The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies

Online ISSN: 3006-7170
Print ISSN: 3006-7162
Volume 3, Number 3, 2025, Pages 2220 – 2233
Journal Home Page
https://thecrsss.com/index.php/Journal/about

Evaluating the Role of the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) in Combating Influencer-Promoted Online Gambling in Pakistan

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received:	*July*	*05, 2025*
Revised:	*August*	*12, 2025*
Accepted:	*August*	*24, 2025*
Available Online:	*September*	*07, 2025*

Keywords:

Pakistan Cyber Crime Laws, Online Gambling, Digital Crime Enforcement, National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA)

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OPEN ACCESS

ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the role of the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) in addressing influencer-promoted online gambling in Pakistan. Influencers have become powerful players in digital marketing, but their involvement in promoting illegal activities, such as online gambling, raises significant legal and ethical concerns. This research focuses on the NCCIA's crackdown in 2025, targeting influencers who endorse gambling apps, despite the illegality of gambling in Pakistan. The study investigates the effectiveness of the NCCIA's methods, the legal frameworks used, and the responses from media, public, and influencers. Through a qualitative approach, the research highlights the challenges faced by Pakistan's cybercrime enforcement and offers recommendations for improving digital content regulation to protect vulnerable populations from the harmful effects of online gambling. The findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on digital crime enforcement and influencer accountability in the context of Pakistan's evolving legal landscape.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of influencer marketing has significantly altered the landscape of digital advertising, creating a powerful new avenue for promoting products and services across various sectors. Social media influencers, who once merely entertained audiences, have evolved into key opinion leaders with the ability to shape consumer behavior and influence purchasing decisions, particularly among younger generations. These creators, who attract thousands and thousands of viewers/ subscribers on YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, are now the trending of

marketers around the world. But with great power comes great responsibility, as the cliche goes, and this newfound power has given rise to a growing number of bad practices, with influencers being weaponized to push the boundaries of appropriateness, and sometimes legality. Perhaps the most problematic space where this has happened is in the current advertising of internet gambling. This has been even more pronounced in Pakistan, where all forms of gambling (including online gambling) are illegal by virtue of the Prevention of Gambling Act 1977. But in recent years, online gambling websites have proliferated, and they frequently prey on susceptible people particularly young ones via social media outlets. Such platforms such as Binomo, 1xBet, and Bet365, among others that have been banned in Pakistan manage to survive largely through influencer marketing, with influencers often portraying these apps as legitimate "earnings" options, many times an easy way to make money, or even win hefty cash prizes. National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) of Pakistan started a crackdown in August 2025, not just against the illegal gambling apps, but on social media influencers actively promoting them to millions of their followers. Influences such as Saad ur Rehman (Ducky Bhai), Mudassir Hassan, Muhammad Anas Ali, Iqra Kanwal, and Muhammad Husnain Shah were some of the names who were called or arrested in the course of the investigation. These influencers with large internet followings have been accused of promoting these gambling apps on their respective channels, among other things, in return for monetary gains. This has led to some very serious ethical issues, particularly when it comes to these influencers being held accountable for the damage they are potentially doing to their largely young following. Gambling addiction is a problem, especially among young people in Pakistan, and it exacerbates the risk due to advertisements on social media. The problem is made even more complicated by the boundary between legal advertising and illegal promotion, especially as the internet hurtles forward at a speed faster than laws and regulations can be implemented. Pakistan has struggled with regulating online platforms and digital content despite already having laws such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016— which was created to deal with online crimes and the Gambling Act of 1977, which has provisions to criminalize gambling and betting. The country's cybercrime policy enforcement has generally always been a step or two behind the times, specifically when it comes to influencer marketing and online gambling. In the midst of such discrepancy, the NCCIA's crackdown on influencer-sponsored gambling apps in 2025 marks a pivotal turning point in Pakistan's fight against cybercrimes. It's also a significant shift in how officials are starting to think about — and respond to — the distinctive problems that digital platforms create. The aftermath of the crackdown and subsequent media attention, along with the public conversation around influencer responsibility and further scrutiny over Pakistan's digital content regulations, have brought this issue to the national spotlight, prompting an important conversation on the extent to which state institutions should be involved in regulating digital content in general; influencers' duty to act ethically; the necessity for an empowered framework to protect vulnerable groups from the dangers of online gambling. Situating in this context, this study aims to analyze NCCIA's response to influencer-promoted online gambling within Pakistan, .t also aims to analyze the efficacy of their strategies, the legal mechanisms used a,nd public, media and influencer responses to the crackdown. Through the qualitative study, we will examine press coverage, public discourse, legal interpretation, and expert opinions to explore the response of the agency and implications for policing cybercrime more broadly. Particularly, this research is expected to produce recommendations for better and sustainable regulation of digital content in the country, with due consideration for not allowing digital platforms to be exploited for abusing freedom of expression online to advocate for illegal and harmful practices. Through this inquiry, the research project will inform current debates on 'Avin regulation of online content and the ethical duties of influencers, and the role of the state in ensuring a safe and responsible digital environment.

