

Original Article

The Impact of Social Media Consumption on Marital Relationships among Married Couples in Karachi

Ahsan Ahmed Khan¹, Maheen Ahsan²

1. Ph.D. Scholar Depart. Of Mass Communication Federal Urdu university Karachi; ahsankhan258@hotmail.com

2. M.Phil Scholar, Bahria University, Karachi Pakistan; maheentariq1113@gmail.com



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Abstract: Social media has become a part of everyday life, which has changed the way people communicate and interact in marital relationships. The impact of social media has been explored on couples in western societies, however, not much has been researched on this topic in the socio-cultural context of Karachi, Pakistan. The present study aims to venture into addressing this gap and examine the role of social media usage on communication, trust, emotional intimacy, conflict and marital satisfaction among married couples in Karachi. The qualitative phenomenological approach was used to hear the lived experiences of the participants. The data were gathered using semi-structured in-depth interviews with 50 married couples (100 interviewees) drawn through convenience sampling and then analysed using the thematic analysis method of Braun and Clarke (2006). Six themes emerged from the findings: communication and connectivity, trust issues and online surveillance, jealous feelings and overuse of social media, lowered emotional availability and in-person communication, marital tension, and setting boundaries online. The findings suggest that the use of social media has a dual effect on marital relations. It can help communication and emotional bonding, but can also lead to mistrust, jealousy, emotional disconnection and relationship issues when used too often or to excess. Those who set boundaries and discussed social media in the relationship felt they had happier relationships. The study brings context-specific information about digital communication and marital relationships to the discussion and holds practical implications for family counselors, researchers, and married people in today's digital societies.

Keywords: Social Media, Marital Relationships, Karachi, Consumption Of Social Media, Communication.

Introduction:

There has been a swift evolution in digital technology and the way that communication has evolved has changed globally with social media being a part of everyday life. Social media like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok and X (Twitter) allow people to connect, share and keep up social connections irrespective of distance. These platforms offer many chances for interaction and connectivity, but the impact

they have on interpersonal and marital relationships has become a concern of scholars (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). There are many general ideas about marriage as a social institution that relies on trust, commitment, emotional intimacy and effective communication. These factors contribute to satisfaction in the relationship and marital stability (Rempel et al., 1985). But with the adoption of social media, relationships are faced with new challenges. Social networking sites can enable users to connect with many people, from friends and former partners to strangers, which can result in feelings of jealousy, mistrust and conflict in the relationship (Tokunaga, 2011). Too much of social media can have a negative impact on marital satisfaction, according to research, which attributes the poor quality of in-person interactions between spouses to the greater use of social media. With more time online, quality face-to-face communication and connection can be lost and can lead to emotional detachment and dissatisfaction with relationships (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016).

However the use of social media has also been linked to disruptions in family life due to the use of technology that could negatively impact relationship quality and marital harmony (Roberts & David, 2016). Among the factors that predict marital satisfaction and longevity of the marriage is trust (Rempel et al., 1985). Social media sites can, however, make it easier to engage in behaviors that can create conflict, like partner monitoring and online surveillance, that can damage marital trust. Tokunaga (2011) suggested that the social networking sites are now being used as a medium of interpersonal electronic surveillance, in which individuals can track their partners' web use at all times. Often such behaviors are related to uncertainty and suspicion and can lead to conflict and dissatisfaction in marriage. One of the other major concerns of using social media is jealousy. The online interactions, comments, photos and friendships can become very visible and therefore there is an opportunity to misinterpret and for negative interpretations. In fact, Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) discovered that the use of Facebook was positively linked to romantic jealousy regardless of the nature of the relationship. Greater jealousy can lead to more monitoring, which in turn can be detrimental to marital trust and satisfaction. In addition, social media has increased the chances of emotional infidelity and online infidelity. Being able to rekindle old romantic relationships and form private online relationships could be a threat to the boundaries of marriage. Research has also shown that online infidelity and non-consensual relationships online may have a negative impact on relationship satisfaction and marital conflict (Cravens & Whiting, 2014; McDaniel et al., 2017). In Pakistan, the use of social media has grown exponentially in the last decade with the ease of access to smartphones and a low cost of internet services. For communication, entertainment and social networking, married couples are increasingly using social media. But the effect of social media use on marriages is a field of study that is still in its infancy in Pakistan.

