new ethical and policy dilemmas.

This research contributes to the fields of communication, health studies, and digital sociology by highlighting the intersection of drug use, media behavior, and digital risk in the Global South. It emphasizes the need for a culturally grounded and ethically sensitive approach to studying and addressing substance use in the digital era.

## 8.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings, several practical and policy-oriented recommendations are proposed:

### 8.2.1. For Health Communicators and NGOs

- a) **Develop Peer-Led Campaigns:** Partner with recovered users or peer influencers to design harm reduction messages tailored for platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram.
- b) **Use Cultural Codes:** Health communication should adopt the same visual and symbolic language used by users—memes, hashtags, emojis—to enhance resonance and engagement.
- c) **Create Safe Digital Spaces:** Establish anonymous helpline groups on messaging apps where users can seek guidance, mental health support, or rehabilitation options.

### 8.2.2. For Policymakers and Law Enforcement

- a) **Avoid Over-Criminalization:** Focus on treatment and rehabilitation rather than punitive responses to digital expressions of drug use, especially among youth.
- b) **Digital Literacy and Ethics Education:** Integrate social media ethics, digital footprint awareness, and critical media literacy into secondary and university-level education.
- c) **Incorporate Digital Behaviors into National Drug Policy:** Policies should be informed by empirical evidence on how users communicate and access substances online.

### 8.2.3. For Social Media Platforms

- a) **Local Language Moderation:** Algorithms must be trained to detect context-specific slang, emojis, and code words to flag harmful content without infringing on free speech.
- b) **Promote Harm Reduction Content:** Collaborate with local experts to increase the visibility of verified health and recovery content on user feeds.
- c) **Enable Anonymous Reporting:** Introduce easy-to-use features for users to anonymously report peer content that may signal distress or overdose risk.

### 8.2.4. For Future Researchers

- a) **Expand Sample Diversity:** Future studies should include rural users, female drug users, and transgender individuals for a more comprehensive perspective.
- b) **Longitudinal Approaches:** A follow-up over time could explore how communication behaviors evolve with changing policies, technologies, or recovery status.
- c) **Comparative Studies:** Cross-national comparisons with countries like India, Nepal, or Indonesia could reveal regional trends and shared digital subcultures.

## 8.3. Final Thoughts

As digital platforms become central to youth culture and informal health discourse, it is critical that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners pay closer attention to how vulnerable groups like drug users communicate online. In the context of Bangladesh—where social conservatism meets

rapid digitalization—this study underscores the urgency of rethinking public health through a communication lens that is inclusive, empathetic, and attuned to the digital realities of marginalized communities.

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