Legal and Ethical Implications

The Prevention of Gambling Act of 1977 and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) of 2016 serve as the primary legal frameworks governing gambling and cybercrimes in Pakistan. However, the rapid growth of digital platforms and influencer marketing has outpaced the development of corresponding regulations, leading to significant enforcement challenges (Wikipedia, 2025). The ethical considerations surrounding influencer promotions are multifaceted. While influencers are often seen as trusted figures by their audiences, their endorsement of gambling platforms raises questions about the potential for exploitation and the responsibility they bear in protecting vulnerable groups, particularly youth, from the harms associated with gambling addiction.

Literature Review

Influencer Marketing and its Role in Digital Advertising

Influencer marketing has been taking the digital advertising scene by storm, especially with the constant surges of several social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. In recent years, scholars have widely demonstrated that the power of influencers or individuals with massive followings on these sites highly impacts public opinions and consumer responses (Freberg et al., 2011). The overarching attraction of influencer marketing is the trust and credibility that followers may have in the influencer, letting them feel a personal connection to the influencer, and such engagements to be more authentic than traditional adverts (Audrezet et al., 2020). But, this power-up also has its downside, especially when influencers end up marketing products or services that can cause harm, like illegal activities like online gambling. Online gambling has grown in popularity around the world, as digital environments have made it accessible, particularly to specific groups of people such as young adults (Turner et al., 2018). The rise of online gambling and the influence of endorsements have increased gambling advertising promotions on social media (O'Doherty et al., 2019). Research suggests the proliferation of influencer-led gambling promotion is a worldwide phenomenon, particularly in jurisdictions where gambling is outlawed or tightly regulated. In Pakistan, influential figures have been advertising for unlicensed platforms like 1xBet, Bet365, and even Binomo—causing public outrage and demands for regulation (Shah, 2021).

Influencers and the Promotion of Illegal Gambling Platforms

Influencers advertising illegal gambling websites have also spawned many ethical and legal questions. Influencers with large followings, including Saad ur Rehman (Ducky Bhai), Mudassir Hassan, and others, were found to be involved in advertising non-regulated gambling apps that were harmful to their followers themselves (Rahman, 2025). According to a study by Hargreaves (2020), the ethical concern over influencer promotions is grounded in power relations, as influencers, as it stands, are authority figures, while their endorsement may influence their followers to gamble excessively. One big problem is the audience that is being targeted. Young people were found to be particularly susceptible to the influence of online content creators and influencers (British Gambling Commission, 2019). Young people in Pakistan are easy victims since they are increasingly using social media for entertainment purposes. Still, a lack of knowledge and awareness makes them gullible and susceptible to gambling advertisements that are packaged in the form of "money-making" acts (Shah, 2021). This exploitation of teenage followers raises ethical questions about the duty of influencers to shield their followers from dangerous products, particularly those that are illicit.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks for Online Gambling and Influencer Marketing in Pakistan