A study by Iqbal and Jami (2019) among married users of Facebook in Pakistan found that Facebook usage level indirectly predicted marital satisfaction via trust, jealousy and electronic surveillance behaviors among spouses. Their results showed how complicated social media could be in determining marital outcomes. As Pakistan's largest metropolis, Karachi is also a significant hub of digital connectivity, thus offering a pertinent backdrop for the study of social media usage and marriage. This is a suitable context for studying the effect of social media on trust, communication, intimacy and marital satisfaction, as the city was home to a multi-cultural population and extensive use of digital technologies. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the effects of the use of social media on marital relations of married couples in Karachi. The study aims to examine the connection between the use of social media and the major aspects of marriage such as trust, communicating and jealousy, marital satisfaction and its implications for the present study for the relationship between social media and key dimensions of marital relationships in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

Social media has grown to become a medium that has revolutionized the way people communicate and interact with one another. Social media like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) have become a part of daily life that allows people to communicate and interact instantly (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Although these platforms have their advantages, scientists have lately come up with worries about the way they can affect marriage relations. Too much use of social media has been linked to problems like lessening of face-to-face communication, jealousy, online monitoring, mistrust, and dissatisfaction in relationships (Tokunaga, 2011; Muise et al., 2009). Trust, communication, commitment, and emotional intimacy are important factors in the stability and success of marriage (Rempel et al., 1985). But, due to the increasing use of social media, the traditional patterns of interaction between spouses have changed. Research shows that SM can lead to partner monitoring, suspicions about online partner behaviors, and opportunities for emotional or online infidelity, which can negatively impact marital quality (Cravens & Whiting, 2014; McDaniel et al., 2017). In addition, technology-related interruptions (or technoference) have shown to disrupt couple interactions and increase relationship conflict and dissatisfaction (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Roberts & David, 2016). Studies have been conducted in different countries, showing that overuse of social media can adversely affect the quality of relationships and marital satisfaction (Valenzuela et al., 2014; Rostami et al., 2017). Likewise, Muise et al. (2009) indicated that social media can heighten the level of jealousy for romantic partners, and Tokunaga (2011) reported that social networking sites can be used for interpersonal electronic surveillance and this might break the trust between the couple. Based on these results, it could be concluded that the use of social media can have a significant impact on the trust, communication, intimacy and satisfaction of marital relationship. The widespread use of smartphones and internet access in Pakistan has led to a surge in the number of people using social media. Although social networking sites are becoming even more popular among married people, minimal empirical studies have focused on the effect of these sites on marital relations in Pakistan. In one of the few studies done in Pakistan, it was revealed that Facebook use intensity mediated the relationship of Facebook with marital satisfaction via mechanisms of trust, jealousy and e-surveillance behaviors among married individuals (Iqbal & Jami, 2019). This study was conducted specifically on Facebook users and did not cover the effect of the general social media consumption on the married couples. As the biggest metro city of Pakistan, Karachi, has emerged as one of the most digitally connected cities with a significant rise in social media usage among married couples. In spite of this development, there is an absence of study about the impact of social media usage on marital relationship between married couples in Karachi. A lack of city-specific empirical evidence makes it difficult to present an understanding of social media use and marital outcomes in the city's specific social and cultural context.

Importance And Significance Of The Study

Social media has changed the way people communicate, interact and relate with each other in many ways. Social networking sites offer connections and information, but can also create new challenges for marriage. Researchers have found a variety of problems that impact marital satisfaction and relationship quality, like online surveillance, jealousy, technoference, decreased face-to-face interaction, and online infidelity (Muise et al., 2009; Tokunaga, 2011; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Hence, it is opportunistic and meaningful to analyze the relationship of social media consumption with marital relationship amongst married couples of Karachi. This research is significant as it adds to the expanding literature on digital communication and familial communication. Social media is now a part of everyday life, but there is a limited number of empirical studies on the impact of social media in marital relationships in Pakistan. Previous research has been carried out in the Western cultures where family structure, culture, and communication is different from Pakistan (Boyd &