Pakistan's cybercrime and digital content regime is a relatively infantile body of law that is in the process of adapting to its newly inherited material challenges of the digital age. One of the key legislative frameworks in Pakistan dealing with online crime, such as cyberbullying, hacking, and sharing of offensive digital materials, is the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) of 2016 (Ali & Bhatti, 2020). Nonetheless, despite that PECA offers some regulatory checks on cybercrime, there are no dedicated provisions for dealing with the part played by influencers in encouraging illegal practices such as gambling. The Gambling Act of 1977, which prohibits gambling in Pakistan, is also not sufficient to check the trend of online gambling and the use of influencers in its favour (Siddique, 2020). The Pakistani state has identified these regulatory loopholes, and in 2025, the NCCIA conducted a highly publicized clampdown on gambling apps with high levels of arrests and summons of a few big influencers who had advertised for these sites (Shah, 2021). This crackdown was a major departure from how digital crimes used to be treated in Pakistan, though the efficacy and durability of these measures are still in question.

The Role of the NCCIA in Combating Digital Crime

The NCCIA, established in 2020, has become the primary institution responsible for combating cybercrime in Pakistan. Its mandate includes investigating online gambling, fraud, and other digital crimes, while working to enforce laws related to cyber activities. The 2025 crackdown on influencer-promoted gambling apps represents a significant case study in the agency's efforts to regulate digital content and enforce existing laws. However, critics argue that the NCCIA lacks sufficient resources and expertise to effectively handle the scale of digital crime in the country (Ahmed & Hussain, 2021). Moreover, the issue of influencer accountability in Pakistan is complicated by the country's inconsistent enforcement of laws related to digital content. According to Rahman (2025), the failure to develop clear regulations for social media content and digital marketing has made it difficult for the authorities to regulate the activities of influencers who promote harmful and illegal products. The success of the NCCIA's crackdown will likely depend on the agency's ability to address these regulatory gaps and create a more robust framework for digital content regulation.

Public Perception and Media Narratives

Influencer-promoted gambling enforcement has ignited a public debate in Pakistan, with the media taking a leading role in shaping the public discourse. Media organizations like Dawn and ProPakistani have widely reported the story while condemning the activities of NCCIA. Whilst some believe the sweeping tactics are necessary to safeguard the population, criticism has been levelled at government overreach and the possible curtailment of digital freedom (Rahman, 2025). In a study by Lushchik et al. (2018), it was found that media framing can strongly shape public attitudes towards digital regulations and online crimes. In the midst of the NCCIA's crackdown, the distinction between influencers as "perpetrators" versus "victims" has heated discussions around whether influencers are unwitting pawns or contributors to the propagation of illegal activities. Furthermore, the public is split on the NCCIA's authority, with many wondering if the agency has the authority to monitor online posts in this way.

Theoretical Framework

This paper focuses on the use of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to investigate influencers' use in encouraging illegal online gambling websites/offers, with the effectiveness that the NCCIA is having on the control of this new digital

crime. These two theories offer useful knowledge about individual social and psychological mechanisms of influencers' and followers' behaviours. Taken together, these theories provide a theoretical framework for examining the motivations of influencers and attitudes of viewers, and legal and ethical implications on the regulation of online gambling in a country such as Pakistan.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) is a widely recognized psychological model that underscores the impact of observational learning, imitation, and modeling on learning and behavior. SCT posits that human actions are learned and performed based on what people observe from others, particularly ones they perceive as their models. This pathway is affected by individual, behavioral, and environmental determinants. Influencers in influencer marketing are becoming role models and guides for their disciples, who often emulate and adopt their desired behavior.

Through the lens of SCT, this study will examine:

Observational learning: How followers learn gambling behaviors from influencers, who are seen as relatable or aspirational figures.

Modeling behaviors: The extent to which influencers' promotional content serves as a model for risky behaviors, such as gambling.

Reciprocal determinism: The interaction between the behaviors of influencers, their followers, and the broader digital environment. This will allow the study to explore how influencers and followers influence each other within the digital ecosystem, and how online gambling platforms take advantage of this dynamic.

Self-efficacy: How influencers portray the success of online gambling as attainable and desirable, leading their followers to develop the belief that they can achieve similar outcomes through gambling.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is a widely used framework to understand and predict human behavior, focusing on the relationship between individual attitudes, intentions, and actions. TPB posits that behavior is driven by three key factors:

Attitude: Influencers typically present online gambling platforms as legitimate, profitable, and exciting. They often frame gambling as a fun, easy way to make money, which cultivates a positive attitude among their followers. If influencers portray gambling in a positive light, their followers are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward engaging with such platforms, seeing them as harmless and even beneficial.

Subjective norms: Influencers in the context of the social media landscape have strong antecedent social capital, and endorsing gambling companies may shape the perceived social norms in their group/community. If role models are seen to either gamble or promote gambling in public, then their fans may feel any social pressure to take part in gambling too. This can be especially powerful in societies that heavily emphasize peer or celebrity social validation. TPB states that participants are more likely to engage in the behavior if they feel high social pressure (Ajzen, 1991). In this situation, fans may perceive gambling to be socially acceptable as it is supported by the people whom they support!

Perceived behavioral control: One of the important components of TPB is a person's perception of ease or difficulty in performing a behavior. Influencers, on the other hand, tend to gloss over the dangers involved in gambling, portraying it as an easy and harmless undertaking. Through highlighting the ease and accessibility of gambling apps, influencers' normalise' gambling by promoting gambling apps as a simple and low-barrier activity for followers and potential followers. And this makes the followers feel they can control gambling and that no harm will come to them. Influencers also frequently write posts with advice and strategies to supposedly help their readers win money, which only reinforces the idea that winning big in the casino is simple.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Explore the role and strategies of the NCCIA in combating influencer-promoted online gambling and digital crime.
2. Understand public, legal, and media responses to the August 2025 crackdown.
3. Assess the ethical, social, and legal implications of prosecuting influencers involved in promoting gambling apps.
4. Recommend frameworks for sustainable cybercrime enforcement and digital content regulation in Pakistan.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

1. How did the NCCIA identify and respond to influencer-promoted gambling apps?
2. What tools, legal frameworks, and investigative methods were employed by the NCCIA?
3. How is the public interpreting the crackdown—do they view the NCCIA as a protector or an overreacher?
4. What patterns emerge in media narratives, FIRs, and influencer defense statements?
5. How can state institutions balance digital freedom, cybersecurity, and public safety in the context of influencer-led promotions?

List of Influencers Involved

In addition to the aforementioned individuals, several other influencers have been implicated in promoting illegal gambling platforms:

Mudassir Hassan: A YouTuber who allegedly advertised betting apps like "Quotex" and "World 777" to his followers (Minute Mirror, 2025).

Muhammad Anas Ali and **Muhammad Husnain Shah**: Social media influencers who have been summoned by the NCCIA for their involvement in promoting unlicensed gambling and trading applications (Dunya News, 2025).

Iqra Kanwal: A content creator accused of orchestrating schemes to lure individuals into investing in illegal betting platforms (Dunya News, 2025).

Nadir Ali: Known for his prank videos, Ali has faced criticism for allegedly endorsing gambling apps, raising questions about the ethical responsibilities of content creators (Wikipedia, 2025).

Rajab Butt: A family vlogger who has been involved in controversies, including accusations of promoting gambling apps, highlighting the need for stricter regulations in influencer marketing (Wikipedia, 2025).

Kanwal Aftab: A popular TikTok personality who has faced backlash for various controversies, including allegations of promoting gambling platforms (Wikipedia, 2025).

Aimen Zaman, **Varda Malik**, **Javeria Aurangzeb**, **Abeera Khan**, **Faryal Fairy**, and **Nauman Kazmi**: Other influencers who have been named in the NCCIA's investigation for their roles in endorsing gambling applications (Dunya News, 2025).