Ellison, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This study will yield evidence specific to married couples in the city of Karachi, the impact that social media has on the marital relationship in Pakistani society. Moreover, the study is important since it aims to explore the impact of the use of social media on the primary aspects of marital relations, such as trust, communication, intimacy, jealousy and marital satisfaction. Trust is considered as one of the most essential ingredients of successful marriages, and past studies suggest that social media can negatively impact trust by raising partner monitoring and online surveillance behaviors (Rempel et al., 1985; Tokunaga, 2011). These dynamics can help shed light on what makes marriage successful or not in the digital age. Besides, the study adds to the knowledge regarding the effects of social media jealousy on marital outcomes. Studies have shown that social networking sites may give users information that can lead them to suspect and feel insecure about their partners' activities (Muise et al., 2009). As jealousy is correlated with reduced relationship satisfaction and escalated conflicts, it is important to explore the effect of jealousy among married couples living in the city of Karachi and draw its implications for the social and psychological impact of social media. An other important aspect of the study is its analysis of communication between husband and wife. It is well known that marriage satisfaction and relationship stability is predicted by effective communication (Javadivala et al., 2021). But spending too much time on social media could lead to less in-person time and emotional connection with one's spouse (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). The study helps to better understand the link between social media use and communication quality, giving insights into the impact of digital technologies on marital communication. The study is also applicable as it discusses the emerging issue of technofence (interruption of interpersonal relationships with technology) and studies how this impacts the pre-service teacher's intentional and unintentional behavior. Studies have shown that technology use can lead to relationship dissatisfaction and emotional separation between partners in frequent instances (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Roberts & David, 2016). Exploring this phenomenon with married couples in Karachi will shed light on the extent to which social media affects marital communication and quality of relationship among Pakistani people. Further, the results of this research can be used by marriage counselors, psychologists and family therapists to gain empirical evidence of the effects of social media on marriage. The knowledge of the impact of online behaviors like surveillance, excessive use, and digital distraction on marital satisfaction can help professionals create a more effective counseling approach and intervention to facilitate healthy relationships among couples (Rostami et al., 2017). Additionally, the study is relevant for policy makers and communication practitioners who are interested in the social impacts of digital media. In Pakistan, the use of social networks is on the rise, which may require evidence-based policies and awareness programs to teach users responsible use of social networks and its effects on family life (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2014). Further, this study makes a contribution to the academic knowledge by building upon the existing studies that had already been done on social media and marital satisfaction. For instance, Iqbal and Jami (2019) explored the relationship between the intensity of using the Facebook and marital satisfaction among married users of Facebook in Pakistan. The present study, however, takes this view one step further by studying the overall social media usage of married couples in Karachi and studying various aspects of the marital relationships such as trust, communication, intimacy, jealousy and satisfaction. The study is especially important due to the city of Karachi being the biggest metropolitan city in Pakistan and one of the most technologically connected cities in the nation. In Karachi, married couples are increasingly coming across the social media technologies and communication practices online. Yet, there is a lack of strong research studies to explore the impact of such technologies on marital relationships in this socio-cultural environment of the city. So, the present study helps in closing the gap in the literature and also contributes with the evidence which can be useful for further studies on digital communication and family relationship in Pakistan (Iqbal & Jami, 2019). Lastly, the results of this study could help married couples to become more cognizant of the possible impact of social media on their marriage. Familiarizing themselves with how different aspects of social media use can affect trust, communication,

jealousy, and marital satisfaction can help couples create effective boundaries and communication habits that will help maintain a stable and healthy relationship in the long-term (Cravens & Whiting, 2014; McDaniel et al., 2017).

Research Objectives

RO 1 To explore the patterns of social media consumption among married couples in Karachi.

RO 2 To examine the influence of social media consumption on communication, trust, and emotional intimacy within marital relationships among married couples in Karachi.

RO 3 To investigate the perceived positive and negative effects of social media consumption on marital satisfaction and relationship quality among married couples in Karachi.

Research Questions

RQ 1 What are the patterns of social media consumption among married couples in Karachi?

RQ 2 How does social media consumption influence communication, trust, and emotional intimacy within marital relationships among married couples in Karachi?

RQ 3 What are the perceived positive and negative effects of social media consumption on marital satisfaction and relationship quality among married couples in Karachi?