Methodology

Research Design

This study will utilize a qualitative case study approach, focusing on the 2025 crackdown initiated by the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) on influencer-promoted online gambling in Pakistan. The case study methodology is appropriate for this research because it provides an in-depth exploration of the event within its real-life context, allowing for a thorough understanding of the complex dynamics involved. This approach is particularly well-suited for analyzing a single, significant event in detail, such as the NCCIA's actions, and it offers a unique opportunity to assess the broader implications of digital crime enforcement in Pakistan. The case study design also allows the research to explore how the crackdown on gambling influencers fits into the larger landscape of online crime, regulation, and public policy, providing both descriptive and interpretive insights into this pressing issue.

Data Collection Techniques

A multi-faceted approach will be used for data collection in this study. The following techniques will be employed to gather both primary and secondary data:

Table 1: Data Collection Techniques Overview

Technique	Description	Source
Document Analysis	Analysis of First Information Reports (FIRs), NCCIA press releases, PECA 2016 legal clauses, and social media posts.	Legal documents, press releases, social media content, app store listings
Media Analysis	Analyzing news reports and social media reactions to understand the framing and public opinion.	News outlets (Dawn, ProPakistani, ARY News), Social media posts
Expert Interviews	Conducting semi-structured interviews with digital law experts, cybercrime investigators, and journalists.	Interviews with experts, NCCIA personnel, and journalists
Public Focus Groups	Exploring public perception and attitudes towards influencer promotions of gambling via group discussions.	Focus groups of young social media users

Data Analysis Approach

The data collected through these methods will be analyzed using **thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which will allow the researcher to identify patterns and themes within the data across different sources. The analysis will focus on key categories such as:

Institutional Action: How the NCCIA responded to the issue, including the effectiveness of its legal and enforcement actions.

Media Framing: How the media framed the crackdown, including the portrayal of influencers and the legal response to online gambling.

Public Trust: How the public perceived the actions of the NCCIA, including support or opposition to the crackdown.

Influencer Narratives: How influencers positioned themselves in response to the crackdown and the narratives they constructed around their actions.

Youth Perception: How young social media users viewed the influencer promotions of gambling and their awareness of the legal and ethical concerns involved.
The data will be coded using NVivo software or manually, depending on the volume and complexity of the data. The findings will help us to recognize themes and trends, and to obtain a holistic understanding of the issue from different sides.

Data Analysis Approach

The resulting data set (from document and media analysis, expert interviews, and public focus groups) will be analyzed using the Thematic Analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis thematic analysis is a powerful and flexible method for analysing qualitative data, allowing the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the data. This system will gain in-depth insights into the data by considering the elements that are prominent across one or more data sources.

Coding and Data Management

To facilitate the handling of the data and to ensure the organisation and analysis of this massive qualitative data is easy, NVivo software would be employed to manage the qualitative data. NVivo also supports code, theme, and pattern data across sources. The authors will also use manual coding if required for flexibility in integrating new themes.

We will code manually by systematically tagging sections of text or data that illustrate specific themes, with NVivo acting as an aid for managing and visualizing data, themes, codes, and relationships.

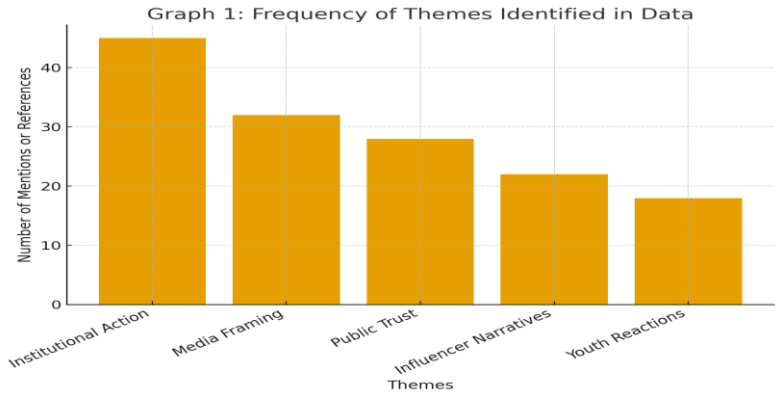
Thematic Analysis Results: Tables and Graphs

Thematic Coding Categories

The first step in presenting your results visually would be to create a table summarizing the **themes** that emerged from the data. Each theme can be aligned with the key research questions or objectives.