Literature Review

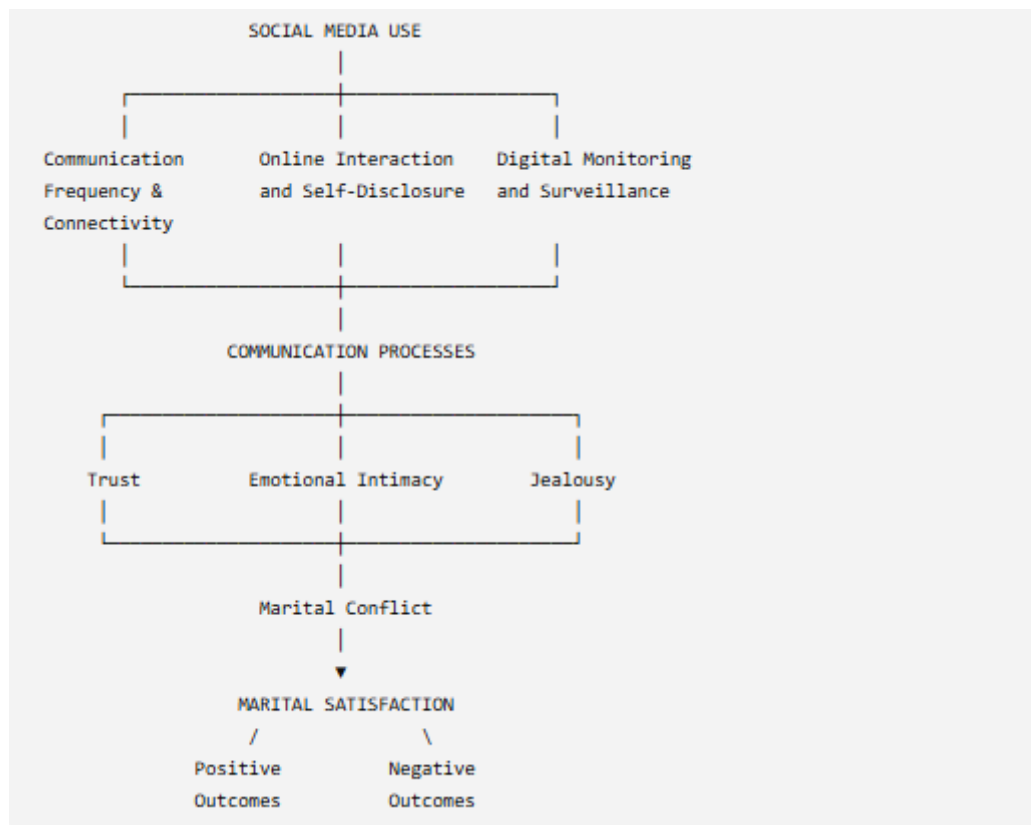
Social media has revolutionized interpersonal communication and interpersonal relations. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok and Snapchat have become a part of everyday life and are now vital tools for communication, sharing and keeping up emotional contact between partners, even when they can't be physically present. But there is a growing body of research suggesting that overuse of social media can also present problems with regard to trust, jealousy, surveillance, conflict and relationship dissatisfaction. For this reason, the role of social media on marriages has become an intriguing field of study. Recent research has shown that the use of social media can have positive and negative effects on marital satisfaction. Deng et al. (2024) reported that older Chinese married couples experiencing negative impacts from addictive use of short-video social media platforms were less satisfied with their marriage, as compared to those who were not experiencing such impacts. The study found that overuse of social media led to less time and attention being spent on the relationship, which ultimately led to a decrease in relationship satisfaction and emotional bonding. The authors found that social media addiction has the potential to interfere with positive marital relationships and reduce marital quality. Likewise, Nazari et al. (2024) studied how social media usage affects sexual satisfaction and attitudes towards marital infidelity among married people in Iran. They revealed that the social media usage behavior significantly affected the marital attitudes, trust, and fidelity perceptions. The study pointed out that online encounters can impact assurance in the relationship and raise doubts about infidelity, especially when social media relationship guidelines are not set. Another dimension that has been investigated in the last decade in relation to infidelity is the concept of social media addiction and its connection to infidelity-related behaviours. In the study conducted by Abbasi and Dibble (2025), it was revealed that excessive use of social networking sites had a relationship with jealousy, surveillance behaviors, relationship conflict, and decreased relationship satisfaction. They found that social media addiction could provide ways to engage in emotional and relational boundary crossings that could further damage marital trust and lead to marital conflict. Technology distractions have also been closely examined in terms of their effect on the quality of relationship. The effects of technology-mediated

distractions on the quality of relationship have also been examined. Karaman and Arslan (2024) found that social media addiction and phubbing (not paying attention to one's partner) had negative effects on the satisfaction with one's relationship. Their research found that overuse of digital interaction led to a diminished emotional responsiveness between partners, which then led to a sense of neglect, and lower relationship quality and satisfaction. Delatorle and Costa (2025) performed an integrative review of the literature to summarize the results of 23 studies examining the role of social media in marital and long-term relationships. There were four common themes highlighted in the review: beneficial and harmful consequences of social media use, infidelity, jealousy and surveillance, overuse of social media, and online initiated relationships. The authors found that the impact of social media on marriage rests primarily on the way couples communicate, their expectations for each other on social media, and their respective boundaries of relationship. They also highlighted the potential for healthy digital practices to boost relationship quality while the excessive and unregulated use of digital communication may be linked to conflict and dissatisfaction in relationships. There is also recent evidence that digital communication interventions could be beneficial in the outcomes of relationships if they are used appropriately. Kernová, Halamová, and Deriglazov (2025) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis which found that technology-based interventions have a positive impact on relationship satisfaction, as they can foster communication, emotional support, and conflict resolution skills among couples. They found that digital technologies are not a problem in themselves, but rather the effect of these technologies on relationships is largely dependent on how couples use them.

With the rise in the usage of social media, there has been a lot of scholarly interest in the effects of social media on interpersonal and marital relationships. Social media platforms have revolutionized the way people communicate as they offer immediate access and connection to people and a means of socializing. However, these platforms have been asserted to have a negative impact on relationship quality, trust, intimacy and marital satisfaction if used excessively. Social media influence on marriage has become a critical field of communication and social science research as it has become an integral part of everyday life. One of the initial issues that came up with social media and romance was online monitoring. Tokunaga (2011) suggested that social networking sites introduced the possibility of interpersonal electronic surveillance, thereby enabling individuals to keep track of their partners' online behaviour more often. This kind of monitoring behaviors are frequently associated with uncertainty, insecurity and can lead to tension in the relationship. The study indicated that personal information on social media is often easily accessible which can lead to over-monitoring of the partner and subsequently impact on trust and satisfaction with the relationship. Trust is thought to be one of the most significant aspects of a successful marriage. Holmes and Zanna (1985) state that trust is the basis for emotional security and relationship stability. In social media there can be times when spouses question the level of trust, especially if they feel like social media interactions are threatening and improper. Studies suggest that greater access to the other's online behavior can lead to suspicion and uncertainty, thus undermining trust in the marriage and raising marital conflict (Tokunaga, 2011). One of the important topics discussed in the literature is social media induced jealousy. Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) investigated the relationship between Facebook use and romantic jealousy and concluded that increased use of Facebook was correlated with increased romantic partner jealousy. The authors suggested that there is too much information on social networking sites that can induce negative assumptions about their partners' online activities. This jealousy can spur more monitoring behaviors, which can lead to even less satisfaction in the relationship. The connections between social media use and marital satisfaction have also been investigated. In a pioneering study in Pakistan, Iqbal and Jami (2019) tested the influence of the intensity of Facebook usage on marital satisfaction for married individuals who use Facebook. The results of the study revealed that the intensity of using Facebook was directly related to online surveillance and jealousy, and trust was directly related to marital satisfaction. Moreover, Facebook

related jealousy and surveillance were found to be the mediators between Facebook use and marital satisfaction. Results revealed that when being engaged in too much social networking negatively impacted marital quality, it was likely due to the impact on marital jealousy and mistrust between the partners. The effects of social media on the communication dynamics in marriage have been identified by several scholars. Communication has been known to be a factor in marital satisfaction and stability. Research indicates that social media has a negative impact on opportunities for face to face interaction, which can lead to diminished intimacy with an intimate partner. According to Javadivala et al. (2021), a systematic review revealed that the quality of communication is significantly linked to marital satisfaction and marital success in the long term. Healthy communication couples report higher marital satisfaction than communication barriers couples. Technoference is another newly relevant research field as well. Technoference: Interruption to interpersonal communication due to technology use. Excessive digital device use during couples' interaction is associated with decreased relationship satisfaction and increased relationship conflict (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). Excessive "Facebook time" can also foster a sense of neglect and emotional disconnection, which can strain relationships. Instead of communicating, couples can also spend too much time on social media, leading to feelings of neglect and emotional distance. The use of social media has been also studied in relation to infidelity-related behaviors. However, McDaniel, Drouin, and Cravens (2017) studied the connection between social media and online infidelity in the context of married and cohabiting relationships. They found that people who did any infidelity-related online activities were less satisfied with their relationship and more ambivalent about it. The research indicated that social media can create opportunities to meet other romantic partners that could compromise the stability of marriage and conflict in relationships. Studies also indicate that social media has positive and negative impact on marriage. Too much use of it can lead to conflict, jealousy and mistrust, but just the right amount, with careful and conscious use, can enhance communication and provide the emotional tie that can help with couples who work or have families that require them to be separated. A recent qualitative and exploratory study in Jammu and Kashmir revealed that social media was associated with keeping families connected and communicating over distance in the context of marriage. The study however noted that excessive use of social media resulted in problems with trust, addiction, emotional distance and marital conflict. In addition, relationship researchers stress that there are a number of factors beyond social media that impact marital quality. They involve marital outcomes across the domains of communication quality, emotional intimacy, mental health, socioeconomic factors, and interpersonal compatibility. According to the systematic review by Rostami et al. (2017), there are three important factors that are known to affect marital satisfaction, which are communication, interpersonal relationships, and emotional well-being. The review has concluded that quality of the relationship is influenced by personal, social and psychological determinants. New research has kept investigating the ways in which social media impacts relationships. Studies on social media-related jealousy indicate that jealousy can arise from social media, especially when users contrast their relationships with the idealized depiction of others. Comparisons may result in unhappiness, over-scrutiny and partnership discord. Jealousy is a factor that continues to be considered as one of the most influential ways that social media affects the quality of a relationship, according to scholars. With the surge of Internet and smartphone usage, the studies concerning social media and marriage in the Pakistani context are still limited. The study conducted by Iqbal and Jami (2019) is one of the few empirical studies that investigated the connection between social media and marital happiness among married couples in Pakistan. Considering Karachi as one of the most digitalized urban centres, and the biggest metropolis in Pakistan, further research is required to explore the effects of social media usage on trust, conversations, jealousy, intimacy, and marital satisfaction in married couples living in the city.

Conceptual Framework



Theoretical Framework

In this research, Social Penetration Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Relational Dialectics Theory are used. Social Penetration Theory describes how social media can help facilitate self-disclosure and emotional intimacy with one's spouse. Uses and Gratifications Theory contributes to an understanding of motives for engaging in social media and the rewards that couples receive from digital communication. Relational Dialectics Theory accounts for the opposing forces of openness/privacy, connection/autonomy that arise in online relationships. These theories, when combined, offer a comprehensive perspective on the impact of social media on various aspects of communication, trust, jealousy, emotional intimacy, conflict and marital satisfaction among married couples in Karachi. This integrated approach allows for a more in-depth understanding of communication processes involved in participants' experiences, and enhances the theoretical contribution of the study.

Social Penetration Theory

Social Penetration Theory (SPT) is a theory developed by Altman and Taylor (1973) that describes the process of relationship development via the gradual disclosure of self. Spouses post thoughts, emotions and daily activities online, in the context of social media, which can enhance emotional intimacy and relationship satisfaction. But self-disclosure, if it occurs at all, can be incomplete or partial and lead to misunderstandings and emotional distance. The theory provides insight into the role of social media mediated communication on intimacy between husband and wife.