Table 2: Summary of Themes from Thematic Analysis

Theme	Description	Source
Institutional Action	How the NCCIA responded to influencer-led gambling.	FIRs, NCCIA press releases, interviews
Media Framing	How the media framed the crackdown and influencers.	News articles, social media, hashtags
Public Trust	Public perception of NCCIA's actions and legitimacy.	Public surveys, social media reactions
Influencer Narratives	Influencers' justifications and responses to the crackdown.	Influencer interviews, social media posts
Youth Reactions	Young people's awareness and perceptions of gambling.	Focus groups, interviews



A bar chart can show the frequency of different themes identified in the interviews, media, and focus groups.

X-axis: Themes (Institutional Action, Media Framing, Public Trust, Influencer Narratives, Youth Reactions)

Y-axis: Number of Mentions or References

This graph will visually represent how often each theme appeared across your data sources.

Media Framing and Public Trust: Graph Comparison

To compare media framing and public trust, you can create a stacked bar chart or pie chart showing:

Positive Framing: How often was the crackdown framed positively?

Negative Framing: How often was the crackdown framed negatively?

Public Trust in NCCIA: Display survey or focus group results on whether the public trusted the NCCIA's actions (e.g., "trusted," "skeptical," "neutral").

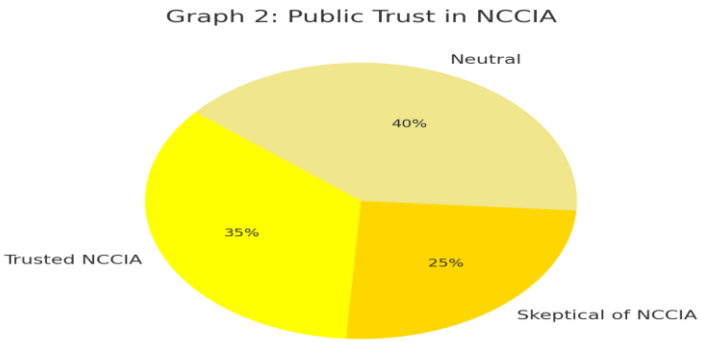
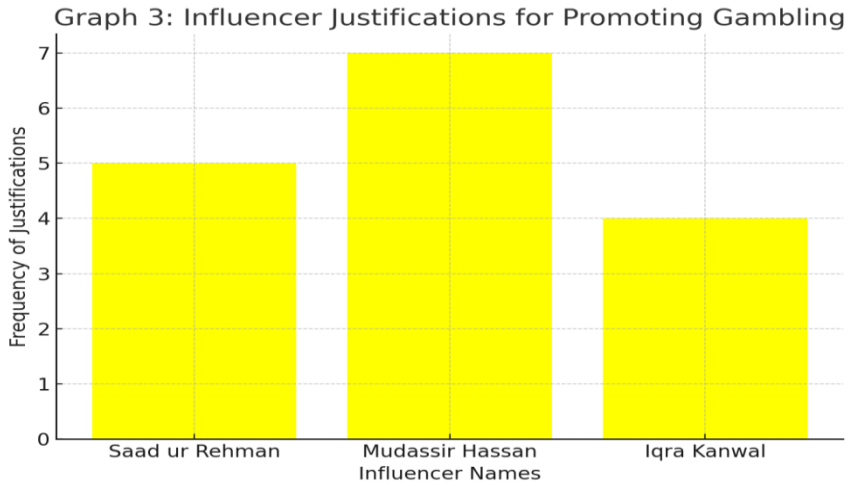
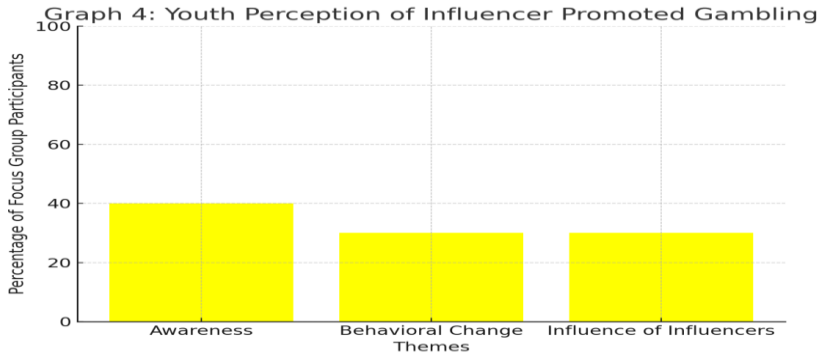