Uses And Gratifications Theory

According to Uses and Gratifications Theory, people purposefully consume media to meet their needs, including communication needs, entertainment needs, information needs, and social interaction needs.

Social media can serve as a tool for married couples to stay connected, show love, and connect with one another. But overusing social media to get rewards can lessen interpersonal communication and result in marital conflicts. This theory provides explanations on why couples are using social media and how it impacts their marriage.

Relational Dialectics Theory

Relational Dialectics Theory(1996) proposed by Baxter and Montgomery focuses on interactions that are inevitable within relationships, including those of connection versus autonomy and openness versus privacy. These tensions can be exacerbated by the visibility of social media interactions, and by the opportunities for monitoring, which can occur through social media. This theory was used to explain the development of some of the issues of trust, jealousy, surveillance, and conflicts found in the study.

Research Methodology

The study was of a qualitative phenomenological type to understand the lived experiences of married couples on the influence of social media on marital relationships. The study included a total of 50 married couples (100 participants) from Karachi, Pakistan. The participants included people of different age, educational level, occupation, length of marriage and the frequency of using social media which created a diversity of perspectives. Participants were recruited by convenience sampling through personal networks, community referrals and social media. Participants had to be married and use at least one social media platform, and be willing to share their experiences and perceptions about how they used social media in their marital partnership.

Sample Size And Data Saturation

While in general, phenomenological studies would require smaller sample sizes, a larger sample size was deemed suitable to illustrate the diversity of experiences across various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds in Karachi. Data collection was continued until thematic saturation was reached, defined as no further significant themes or insights were gained from further interviews. After about 44 couples, saturation was reached, but the remaining interviews were conducted to ensure the consistency and depth of the themes identified.

Interview Guide Development

Semi structured, In-depth interviews were used to gather data. The interview guide was based upon an in-depth review of literature on social media use, interpersonal communication, trust, emotional intimacy, jealousy, conflict, and marital satisfaction. The interview protocol was content validated and clarified by two experts in the fields of communication and qualitative research. Two couples participated in a pilot interview which was used for minor adjustments in the sequence of the questions and the clarity of the questions.

Data Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded with permission, and later transcribed word for word and analyzed through the six steps of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis consisted of familiarization with the data, initial codes, themes identification, review of themes, definition and naming themes, and report preparation. To minimise subjective bias, initial coding was undertaken independently by two researchers. The coding results were compared and discussed until a consensus was reached on coding for code definitions and thematic categories.

Trustworthiness And Reliability

Study criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Credibility was strengthened by extended engagement with participants and member checking, in which selected participants checked the accuracy of the summaries of their interview responses. A detailed audit trail of coding decisions and theme development was maintained, which helped to build dependability. Researcher reflexivity and two or more researchers were used to ensure confirmability. Transferability was enhanced by the inclusion of detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics and analytical procedures, allowing other researchers to judge the applicability of the findings to other similar settings.

Findings Of The Study

This study was conducted on 50 married couples (100 people) living in Karachi, Pakistan, using semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed thematically and six themes emerged that revealed the perceptions and experiences of the participants on the effects of social media usage on their marriage relationship. Themes are identified that have both positive and negative associations with social media in relation to communication, trust, intimacy, conflict, and marital satisfaction.

Theme Development Table

Initial Codes	Categories	Final Theme
Frequent messaging, video calls, sharing updates	Digital interaction	Communication and Connectivity
Monitoring profiles, checking online status	Surveillance behaviors	Trust Issues and Online Surveillance
Likes, comments, opposite-gender interactions	Relationship insecurity	Social Media-Induced Jealousy
Reduced face-to-face conversations	Communication displacement	Emotional Distance
Arguments about social media use	Relationship tension	Marital Conflict
Agreed social media rules	Boundary management	Need for Digital Boundaries

Theme	Couples Mentioning Theme (n=50)
Social Media as a Medium of Communication and Connectivity	42
Trust Problems and Online Surveillance	38
Jealousy Associated with Social Media Use	35
Lack of Physical Interaction and Emotional Distance	31
Marital Disagreements Due to Social Media Use	40
Need to Establish Social Media Boundaries	44

Theme 1: Social Media as a Tool for Communication and Connectivity

The majority of participants expressed that social media platforms, especially WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger improved communication between their spouses. Participants mentioned that social media

helped them to communicate all day, to share updates and keep in touch even when their workload was heavy. For many couples, social media platforms were used as resources for expressing love and affection, sharing information and organizing family activities.

One of the female participants said: "My husband and I are talking on WhatsApp even while working, just a message is enough to give me the feeling of being connected." (Participant F12)

The male participant said: "Social media makes it possible to stay in touch with each other's lives, sharing pictures, updates and significant events as they happen." (Participant M21)

Theme 2: Trust Issues and Online Surveillance

Trust was one of the dominant themes that arose from the interviews. A lot of participants revealed checking their spouses' social media data, such as friend lists, online presence, comments, and interactions with other users. Some thought this monitoring was benign curiosity and others thought this was a source of mistrust and conflict.

One participant remarked: "When I see when my husband last went online and who commented on his posts, sometimes it gives me the creeps." (Participant F18)

Another participant stated: Too much monitoring undermines trust; social media provides opportunities to keep an eye on one another. (Participant M30)

Theme 3: Social Media-Induced Jealousy

Another common thread was jealousy, shown by numerous couples. It was noted that the participants did not feel comfortable with their husbands getting involved with the opposite sex, posting photos, or when they received comments from people they did not know. Some of the respondents pointed out that social media sometimes led to miscommunication because of what is visible on the internet.

One woman of the participants said: "Even if he says it is nothing it makes me feel insecure when he likes photos of other women." (Participant F25)

In the same way, one male participant commented: "Comments or private messages sometimes can leave misunderstandings and cause unnecessary arguments." (Participant M09)

Theme 4: Reduced Face-to-Face Interaction and Emotional Distance

A lot of the participants said that they were worried about the lack of quality time spent together because of their social media usage. Some couples said they would spend a large portion of their time on social media rather than spending time with their partner.

One participant stated: "We are in the same room, but we're both on the phone, we speak less, than we used to." (Participant F07)

Another respondent commented: "Social media consumes a lot of our time and sometimes we don't have a conversation that is really important for our relationship." (Participant M14)

Theme 5: Social Media-Related Marital Conflicts

Many testified to having disagreements and arguments about the use of social media. The most frequent issues that led to conflicts were a spending too much time online, interactions with ex-partners, privacy issues and disagreements about what should or shouldn't be allowed on the internet.

A participant shared: "Many of our conflicts begin because one of us is on something like social media too long, and forgets to do the responsibilities of family." (Participant F31)

Another participant explained: "A simple comment or post is misinterpreted and it becomes a serious argument." (Participant M27)

Theme 6: Establishing Digital Boundaries for Healthy Relationships

An increasing number of participants spoke about the need to establish limits with social media. People who were more satisfied with their marriages tended to verbalise concrete understandings about privacy, screen time, and online communication.

One participant noted: "No phones will be checked except with permission; this has helped us to maintain trust." (Participant M11)

One of the female participants said: "We limit family time to phones and it has helped to improve communication, lessen conflict. (Participant F38)

Discussion

RO 1 To explore the patterns of social media consumption among married couples in Karachi.

The results showed that social media has become a part of the married couples' existence in Karachi. The participants reported using platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X for communication, entertainment, information, social connection or activities, on a regular basis. WhatsApp proved to be the most popular tool for international couples to communicate with each other, allowing them to stay in touch all day long, even with busy working and family lives. Results indicate that social media has become an integral part of marital communication and is an important medium for interpersonal communication. The results are in line with those of Boyd and Ellison (2007) who stated that social networking sites have changed how one builds and cultivates social networks. Likewise, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) pointed out that social media platforms afford social interaction, information sharing, and social relationship maintenance in a variety of social contexts. This study revealed that social media was the way the participants viewed it for communicating with their spouses or family members, thus digital communication is a normal part of marriage. It is also found that married couples' social media use is not restricted to communication, but extends to other areas of social media such as entertainment, social networking, and content consumption. This indicates the growing penetration of digital technologies into daily family life and draws attention to a need for understanding of how digital technologies affect mutual relations in marriage.

RO 2 To examine the influence of social media consumption on communication, trust, and emotional intimacy within marital relationships among married couples in Karachi.

The results showed that social media has a dual effect on the communication, trust and emotional intimacy between couples. The positive side of the coin was that participants said social media has helped them communicate better, enabling their spouses to send them messages and give them news updates, and keeping them in touch throughout the day. Couples who mostly communicated and supported each other via social media showed greater levels of connectedness and accessibility. These findings corroborate those of Javadivala et al., (2021) which found that communication is one of the most significant factors that can predict relationship satisfaction and stability. Social media can be helpful in communicating and creating emotional connections if used in a positive way. The results also highlighted major issues with respect to trust and emotional closeness. A large number of participants reported performing online surveillance acts, including checking spouses online activity, checking friends' lists, and seeing who they are interacting with online. Often these behaviors stemmed from feelings of insecurity and suspicion. The results reveal opportunities of monitoring and surveillance created by social media that can have a negative effect on relational trust. This result is in line with Tokunaga (2011) who claimed that social networking sites are now instruments of interpersonal electronic surveillance. Likewise, Rempel et al. (1985) pointed out that trust is an essential ingredient in a successful marriage. From the experiences of the participants it is clear that too

much monitoring of online activities can reduce trust and tension in the relationship. Another finding of the study was that social media-induced jealousy negatively impacted emotional intimacy. Often, the participants complained of discomfort with their spouses' online interactions, especially with the opposite sex. This could sometimes lead to miscommunication and emotional upset.