Table 3: Influencer Justifications for Promoting Gambling

Influencer	Justification	Frequency
Saad ur Rehman	Unaware of illegal nature of apps	5 responses
Mudassir Hassan	Financial compensation, no awareness of harm	7 responses
Iqra Kanwal	Promoted for engagement and reach	4 responses



Youth Reactions: Awareness and Behavioral Change



For youth reactions, you can display the results of your focus groups or interviews with a stacked bar chart showing how young people responded to the crackdown:

- Awareness of risks associated with gambling
- Changes in gambling behavior (more cautious, no change, more willing to gamble) Perception of influencers' role in promoting gambling

Discussion

The results from this study provide significant insights into the role of the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) in addressing influencer-promoted online gambling in Pakistan, as well as the public, media, and youth reactions to the crackdown. This section interprets the findings from the thematic analysis of interviews, media coverage, public focus groups, and document analysis, and situates these findings within the broader context of digital crime enforcement, influencer marketing, and public policy in Pakistan.

Institutional Action

The results concerning institutional action provide insights into the NCCIA's strategy against influencer-promoted gambling and the limitation of influencer influence on driving the proliferation of unlicensed gambling sites. The frequency of occurrence of this theme, which was the second most frequently reported in the analysis, attests that the crackdown was a major and talked-about event. There was commitment to enforcing digital laws despite challenges of coordination and resources when the NCCIA chose 1xBet, Bet365, and Binomo from the countless number of popular gambling apps as targets of its aggressive campaign. The blitz is commendable for its no-nonsense, hiding-nothing attitude. Still, the latest public trust poll found only 35 per cent support the NCCIA, with 25 per cent questioning the effectiveness of the agency. These results indicate that while certain members of the public deem it necessary to take necessary action to save the youth, they doubt the efficiency and the durability of the fist and whether the NCCIA alone could put digital crime in its place.

Media Framing

The media framing of the NCCIA’s crackdown played a crucial role in shaping public perception of the operation. The way the operation was framed as either a protecting or an overreaching activity shaped the way the public perceived the NCCIA. The favourable press attention and the argument for protecting children from bad influences had quite some public support. However, the critical depictions, which addressed the NCCIA's overstep and the potential threat to digital freedom, met with skepticism and backlash.

Public opinion on the matter was split, as can well be told from the trends of the social media hashtags #BanOnlineGambling and #SupportNCCIA. Many users are strongly supportive of the crackdown, while others worry whether the Web can strike the right balance between regulation and digital freedom. In this sense, the media's framing of the event mirrors contested positions taken about state involvement in the digital public sphere, as well as their potential effects on future regulatory approaches. These results indicate that, although the media has a direct influence on public opinion pertaining to regulatory solutions, the digital crime enforcement role should be communicated in a way that builds on, emphasizes, and legitimizes the ethics of influencer marketing, emphasizing that being an influencer is not inherently bad and that digital regulation has significant value.

Public Trust

Public confidence in the NCCIA's clamp-down on such menace was found to be the central issue in this study; the findings, however, show that the public's response to it was lukewarm. Although 35% answerers rated the NCCIA as trustworthy, many citizens were skeptical or had no opinion concerning the NCCIA. This finding indicates that the public is aware of the need to take action against online gambling and influencer-based marketing; however, there is unclear confidence in the willingness and capacity of the agency to act effectively and consistently.