The results confirm with Muise et al. (2009) who reported that using social media would lead people to become more jealous as they would be more exposed to information that can cause insecurity and suspicion. Furthermore, some participants said they had seen a decline in communication in the real world and quality family time due to their excessive use of social media. Many couples ended up being physically together but emotionally distant, as a result of their extended engagement with cell phones. This discovery aligns with the idea of technoference put forward by McDaniel and Coyne (2016), who stated that technological interruptions might have a detrimental result on interpersonal relationships and emotional health. The overall results indicate that social media can help to improve communication and connection, but excessive use and online behaviors such as monitoring and surveillance can have a negative effect on trust and emotional intimacy in marriage.

RO 3 To investigate the perceived positive and negative effects of social media consumption on marital satisfaction and relationship quality among married couples in Karachi.

The results showed that there are positive and negative consequences of using social media regarding marital satisfaction and relationship quality. The participants noted that there were a number of positive outcomes such as enhanced communication, increased access, emotional support and opportunities to keep up with family. When used prudently and within established limits, many couples found social media to be a helpful tool to help build their relationship. These results are consistent with the study conducted by Valenzuela et al. (2014), which showed that social networking sites can positively affect well-being of relationships and social capital by providing a way to communicate with others and socially support each other. The positive experiences reported by the participants indicate that social media use can have a positive influence on marital relationship when used in a moderate way. However, the negative impacts of social media were discussed more often by participants than the positive impacts, as reflected in the findings. The challenges that came up in relation to marital satisfaction were trust issues, jealousy, excessive screen time, online surveillance, privacy concerns, and conflicts regarding social media. Misunderstandings about communication and social media issues on line sparked arguments among participants. The results are in line with the findings of Cravens and Whiting (2014) who identified that social media can lead to the opportunity for perceived infidelity and relationship insecurity.

Similarly, McDaniel, Drouin, and Cravens (2017) found that the infidelity-related behaviors exhibited on social media negatively impact relationship satisfaction and relationship ambivalence. The present study indicates that social media could be a threat to the traditional boundaries of marriage and also a source of conflict if there is an ambiguity in the expectations of the couple's behavior on social media. In addition, those that indicated higher levels of marital satisfaction frequently mentioned setting boundaries with social media use. Couples that discussed expectations of privacy, screen time limits, and acceptable online interactions openly had fewer conflicts and higher trust. The results suggest that the quality of relationships is not only shaped by technology use, but also by relationship regulation and management of digital behavior. These results are also similar to those of Rostami et al. (2017) who stressed that the quality of communication, trust, emotional intimacy, and interpersonal understanding have a significant impact on marital satisfaction. The current study shows that all of these factors are influenced by social media, and as a result, it has an impact on marital satisfaction and the quality of the relationship.

Conclusion

The current study was an exploratory study that focused on married couples of Karachi and their experience and perception on how social media is affecting their married life. The results showed that social media has become a part of the lives of every married couple and cannot be separated from communication or interaction. It is well known that social platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X are popular for communication, information sharing and keeping in touch with our spouse throughout the day. The study showed that social media can be used as a communication tool and has a positive effect on increasing connectivity and providing emotional support for partners. Participants emphasized that social media helps to keep them connected when they have a lot on their plates and a family to take care of. As far as this is concerned, social media plays a good role in maintaining the relationship and communication with others. But the results also revealed some risks of excessive use of social media. One of the main worries that arose was the role of trust in the relationship of married couples. There were reports of participants engaging in online surveillance, watching their partners use the internet and feeling suspicious of their partners when using the internet. Jealousy caused by social media was also cited as one of the leading factors that cause misunderstandings and relationship problems. The visibility of online activities and interactions often led participants to develop feelings of insecurity and mistrust. In addition, the study showed that the overuse of social media could lead to less face-to-face communication and less quality time with one's spouse. A large number of participants indicated they spent significant time on their phones, which impacted their relationships with others and their emotions. The most frequent conflicts reported by participants were related to social media usage, such as issues of excessive screen time, privacy concerns, and conflicts with other people online. However, the research revealed that when couples set strict rules about social media use and communicated expectations with their partner, they shared less conflict and had greater marital satisfaction. Trust, communication and mutual understanding turned out to be the most important variables for either a positive or negative effect of social media on marital relationships. In conclusion, the study results reveal that social media does not have a positive or negative impact on marriage as such. Instead, it's dependent upon how couples utilize and manage the impact. With responsible social media usage, healthy communication practices, and clearly established boundaries within social media, couples can make the most of the benefits of social media while reducing the risks. The results offer important insights for researchers, family counselors, relationship therapists, and married couples to understand and tackle the impact of social media on marital relationships in the socio-cultural environment of Karachi. Future studies could involve the comparison of other cities in Pakistan and other age groups than examined here, and socioeconomic backgrounds, to gain a better understanding of the changing dynamics of social media and marital wellbeing.

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