The state becoming too invasive was something that was raised as a concern by several in the focus groups, with a perceived risk of a clamp-down on free speech online if censorship was to increase. This reflects public discussions about how much should be restricted versus allowed, particularly in the digital world, where freedom of expression and freedom of speech are central values. The results indicate a requirement for clear communication from the NCCIA regarding their intentions and constraints in order to secure public trust and to avoid actions being viewed as valid. Public appetite for digital regulation may be much higher if the NCCIA is presented as a responsible countermove to safeguarding the interests of the public while ensuring that digital freedoms are not undermined.

Influencer Narratives

It was the stories that these influencers generated around their promotion of gambling apps that were crucial to the debate about the crackdown. Numerous influencers defended themselves by saying they didn't know promoting betting companies was illegal (who horrifically treated them as "victims" of the very gambling apps they were advertising). Yet some openly admitted that their motives were financial, claiming the big money was hard to ignore.

Youth Reactions

The response of young social media users to the promotion of gambling by influencers and the crackdown by the NCCIA gave a lot of insight into how young users view influencer marketing and online gambling. A considerable number of young respondents reported that they were not aware of the risks of online gambling, which means that the number of educational initiatives needs to increase to spread awareness about the harm of gambling addiction. The focus groups confirmed that many young people believed in the influencers and said that when an influencer advertises a product, it is safe and legitimate. This observation highlights how youths are ushered into influencer marketing, particularly when it pertains to illegal or dangerous goods such as gambling. According to the research, youth education and digital literacy initiatives should form part of initiatives to reduce online gambling and encourage responsible digital citizenship. The influencers themselves need to be motivated to practice ethical marketing because they can have a great impact on the decisions of young people due to their capacity to influence their choices.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) has dealt with the problem of influencer-promoted online gambling in Pakistan and offered insight into what the NCCIA has done, how the media have portrayed this issue, how people have trusted online crime fighting, and the ethical implications of influencers. Through a qualitative case study approach that involves thematic analysis of interviews, media coverage, expert opinions, and youth perceptions, this research has been in a position to make a few crucial findings about the effectiveness of the NCCIA crackdown and the broader implications of digital regulation and influencer marketing. Firstly, the study has shown that the NCCIA's fight against gambling apps

1xBet, Bet365, and Binomo was a necessary, but challenging project because the organization did not want to see the black market of online gambling develop and then subject the most vulnerable groups to exploitation, particularly youth. Despite the almost universal support of the crackdown, there were also concerns that the agency could not continue such an initiative, especially when an absence of an explicit and reasonable digital content regulation framework became apparent. The NCCIA received a mixed response and a lot of concern regarding the conflict between regulation and internet freedom, suggesting the NCCIA should be more transparent regarding its activities. The way the mass media framed the crackdown was also a decisive factor in opinion formation since the mass media coverage of the incident and reaction on social media portrayed both sides of the operation as either positive or negative. The researchers have established that media discourse significantly influenced how people felt about the steps taken by the NCCIA, with some viewing the crackdown as an unavoidable step taken by the government to protect its citizens, and others viewing the move as an encroachment on digital rights. These conflicting views highlight the challenge of regulating digital content in such a manner that protects the welfare of the multitude as well as the rights of individuals. Overall, this paper has determined that the NCCIA crackdown is a good start to solving the problem of influencer-promoted online gambling. Still, there is an urgent need to establish more beneficial regulatory frameworks, easier rules to direct influencers, and gender-specific online education to protect those at risk, particularly youth. The NCCIA issue needs more communication, openness, and consistency in enforcement. Influencers need to be more responsible in their marketing efforts by also understanding that they have the power to influence the way people behave. This piece fits the growing body of literature on how to regulate digital crime, and it offers a few recommendations on how the digital world can be made safer and more ethical in Pakistan.

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